

POETRY REVIEWS IN THE IRISH TIMES

• A D D E N D A •

February 2020

DR KENNETH KEATING AND DR AILBHE MCDAID

• M E A S •

Measuring Equality in the Arts Sector:
Literature in Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

In 2019 MEAS prepared a report entitled 'Poetry Reviews in the Irish Times, 2013-2018: Gender, Race and Publishers'. The sole focus of this report was on poetry reviews, ie volumes of poetry reviewed in the books pages of the Irish Times Review Section. This is important to state at the outset of this document. The rationale for this focus was provided, as was the justification for analysing the Irish Times, as the largest poetry reviewer in Ireland, and the reasoning behind the timeframe of our analysis. Following extensive research and analysis, this report was published on 16 January 2020.

This report pointed out some areas in which the Irish Times poetry reviews had lacked balance, representation, and diversity, in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, and in relation to the publishers featured in these reviews. This report also noted recent improvements in some regards, but the data gathered was also considerably problematic. Our report reflected these issues, always referring to quantitative data to justify our conclusions, never making wider sweeping claims outside of the remit of this report, and never making personal attacks on any individual.

Out of respect for his position and his work, we shared this report with the Literary Editor of the Irish Times in an email on 16 January before anyone else was notified of its existence or publication.

On 23 January we received an email response to our report from the Irish Times. As per this email, we are sharing it here, unedited. This email was intended to challenge our findings and intended to have us change our report. The email, included below, made baseless arguments, some of which were grossly offensive to the nature of our work and to the work of many fine publishers and poets across Ireland and beyond. We were very disappointed to receive an email of this tenor, and believe that any reader of this email could not agree with the arguments presented.

On 27 January we emailed a response. It is long. It takes the time to consider, analyse, and refute the false arguments of the Irish Times's email. We believe it was firm, but constructive. Our data was never challenged, and we stood firm on our analysis and conclusions. We wanted to keep a dialogue open with the Irish Times, and hope to contribute to continued progression in certain areas, and encourage the vital need for progression in others.

On 31 January, without reciprocation of the professional courtesy of notice of publication, Martin Doyle published an article on the Irish Times website. This article omitted any reference to our previous correspondence. This article grossly misrepresented both the subject of our report and the nature of our conclusions. Whereas the initial email correspondence between both parties centred on the data and its analysis, the Irish Times article refused to engage with our conclusions or our robust defence, and instead misdirected its reader to subjects outside of the remit of the report. This article deflected attention away from the actual subject of the findings of the report and attacked the impartiality and objectivity of the analysis of quantitative data.

To support the misdirection and misrepresentation of the straw man argument, this article also made an ad hominem attack in implying personal bias on the part of one of the report's

authors, Kenneth Keating, in relation to his previous role as the editor of a small online poetry press, Smithereens, which no longer operates. Martin Doyle is fully aware that this small press, which published poetry online only, never sought or canvassed for reviews of any sort from the Irish Times. It simply was not that kind of press. The poets published by Smithereens will confirm this.

There are many flaws, misrepresentations, and errors – accidental or otherwise – contained within this article published on the Irish Times website. This article is reproduced in this document, with detailed annotation identifying errors and misrepresentations, correcting the record, and contextualising arguments. It is our belief that, while it was intended to discredit our report, this article on the Irish Times merely provides further evidence of a refusal to acknowledge and accept the issues present in poetry reviews in the Irish Times covered in our original report.

At Kenneth's invitation, Martin Doyle agreed to meet on 31 January 2020. Both parties expressed their opinions and positions, but no constructive conclusion was reached. Martin Doyle accepted that the previous correspondence between the Irish Times and MEAS would be published in this document. Other than this, the specific details of the content of this meeting will remain private.

On 31 January, on the subject of race and ethnicity, the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics pointed out the errors in Martin Doyle's arguments, particularly in relation to his misuse of their statistics in his article. These errors are irrefutable, considerable, and gravely concerning. For the record, we have included a version of these initial responses as provided to us by the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics on 4 February.

On 3 February we submitted a Letter to the Editor of the Irish Times. We reproduce this letter in full below.

Subsequent to the preparation of this report, we received further email correspondence from the Irish Times. This correspondence simply reiterated the position of the Irish Times as established in previous correspondence. No constructive communication was offered. In the interest of transparency we have published this correspondence here, and offered a very brief response.

This document is a response to the Irish Times, and to Martin Doyle. We recognise that the Irish Times has a much larger readership and a megaphone to reach a far wider audience than MEAS. It is precisely because of this position of power that the Irish Times has a responsibility to act in a considered fashion. It is also the responsibility of the Irish Times to recognise, acknowledge and address legitimate criticism without resorting to misrepresentation or personal attack. While the data may be difficult for the Irish Times to read, it is indisputable, and to attempt to discredit the data is a direct challenge to independent critical analysis and impartial academic research. In seeking to silence dissent and dismiss legitimate criticism supported by statistical evidence, the Irish Times does both itself and the Irish literary public a profound disservice.

We defend our initial report entirely and in the strongest terms possible. The purpose of MEAS is to gather and analyse irrefutable quantitative data. We have done this. We are glad the Irish Times is unhappy with this data. We are too. We look forward to recording improvements in our annual reports going forward.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

16 January 2020 – MEAS report published

23 January – Irish Times’s first response (email)

27 January – First MEAS response

31 January – Martin Doyle’s Irish Times article

31 January – Meeting with Martin Doyle

31 January – Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics initial response

3 February – Our Letter to the Editor of the Irish Times

4 February – Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics response

4 February – Irish Times’s third response (email)

5 February – Third MEAS response

IRISH TIMES FIRST RESPONSE (EMAIL - unedited)

23 January 2020

Dear Dr Keating and Dr McDaid,

I refer to your recent publication 'Poetry reviews in The Irish Times 2013-2018' produced on behalf of MEAS.

In regard to the section headed 'Gender', I note your conclusion that "the overall picture of the very recent history of poetry reviews in The Irish Times presents a clear picture of sustained imbalance in favour of male-authored reviews, and in favour of reviewing male-authored publications".

The fact is that the number of female poets reviewed in The Irish Times reflects the number of female poets being published. According to figures in your own 2019 report on gender and publishing, male poets constituted 62.59%, female 37.15% and non-binary 0.08% of what was published. According to your figures in this 2020 report, The Irish Times reviews worked out at 62% male and 38% female. So, the reviews are fully in accord with what is being published. It would seem, in your conclusion, that you believe The Irish Times should deliberately discriminate against male authors and decline to review their work in order to over-represent female authors.

Your report arbitrarily offers a snapshot of the years 2013-2018, offering no indication of the situation prior to John McAuliffe's appointment. In fact, in 2012, a period of upheaval in the section, only two of the 19 collections reviewed were by women (10%). In 2019, surely the most relevant year for what purports to be an up-to-date assessment, 21 of the 35 books reviewed (60%) were by women poets, hardly evidence of a "sustained" imbalance, as you conclude.

In regard to the gender balance of reviewers, as you note, the appointment of a sole, male, chief poetry reviewer in 2013 meant that there was an inbuilt gender imbalance in our coverage. To remedy this, in 2018, Caitriona O'Reilly came on board to share reviewing duties with John. When Caitriona had to step down due to work commitments, she was replaced by another female poet and reviewer, Martina Evans, and as of last year, the range of our reviewing pool was expanded once more with the appointment of Sean Hewitt.

In regard to the section headed 'Race and Ethnicity', I note your conclusion that, as concerns poetry reviews, there is a degree of 'marginalisation and exclusion'"for which The Irish Times must bear responsibility". You pointed out in your report that there are very few BAME

authors published in Ireland and that, understandably, our reviews are focused on that which is published in Ireland. To say that this “does not explain or justify the degree of marginalisation and exclusion” is to ignore the (accepted) facts and to indulge in extravagant hyperbole. It is true that we have reviewed very few BAME authors from overseas and this is an area in which we are taking steps to improve. For example, next Tuesday we are publishing a feature on First Nation poets in Australia and we have commissioned reviews of new work by BAME writers from the UK and US this spring.

In regard to your section entitled ‘Publishers Reviewed’, you conclude that The Irish Times is “significantly imbalanced in its poetry reviews, favouring Gallery Press and offering this small press with problematic gender ratios privileged access to its review pages”. Whether Gallery Press has gender ratios which are “problematic” is for Gallery Press to respond to. You also make reference to Faber. The Gallery Press and Faber are the longest established presses publishing Irish poetry. Not surprisingly, they publish many Irish poets who are among the most-recognised nationally and internationally. The limited amount of space available necessitates a limited amount of reviews. The Irish Times has, in recent years, sought to reflect the range of work published by new smaller presses and by younger writers (and at a higher rate than evident elsewhere in the Anglophone media) but it is the readers’ interests which are paramount. The Irish Times seeks only to offer our readers that poetry which we think is qualitatively best-deserving of their attention. We do not, and would not want, to engage in reviews rotated on a Buggins’s Turn’ approach which has no regard for the quality of the output.

The Irish Times is committed to improving the diversity of our poetry coverage consistent with offering our readers that which we believe to be the best on offer.

The Irish Times has a high regard for MEAS and the work that it does. Your review, while welcome, has drawn conclusions that are not supported by the facts. It would be appreciated if you amended your conclusions in light of these points and if you would place this response on the MEAS website.

Yours sincerely,



FIRST MEAS RESPONSE (unedited)

27 January 2020

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email, dated 23rd January 2020, in response to our recent publication 'Poetry Reviews in the Irish Times: 2013-2018'. We appreciate your taking the time to read this report and to respond to it, but feel it is necessary to correct here, in this private correspondence, your misrepresentation of the analysis and conclusions contained within this report.

On the subject of gender:

We note that you have read our wider report on gender in Irish poetry, but are dismayed to learn that you acknowledge that more male poets are published than female poets and yet remain content for the Irish Times to reflect in your pages this larger gender bias without consideration. We have never suggested that any organisation, including the Irish Times, should engage in any form of discrimination. This is a gross, if convenient, over-simplification of our activities as an organisation. We fundamentally disagree with the assertion that by striving for gender equality in its reviewing ratios that the Irish Times would be deliberately discriminating against male authors. In truth, we are quite taken aback by this line of defence, which is at odds with all best-practice guidelines on improving diversity and equality, including those from the US-based Vida Count (<https://www.vidaweb.org/the-count/>) and UK-Based Ledbury Survey: The State of Poetry and Poetry Criticism in the UK and Ireland 2011- 2018 (<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/new-and-international-writing/emerging-critics/>).

As the findings of these international reports and the MEAS Gender in Poetry Publishing Report demonstrate, gender bias is not a result of there simply being more male writers, or there being more male writers of objectively higher quality than female writers. Rather, the majority of publishers are run by men, and these presses exclude and marginalise female writers, in this instance poets, and are less inclined to publish their work because of inherited patriarchal biases which inform conservative ideologies of what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' poetry.

We would like to express in the strongest terms then, in this personal correspondence, that the Irish Times, in producing critical reviews of more male poets than female poets, passively reflects this bias. In this way, the Irish Times is culpable of complicity in discrimination against the work of female poets. The argument that equal gender representation would entail discrimination against male writers is a commonly utilised misdirection, based in falsehoods and an unwillingness to think critically about the methodologies behind editorial practices,

that has been widely debunked. The claim that the Irish Times is bound to reflect the imbalances proved by the data in the MEAS Gender Report suggests that (a) the Irish Times exerts no editorial decision-making power over what publications it reviews and/or (b) the Irish Times is content to perpetuate the existent proven biases in the Irish poetry publishing industry.

On the related matter of the date range of our report:

All research must operate within parameters. We chose 2013 as a starting point, because to go back further seemed to turn up for us uncertain and unverifiable data. We chose 2018 as an end point because, as the publication date in early January suggests, this report was largely compiled in 2019. To include data for a year that was then ongoing would have led to inaccurate figures, and to try to rush complicated analysis may have led to errors in judgement on our part. Instead, we chose the dates with the most reliable data and took our time to analyse and come to reasoned and detailed conclusions. We would have been happy to provide further information about our date range in relation to this report if you had simply asked us, rather than accusing us of being 'arbitrary' in our decision making.

Nevertheless, thank you for providing figures for 2012, which you claim presented only two reviews of work by female poets. In light of this, and in reference to our original report, we can find no reason whatsoever to justify your objection to our description of 'sustained imbalance' in the reviews under scrutiny. If **seven years** (2012-2017) of data does not throw up even a single year in which more female poets were reviewed than male poets, and shows only a single year of parity, then it is indisputable that this demonstrates an imbalance in favour of male poets, and that this imbalance has been sustained over that seven year period.

We note your reported figures for 2019 and hope, despite your earlier avowal that the Irish Times must reflect uncritically the inequalities evident in the poetry publishing industry, that this marks a deliberate editorial decision to take active measures to improve the gender bias on the poetry review pages of the Irish Times.

On the subject of the gender of reviewers:

We noted in our report that in 2013 John McAuliffe was appointed Poetry Reviewer, which explained, but did not justify, the imbalance. We welcome your admission that you appointed female reviewers to 'remedy' your 'inbuilt gender imbalance'. We congratulate you on identifying and correcting this issue. Given that you acknowledge this in your email, your objection to our identifying in our report that this 'inbuilt gender imbalance' continued for five years without being addressed is unwarranted.

Further, we note that that your correspondence omits any reference to the data on invited guest reviewers. As you will have observed in the report, the ratio of invited female guest

reviewers to invited male guest reviewers during the reign of the sole male editor compounds the gender imbalance during this period.

Thank you for the information that you have appointed Seán Hewitt as a reviewer in 2019 which, as outlined above, falls outside the remit of this report. We are unclear what relevance this has to this section of the report on gender. We will certainly note its impact on any future analysis we may conduct of the gender of poetry reviewers in the Irish Times.

On the subject of Race and Ethnicity:

Once more we welcome your acknowledgement in this correspondence of the veracity of our analysis, that '[the Irish Times has] reviewed very few BAME authors from overseas and this is an area in which [you] are taking steps to improve'. To be clear, an expressed desire to improve in this context, following the admission of 'very few', clearly implies an acceptance that something was not as good as it could or should have been.

In light of your admission on this subject, we reject entirely your description of our statements as 'extravagant hyperbole', and question how you are capable of both accepting and dismissing our analysis. As our report sets out, the Irish Times reviewed a considerable number of poets from outside of Ireland, but featured only a small minority of BAME poets.

Similar to the discussion of the gender of reviewers above then, the correspondence suggests that the Irish Times is aware of and has identified structural problems or omissions in this review section and the related issues within Irish poetry more widely. However, when there is an opportunity to address these issues, be it through commissioning more reviews from guest female reviewers, or through commissioning reviews on BAME authors from outside of Ireland, the Irish Times failed to do so during this period.

We welcome the efforts you are currently making regarding BAME poetry in particular. Once again, we are bemused that you would ask us to revise our findings in light of your correspondence which confirms rather than contradicts our analysis. Indeed, these very efforts you are making underline the extent to which the Irish Times has looked at the same data and has come to the same conclusion as our report: there is a considerable imbalance and bias here not reflective of Irish society or Irish Times readership, and efforts must be made to correct it.

On your comments regarding publishers reviewed:

We thank you for not challenging the assertion that the Irish Times is 'significantly imbalanced in its poetry reviews', although we are disappointed to see your attempt to justify this imbalance.

Firstly, we absolutely agree that it is the sole responsibility of Gallery Press to respond to their categorisation as having 'problematic' gender ratios. We note that you have read our previous reports however, and can safely assume that you are aware of the details of these problematic ratios. It is not the responsibility of the Irish Times to address the issue in relation to the output of Gallery Press, but it is the responsibility of every individual and organisation, once aware of these ratios and the sustained imbalance clearly identifiable here, to decide whether or not they should continue to engage with, support, or promote the work of this press in various guises, including privileged and unparalleled access to the reviews pages of a national newspaper. It is also our responsibility, albeit one which we have taken on ourselves as an organisation, to identify this complicity in our reports.

Yet after this, we appear to be in agreement once more. You state that the Irish Times has 'sought to reflect the range of work published by smaller presses and by younger writers'. This is an approach to be commended. However, it clearly implies once again that the Irish Times also identified an insufficiency, an error in its review policy, which it is trying to address.

We would also like to take this opportunity to defend the fine work being produced by a range of Irish poetry presses, ones which the Irish Times sees fit to dismiss or marginalise, identifiable both in the data collected and in your dismissive reference to 'a Buggins's Turn approach'. This is an unwarranted attack on the quality of work produced by poets and published by editors across the island, and is disappointing.

Nevertheless, our work in MEAS is not to understand the editorial policy informing reviews in the Irish Times. It is simply to look at the data and to draw logical, reasoned conclusions. We are certain that your organisation attempts at all times to act with integrity and on principles which best serve the interests of your organisation. We are simply identifying certain issues evident within your output.

We understand that it is your obligation to justify the actions of the organisation in which you are employed, but you must also understand that we are compelled to defend our own principled, unbiased, and impartial analysis of data collected with honesty and in good faith.

In conclusion, we believe that your comments have revealed that we are largely in agreement about the recent history of poetry reviews in the Irish Times, as your admissions of failings and declarations of future improvements underline an acknowledgement that what has preceded has needed improvement. We would prefer to be allies in this matter, and remain open to helping inform the changes you have made and appear to be making. We hope that,

should we choose to do another analysis five years from now, we will all be very happy to see the fruits of the editorial changes you have detailed. Perhaps, if you take the time to consider the above, there will also be further changes made.

It is in light of this then, that we unequivocally reject your assertion that we have drawn conclusions in our report that are not supported by fact. The data is accurate, the reasoning in the report is sound, and the additional detail contained above underlines the extent to which we have always been considered in our approach. Under no circumstances whatsoever will we amend our conclusions or alter our report in any way. The data is sound. The conclusions are those which would be reached by any general reader. The arguments, while they may make for uncomfortable reading for the Irish Times, are impartial, reasoned, and incontestable by any independent assessor.

Finally, there are issues present within the poetry review section of the Irish Times. You have admitted as much. Disappointingly however, your response to our report was to accept the data but to try, unsuccessfully, to challenge our conclusions. These conclusions have been argued with evidence beyond reasonable doubt. It is a great shame then that the response was combative in nature. We feel this is a learning opportunity, one which could begin with a simple acknowledgement that the report is correct, and that our experience and perspective on these subjects could be a valuable asset to present and future changes in the reviews section. We are disheartened that you were unable to simply accept the existence of the problems detailed in our report and, rather than attempt to discredit our work, to continue making concerted efforts to address these problems.

We would be very happy to post your original email and our response as an appendix to the report, on our website, and on social media channels. This would give readers of the report and of the Irish Times the opportunity to assess both sides of this disagreement. We have considerable faith in our readership.

With respect, and a continued willingness to engage constructively on this subject,

Dr Kenneth Keating and Dr Ailbhe McDaid

MARTIN DOYLE'S IRISH TIMES ARTICLE – ANNOTATED

31 January 2020

Title:

A miracle, not a crime: gender balance, race and poetry in The Irish Times

A new report criticises our poetry coverage. We explore the issues and defend our record

Response:

The MEAS report plainly did not criticise the 'poetry coverage' of the Irish Times. The MEAS report gathered data and made conclusions in relation solely to poetry reviews by the Irish Times. The rationale to focus only on reviews was made very clear in the introduction to our report. This is an obvious misrepresentation of the subject of our report and purposefully sets up to challenge an argument that has not been made.

Section 1:

"After spending a long time looking at the figures," wrote Anne Enright in her much-discussed LRB essay from 2017 on the under-representation of women writers in both publishing and reviewing, "anything over 40 per cent feels like a miracle and anything under 30 per cent a crime."

The fact then that last year 60 per cent of the poets reviewed in The Irish Times were female should be cause for celebration, if not canonisation, particularly given that a 2018 report found that women made up only 37 per cent of poets published in Ireland in the years 2008-2017.

Response:

To open with this quotation out of context from Anne Enright is to suggest her implicit approval of the Irish Times poetry reviews. This line, one of frustration, is taken from an article, subsequently republished in No Authority. In this article Enright heavily criticises, amongst other things, the marginalisation of reviews of female authors in the Irish Times during a period which overlaps with the period covered by the MEAS report. Enright's article utilised quantitative data relating to the Irish Times to do so, data which was collected by one of MEAS's contributors. This is not a faithful representation of the substance of Enright's article, it is a convenient manipulation intended to reflect the Irish Times in a positive light of approval from one of Ireland's fiercest supporters of work by female authors and reviewers.

The second paragraph leads with data relating to 2019, which falls outside of the remit of the MEAS report, and as such is not relevant in an article rejecting this report.

Section 2:

The over-representation of published women poets reviewed in The Irish Times in 2019 was not a one-off. Aggregating the figures for the years 2016 to 2019, 49 per cent of poets reviewed were female, one-third more than might have been expected, given the number of women poets published in those years, a remarkable and recognisable editorial intervention in the market, one would have thought.

Response:

In previous correspondence, reproduced above (page 6-7), the Irish Times rejected the idea of 'over-representing' female poets, as it would be to discriminate against male poets. In an inexplicable volte-face, here the practice is celebrated.

Also troublingly, without clear justification, this article collates data for three years, 2016-2019. The MEAS reports cited here cover only up to 2017 and 2018 respectively. This serves to present a distorted reality which depends on the omission of relevant data. This selective practice does not engage with the MEAS findings in good faith.

Section 3:

This is not to say that our record has always been impeccable. In 2015, only 13 out of 33 poets reviewed were female; in 2014, eight out of 33; and in 2013, five out of 23. What the underwhelming figures for these three years do show, however, is that the overall trend over the past decade was a positive one, arcing towards fairness and parity.

Response:

The acknowledgement of the extremely poor figures cited in the MEAS report in the period 2013-2015 supports the findings of 'Poetry Reviews in the Irish Times, 2013-2018'. We are glad to see these figures described here, but their removal from the overall percentage in the preceding paragraphs further underlines the manipulation of data taking place to distract away from the period covered in the report. MEAS makes no argument in relation to 2019 in its report.

Section 4:

We crunch these unpoetic numbers not to seek praise but to defend our record from attack. Dr Kenneth Keating and Dr Ailbhe McDaid, whose previously mentioned Measuring Equality in the Arts Sector (MEAS) report, Gender in Poetry Publishing in Ireland, 2008-2017, established that Irish poetry publishing disproportionately favoured male poets (63 per cent to 37 per cent), have produced a follow-up report, Poetry Reviews in The Irish Times 2013-2018, which argues that reviews in that period disproportionately favoured male poets (68 per cent to 32 per cent). Remarkably, their argument fails to contextualise this by any reference to their own 2018 report.

Instead, it concludes: “While there have been improvements in certain areas, the overall picture of the very recent history of poetry reviews in The Irish Times presents a clear picture of sustained imbalance in favour of male-authored reviews, and in favour of reviewing male-authored publications.”

Response:

We stand by this conclusion. The article here notes our previous report identified sustained imbalance in both the poetry publishing industry in Ireland, and this more recent report identifies the same in the Irish Times’s poetry reviews. These figures are comparable. The Irish Times accepts the imbalance in the publishing industry, but expects it to be commended for reflecting this imbalance passively. This is another logical inconsistency in the argument, as the preceding paragraphs asked for praise for ‘over-representing’ female poets.

The process of reviewing is not a passive reflection of the industry. The Irish Times has power and autonomy. It can choose to review any poet it wishes. It actively chose to review more male poets than female poets. It should not be a matter of pride that the data reveals the Irish Times to be as biased and marginalising as the overall publishing figures. As our data in previous reports has identified, there are publishers and magazines which actively pursue correcting this overall imbalance. The Irish Times is free to pursue a similar drive for parity or correction of imbalances. As our figures show, for the period under consideration, it did not. Even if the figures for 2019 were added to our overview, there would still be an imbalance in favour of male poets.

Section 5:

The report is likewise critical of the gender imbalance of poetry reviewers in The Irish Times, calling it “a sustained privileging of the male critical voice”, while at the same time claiming that the appointment of John McAuliffe in 2013 as chief poetry reviewer “would naturally lead to an unintended consequence of domination by male-authored criticism”. But the argument about gendered reviewing practices hardly stacks up when, in the wider context of the Irish Times books pages, our YA reviewer is Claire Hennessy; our children’s books reviewer is Sara Keating; our new fiction reviewer is Sarah Gilmartin; and of course for many years our literary correspondent was the late Eileen Battersby. Is this then evidence of “a sustained privileging of the female critical voice”?

Response:

This is complete misdirection. It was never the remit of the MEAS report to analyse anything outside of the Irish Times poetry reviews. For information on this, the only quantitative analysis made public is presented in Anne Enright’s LRB article, cited at the outset of the Irish Times article, which explicitly addresses the Irish Times Books pages up to 2013.

As we noted in our previous correspondence, the Irish Times has acknowledged ‘inbuilt gender imbalance’ in its poetry reviewers. The Irish Times had numerous opportunities to improve this imbalance when inviting guest reviewers to contribute, for example. Over the

period covered in this report, MEAS noted that more male guest reviewers were invited than female guest reviewers. The Irish Times could have improved this 'inbuilt gender imbalance' earlier, but decided not to.

Section 6:

Appointing Caitriona O'Reilly and then Martina Evans as joint poetry reviewer was not primarily about gender balance, although that was certainly a consideration but, given John McAuliffe's position as a poet published by Gallery Press, to avoid any perceived conflict of interest. (A jaded observer might remark that the poetry scene generates more conflicts than interest.) The poetry world is small and full of these overlaps. One of this report's authors, Kenneth Keating, is also editor of a small press, Smithereens, none of whose 26 publications we have reviewed.

Response:

This is a clear deflection away from the sustained period of 'inbuilt gender imbalance' evident in the gender of the poetry reviewers in the Irish Times.

This is also an ad hominem attack on one of the authors of this MEAS report. It attempts to imply that the motivation for this report is one of personal bias. We reject this in the strongest terms possible. This misrepresents the work of Smithereens Press, a small online press project born out of doctoral studies, which never contacted the Irish Times or sought reviews.

We wish to emphasise that the MEAS report made no such ad hominem attacks, and did not criticise any one individual at any point. The remit of MEAS is to monitor and report on equality in the arts sector in Ireland, with a particular focus on the literary arts. We gather quantitative data to provide an accurate account of the literary landscape in Ireland and to record annual changes. MEAS undertakes research in good faith, to present quantitative data as per rigorous research standards. To have our professional integrity questioned without basis is extremely disappointing. This attack is without integrity, it is beneath the standards of any journalistic enterprise, and is certainly beneath the Irish Times. This attack is also a challenge to free critical and academic analysis and research, and should be taken with great seriousness.

Section 7:

As well as reviewing more poetry than any other Irish, British or indeed Anglophone newspaper over the past decade, The Irish Times has devoted a lot of attention to the issue of gender balance in Irish poetry, publishing and in the arts generally. Consider this article by Christine Murray: Tackling the catastrophic canonical neglect of Irish women poets and writers; this by Sinéad Gleeson: A profound deafness to the female voice; and Deirdre Falvey's investigation into the previous MEAS report: Two-thirds of published poets are male, so does poetry have a gender issue?

Response:

The Irish Times has indeed devoted attention to the issue of gender balance in Irish poetry. These features were outside of the remit of the MEAS report. Listing them here represents an act of deliberate misdirection away from the findings of the report which focuses only on poetry reviews in the Irish Times.

The articles cited here all focus on the substantive issue of gender balance in Irish poetry. The MEAS report is a contribution to this focus and this discussion. The motivation for such a sustained challenge of this report suggests the Irish Times wishes to discuss the subject of gender balance only as an interlocutor, and not as the subject of the conversation itself. This is a problematic position, as it implies the Irish Times cannot be examined within the terms of the discussion it itself encourages.

Section 8:

The academics' report goes on to criticise The Irish Times's coverage on the grounds of race and ethnicity. In the period considered, 81 per cent of poets reviewed (153) were Irish. None of these Irish poets, it says, are BAME, a term used in Britain to group people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. The authors do not offer a single example of a collection by an Irish BAME author or cite what percentage of poetry published here is by a BAME poet, obscuring the possibility that it is perhaps zero. In fact, race is not included as a category in any previous MEAS report, which makes it difficult to accurately assess any possible imbalance between our reviewing of BAME writers and the actuality of the publishing landscape in Ireland.

To quote Michael Connelly's detective Harry Bosch: "Everybody counts or nobody counts." In this context, that means if you are going to count the race and ethnicity of every poet reviewed in The Irish Times, then it is only fair to count the race and ethnicity of every Irish poet published to make a meaningful comparison.

The latest report does acknowledge that Irish publishing is "severely lagging behind" because of "editorial failings and biases" but is unwilling to "absolve The Irish Times of responsibility for the significant racial imbalance" as only three (in fact, it is four – it cites both figures: Vahni Capildeo, Derek Walcott, Ocean Vuong and Maryam Al-Masri) out of 35 non-Irish poets reviewed were BAME, which translates as 11.4 per cent. We also highlighted two other UK-published BAME poets, Kei Miller and Danez Smith, in end-of-year best-of columns.

In the 2011 census, 12.9 per cent of the UK population identified as BAME, but again, the report offers no benchmark for what would be appropriate here, no statistic for the proportion of BAME poets published here or elsewhere, or definition of how this British term relates here or in a global context, yet concludes this "underscored the extent to which The Irish Times continues to privilege white voices and marginalise BAME poets".

In fact, an internet search unearths Sandeep Parmar's 2019 report, The State of Poetry and Poetry Criticism in the UK and Ireland 2011-2018, which found that 8.13 per cent of books reviewed in that period were by BAME poets, a significantly smaller figure than that achieved by The Irish Times.

No one would dispute that the pattern of immigration and its subsequent influence on the arts and society are very different in Britain and Ireland. BAME poets in Britain are winning major prizes (Vahni Capildeo; Raymond Antrabus; Roger Robinson) whereas in Ireland they are still working on their debut collections. They are making their presence felt in anthologies, however – Landing Places: Immigrant Poets in Ireland Eds. Eva Bourke and Borbála Faragó (Dedalus Press, 2010) and Writing Home: ‘New Irish’ Poets, edited by Pat Boran and Chiamaka Enyi-Amadi (Dedalus Press, 2019) – both of which we have featured.

When poet Jessica Traynor and actor Stephen Rea created Correspondences, giving voice to the experiences of people living in Direct Provision centres, not only did we review it, but we ran a feature about the making of it.

Response:

This is a very troubling argument for many reasons. In light of this, we believe the response of the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics should be given precedence. This response makes it very clear that the Irish Times article misrepresents and misuses data collected by this organisation in order to justify the exclusion of BAME poets.

We have included the details of this response in a separate document on page 22 below. Please read this.

MEAS accepts that previous reports have not included race and ethnic identity in its previous reports. This has been a failing on our part. We intend to include race and ethnic identity as a category in all future reports.

Section 9:

This week, to mark Australia Day, we published a significant essay by Felicity Plunkett on Australia’s First Nations poets, reflecting the burgeoning success of Indigenous writers there and, incidentally, our commitment to diversity. As it is a feature, not a review, however, it would not have registered in the MEAS report. Likewise, Ian Duhig’s interview with Sinéad Morrissey from 2017, to mark her winning of the Forward Prize. Or this news feature marking Raymond Antrabus winning the Rathbones Folio Prize. Or this feature devoted to Rachael Hegarty’s collection of poems addressing the Dublin bombings in 1974, May Day 1974, published by Salmon Poetry.

Or consider these three surveys of Irish poets’ favourite love poems to mark St Valentine’s Day: ‘Take your clothes off’: Poets reveal their favourite love poems; Love poems: ‘For one night only naked in your arms’ – 14 poets pick their favourites; and Valentine’s Day: Impress them with these love poems. Of the 46 poets invited to contribute, 25 are women.

In the years covered in this report, we have also greatly expanded our coverage of poetry online, broadening and deepening our engagement. None of this is considered worthy of note. Take, as a random sample, this 2015 essay by Doireann Ní Ghriofa on the inspiration for her collection, Clasp; this 2016 feature by Mary O’Malley on her collection, Playing the Octopus (Carcanet); this 2017 article by poet and critic Martina Evans on love poetry and love stories; this 2018 interview with Sydney-based poet Anne Casey; and this 2019 article by Jenny Farrell

about The Children of the Nation: An Anthology of Working People's Poetry from Contemporary Ireland, which she edited.

Response:

To reiterate once again, it was never the remit of this MEAS report to analyse anything outside of the Irish Times poetry reviews. The report never stated that anything else was not 'worthy of note'. Once more the reader here is being asked to look at what is outside of the report, rather than what the report contains.

We provided an analysis of poetry reviews. We justified the rationale behind this focus. It was not our intention to either flatter or insult the Irish Times. It was our intention to provide clear quantitative data and analysis on a specific subject. We did this, without qualitative judgement or dismissal of any other element of the Irish Times culture section. To imply otherwise is to wholly misrepresent the MEAS report.

Section 10:

WH Auden may not have foreseen this report's particular use of statistics when he wrote his commencement address for graduating Harvard students, Under Which Lyre, a poem which poked fun at quantity-measuring approaches to art, and life: "Thou shalt not sit / With statisticians nor commit / A social science". However, he – and most readers of poetry – would understand the problem of reading poetry from a populist, levelling perspective, which sets aside national and international reputation and achievement, and dismisses the painstaking discussion about quality and value, alongside the obvious editorial concern with representation, which inform our critics' choices.

The report never acknowledges the absolute bedrock of literary criticism, which is selection on merit. Nor does it acknowledge that The Irish Times is a commercial organisation that has to have one eye on popular interest and appeal. It goes so far as to question how often we have reviewed Paul Muldoon, for example. It may as well have questioned why Seamus Heaney gets so much attention. It also questions the disproportionate amount of reviews of Gallery Press titles to the detriment of what they describe in Stakhanovite terms as "highly productive presses". The answer is simple: because Gallery publishes many of our finest poets, such as Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin; Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill; Medbh McGuckian; Vona Groarke; Derek Mahon; Ciaran Carson; and Muldoon.

The Irish Times takes pride in our commitment to poetry, which is reflected not only in our reviews but in features and interviews too; in the original poem we publish each week; the poems we publish each month as part of our New Irish Writing; and the annual 'Irish Times' Poetry Now award, presented as part of Mountains to Sea dlr book festival. We welcome all feedback; we do not claim to be perfect; but we do not recognise how we have been portrayed in this report. Of all the national newspapers in Ireland, The Irish Times is the only one to devote the considerable resources and attention required to cover poetry well. To have been singled out in this report is, I suppose, a backhanded compliment. Since it is the only one that it pays us, I suppose we shall have to take it.

Response:

The article has up to this point emphasised that the 'true' reflection of the Irish Times poetry coverage is only obtained by looking at the elements outside of the subject of the MEAS report. This conclusion reveals a truth the above is intended to disguise however; that in line with the rationale behind the focus of the MEAS report, the Irish Times agrees that literary reviews confer the greatest importance on the work of specific poets which are considered writers of the 'best' work. The Irish Times considers its selecting the 'best' work, founded on literary merit, as 'the absolute bedrock of literary criticism'. In its selections of texts for reviews then, and in this final revelation, the Irish Times reaffirms the accuracy of the findings of the MEAS report, that the Irish Times privileges poetry by white, male poets published by specific presses, and marginalises work by other poets and presses, because the latter is implicitly considered inferior and unworthy of similar levels of reviewing coverage. This admission confirms the need for the MEAS report, and the urgent need for the Irish Times to reconsider its editorial principles and its attacking response to external, independent analysis.

MEAS undertakes quantitative research without qualitative analysis. The report passes no judgement on the quality or otherwise of poetry books reviewed in the Irish Times. The data gathered in MEAS reports can be used by editors to inform those 'painstaking discussion about quality and value' and to highlight, where necessary, areas demanding attention and improvement. Concepts of 'merit' and 'value' are never objective or neutral, but once again, this is not the remit of MEAS as an organisation. The report merely presents the objective data, gathered over a five year period, relating to poetry reviews in the Irish Times.

MEAS LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE IRISH TIMES

3 February 2020

Sir,

It was with great surprise and deep disappointment that we discovered the Irish Times had published the Literary Editor Martin Doyle's article disputing the findings of independent academic research, 'A miracle, not a crime' (31 January).

Ostensibly addressing the latest MEAS report 'Poetry Reviews in the Irish Times, 2008-2013: Gender, Race and Publishers, this article does not focus on the true content of the report. Instead it misuses data to construct a false argument, diverts from the findings of the report and does not meet the standards of integrity or impartiality expected of a feature in the Irish Times.

The article misrepresents the subject and conclusions of the MEAS report and misuses other independent research by the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics organisation to justify the marginalisation or exclusion of BAME authors, which the Ledbury organisation has identified. The article also includes an ad hominem attack on one of the authors of the MEAS report in question.

MEAS is an independent organisation established to monitor and report on equality in the arts sector in Ireland, with a particular focus on the literary arts. It gathers quantitative data and prepares annual reports to provide an accurate account of the literary landscape in Ireland and to record annual changes. The findings of the latest report, while perhaps unflattering and difficult to read, are based entirely on principled, unbiased, and impartial analysis of data collected with honesty and in good faith.

That this article was published raises questions over the respect the Irish Times has for independent academic research. In the absence of a right to reply in print, we urge readers to access the original report at www.measorg.com and to take the time consider the findings of the report.

Sincerely,

Dr Kenneth Keating and Dr Ailbhe McDaid

Measuring Equality in the Arts Sector (MEAS)

LEDBURY EMERGING POETRY CRITICS RESPONSE

4 February 2020

Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics is a mentorship programme for poetry reviewing founded in 2017, when critics of colour in the UK and Ireland were deeply underrepresented (3.7% of reviews published). Three years on, the LEPCs are now an experienced and esteemed cohort of twelve UK-based and four US-based critics of colour who have made huge strides working alongside commissioning editors of poetry magazines and national newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The TLS*, *The Telegraph*, *The New Statesman*, *Poetry Review*, *Poetry London*, *The White Review*, *Ambit*, *Modern Poetry in Translation* and many others). In that time they, alongside a cultural shift towards inclusion and BAME critics more widely, have more than doubled reviewing by critics of colour to over 11%. Therefore, we were disappointed to see *The Irish Times's* Books Editor Martin Doyle's recent article, 'A miracle, not a crime: gender balance, race and poetry in *The Irish Times*', a defence of criticisms of the newspaper's lack of race and gender representation in poetry reviewing. We are even more concerned to see our research quoted to justify the exclusion of BAME poets and critics. We sincerely hope that Doyle has seen the quality of our critics' work and will rethink his position.

Doyle's use of the data in our report 'The State of Poetry and Poetry Criticism 2019' (Coates, Parmar) was highly selective and, at times, erroneous. The figure he cites (8.13%) does indeed cover books reviewed 2011-18. However, this figure *includes* data from Irish magazines, not just the UK, as Doyle claims. Removing Irish publications would raise that figure significantly because they are, on the whole, less diverse in their coverage than UK publications. He also fails to employ his own logic: in the past two years, that figure has risen to 12.9% and 13.1% (UK & Ire), thereby exceeding the 2011 demographic figure Doyle cites. Ireland's BAME population was 4.9% in 2011, and is almost certainly higher today. The fact that no BAME poets have been published by Irish presses is troubling, and Doyle's citation of this in his own defence is deeply saddening. *The Irish Times* is indeed a prestigious outlet for poetry criticism. They have the power to sway opinions and create readerships. But they also have a responsibility to address failures where they appear. While we are glad *The Irish Times* has begun to address its heavy bias toward male poets this year, we sincerely hope Doyle maintains this commitment, and applies that logic to commissioning poetry critics of colour.

The figure for the Irish publications in our study (which does not yet include *The Irish Times*) is around 2.5%. *The Irish Times's* figures are four out of 187 (2.1%). They are lagging behind even other Irish publications with poetry reviewing. We should also note that at no point does Doyle mention that not one of those reviews were written by BAME critics, or even that 83% of those reviews were written by men. He leaves this failing unaddressed. There are also logical fallacies in Doyle's piece. He demands demographic data for Irish poets, rather than Irish people. This not only creates a border against writers currently excluded from Irish poetry, it also renders his references to UK demographics meaningless. Doyle argues that BAME poets are present in anthologies. This is positive news, but it also ignores the fact that

those poets require the same mentorship and professional support as their white counterparts, which publishers are obviously failing to do. The fact that one such anthology was published ten years ago, and yet not a single poet in its pages has found their way to publication, should be a very obvious sign that there are structural barriers in place.

Doyle also cites an interview with Raymond Antrobus. Had he read our reports, he would have known that we distinguish between criticism and other prose features. Features are often a fig leaf to disguise a lack of critical engagement with the work of BAME poets and critics.

It is crucial to note that data is only one tool among many to confront the barriers faced by BAME poets and critics: as Doyle rightly notes, it is not merely a matter of numbers. The Ledbury Critics programme is attuned not just to representation but to critical language, its underlying values, and how these are applied to poets of colour. 'The absolute bedrock of literary criticism' is, according to Doyle 'selection on merit'. But as any critic knows all too well, 'merit' is not neutrally applied nor can critical judgements be unbiased. An important part of the Ledbury Critics programme is to encourage an open dialogue with editors: mostly this has been productive and has led to real structural change, not only because a more diverse critical culture makes our shared literary landscape more equal, but because a homogeneous review culture replicates unquestioningly what it values and not why it values it. It resists change. Criticism should, by its very nature, respond to an ever-evolving art form and shifts in aesthetics, politics and the social conditions by which poetry is read, produced, and, indeed, valued. We would welcome an open dialogue with *The Irish Times* to help address the present imbalances in their review pages.

For further details about the Ledbury Poetry Critics scheme, see our latest report: https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/centrefornewandinternationalwriting/State_of_Poetry_Criticism_Report_2019_-_Ledbury_Emerging_Poetry_Critics.pdf

IRISH TIMES'S THIRD RESPONSE (email - unedited)

4 February 2020

Dear Dr Keating and Dr McDaid,

Thank you for your very lengthy response of January 27th in the matter of poetry reviews in The Irish Times.

I note your observation that The Irish Times is "content" to reflect a gender bias "without consideration". My email to you, pointedly, did not say that The Irish Times is content with the gender balance in its reviews but only that there is a very good reason for it. Similarly, your assertion that the current situation pertains "without consideration" is factually incorrect. The issue receives frequent consideration.

I note your point that the majority of poetry publishers are run by men and that these men "exclude and marginalise" (i.e. discriminate against) female writers because of "inherited patriarchal biases". You certainly have no hesitation in imputing motive.

When we say that our reviews are representative of that which is published, you conclude that we have "no editorial decision-making power" over our choice of reviews and/or that we are "content (that word again) to perpetuate... biases". More erroneous conclusions. We do engage in decision making and we never expressed contentment with the status quo.

You fail to acknowledge the fact that last year 60 per cent of the poets reviewed in The Irish Times were female, even though your own 2018 report found that women made up only 37 per cent of poets published in Ireland in the years 2008-2017. Nor was this a one-off. In the years 2016 to 2019, 49 per cent of poets reviewed were female, one-third more than the percentage of women poets published in those years.

You quote our "avowal that The Irish Times must reflect uncritically the inequalities evident in the poetry publishing industry". Saying that our reviews reflect that which is published falls a long way short of an assertion "that we must reflect uncritically the inequalities etc". We do not have to reflect any inequalities. What we do have to do is to bring the best poetry published, as determined in our decision-making, to the attention of our readers.

I note your decision to "defend the fine work being produced by a range of Irish poetry presses, ones which The Irish Times sees fit to dismiss or marginalise". We neither dismiss it nor marginalise it. Unfortunately, you presume to have a lot of knowledge of the Irish Times editorial decision-making that occurs. My reference to a "Buggin's Turn approach" was not in any sense a criticism of any Irish poetry but rather a (somewhat exasperated) dismissal of the modus operandi that you were advocating.

I do regret that you have decided not to amend the conclusions in your report on foot of the information that I provided but that is your right. As I said, the work that MEAS carries out is worthy and welcome. But if conclusions are not in accordance with the facts, it is necessary for us to say so.

Yours sincerely,

██████████

THIRD MEAS RESPONSE (email - unedited)

5 February 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email, dated 4 February 2020.

We are heartened to see your objections to our arguments have decreased considerably, and hope this is because you have come to accept most of the points made in our report and our previous correspondence. We are disappointed, however, to see your continued rejection of our fact-based and data-driven analysis.

We note that you have repeated many of the same points made in your previous email and/or in Martin Doyle's Irish Times article. Please see our response document in full, which details the erroneous nature of these comments. The findings of our report highlight the considerable imbalances in the Irish Times Poetry reviews in relation to gender, race, and publishers, over the years of our report. The objective of MEAS is to collect quantitative data that can be used in a productive manner by editors, publishers, stakeholders and interested parties in their efforts to enact necessary structural change in the Irish cultural landscape. All of our research is conducted in this spirit of seeking progressive change and development in Irish literature. We are saddened that the Irish Times rejected the findings of this report and the spirit in which it is intended.

We will simply conclude by drawing your attention to your own declaration on behalf of the Irish Times:

'We do not have to reflect any inequalities. What we do have to do is to bring the best poetry published, as determined in our decision-making, to the attention of our readers.'

We implore you once more to reconsider the determining factors which inform your establishment of 'the best poetry published', and to reflect on how the findings of our report can be useful in implementing an informed editorial process that will improve the diversity, equality and quality of Irish Times poetry reviews.

We understand this is a difficult conversation for some to have, and remain hopeful that this communication and relationship can move into a more co-operative phase. As always, we remain open to continuing this conversation in a productive fashion.

Sincerely,

Dr Kenneth Keating and Dr Ailbhe McDaid.