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REFERENCES

Justin QUINN (ed.), *Irish Poetry after Feminism*, Princess Grace Irish Library Lectures 10, London, Colin Smythe, 2008, ISBN 978-0-86140-467-4

- 1 This book of essays has emerged from a symposium organised in September 2006 by Justin Quinn in the Princess Grace Library in Monaco where a number of academics, and poet academics were brought together to discuss the issue of Irish poetry after feminism. Such a stimulating and controversial topic was bound to be hotly debated, and in his introductory remarks Justin Quinn clarifies and justifies each term. His aim in organising the event was to assess the challenge feminism has presented for “the craft and tradition of poetry” (12). The volume is composed of eight essays and a poem by Derek Mahon. The symposium format was obviously very conducive to exchange and dialogue. Some of the essays in the collection continue the polemical conversations that animated the symposium. It is clear that people disagreed as to the impact and value of feminism and also differed in their view of the role of the poet and the function of art.
- 2 Moynagh Sullivan applies a hermeneutics of gender to existing historiographical narratives of Irish poetry. Peter McDonald’s vigorously argued response claims that Sullivan’s perspective leaves little space for the male writer and takes Sullivan to task for ideological certainties that are difficult to engage with. Caitriona Clutterbuck’s essay offers an interesting synthesis of the positions adopted by the various participants, while proposing her own analysis of the situation, seeing feminism and Irish poetry as “natural allies” (54). Selina Guinness too gives voice to the discussions that prevailed in Monaco, pinpointing the concerns raised by those who feel that feminist readings of poetry in their gendered orientation show too little regard for poetic quality and tradition. Yet Guinness goes on to show, in her discussion of “The

Annotated House”, that the analysis facilitated by feminism does make an important contribution to the debate.

- 3 Elsewhere, readings of the work of individual poets are proposed. Fran Brearton analyzes “First Principles” by Derek Mahon, a poem which appeared in his début collection and has since disappeared from the Mahon canon. It is reprinted in this volume of essays, allowing the reader to assess Mahon’s engagement with gender politics and to question, as Brearton does, the reasons for such an excision. In a volume where Irish poetry and feminism are mentioned in the same breath, Eavan Boland’s work is frequently cited, most notably by David Wheatley in his stimulating reading of Samuel Beckett’s poetry. Wheatley questions Boland’s combining of the roles of woman and poet and feels that her poetry has suffered as a result. Lucy Collins turns her attention to a younger generation of Irish poets in her study of poems by Sinéad Morrissey and Vona Groarke. Leontia Flynn, who belongs to that younger generation of poets, offers a reading of Medhb McGuckian’s poem “The Sofa”, which she considers to be feminist in its “resistance to an inherited opinion” (82).
- 4 As a reader, one comes away from this thought-provoking collection of essays with two regrets. The first is the absence of Edna Longley’s contribution to the symposium; her incisive comments are reported by many of the essay writers. Her distinctive voice is missed. The second regret is that the print run of the volume is limited to 250 copies. Perhaps both could be rectified with a second edition?