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Faced with the catastrophic canonical neglect of Irish women poets and writers in very real terms, there are many responses. Those of interrogation, of anger, of reclamation, and of healing. These responses have all occurred, are continuing to occur among women writers across literary genres.

In her article "[A profound deafness to the female voice](#)" (Irish Times, April 18, 2018) Sinead Gleeson examines our responses as the women who have been left to reclaim our narrative heritages,

once again, it is up to women to use their time to respond, to do the corrective work of calling out male editors, and how this eats up their creative time, steering the focus away from their own work.

Re-reading Gleeson's article, I was struck by the above because of the truth of her statement. In the almost two years since the publication of *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Poets* a melt of activity has occurred. Fired! Irish Women Poets was part of a response to that othering of women poets but it fed into other meetings, voices and attempts to work out, to formulate responses to a neglect and omission that appears endemic in Irish Literature.

On the weekend of September 6th and 7th 2019 MEAS ([Measuring Equality in the Arts Sector](#)) organised a seminar, Measuring Equality in the Arts Sector, an Interdisciplinary Conference, an event which over two days examined gender inequality from a range of views, including contributions and performances from Kathy D'Arcy, Dr. Lucy Collins, Chiamaka Enyi-Amadi, Dr. Ailbhe McDaid, Dr. Ken Keating, Jess McKinney and more. The weekend was lively and interesting, although one of the delegates felt it was 'ultimately depressing'. Deirdre Falvey's article "[Two-thirds of published poets are male, so does poetry have a gender issue?](#)" (August 17th, 2019) looked at MEAS research and figures in advance of the seminar. MEAS examined funding and found the biggest disparity in gender was closely aligned to the three most highly funded publishers. The numbers and their disparity was not a surprise to many of us who have tried to highlight these issues. We first heard the figures at the Missing Voices seminar in September of 2018, an initiative organised by Poetry Ireland under their [Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018-2020](#). The Missing Voices seminar (2018) was supported by Gerald Dawe in response to criticism on the gender balance of *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Poets* (2017). In many ways, we have come full circle. I will explain this in brief.

Fired! Spent some months organising the pledge, [a tricky little document](#) of non-compliance and non-participation in conferences, reviews, anthologies and events that exclude women, or do not make a good faith effort to include women of expertise in our literary life. After that, we organised readings across the country and in other countries. Fired! is unique in that it represents an all-island, multi-platformed and interdisciplinary group of people, editors and friends. Kathy D'Arcy summed it up when she said that "Fired! Gave her a context outside of the academic to address the issues".

The work of a healing, reclamation and the 're-creative' voice in Irish women's writing
C. Murray

This is hugely important, many of us have been working in quite isolated contexts and it created a moment where we could unite. At a similar time and along a familiar intersection MEAS was conducting their research and Poetry Ireland was working on their strategy. These are all responses to the same problem: the neglect and exclusion of women and other marginalised groups from a male-heavy canon and their inability to engage with the problem.

In short, we have done the work but those who have been criticised, the editors, the publishers have not engaged. attended seminars, readings or meetings on the problem. They do not care to. The Arts Council say “While In relation to the MEAS conference on 6 -7 September, the Arts Council did indeed attend and contribute to that conference. Monica Corcoran, Strategic Development Manager, presented the Arts Council’s newly published Equality, Human Right & Diversity Policy & Strategy, which can be found here: <http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/EHRD%20Policy%20English%20version%20Final.pdf>.

There were questions on funding disparities, specifically in relation to the big three publishers. Monica Corcoran referred us the their policy but did not confirm if the publishers had engaged with their strategy. In the two years since Fired! And other groups began questioning issues of neglect, there has been little if any engagement across multiple seminars, conferences and readings. What are the Arts Council doing in relation to ensuring diversity in publishing houses? Is de-funding an option? Invest in creating digital policies and platforms for emergent artists.

This brings me back to Gleeson’s quote above,

once again, it is up to women to use their time to respond, to do the corrective work of calling out male editors, and how this eats up their creative time, steering the focus away from their own work.

We are working hard, and often at great personal cost. It is time to attend to our voices. I personally want to thank everyone involved in supporting these initiatives on parity of esteem. We need the voices of women in our national cultural narrative. It is time for us to recognise the value of the work and to move on to reclaiming their voices and healing the awful neglect we have all endured.