

to enshrine “moral values” attached to “recovery and redemption” as well as economic values such as efficiency (84).

But perhaps most interestingly, Choi’s analysis of the ways the emerging view of the body placed pressure on the old moral economies and forms of literature makes one thing very clear: the notion of the continuity of the body and environment, and thus vulnerability of the liberal subject, emerges simultaneously with the concept of that subject itself. Posthumanism is, in short, either connate with liberal humanism or a slightly belated twin. Choi demonstrates how narratives of bodily connections not only show pressure to reinscribe identity and belonging, but also offer an alternate model in which the individual easily dissolves into unmarked and anonymous bodily matter dissolved and dispersed through the social body as a kind of macro-organic structure (150). By the end of the century, Choi notes, “germ narrative initiated the reader into a new conception of sociality ... where contact with others was not only involuntary but also constant, not merely intersecting but also enveloping” (148). Choi suggests that although these new ways of understanding bodily connections might be represented within gothic invasion narratives, they also offered new, inclusive modes of thinking human sociality beyond traditional identity categories. Perhaps the next identity the Victorians will enable us to think past might be the human itself.

Pamela K. Gilbert
University of Florida
pgilbert@ufl.edu

CAITRÍONA CLEAR. *Women’s Voices in Ireland: Women’s Magazines in the 1950s and 60s*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. Pp. 189. \$114.00 (cloth).
 doi: 10.1017/jbr.2017.72

When Oscar Wilde accepted an invitation from the Cassell’s publishing firm to edit *Lady’s World* in 1887, he suggested that the magazine should “deal not merely with what women wear, but with what they think, and what they feel. The *Lady’s World* should be made the recognized organ for the expression of women’s opinions on all subjects of literature, art and modern life” (*The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis [London, 1962], 194–95).

Many later women’s magazines have had similar aspirations, and Caitríona Clear of the National University of Ireland, Galway, examines two notable Irish examples for evidence of what women in Ireland were thinking and feeling in the 1950s and 1960s. Thoroughly researched, *Women’s Voices in Ireland: Women’s Magazines in the 1950s and 60s* provides much insight into the social and cultural mores of Ireland and the changing circumstances of Irish women’s lives in these decades. Nevertheless, Clear’s conclusions are necessarily tentative, and she is to be commended for not claiming too much weight for what was clearly painstaking and time-consuming work.

The magazines in question are *Woman’s Life*, which ran from 1936 to 1959, and *Woman’s Way*, launched in 1963 and still extant. Clear looks at the former for the 1950s and the latter for the 1960s. She focuses on readers’ contributions to both—specifically, letters from readers published in the magazines and issues raised by readers in the problem pages. Her book is not, therefore a history of Irish women’s magazines—nor even a history of the two magazines under scrutiny. Clear decries the fact that women’s magazines have been neglected in the historiography of the media in Ireland, and she is right to do so. Still, her aim here is not to fill this gap, but rather to show how *Woman’s Life* and *Woman’s Way* “gave voice and space to real women’s satisfactions and dissatisfactions, whatever they were and however they evolved” (131).

But how representative were the letters and problems that surfaced in the two magazines? As Clear points out, “it is impossible to know on what basis letters [and problems] were selected” (77). What is available, therefore, is “a *kind* of evidence ... of *some* of the problems *some* Irish girls and women ... were *able to articulate* in these years and Irish magazines were *able to print*” (28). Since, as Clear states, “we can only go on what we can see in front of us” (36), it follows that “as historical evidence they [the letters and problem pages] must be treated with extreme caution” (11).

With this caveat, the single item that emerges most clearly from Clear’s study is the shift in focus from concerns about courtship behavior and marital difficulties in the 1950s to a more open discussion of sexuality and birth control in the 1960s. The advice given was always firmly within the strictures of Roman Catholic teaching on these matters, reflecting a desire not to offend the religious sensitivities of readers. Nevertheless, the long-time “agony aunt” in *Woman’s Way*, Angela Macnamara, incurred the wrath of the archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, because of her pleas for proper sex education for young people.

The lack of knowledge about sex in Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s revealed in this book is genuinely shocking. Clear comments that “it is hard to believe, now, that Irish girls and women were really that ignorant about the mechanics of reproduction, but this seems to have been the case.” She adds, “One correspondent who ... queried the need for ‘sex instruction’ on the grounds that the previous generation had managed fine without it, was (sharply? wearily?) told he or she ‘should see the letters’ Macnamara received” (91).

Other matters raised regularly in the magazines included career and workplace issues, the lack of women in public life, compulsory Irish in state examinations, corporal punishment in schools and in the home, and problems of and with teenagers, as well as domestic issues such as personal hygiene and grooming, cooking, knitting, and needlework. One important issue that was avoided was emigration, and Clear points out that this omission contrasts with the numerous features on the experience of British people settled abroad in some British magazines, especially *Woman’s Realm*, in the 1950s. The only evidence of the Irish experience of emigration was the preponderance of photographs of babies with English addresses in the “bonnie babies” feature of *Woman’s Life*, testifying to emigrants’ forlorn desire to keep in touch with home.

This study is, accordingly, a useful starting point for analyzing women’s concerns and opinions in Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s. It is always difficult to assess the impact and significance of magazines, journals and newspapers—but, as Walter Lippmann argued, their real importance derives from the fact that they “signalize” an event or issue (*Public Opinion* [London, 1922], 144). In other words, they tell people what to think about. Thus, even if *Woman’s Life* and *Woman’s World* publicized letters and problems that were unrepresentative of the opinions and concerns of Irish women generally, the simple act of raising these matters brought them to a wide audience and shaped the discourse that ensued. The magazines did not necessarily determine or reflect the outcome of that discourse, but they helped initiate and encourage it.

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the very existence of these magazines signaled that, “women’s lives were of abiding interest, whether situated within the home or outside it” (122). Clear quotes the founding editor of *Woman’s Way*, who wrote in 1963 that “females are still, after 40 years of self-rule in this part of the country, not taken seriously” (47). Both *Woman’s Life* and *Woman’s Way* played their part in rectifying this. Their fundamental, if subliminal, message was that (Irish) women’s lives mattered.

Felix M. Larkin
Independent scholar
felixmlarkin@gmail.com