"Powerful on land and sea":
An analysis of history's attitudes to the
lives and careers of two female pirates;
Grainne Mhaol and Anne Bonny

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M.A. 1999
“Powerful on land and sea”:

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by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Women’s Studies.

August 1999

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For my parents Brian and Geraldine, and my brother Edwin,

who have always given me their unfailing support and encouragement,

despite being utterly terrified at the thought of having a feminist in the family.

*I love you all very much.*
Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with assessing historians’ attitudes to women in history and, more specifically, to women in piracy (which has traditionally been considered a male preserve) by comparing the lives of two female pirates, Grainne Mhaol and Anne Bonny. Although both women chose piracy as a career, their reasons for doing so were extremely different. Grainne turned to piracy because legitimate trading was unavailable to her, due to English control of Galway city. Anne turned to piracy as a means of escaping a loveless marriage and the rigid social roles of early 18th century America. The culture in which each woman grew up, and the historical status of women in these cultures, had a major influence on their ability to achieve high status as pirates. By analysing the reasons why their careers and fame as pirates were so different I have shown that, although their contemporaries accepted them as pirates, historians have deleted them from history, dismissing them as fictitious characters or prostitutes or lesbians. The result has been the creation of an illusion in which piracy was an entirely male domain.
I would like to thank the following people for their help, encouragement and input during this year:

- Katherine O’Donnell, my incredibly supportive supervisor who kept me to my deadlines, helped with my inquiries, contacted people all over the world to get advice for me, talked me through how a thesis should be done and encouraged me consistently (thanks for everything).

- Anne Byrne, Dept. of Sociology & Politics, UCG without whom I would never have even considered doing this M.A.

- Mary, Ruth and Jennifer Drury-Byrne, for their warmth, encouragement and support.

- All the people who have made it their job to rescue women from obscurity by researching women’s lives and refusing to consign women to the ‘useless information’ pile where we have lain so long.
Abstract

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"Knowledge is not absolute or true, but always relative. It is produced in complex ways within large epistemic frames that themselves have an (at least quasi-) autonomous history. Its uses and meanings become contested politically and are the means by which relationships of power - of domination and subordination - are constructed" (Joan Wallach Scott)

Historians have traditionally claimed that theirs is a value free science, that is it neutral and unbiased. They have assumed that the information which they have recorded is the only information truly worth recording; the lives of kings and lords, feuds and wars. They see no difference between the history of the men they specifically designate as worthy of historical study and everyone else’s history\(^1\). They did not study women because women were not deemed important enough to study. Women’s function was to make life run smoothly for men, not to perform deeds which history would record. History was exactly that, “His-Story”, work devoted to cataloguing men’s achievements and behaviour through the centuries. Its purpose was to serve as a means of glorifying the machismo and masculinity of former generations of men.

\(^1\) Zinsser, 1993: 6.
This dissertation seeks to rethink and rewrite this received view of history by examining the lives of Grainne Mhaol and Anne Bonny, two female pirates. I will be comparing their careers, and the societies in which they lived, to show how they manipulated and subverted society's expectations of them as women. I will also be analysing historians' attitudes to them, as well as examining their influence as feminists and feminist icons. By doing so I hope to show that history itself labours under severe sexual prejudice, choosing to ignore or denigrate women who step outside the domain of home and children.

I have chosen to focus on two female pirates because pirates have always been one of the ultimate representations of masculinity. Beyond the control of the law, they exist in a world in which strong men reign supreme, where the raiding of ships is an everyday occurrence, where women exist only to be used and cast aside when they have served their purpose. Literature, cinema, television and history have all made their contribution to this stereotype of what a real pirate is. Given that most people first learn of pirates through books and film, it is no wonder that it is hard for them to accept a different view. Ask most children who they think of when they think of pirates and the chances are that Long John Silver and Captain Hook are top of their list. There are no female pirates on Treasure Island, or in Never-Never land. There are mothers, Indian princesses, mermaids and fairies but there are no female Long John Silvers or Captain Hooks to be found. This is not because female pirates did not exist. Rather, men have created a male dominated view of history and more especially of piracy simply because "the pen has been in their hands".

\[2\] Austen, Jane, Sense & Sensibility.
By 1800 certain fundamental myths had been established about pirates; they were savage murderers or noble outlaws. By 1900 they were firmly established as sadistic brutes who murdered, drank and wenched. The one unchanging attribute which they all shared was that they were male. So it comes as something of a shock for most people to realise that there were female pirates. All around the world, from Ireland to America to China, women have been engaged in piracy for as long as men have. For the most part history has treated them as anomalies. Women such as Cheng I Sao, Artemisia and others have been dismissed as transgendered figures or pseudo men, diminished as prostitutes or pirates' lovers rather than actual pirates, or simply ignored completely.

Chapter one deals with Grainne Mhaol or Granuaile as she is often called. A Mayo noblewoman with a strong sea-faring background, Grainne went on to become a chieftain in deed, though not in name, leading over two hundred men from diverse clans in her trading and raiding. Her activities were not merely piratical but also political. She petitioned and met Queen Elizabeth I, gaining not only a pardon for her piracy but also gaining permission from the Queen to maintain her livelihood of "maintenance by land and sea".

Chapter two focuses on Anne Bonny. Although born in Ireland and traditionally dubbed an Irish pirate, Anne's piratical career occurred in America, following her parents' emigration in the very beginning of the eighteenth century. Most of the information about her comes from Captain Johnson's *A General History Of The*

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Due to the minimal information about Anne's life, this chapter deals only with her life until her release from prison in 1721.

Chapter three analyses women in Irish society in the sixteenth century. It provides some fascinating insights into areas such as marriage, divorce and the status of women, raising many questions about the assumed prevalence of patriarchy and patriarchal society in pre-colonial Ireland.

Chapter four deals with women in seventeenth century South Carolina, the colony where Anne's family settled upon coming to America. South Carolina differed strongly from colonies such as Massachusetts which were Puritan and thus more restrictive on women. This is not to say that South Carolina was a feminist society. However, until villages, towns and cities were firmly established women enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than their Puritan counterparts. This freedom disappeared as society became more settled.

Chapter five compares Anne and Grainne's lives from a variety of viewpoints. This chapter seeks to consolidate the theory that society influences women's lives in numerous ways, both by defining "appropriate" roles for them and by expecting dissident women to follow a similar life pattern when they deviate from the norm. It looks at the reasons why Anne and Grainne turned to piracy, their status on ship, their attitudes to other women and their position as feminists and feminist icons.

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4 Captain Johnson's book was initially claimed as the work of Daniel Defoe but this claim was later proved untrue. I have therefore used the name Captain Johnson when acknowledging information from this text.
Chapter six examines the various ways in which historians, traditional and feminist, have sought to contextualise Anne and Grainne. It also looks at the challenges which face feminists now, in their struggle to create a new herstory.

Overall, this dissertation raises more questions than it answers. As a feminist I believe that this is an advantage. For too long we have simply accepted history as an objective form of knowledge, but if we do not question and challenge perceived truths, how can we be truly satisfied with the knowledge we possess? When I started this dissertation it was a labour of love based on my interest in Grainne Mhaol. Now I hope that the work I have done will enable others to challenge, not only the perception of piracy as a male domain, but also the belief that received history is an objective truth. It was not possible (nor desirable, for me at least) to provide a comprehensive guide to women in piracy. That is a challenge which remains for another time.
Granuaile, Grace O’Malley, Grainne Mhaol. These are all names given to one of the most famous pirates ever to appear in Irish history. She was born in Belclare Castle, Co. Mayo in 1530, the daughter of Margaret and Owen ‘Dubhdarra’ O’Malley. She had one brother, Donal ‘na Piopa’ (Donal ‘of the pipes’) and no sisters. Her mother, Margaret, does not appear to have exerted any great feminizing influence over Grainne, as she grew up to become one of the most legendary female pirates of all time.

Margaret O’Malley was the daughter of Conchobhar Og mac Conchobhair mic Maoilseachloinn and, when she died, she left all that she owned to Grainne, as was testified to by Tibbot ‘na Long’, Grainne’s youngest son, in 1606. Some historians have taken this to mean that Donal was an illegitimate child. However, Brehon law (which prevailed in Connaught until the seventeenth century) did not distinguish between children as legitimate or illegitimate. Brehon law also allowed men to have secondary wives (wives of a lower status than the first wife). It is possible, therefore, that Donal was the son of a second wife of Owen O’Malley, although there is no proof of this.

Owen ‘Dubhdarra’ O’Malley was chieftain of the Umhall Uachtar, what is now Murrisk. The O’Malleys were a sea-faring clan and he would have commanded all the sea around this area. According to Leabhar na gCeart (the Book of Rights), the
O'Malleys were tributory kings to the provincial kings of Connaught and lords of the Urnhalls (the baronies of Murrisk and Burrishoole).

There is very little known about Grainne’s childhood. According to tradition she was “dark-haired and of dark complexion”. She appears to have taken little interest in the usual female activities of the time, preferring instead to watch and learn from her father. There is no record of when Grainne first went to sea, but legend has it that when she was six or seven she asked her father to take her on a fishing trip. He refused, saying that her hair would only get in the sailors eyes. When he got home he discovered his wife distraught. Grainne had cut off all her hair. Now she insisted that he would take her and he agreed. It was from this act that she earned the name Grainne ‘Mhaol’ - Grainne ‘the bald’. Whether this legend is true or not, it indicates the determination which Grainne had throughout her life, to do things her own way, regardless of what anyone else thought.

In 1546, Grainne was married to Donal O’Flaherty of Ballinahinch. It was a good match, as the O’Flahertys were a strong clan and Donal was the acknowledged tanist, of the clan. They lived in Bunowen castle and Grainne had three children, Owen, Murrough and Margaret. Grainne’s domestic duties involved running two castles, Bunowen and Ballinahinch. Apart from this little is known of her domestic life in Bunowen. However, later in the marriage, Grainne took to seafaring and piracy. As

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1 Chambers, 1994: 52.
2 Tanist - an elected leader. The future chieftain of the clan.
a base for piratical activities Bunowen was well placed, situated as it was beside a concealed sea-inlet which merged with the Bunowen river.

Grainne appears to have usurped her husband’s authority over his followers, convincing them to follow her on sea-raids rather than on Donal’s cattle-raids. She sailed to Portugal and Spain to trade goods, as well as raiding any ships heading for Galway. Trading with foreigners would not have been a problem as most of the Irish spoke Gaelic as their first language and Latin as their second. How Donal reacted to his wife’s behaviour is unknown. Grainne was obviously strongwilled and it is possible that Donal found it easier to let Grainne do what she wanted rather than fighting with her about it.

In 1549, Donal (whose nickname was Donal ‘an Chogaidh’ meaning Donal ‘of the Battles’ and also Donal ‘an Cullagh’ meaning Donal ‘the Cock’ on account of his fondness for raiding and skirmishes) was implicated in the murder of Walter Fada, the would be tanist of the Burkes. This damaged his prospects as tanist of the O’Flahertys.

Donal was killed by the neighbouring Joyce clan after one of his raids on their territory. Some of his men escaped and ran to the castle to tell Grainne. When the Joyces arrived they found, not an empty castle, but a castle prepared for siege. Gráinne defended the castle until the Joyces retreated and in honour of this the clans named it Hen’s Castle. In other words it was no longer Donal ‘the Cock’s castle’ but his wife’s (who was by association ‘the Hen’).
In spite of Grainne’s defence of the castle, she was denied her widow’s portion by the O’Flaherty clan (custom dictated that a chieftain’s wife was entitled to one third of his possessions. However this was not legally enforced). She returned to her father who gave her the castle at Clare Island for her own. From here she began her career of raiding and trading in earnest. Her castle on Clare Island, in particular, was very well suited to this type of enterprise, affording her an all-encompassing view of the wide expanse of water which surrounding the island. Ships could be spotted from a long distance away while the castle itself could not be noticed by passing shipping from any great distance. “Clare Island and Clew Bay in general, were perfect strongholds for her maritime operations; they afforded a natural protection for her ships and the inaccessible nature of the area acted as a deterrent to would-be intruders or pursuers”. She had, by this stage, over two hundred men following her from various clans.

At some stage after Donal’s death Grainne apparently had a lover who was killed by the McMahons of Ballycroy. In revenge she killed those responsible and then went to the McMahon stronghold at Doona. Routing the inhabitants, she took it over and installed her own followers there. From this she earned the name “The Dark Lady of Doona”.

In 1566, she married again, this time to Richard ‘an Iarainn’ Burke. This marriage was, according to tradition, made under Brehon law for a period of one year certain.

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4 Chambers, 1994: 74.
5 Chambers, 1994: 76.
What this meant was that after one year, either party could divorce the other if they were unsatisfied. Marrying Richard provided Grainne with Rockfleet Castle as her new home and it was where she would live for the rest of her days. She bore Richard one son, called Tibbot ‘na Long’ who was born in 1567. The folklore surrounding Tibbot’s birth tells us that he was born at sea (hence the name meaning Tibbot ‘of the ship’). The day after Grainne’s ship was attacked by Turkish pirates. Her crew panicked and Grainne had to come up on deck, still suffering the afterbirth. She reputedly fired blunderbusses at the Turks, captured their ship and hanged them all at Carrig-a-howley.

She was not always so fortunate. In 1577, while on a raiding party, she was captured by the Earl of Desmond. He gave her to the English, who transferred her to Dublin castle. She remained in captivity for two years until her release in 1579. The conditions of her release are unknown. She was very lucky however. Most prisoners in Dublin castle never left there alive.

Her husband, Richard became the MacWilliam in 1580 and was knighted by the English in September 1581. His relations with the English appear to have been encouraged by Grainne who was a shrewd diplomat. She had realised that antagonising the English would only result in the loss of property and lands. Knowing that the old Gaelic way of life was being slowly eroded by the English, she understood the importance of going with the tide of change. In this marriage, as in her previous

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6 McDermott, 1940: 214.
7 Chieftain of the Burkes.
one, she appears to have been the dominant partner. Sir Henry Sidney noted upon meeting her that, she “brought her husband with her for she was as well by sea as by land well more than Mrs. Mate with him...”

Legend has it that one day (a year after the marriage), on returning from a hunting raid, Richard discovered he was locked out of the castle. Grainne stood on the battlements and called down to him ‘I dismiss you’, divorcing him instantly. Under Brehon law, if she could hold the castle against him it was hers. And hers it stayed.

Whether or not this is true, the marriage officially ended after Richard’s (natural) death in April 1583. Determined not to be ousted from her property, as she had been on Donal O’Flaherty’s death, Grainne rallied her men and her livestock and moved them all inside the castle walls. Her position “as chieftain of Rockfleet Castle and the nearby territory, a position she assumed on the death of Richard-an-larainn, was in defiance of both Gaelic and English law alike. No-one of sufficient power had yet emerged to challenge her.”

In 1584 Sir Richard Bingham became governor of Connaught. He was, according to Chambers, one of the biggest obstacles Grainne had ever encountered. “Under Sidney and even the dour Fitton, she had managed to rule her ocean territory and to continue to ply her trade virtually unopposed. Under Bingham’s administration however, west

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9 “[T]he law allows a private individual to enforce a claim against another by means of distraint i.e. the formal seizure of property belonging to another, without recourse to a court of law” (Kelly, 1988: 177).
Mayo became less remote from the centre of English rule and administration, until eventually the power and influence of the English government pierced its armour of obscurity, revealing all its secrets". Chambers points out that Bingham’s penetration and subsequent domination of Grace’s sea domain, the result of which was the virtual impounding of her fleet, was the single greatest setback Grace ever encountered and she never recovered fully from it.

Bingham had forced Grainne from Rockfleet through his ‘taxes’ and ‘cessing’. Cessing was a practice whereby English soldiers were stationed in a certain area and the local clans had to provide food, drink and shelter for them. In reality what this meant was that the areas were left devoid of all food and provisions when the soldiers left, therefore they were unable to cause trouble for the English. Grainne fled to Ulster where she stayed with the O’Neill and the O’Donnell for some time. She was well acquainted with them having transported soldiers from Scotland to Ireland for them on numerous occasions, one of the benefits of her illegal career! In 1587, Sir Richard Bingham was sent to Flanders by Queen Elizabeth and Grainne was able to return to Rockfleet Castle.

It was on the 4 May 1588 that Grainne was first pardoned by Queen Elizabeth I after her involvement in a recent rebellion in Mayo. She had been sentenced to be hanged but her son in law Richard ‘The Devil’s Hook’ Burke went surety for her. She went to Dublin for this pardon which she received from Sir John Perrott. Her joy was

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short-lived however. Bingham had a brother John who had captured Owen (Grainne’s oldest son). John Bingham murdered Owen in cold blood on the pretext that he was trying to escape.

In 1589, the Irish chieftains in Connaught again rebelled. Among them were Grainne’s son Tibbot and her son in law Richard ‘The Devil’s Hook’ Burke. When Bingham returned from Flanders he put down the rebellion. Unfortunately one of his allies in doing so was Grainne’s second son, Murrough. In response to her son’s treachery, Grainne, sailed to Bunowen, burned the town and killed some of his followers, plundering and spoiling the rest of his lands.

In 1593, Grainne’s son Tibbot and her brother Donal ‘na Piopa’ were thrown in prison. Knowing that Bingham had done this to spite her, she decided to go over his head to a higher power. She wrote to Queen Elizabeth requesting an audience with her and it was granted.

The meeting was not what one might have expected. “[K]nowing her own long record of unloyal activities had precede her to Elizabeth’s court, [Grainne] dared to ask not necessarily for forgiveness but for special favours and protection from Elizabeth’s own administrators”\(^\text{13}\). Grainne asked for a pardon for herself and her brother and sons. She also asked the Queen to give her what was hers by right of her marriages to Donal O’Flaherty and Richard an Iarainn. As well as this she requested the Queen’s permission to have “free liberty during her life to invade with sword and

\[^{13}\text{Chambers, 1994: 147.}\]
fire all your highness' enemies, whosoever they are or shall be, without any interruption of any person or persons whatsoever. What Elizabeth may have thought of Grainne is unknown. However, she granted all of Grainne's requests, including that of "maintenance by land and sea" (in other words, a return to her old ways, before Bingham had taken her boats). In effect, Elizabeth had just given Grainne free reign to continue her piracy and trading without any interference from Bingham, all under the royal seal of approval!

"Tradition states that at the introduction of these two remarkable women, Elizabeth held her hand high, but [Grainne] was the taller of the two and the English queen had to raise her hand to that of the Irish woman." Other folklore states that Elizabeth offered to confer the title of Countess on Grainne but that she declined on the grounds that one queen could not confer title on another. Another story is that, having a cold, Grainne asked for a handkerchief. When she had used it she threw it in the fire, which caused consternation among the ladies. Grainne's response was that in Ireland they had a much higher standard of hygiene than to keep soiled articles about their persons.

Theoretically, the result of Grainne's visit to the queen was that she was free to continue to do what she had done all her life, without fear of persecution. In reality however, Bingham refused to honour the queen's terms and Grainne's petitions fell on deaf ears. While he dared not persecute Grainne outright, Bingham made sure that

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14 Petition from Grainne to Queen Elizabeth I, cited in Chambers, 1994: 204.
16 McDermott, 1940: 216.
she was kept poor by depriving her of cattle and maintaining a high military presence in the area. The result of all of this was that Grainne died in abject poverty. It appears that even her sons deserted her, or at least were unconcerned with her welfare, once she was no longer of use to them. They fought on the side of the English against the O'Neill and O'Donnell, which resulted in O'Donnell plundering all the cattle in Connaught in Autumn 1598. Grainne was saved because of the strength of Rockfleet but she was destitute. She died in 1603 and is reputedly buried on Clare Island. All that we know for sure about her last years is that "[f]rom 1603 onwards no Irish chief ever again ruled territory and people as independently as [Grainne] had"17.

17 Chambers, 1994: 75.
Although Anne Bonny was born almost a century and a half after Grainne, we know far less about her than one would expect. The information we have about her relates almost entirely to her career as a pirate and she vanishes from history in 1721. Whether this disappearance was deliberate, or simply because she no longer merited attention once she was no longer engaged in piracy, is a mystery.

Anne Bonny and Mary Read are often the only two female pirates ever mentioned in European and American history. This uniqueness is false because Anne was only one in a long line of female pirates, including Artemisia, Elissa, Jeanne De Clisson, Lady Killigrew, Jeanne De Montfort, Jacquotte Delahaye, and of course Grainne Mhaol. One of the main reasons for their fame is the fact that they both sailed on the same ship and were brought to trial in Jamaica in 1720. Their trial report, while detailing their actions as pirates, unfortunately contains no information about the details of their daily lives on board ship.

Anne was born in Kinsale, Co. Cork in 1697, the illegitimate daughter of Mary Brennan (a maidservant) and William Cormac (an English lawyer). According to Johnson, the affair was only found out by Cormac’s wife upon the theft of some silver spoons. Upon finding that the maidservant was pregnant, and that Cormac refused to reconcile with his wife, Cormac’s mother disinherited him. He subsequently lived

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1 Johnson, 1724: 159.
publicly with Brennan which cost him most of his clients in the town\textsuperscript{2}. Cormac and Brennan then fled to America following Cormac's divorce from his wife. They set up a plantation in Charleston, South Carolina.

As would have been common in those days, when Anne's mother died Anne took on the duties of housekeeper for her father\textsuperscript{3}. However, in spite of the ordinariness of this situation, Anne managed to get herself into trouble. According to one tale, as a child she stabbed a serving maid in the stomach with a knife\textsuperscript{4}. She was also very strong. Upon being attacked by a would-be rapist, she beat him so badly that he was injured for a very long time after\textsuperscript{5}. On another occasion, a one-eared sailor got in her way upon her arrival in New Providence and insulted her. In response Anne pulled her pistol and shot the sailor's other ear off\textsuperscript{6}.

When she was in her teens Anne married James Bonny, a ne'er-do-well pirate/sailor. James Bonny had married Anne in an attempt to gain control of her father's plantation, which made Anne an attractive catch, despite her temper\textsuperscript{7}. His plan failed when Anne's father disinherited her because of the elopement. James Bonny then took Anne to New Providence in the Bahamas where he turned informer to the Governor Woodes Rogers, denouncing any sailor he didn't like as a pirate, for a handsome reward. However, James Bonny lost his job when Governor Rogers

\textsuperscript{2} Johnson, 1724: 164.
\textsuperscript{3} Cordingly, 1996: 117.
\textsuperscript{4} Cordingly, 1996: 135.
\textsuperscript{5} Johnson, 1724: 164.
\textsuperscript{6} Klausmann, 1997: 194.
\textsuperscript{7} Cordingly, 1996: 117.
offered an amnesty for all pirates who were willing to turn themselves in before 5 September 1718.

It was around this time that Anne became involved with Calico Jack Rackham. Anne had grown to dislike her spineless husband and had begun to seek alternative companionship. Rackham was a former quartermaster of Charles Vane and had been second in command on Vane's ship before the two had quarrelled. He had managed to persuade Governor Rogers to grant him a belated pardon in 1719 and it was in New Providence that he first met Anne. Rackham had earned the name 'Calico Jack' for the calico trousers he wore.

The admiration between Anne and Rackham was mutual. Rackham was a successful pirate, a strong contrast to the weak James Bonny. Anne was a strong-willed and independent woman, as had been indicated by her refusal of her father's choice of husband and her elopement with James Bonny. When James Bonny discovered the affair he was furious. He brought them to the governor and demanded that the relationship be discontinued. Rackham offered to buy Anne from James Bonny but Bonny instead took the matter up with Governor Rogers, who said that Anne was to be flogged and returned to her true husband. That night Rackham and Anne slipped out in the harbour, stole a sloop and began a life of piracy together. She was only a few months at sea with the pirate crew when she fell pregnant with Rackham's child.

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9 Stanley, 1996: 188.
10 A married woman at this time was her husband's property. He could buy and sell her at any time.
She went to Cuba where she gave birth before returning to sea with Rackham, leaving the child behind\textsuperscript{11}.

Some time later, Rackham’s crew captured a Dutch vessel and pressed a number of its crew to sign articles with them\textsuperscript{12}. According to Johnson, Anne took a fancy to one of the new pirates. Unfortunately for Anne, her favourite turned out to be a young Englishwoman named Mary Read. Mary was the illegitimate child of a London woman who had disguised the young Mary as a boy in order to extort money from the child’s grandmother\textsuperscript{13}. As a child Mary was apprenticed as a foot-boy to a French lady, but she ran away to sea, signing on as a cabin boy on a warship. She then went on to be a powder monkey on a man-of-war, an infantry soldier, a cavalry trooper, and finally a seaman on board the trading vessel bound for the West Indies which was captured by Rackham and his crew\textsuperscript{14}. Mary shared her secret with Anne, who in turn told Rackham after he threatened to kill Anne’s new ‘boyfriend’. Upon finding out that Mary was a girl, Rackham invited her to join the crew as a full-fledged member\textsuperscript{15}.

Anne was a skilled pirate and often resorted to trickery in order to avoid unnecessary use of force. This is not to say that she was squeamish about violence. Cordingly

\textsuperscript{11} Stanley, 1996: 188.
\textsuperscript{12} Signing articles was the process by which pirates agreed to the laws which controlled behaviour on board their ships. By signing articles, the crew promised to work together as a community for shared goals. Articles covered a variety of topics - the division of loot, behaviour towards crew members, compensation for the wounded and so on. It was in essence a democratic agreement in the time before democracy.
\textsuperscript{13} Cordingly, 1996: 117.
\textsuperscript{14} Macksey & Macksey, 1975: 133.
\textsuperscript{15} Cordingly, 1996: 118.
states that both Anne and Mary were first-rate pirates who never shirked their duties in battle\textsuperscript{16}. Anne showed great intelligence in the plots she used to achieve her goals.

One of the most interesting story is that told by Klausmann, in which Anne used what are traditionally considered ‘women’s weapons’ to steal a ship which had belonged to a Chidley Bayard. The ship in question was a sloop called the \textit{Royal Queen}, an ultra luxurious ship with mahogany panelling, cabins which were inlaid in gold and silver and equipped with twenty cannon. The ship was commanded by a Captain Hudson, who had quite a reputation as a lady’s man. Anne tricked Hudson into inviting her onto the boat by pretending to be a lady of some consequence. She then accepted his invitation on certain conditions; his crew were all to stay beneath deck during his visit so that her ‘good reputation’ would not be compromised. This seemed a reasonable request for a well-bred woman to make and Hudson made sure that his crew followed the instructions exactly. When Anne came on board she offered Hudson a drink laced with sleeping powder. Once he had succumbed to its effects, she was free to explore at her leisure. The next day Hudson awoke to find Anne gone. He suspected nothing and sailed out of the harbour. He received an unpleasant surprise a few hours later when the \textit{Royal Queen} was attacked by pirates. His brand new cannons would not fire; Anne had doused the firing pins in water. There was no choice but to surrender and the \textit{Royal Queen} was taken by Anne and her crew without a fight\textsuperscript{17}.

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\textsuperscript{16} Cordingly, 1996: 118. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Klausmann, 1997: 200.
\end{flushright}
In spite of such ingenuity, retribution was close at hand. Rackham’s ship was anchored off Jamaica’s north coast in late October 1720 when they were challenged by a privateer sloop, under the command of Captain Jonathan Barnet, which had a commission from the governor to take pirates. Mary Read and Anne Bonny fought it out on deck until captured, the rest having retired below despite Anne Bonny’s attempts with her pistol to flush them out into action. Captain Jonathan Barnet, the sloop’s commander, testified at their trial that the two women had fought like wildcats, using pistols, cutlasses and boarding axes before being overpowered.

The trial occurred in the High Court of Admiralty in St Jago de la Vaga, Jamaica, on 28 November 1720. Anne and Mary were tried separately from the rest of Rackham’s crew on account of their sex. They were charged with having committed piracy, robbery and other felonies, in four separate incidents. Both women pleaded ‘not guilty’ to the charges. One of the witnesses, Dorothy Thomas, observed that Bonny and Read were just as aggressive as their male counterparts, having instructed the male pirates to kill her (Thomas) if she resisted their attack.

According to Thomas, Read and Bonny wore men’s clothes, carried knives and pistols as well as swearing and cursing at the male pirates. Thomas maintained that the reason she knew Read and Bonny were women was because of the size of their breasts. Two other pirates also supported the statement that Read and Bonny were

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19 Cordingly, 1996: 118.
armed and readily used their weapons. They claimed that Anne handed gun-powder to the men, that she wore men's clothes during fights and women's clothes at other times. There was no mistaking that Anne was in every way an active member of the crew, despite assertions to the contrary by Rogozinski.

Rackham and the other men were hanged immediately but both Anne and Mary pleaded pregnancy when asked by the judge if there was any reason why their sentence should not be carried out. Since hanging would kill the unborn child (who had committed no crime), the women were reprieved until they gave birth. Before Rackham was hanged he asked to see Anne one last time. She is reported to have said "I am sorry to see you here, but had you fought like a man, you need not have been hang'd like a dog", a reference to his cowardice during their capture.

Mary Read died in prison from a fever but Anne received several stays of execution before mysteriously vanishing from official records. The reason for this disappearance is unknown. Some believe that her father, who had contacts in Jamaica, forgave his daughter and ransomed her back to the Carolinas where she assumed a new name and a new life. Regardless of the circumstances under which she escaped the hangman's noose, her life after this point remains a mystery.

24 Rogozinski claims that the reason the women were tolerated on the ship was not because they were good pirates but rather because they had sex with all the men on the ship. (Rogozinski, 1995: 33)
26 Cordingly, 1996: 118.
Women in sixteenth century Ireland appear to have enjoyed a greater freedom than their English counterparts. Their legal status was quite different from that of English women. They were much freer in their marriages, being entitled to retain control of their own property, and having the option of divorce. Women were also very active in political causes. For example, William O'Connor Morris states that "Brian O'Connor was sent back to his tribe; for his daughter... had crossed the sea to fall at the feet of the queen". In other words O'Connor's daughter (whose name is unknown to us) saved his life by petitioning the queen in much the same way that Grainne was to do later.

Brehon law, which prevailed over most of the country, bar the Pale and its immediate surroundings, viewed women as independent and capable beings rather than being passive, dependent children. In Connaught "only an isolated area around Galway and Athenry remained significantly Anglicised and in regular contact with Dublin". What this meant was that Grainne and her peers would have grown up in a Gaelicised environment, enjoying its liberal attitude to women.

Although under early Irish law (6th - 8th centuries) women, while having considerable property rights, were subject to a perpetual tutelage which placed them in the judicial status of minors, it would appear that by the 16th century women fulfilled a variety of

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2 Ellis, 1985: 90.
important legal and political roles, as wives, mothers and independent persons. Women could be witnesses in legal matters as well as acting as political agents for their husbands. As well as this they are known to have acted as arbitrators in disputes over property\(^3\).

Sawyer points out that the freedom which Irishwomen had was anathema to the English. They were often disturbed by seeing women presiding over feasts, drinking alcohol and apparently flaunting their sexuality by not wearing corsets. Where English women were restrained by rules and clothing, Irishwomen were free and uninhibited. They mixed with male and female guests greeting strangers with a social kiss\(^4\). This apparent licentiousness led some to exclaim that Irish wives were promiscuous, an idea which may have arisen from the old Brehon law whereby a woman could engage in relations with other partners for the purpose of getting a child if her husband was infertile\(^5\).

**Property**

Kenneth Nicholls states that in the purely Gaelic regions of Ireland i.e. those which had not yet been Anglicised, married women had a legal right to hold and administer property independently of their husbands, a position quite the opposite of English Common Law, which gave control of a woman’s property or goods to her husband upon marriage\(^6\). According to MacCurtain “all the evidence points to the presence of wives as subgroup holding property in their own right - a right that was gradually

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\(^3\) Nicholls, 1991: 18.  
\(^4\) Sawyer, 1993: 17.  
\(^6\) Nicholls, 1991: 17.
whittled away towards the end of the century...". In other words, as the English took control of the land, they enforced English Common Law which denied women property and civil rights.

However until this happened, "[m]arried women of the nobility and gentry class administered large properties during the greater part of the century by way of widow’s dower, by being co-heirs and by marriage contracts. They also learned the ways of buying and selling property and became skilled in the ways of executing deeds of settlement and trusteeship". This occurred in spite of the fact that under native Irish law and custom a woman could not inherit the hereditary land of her clan. This was because land in Ireland was owned corporatively, that is it belonged to a clan rather than an individual. In the case of women owning land it occurred in two forms. Where a daughter inherited (clan land), this was only for her lifetime, the land reverting on her death to the agnatic (clan ownership) patrilineage instead of passing to her children. The land would often be granted in mortgage for a dowry. However a woman could also inherit through her mother. In this case a mother could pass on her dowry goods and any lands/goods she might have gained during her marriage to her daughter (as was the case with Margaret and Grainne O’Malley). When we consider that many dowries consisted of large amounts of land or cattle, it becomes very clear that a large proportion of the portable wealth of the country was in fact passing in the female line.

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7 MacCurtain, 1985: 58.
8 MacCurtain, 1985: 59.
Marriage

Marriages were a matter of extreme importance in Ireland as elsewhere because they could cement alliances between various clans, creating new allies and increasing clan wealth. "The daughters of leading families among the Fitzgeralds, the Butlers, the Burkes, the O’Neills, O’Donnells, O’Connors and MacCarthys... provided the essential means though which their ramifying alliances were sustained and extended from generation to generation; and a similar function was doubtless being discharged by the women of countless lesser families whose marriages and affinities are carefully but laconically recorded in the annalistic entries. The political importance and diplomatic influence of these women accounts in good part for their remarkable legal privileges and high social status which have often been noted by scholars and which were such a scandal to hostile commentators like Moryson"11.

Nicholls and MacCurtain both point out that the majority of these marriages were secular, not Church, marriages. The result of this was marriages between kinsfolk were quite common. Other consequences were a high rate of divorce, clandestine marriages (i.e. elopements or illicit liaisons which could later be denied as there were no official witnesses) as well a rapid succession of spouses12. One notable aspect of marriage was that women kept their own names afterwards, a fact commented on at some length by the English at the time13. This would explain why Grainne is always referred to as Grainne O’Malley during her lifetime, rather than by her married name.

Dowries were a major part of any marriage, usually paid by a woman or her kin to her husband. If the husband was still living at home then the dowry was paid to his father. However, unlike women in other countries, Irish women retained considerable control over their marriage portions. This meant that brides whose dowries consisted of troops and ships could take an active role in military and political events as did Fionnuala O'Donnell, and Grainne Mhaol. They also received sureties for return of the dowry should the marriage fail.

Bringing a dowry did not ensure one rights in clan property however. A dowry was required for a marriage but a wife had no rights of succession beyond the bare repayment of this dowry. However, she could hold and acquire other property independently of her husband. We do not know to what extent, if at all a husband's consent was required for his wife's transactions, although in earlier Irish history certain types of marriages e.g. a marriage where one partner brought a greater amount of wealth to a marriage than the other, the partner who was less wealthy required the consent of the other for any transactions made, regardless of sex.

Divorce
The result of these transfers of goods and property was that Brehon law took very serious account of the material consequences of divorce. However, it also acknowledged a wide variety of reasons for divorce, for both men and women.

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16 Sawyer, 1993: 15.
Men could divorce on the following grounds:

1. If illness has made the marriage impossible or if separation is necessary due to some disease.
2. If one of the parties is making a pilgrimage (necessary because of the length of time it took to travel anywhere).
3. Physical blemish or injury which is incurable.
4. Leaving the area on a mission of vengeance, to seek a friend or similar grounds.
5. Loss of sanity.
6. Barrenness - spouses may co-habit with other partners and return to the marriage at a later stage if they so wish.

Women had a separate category of reasons for divorce.

1. If her husband vilifies his wife (circulates a false story about her).
2. If he satirises her, making her a fool in front of her neighbours.
3. If he hits her and leaves a mark.
4. If he has an affair/goes off with another woman.
5. If her husband is homosexual.
6. If he gives her a love potion or seduces her by illicit means.
7. If he deprives her of food or clothing or other necessities for whatever reason.
8. If he is impotent.

These conditions meant that Irish women enjoyed a great deal of freedom in the nuptial contract. Brehon law clearly recognised that there were a variety of problems which could arise in a marriage. Unlike religious law, it did not believe that a person should be punished for ending up in the wrong marriage. Unlike Christian marriage,
wives were not expected to submit to their husband in all things. If a man hit his wife, or neglected her physical, emotional or sexual needs, she was entitled to leave him and to take back her dowry. In the case of physical assault she was also entitled to compensation. However, divorce also had its downside, as women did not receive any interest on her dowry for time spent in a marriage which later failed.

"Among the Irishry the custom is, that wives shall have but her first dowry without any increase or allowance for the same, time out of mind it hath been so used, and before any women so deliver up her marriage [dowry] to her husband she receives sureties for the restitution of the same in manner and form as she hath delivered it, in regard that husbands through their great expenses, especially chieftains at the time of their deaths have no goods to leave behind them, but are commonly indebted. At other times they are divorced upon proof of pre-contracts; and the husband now and then without any lawful of due proceeding do put his wife from him, and so bringeth in another so as the wife is to have sureties for her dowry for fear of the worse."

Education

It appears that sixteenth century noblewomen were well educated. Grainne spoke Irish and Latin (she may also have spoken some Spanish and Portuguese as she is known to have traded in these countries) She "proved her ability to converse with the queen in Latin when summoned to answer charges of piracy. Her nautical skills as a

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sea-captain and leader of a fleet down the west coast of Ireland raise tantalising questions about her education. Other Irishwomen in her position were also well educated. It appears however that the majority of educated women lived in the Pale or in Anglicised parts of the country. MacCurtain points out that the 16th century included the schooling of daughters as part of a progressive society. However the English dominance of society in the latter half of the century, resulted in women on the whole being denied access to education, on the grounds that it was more important for boys. This situation was not rectified until the 19th century.

On the whole however, it may be seen that Irishwomen had a great deal of freedom during the 16th century (under Brehon law). They could marry and divorce with great choice. They were protected from physical abuse by their husbands. They could own property and they could make contracts without requiring a male relative to authorise the transaction. It was in this environment that Grainne’s character was formed. It was in this time of freedom and change, that she engaged on her remarkable career. The extent to which other women behaved in a similar manner is, as yet, unknown.

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Scholars disagree about whether or not women were better off in America than they were in England and Ireland. Some believe that the colonies gave women greater freedom. Others believe that women were more restricted. One fact which is, however, indisputable is that, across America, the delineation of the female role was remarkably consistent. An adult woman's status was defined by her marital state. A married woman's social standing depended on her husband’s position in the colonial hierarchy. She was the mistress of his household and this was her primary (if not only) role in both family and community affairs. It was from this position as mistress of the household, that she derived most of her authority. Although she was obliged to run the household under her husband’s supervision, she commanded a degree of power over her children and any servants the family might have.

Single women in the colonies tended to be indentured servants. According to Woloch, approximately half the women colonists arriving in the Southern colonies came as indentured servants. This meant that they were obliged to work as servants for four or five years to pay the cost of their travel. Most of them expected to marry once their term of service was up. Their decision to emigrate may therefore be viewed as a means to ensure their economic survival. “Once a term of indenture was

1 ‘Women’, for the purpose of this paper, should be taken to mean white women of English/Irish descent.
3 Norton, 1989: 44.
4 Norton, 1989: 44.
5 Woloch, 1984: 32.
6 Evans, 1989: 27.
up, a young woman servant was available for marriage and virtually assured of it in the southern colonies, where women were so greatly outnumbered. In fact, since she had no property or family, marriage was her only option. She was likely to become the wife of a farmer on a small, perhaps new, plantation, probably marrying at an older age than her free counterpart and therefore having fewer children.  

South Carolina

It was in the 1600s that Britain began to found colonies in America. The first major settlements were in Virginia and Massachusetts. Colonies such as North and South Carolina were founded in the second half of the seventeenth century. Women had an active part in the founding of these colonies, not only as wives accompanying their husbands, but also as single women coming on their own ventures, bringing in new settlers and establishing plantations.

South Carolina, where Anne spent most of her childhood, was only founded in 1660. As a British colony, its inhabitants would have adhered to English laws and customs and in 1693, South Carolina won the right to initiate legislation in the British House of Commons. As in most southern colonies, South Carolina adhered to the doctrines of the Anglican church. The Church was made official in 1706 and remained so until 1778. Although this affiliation with the Church of England may have saved Anne and other women from the harsh strictures of the Puritans, it did not necessarily benefit

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6 Woloch, 1984: 32.
7 Spruill, 1987, 45.
them. Like most Christian sects, the Anglican Church held to the Pauline doctrine of women’s inferiority and the necessity of their subjection to men.

The colonies differed, not only in their founding dates, but also in the type of immigrants who came to the areas. Instead of tight-knit self-governing communities such as were to be found, for example, in the Puritan areas of Massachusetts, southern colonies were money-making enterprises focused on staple crops such as tobacco in the Chesapeake region and, later, rice in Carolina. Puritan women usually came with their families whereas in the southern colonies most women arrived as indentured servants.

When Anne Bonny’s parents arrived in South Carolina, they would have found themselves surrounded by French, German, Dutch, Irish, English and Scots settlers. It was an environment in which men predominated. For example, in 1708, the sex ratio in South Carolina was 148 males to 100 females. This was mainly because of the hardships involved in settling in a wilderness environment. Such ratios meant that women were less protected but also more powerful than those who remained at home. The lack of women also meant that few jobs were considered inappropriate for women. They were to be found as blacksmith, tavern keepers, barbers and tanners, as well as running plantations or small shops. This changed during the

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9 Evans, 1989: 27.
10 Degler, 1984: 59.
11 Carr & Walsh, 1989: 36. ‘Home’ should be taken to mean the European country of origin.
eighteenth century when women's initial freedom was withdrawn and they were once again restricted to the home.

Marriage

During the seventeenth century, factors such as early death, the highly unbalanced sex ratio, late marriages and a predominance of immigrants, meant that there were fewer restraints on women's social conduct, especially in courtship, than in England\textsuperscript{13}. This was both an advantage and a disadvantage. There were plenty of single or widowed men, and where there were no male relatives hovering to monitor their behaviour or disapprove of their choice, women had considerable liberty in picking a husband. However, this liberty of choice created conditions of sexual freedom in courtship that were not customary in England. In Somerset County in Maryland, the seventeenth century register of births and marriages indicates that approximately one third of the women who married were pregnant at the time. However, premarital pregnancy does not appear to have disturbed communities much, as long as the couple married\textsuperscript{14}.

As many women were indentured servants who had to work off their terms of service, they tended not to marry until they were in their mid twenties. This meant that they had smaller families, usually of four or five children. Another factor which influenced family size was the high mortality rate of spouses. Only one in three marriages lasted more than ten years and it was likely that one partner to a marriage would die within seven years\textsuperscript{15}. In the southern colonies, one fifth of adult deaths among women

\textsuperscript{13} Carr & Walsh, 1989: 36.  
\textsuperscript{14} Carr & Walsh, 1989: 39.  
\textsuperscript{15} Carr & Walsh, 1989: 39
occurred in childbirth\textsuperscript{16}. In spite of this women generally tended to outlive their husbands. One of the major reasons for this was that women tended to be a good deal younger than men when they married\textsuperscript{17}.

The colonists brought with them a common law system of property rights which assumed that any property held by a woman normally passed to her husband's control when she married\textsuperscript{18}. What this meant was that, although women would have shared the material benefits and social status of their fathers, husbands, and even sons, most were economically dependent on the male members of their families throughout their lives. Any income which married women earned, belonged by law to their husbands. Very few of them owned property outright, and although their work was essential to the creation and maintenance of communities they did not receive any financial benefit from it. Women who lacked a husband or father to support them could rarely support themselves because the few occupations which were open to them offered meagre wages. Even women who were married were not entirely secure because their material condition could easily change with an alteration in their marital status\textsuperscript{19}.

The result of this was a high and quick rate of remarriage among widows.

In spite of this, it is noticeable that men usually made their wives the executors of their wills. This made them responsible for paying his debts and preserving the estate. This illustrates an overriding concern on the part of a husband for the welfare of his

\textsuperscript{16} Woloch, 1984: 23.
\textsuperscript{17} Carr & Walsh, 1989: 40.
\textsuperscript{18} Kerber & DeHart, 1991: 28.
\textsuperscript{19} Karlsen, 1991: 57.
widow and to his confidence in her management of his affairs and estate, regardless of
the certainty of her remarriage\textsuperscript{20}.

**Alternatives to marriage**

A woman who did not want to be a farm wife had only a narrow range of alternatives. However, most of these required her to be located in an urban area. If she was fortunate enough she could support herself in one of three ways: by using the household skills she had learned from her mother (sewing, spinning or weaving for wealthy families) as a means of making money. If she had money she could set up a boarding-house or inn. Alternatively she could run a small school in her home or open a shop, usually but not always one that sold dry goods. Norton tells us that there were no other choices, and women who were compelled by adverse circumstances to select one of these occupations, or who chose to do so, were frequently regarded as anomalous by their contemporaries\textsuperscript{21}. "Their environment was both limited and limiting: limited, because of the small sphere of activity open to them; limiting, because they could not realistically aspire to leave that sphere"\textsuperscript{22}.

Although the idea of a woman conducting business enterprises and having a hand in public affairs was not anathema to the early colonists, there were few opportunities to do so, even if women were inclined to work for wages\textsuperscript{23}. Economic conditions

\textsuperscript{20} Carr & Walsh, 1989: 41.
\textsuperscript{21} Norton, 1979: 45.
\textsuperscript{22} Norton, 1979: 39.
\textsuperscript{23} Spruill, Y/U: 53.
reinforced social trends that tended to make all American women more dependent on the family for the definition of their lives and roles than their English counterparts. 

Education

Colonists had little interest in educating girls, as they would not grow up to be legislators or ministers. Not only was there an emphasis on women being wives and mothers, but the right to vote or hold office was conditional on holding property, something which few women would ever do. Therefore, colonial women’s education tended to be directed towards household activities. Most of a woman’s learning came from her mother and was household related. As schools tended to be located in urban areas, and as there were relatively few schools, a large amount of women could neither read nor write. The exception to this was the Puritans, who laid great emphasis on parents teaching their daughters to read the Bible.

Women who lived in urban areas had a greater opportunity to receive an education since the few girls schools which existed were located in or near colonial cities. The education which they received was very basic, consisting of elementary reading, writing, and arithmetic, with perhaps some needlework or musical training thrown in for good measure.

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26 Spruill, 1987: 45.
Women and the Law

Although American women’s legal position was better than that of their English counterparts, attitudes towards women during the seventeenth century remained traditional, differing little from those of contemporary Europeans. The belief in the inferiority of women was universal. Women, particularly married women, suffered under numerous legal and social restrictions and although some women participated in public affairs, the roles of most women were familial. Wives were expected to be subservient to their husbands. Although she might be considered a junior partner in a marriage, with limited control over her children and servants the fact remained that a woman’s children were legally her husband’s possessions.

The emphasis on the family did, however, offer protection to colonial wives far beyond the dictates of common law. Marriage was assumed to be based on the mutual consent of both parties, a civil rather than a religious contract. The law obliged husbands, not only to live with their wives, but also to support them financially. If a husband failed to live up to his obligations, either through adultery or through failing to provide amply for his wife and family he would be punished by the courts. In cases of physical abuse, the law differed from colony to colony. In the south, the law only prevented husbands from inflicting permanent injury on or causing the death of their wives. In New England, on the other hand, physical abuse of wives was completely outlawed.

30 Woloch, 1984: 23.
Woloch is quick to point out that it was not just women who benefited from the colonies' concern with maintaining harmonious homes. "Seventeenth century laws and decisions also protected husbands from wives who ran up debts, waged attacks or engaged in adultery, a crime against both husband and community. The most common offence committed by wives was verbal abuse. If seventeenth century women were silent in church, they were verbally assertive outside it - at least according to court records.... Public order and domestic peace, it was decreed, were far too valuable to be ruined by a loud-mouthed wife\textsuperscript{32}.

Although common law dictated that a woman's possessions belonged to her husband on marriage, both prenuptial and postnuptial agreements were in evidence in colonial court records. The prenuptial agreement enabled a woman to retain control over her own property, which was very important where a woman was remarrying following the death of a spouse. Occasionally, property settlements appear in the seventeenth century court records between widows and their future husbands. This was where both partners signed an agreement whereby the husband-to-be relinquished his rights to his wife's or her children's portions of an estate\textsuperscript{33}. The postnuptial contract on the other hand could be used to reconcile a couple who had disputes or to enable them to separate. It compelled the husband to support his family. The use of such contracts was accepted as a means of preserving domestic peace and public order. They also served the function of keeping wives or widows and their children off the public dole\textsuperscript{34}.

\textsuperscript{32} Woloch, 1984: 22.
\textsuperscript{33} Carr & Walsh, 1989: 43.
\textsuperscript{34} Woloch, 1984: 22.
In spite of all these legal rights, a wife’s role was always subordinate. Despite the importance and economic value of housewifery in a frontier society, wives had no control over the distribution of family resources. Indeed, since common law applied in most colonies, wives had no control over their own possessions.35

The women who had most freedom were widows and spinsters, especially those with money, although admittedly spinsters, and especially propertied spinsters, were rare. Under common law, a feme sole, whether spinster or widow, was a legal individual, unlike a wife or feme covert. The feme sole could own, buy, and sell, property. She could sue and be sued, make contracts, administer estates, and hold power of attorney.36 She could also run her own business. This was permitted by colonial assemblies because a destitute spinster or widow would be a drain on the community’s resources.37 Not only were femes soles’ services and self-support good for the community but the lack of skilled workers and organised guilds of craftsmen or professionals meant that there was little or no opposition to women working in trades. Of course most femes soles survived on small dower rights or scratched out a living, rather than making any great fortunes.38

What is obvious from all of this, is that women occupied an extremely restricted space in colonial society. Although women’s importance in a frontier society was acknowledged, the way this recognition was accorded was detrimental to women,

36 Woloch, 1984: 27.
38 Woloch, 1984: 30.
limiting their opportunities and denying them the possibility to advance outside the
domestic roles they had been allocated. Indeed, given this ideology of the housewife,
it is unsurprising that women who rebelled against society’s constraints and dared to
advance into masculine areas such as piracy, were limited in what they could achieve.
Even pirates succumbed to the ideology of women as domestic creatures, thus
reducing any chance women might have of participating in a piratical career, and
completely annihilating any possibility of women being captains and leaders.
Having looked at the lives of Anne and Grainne, can we truly consider them feminists or even feminist icons? Did they affect the women around them? Do they influence us? Are they part of the vanguard of women who forged a new way for women to behave and to seize power in the times when they were denied it? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to first define what I mean by ‘feminist’ and ‘feminist icons’.

What is a ‘feminist’? Media frenzies have created an image of feminists as castrating females. However to my mind a feminist is simply a woman who believes that women should have the right to control their own lives, bodies, finances, educational and career opportunities, a woman who refuses to be ‘kept in her place’ (wherever that is) by a society which views women as somehow less entitled to the very things which men take for granted on a daily basis. A feminist icon then, is someone who embodies some or all of these characteristics, who can be viewed by other women as an inspiration to them, an encouragement to dare to challenge patriarchy in all its forms. With this in mind, how do Grainne and Anne measure up?

In the beginning

What we know about Grainne is that, from a very early age, she refused to abide by the rules of society which constrained her behaviour. She went to sea and not only travelled with her father but also commanded her own ships. Her fleet consisted of
two hundred men who came from a series of different clans. That a leader could manage to bring warring clans together was an amazing feat in itself. That this leader was female is spectacular. Indeed, it might be argued that Grainne was somewhat of a Superwoman\(^1\). Not only did she pursue an active and unusual career but she also married (twice), had children (four), met Queen Elizabeth, arranged pardons for herself and her family, created an empire for herself, refused to be bullied out of her inheritance by her second husband’s family and supported, not only her own clan, but also those in the surrounding areas with her trading and raiding activities.

Anne too was a very unconventional woman. Although she was not a captain, she was nonetheless skillful and intelligent. The child of an adulterous affair, she refused to bow down to anyone. When her father tried to marry her off to the highest bidder, she eloped with James Bonny. While this factor may not seem significant to many people now, in the 18th century obedience to one’s father was absolute. By refusing her father’s wishes regarding her marriage, Anne had indicated beyond a shadow of a doubt that she considered herself an individual who would make up her own mind about who she would marry and what her life would be like.

By later abandoning Bonny and joining up with Jack Rackham, Anne further asserted her ability and intention to remain in total control of her life. In a time when women were expected to comply with their husbands, be meek and subservient, Anne challenged every ideal which society fostered about women and their ‘natural’

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\(^1\) Rogozinski claims that Grainne was endowed with supernatural powers. (Rogozinski, 1995: 245)
instincts. Like Grainne, Anne was the dominant partner in her marriages/relationships.

Anne has come in for much abuse for running away with her lover. However, given the attitudes towards women which existed, this was in fact the only way in which a woman could alter her situation. America in the early 18th century was, as we have seen, based on a firm distinction of male and female roles. This dichotomy meant that the only way in which a woman could strike out for herself was by attaching herself to a man or men who could benefit her in some way and/or by disguising herself as a man.

**Appearances can be deceiving**

The issue of disguise has often been a thorny one. Can women who disguise themselves as men or cross-dress be considered ‘real’ women? Some scholars have claimed that such cross-dressing may be considered as de-sexualising women or in some way negating their womanhood. I disagree. Just because a woman chooses to wear man’s clothes does not make her any less a woman. It is simply a case of adapting to suit one’s environment. The only way in which a woman could gain entrance to a ship as a sailor was by disguising herself as a male. In this light, cross-dressing may be seen as a pragmatic way to achieve ones goal rather than a statement of one’s sexuality.

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There are conflicting reports of whether or not Rackham’s crew realised that Anne was a woman. Some authors have claimed that it was not until Anne and Mary Read were in court that the crew realised there were women on the ship. However the statements given by some of the crew indicate otherwise. This in itself raises the question of whether or not Anne did indeed go on board in disguise as purported by Johnson. Suzanne Stark has argued that it was in fact common practice for women to be on board ships, as women, without need for disguise in the 17th and 18th centuries. In fact, the number of births at sea indicates that the women’s existence was simply not considered important. Again, we see the bias of male dominated society which ignored the women who were on board, refusing to write their names on crew manifests if they were on board in female dress. At other time they removed them from the ship if they were found to be women disguised as men.

Grainne did not disguise herself as a man to lead her crews. Although the story goes that she cut off her hair in order to be taken to sea, there is no record of her being bald (Mhaol) at later times. It is more likely that the nickname simply stuck from childhood. Like the nicknames of her husbands, father and brother, Grainne’s nickname remained attached to her long after the actual event. Such nicknames were also a way of distinguishing between the large numbers of men and women who often shared the same or similar names. Sir Philip Sidney noted that Grainne was a ‘most

3 Macksey & Macksey, 1975: 133.
5 Johnson, 1724: 165.
7 Stark, 1998: 3.
famous feminine sea captain’, hardly an epithet which would be applied to a bald-headed cross-dresser.

This is not to say that women at sea did not wear trousers. While it might have been possible for Grainne or Anne to wear a dress while at sea, it is more likely that they would have worn trousers or breeches as they were known. While a dress would make it awkward to move freely around the ship, trousers would have allowed maximum freedom of movement. They would also have afforded some protection from sexual harassment, denying the sexual feelings aroused by the sight of female clothing among men at sea.

Reasons for becoming a pirate

Grainne and Anne had very different reasons for turning to piracy as a career. Grainne began her sea-faring life when she was very young, learning from her father about trading, handling ships and managing crews as well as the diplomatic skills associated with trading missions to Spain and Portugal. Her initial experience was of legitimate seafaring. It was only when the English closed Galway to Irish traders, denying the O’Malleys access to an essential economic area, that Grainne decided to turn pirate. She was motivated partly by profit and partly by pride. The O’Malleys had controlled the shipping routes around the west coast of Ireland for many centuries before the English arrived. Attacking ships bound for Galway meant that Grainne not only deprived the English of many goods but also defied English encroachment on the O’Malleys’ ancient territorial rights. Most importantly, piracy provided Grainne with a viable means of supporting herself and those who followed her now that their
legitimate trading had been brought to a standstill by the edict of the city councillors that ‘neither O’ ne Mac shall strutte ne swagger thru the streets of Galway’.

By contrast, Anne’s reasons for turning pirate seem far less grand. According to Johnson, Anne followed her lover to sea, disguised as a man. The idea of women going to sea in order to be with their husbands or lovers, was a common theme in the ballads and literature of the period. Such an idea nullified the fact that many women went to sea simply because they wanted more out of life than they could have on shore. According to Stark, some women went to sea because they were lesbians who could only explain their sexual preferences by acting like a man and pursuing a ‘male’ career.

That Anne followed Rackham to sea simply because she was in love with him does not correlate with the eye-witness accounts of her behaviour on the ship. Anne was an intelligent and adventurous woman seeking excitement in her life. She was an active member of the crew, using her skill as a strategist to gain new spoils. She fought alongside the rest of the crew in raids and, according to one of her former prisoners, she was as capable of violence as any of the men on board, if not more so. It is more likely that Ann realised that her best chance to escape her husband was by joining up with Rackham, who in turn offered her the opportunity to enjoy a life which few women would ever experience, as an active member of a pirate crew.

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8 Cited in Chambers, 1994: 20
Marriage and children

Both Grainne and Anne were pragmatists, using marriage and other relationships to improve their status or gain financial and other benefits. Such behaviour should not be condemned however. Men have married for money, property and status since marriage was invented. Where Grainne and Anne differed from other women, is that they refused to be passive and acquiescent pawns, choosing instead to take charge of their marital arrangements, rearranging them to suit themselves rather than their husbands.

While both women had children, their attitudes and behaviour to them differed greatly. Grainne, over the course of her two marriages had one daughter and three sons, in whose lives she played an active role until her death in 1603. Anne had two children that we know of, one whom she left in Cuba after its birth, and another which was born while she was in prison in 1721. While we do not know what happened to Anne’s first child, it is apparent that she was not maternally inclined, opting to leave her child rather than keeping it on the ship or staying ashore with it. Unlike Grainne’s children whose lineage has been traced, nothing is known of Anne’s children, not even their sexes.

Sexual status

One factor which cannot be overlooked is that Anne came on board her ship as Rackham’s lover. Regardless of whether or not she came on board in disguise, once the crew discovered that she was female she had no hope of ever being classified as anything other than the captain’s sexual partner. Even if she had been able to rise
through the ranks she would never have been taken seriously as a commander. In 18th century America, the only chance a woman had of captaining a pirate ship was if she was disguised as a man, and if no-one suspected that she was female.

This is where Grainne had the real advantage. Her independence from both her husbands and the fact that neither of them were allowed on her ships meant that she was only ever seen as the captain, never as any man’s subordinate. To a certain extent she may have used her sexuality as means of controlling the men. By keeping herself isolated and sexually aloof she made herself a central figure in their minds. Like Queen Elizabeth, she could command unswerving loyalty and devotion from the men who followed her because she never allowed herself to become devoted to any one man. Fairburn portrays this vividly in her novel *The White Seahorse* in a scene where Grainne dresses up in as feminine a manner as possible and is rewarded by the utter astonishment of her crew who are now completely in her thrall, “a kind of glory touched their eyes... charged with the emotion men feel for a beautiful woman. She could have asked them for a crown in that moment and been given it”\(^{10}\).

**Life at sea.**

Grainne’s crews would have had a different experience of piracy to Anne’s. Piracy in this day and age has become extremely romanticised. With a variety of films and books promoting this romantic imagery, it is often hard to remember that life aboard ships was not only hard but also dangerous. Pirate crews were criminals, pursued on

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\(^{10}\) Fairburn, 1974: 139.
land and sea by the law. Grainne operated out of the bays and fords around the Irish coast, which meant that her crews could get fresh supplies easily. On her longer trips to Spain and Portugal, these would have been more difficult to acquire. Still, the lack of organised British patrol ships on the sea meant that Grainne could pursue piracy or legitimate trading with little interference from outsiders.

By contrast, in Anne's time, crews could go for months without fresh supplies and cramped quarters often meant short tempers and plenty of fights. The huge numbers of pirates operating in American waters had necessitated the creation of government fleets to deal with the problem. This added to the natural problems which already existed on board a ship. Yet in spite of these problems, both women had very successful careers as pirates. They challenged the roles society had allocated them and proved that women could perform just as well as men in traditionally 'masculine' areas.

**Attitudes to other women**

Neither Grainne nor Anne appear to have been feminist in their attitudes to other women. Nowhere is there any indication that Grainne encouraged her daughter Margaret to follow in her sea-faring footsteps. As far as we know, Grainne was the only woman on her ships and there is no reason to suspect that she encouraged other women to sail in her crew. There are a variety of reasons for this. Grainne did not pursue piracy as a means of asserting her rights as a woman. She turned to piracy solely to support her clan, and others who followed her, by the only means available to them due to English tyranny. Given the dangers attendant on a piratical career, it
is no wonder that she would have kept her crew male. To have brought women on board to learn the trade would have antagonised the men who followed her, men with a long tradition of sea-faring and its skills. It would also have been a foolish waste of time. Grainne’s priority was the protection of her clan, providing them with a means of survival. She was not there to advance women’s liberation.

Grainne was, above all else, a pragmatist. Indeed, she seems to have married her daughter Margaret to Richard ‘The Devil’s Hook’ Burke, solely to gain a new ally. Does this make her a ‘bad’ feminist? No. Grainne was simply playing by male rules. For a man to marry off his daughter to create new alliances is so familiar a scenario in history that we don’t even notice it. However, we seem to expect women to operate under a different set of rules, even when they have already proved that they are operating under their own laws rather than those of the society in which they exist.

Do I consider them feminist icons?

There is no doubt in my mind that Grainne and Anne should be seen as feminist icons. They took control of their own lives, cutting out a destiny of their own choosing. They not only entered a male domain but bent it to their will, forcing their comrades to accept them as they were, not as the men would like them to be. Some people have argued that they cannot be considered feminists because they did not encourage other women to join them and change their situation. This is an unrealistic proposition given the time and cultures in which they lived. Nowadays, we consider feminism to mean consciousness-raising, challenging the dominant ethos and demanding an alteration in the way women are perceived. Back in the 16th and 18th
centuries, feminism as a movement did not exist. To expect Grainne and Anne to behave according to 20th century views is not only foolish but shows a marked lack of understanding of the situation of women in previous centuries.

Feminist icons are not necessarily women who cause uprisings or take on governments, although women who do these things must necessarily be accorded due respect for their courageous behaviour. Women who simply chose to go against the prevailing opinions in their time, who chose to carve their own path are also feminist icons. Grainne and Anne may not have altered the way in which women were treated in their own centuries but they have enabled us to look back at history and see that it wasn’t as bleak as it has been painted. Their presence in male arenas disproves the claims that women have always been passive, that we have never done anything worth recording in history. They are icons because they inspire us to follow them, to choose our own paths, to dare to be different. Their existence is a refutation of those who claim that women are ‘naturally’ domestic, biologically conditioned to be nurturing, lactating mothers only. They show us that we can be, not only mothers, but also warriors, rebels and inspirations to society. The existence of women like Grainne and Anne allows us to teach our daughters that there is another way. As we approach the 21st century, women are learning more and more about the women who have come before us. By learning about them and teaching about them, we encourage others to seek further information, to challenge male dominance of history, literature, politics, folklore, science and every other arena which has denied women’s experience for so long. That is what feminist icons are for.
Where historians have acknowledged the presence of women in history, this acknowledgement has been restricted to those who lived their lives in the public sphere, usually political women such as Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Isabella of Spain, Queen Maebh of Connaught and Margaret Thatcher. Other women have been noted for their relationship to a man; Maud Gonne, Anne Hathaway, Anne Devlin, Kitty O’Shea and numerous others have been ignored as persons in their own right and seen only as the appendages of a famous male.

To a greater or lesser extent, many historians have attempted to do the same to Anne Bonny and Grainne Mhaol. Authors such as Rogozinski and Sawyer have chosen to see Anne, not as a pirate, but as a sexually available woman who just happened to live on a pirate ship. That the crew asserted the active role of Bonny and Read in the running of the ship and on raiding parties is ignored by these men. This attitude is consistent throughout their works. Sawyer for example consistently refers to Maud Gonne as ‘Yeats’s former lover’ or ‘Millevoye’s mistress’ rather than as ‘Maud Gonne’¹. Such epithets reinforce the idea of women as non-subjects in history, marginalising them and adhering to the stereotype of women as sexual objects, not persons.

¹ Sawyer, 1993.
The situation has not arisen with Grainne. Instead, she has been ignored. There is no mention of her in school textbooks, although she was responsible for smuggling both weapons and men to O'Neill and O'Donnell in Donegal before the Flight of the Earls. The Four Masters, whose Annals of Ireland provide us with records of most Irish history for this period, do not mention her at all. Irish historians, past and present, have ignored Grainne completely. If it were not for the English records about her, she would have been lost to us altogether.

Today, Grainne and Anne are still ignored in general history books. However, even in specific books on pirates they have been sidelined. Piracy is still portrayed as an all male domain and the only dissenting voices about this view are found in feminist reworkings of history. Authors such as Anne Chambers, Julie Wheelwright, Dian H. Murray, Suzanne J. Stark and Ulrike Klausmann have challenged the ideology of piracy as a male preserve, seeking and publishing articles and books on the women they have discovered. It is feminist historians who have refused to allow women to be written out of history or dismissed in one-line as anomalies. The research they do provides the scholars who follow with a more balanced picture of history and also encourages further research into this area.

There are a variety of reasons why historians have tended to ignore Grainne as a historical figure. Firstly, Grainne did not have journalists to write down her deeds. The Irish Annalists did not record her deeds or existence, which meant that there was no written record of her in Ireland. Secondly, although the Annalists are often taken to be the only reliable source of Irish history, the usual method for the telling of heroic
deeds was through the poetry and songs of the bards. The English prohibition against bards practising their craft meant that there was no-one to record Grainne’s life. If it were not for the articles of interrogatory which Queen Elizabeth demanded from her, Grainne’s existence would be unknown. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Grainne existed for many years in Ireland only as an *Aisling* figure. The reality of her existence was forgotten and she was seen only as an allegorical figure, mourning Ireland’s demise under English rule.

*Aisling* poetry is poetry which bemoans the state of Ireland under English rule. As English law forbade poems and songs which spoke explicitly of the state of the nation, the poems were allegorical, usually featuring a woman in distress. The woman envisioned asks the poet to follow her, in order to help her regain what has been stolen from her. Although the figure is usually that of Roisin Dubh, the Shean Van Vocht or Cathleen Ni Houlihan, poems and songs such as “Granuaile” from O’Hart’s *Irish Pedigrees*, “Grauna Weal” and “Granuaile” from Hardiman’s *Irish Minstrelsy* and Ferguson’s “Grace O’Malley”, as well as Pádraig Mac Piarais’s “Oró Sé Do Bheatha ‘Bhaile”, portrayed Grainne as an *Aisling* figure. This proved to be a serious obstacle for those who were concerned with the reality of her life. Certainly the existence of such ballads and poems, explains why many works on pirates have ignored Grainne, concluding that she was not a real person after all. It is interesting however, that Grainne is, to the best of my knowledge, the only ‘warrior’ woman used to symbolise Ireland. Most *Aisling* women are passive figures - timid maidens who require help or old mothers who need men to defend them.

2 *Aisling* is an Irish word meaning ‘vision’, hence *Aisling* poetry is vision poetry.
The question then arises of why Grainne, rather than Queen Maebh for example, was chosen as an Aisling figure. Innes argues that Maebh was not chosen because she was a sovereignty figure and thus not in need of rescue. Women like Deirdre were far more appropriate Aisling figures. Why then did poets and balladeers choose Grainne? She was hardly a passive figure in life and certainly is not one in literature and song.

I believe that Grainne was chosen because of her visit to Queen Elizabeth. Unlike other Aisling women, Grainne had created her own destiny. She not only challenged English law but she had faced the head of the English, Queen Elizabeth, and been granted her demands for land and freedom from persecution. Where Queen Maebh was a divisive figure in Irish literature, Grainne could be seen as a unifying figure, having led men from multiple clans who were utterly loyal to her.

Subsequently of course, Grainne was succeeded by more passive figures such as Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Roisin Dubh and the Sean Bhean Bhocht. These were figures more amenable to rescue and thus for portraying a country which needed to be rescued from British rule. Grainne’s existence as an Aisling figure resulted in her dismissal from the ranks of ‘real’ history. However, the wonderful work done by Anne Chamber has gone a long way towards restoring Grainne to her rightful position in Irish history. What remains to be done now, is to ensure her integration into the ranks of general rather than specialist historical study.

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1 Deirdre of the sorrows. She was the most beautiful Irishwoman ever born. However, she ran away with her lover and consequently caused the war which resulted in the death of many Irish heroes. She is the Irish version of Helen of Troy.
Anne has been treated rather differently by history. She has had a very chequered career as a historical figure. Johnson, writing his *General History Of The Pyrates*, viewed her as a legitimate pirate but subsequently historians have assigned her a more minor and less flattering role. Some have claimed that she was simply a promiscuous female who just happened to be on a pirate ship. Others have claimed that she was simply the product of the numerous ballads and penny dreadfuls about women who ran away to sea to be with their lovers.

Other authors have gone in a different direction in an attempt to change the way in which she is viewed. Klausmann, Meinzerin, Kuhn and others have chosen to view Bonny and Read as lesbians in an attempt to create a ‘superwoman’ image. The reasons for this are twofold. On the one hand, it is easier to create an Amazonian heroine if she is unconcerned with men, either as companions or lovers. On the other hand, it may simply be a quest for legitimacy. Just as women have sought to affirm their equality with men by seeking for women in ‘male’ environments, so too lesbians seek to find other lesbians in history.

While such imagery may suit feminists and lesbians who wish to create a new herstory, there is no actual evidence that Bonny and Read were in fact lovers. That there were two women on board the same ship is less likely to have been arranged than to have been pure coincidence. Stark has shown that many women did in fact disguise themselves as men and work as sailors or pirates\(^4\). Unfortunately the

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characterisation of Bonny and Read as lesbians has served the purpose of those who have challenged the idea of women being pirates.

Attacking women as lesbians has long been a tactic of those who seek to keep women confined to domestic duties. To claim that rebel women are lesbians, is an attempt to frighten away those who would like to try new and alternative careers but who also wish to have a relationship with a man. It is a sort of one-or-the-other scenario; you can be a rebel and do all the things you wanted, but you cannot also have a man in your life. This is not a new phenomenon. For much of this century, Irishwomen had to choose between marriage and a career, thanks to the tradition and law whereby women lost their jobs as soon as they married. Many historians have chosen to portray women as lesbians in an attempt to show that warrior/pirate/business women are not 'real' women but pseudo men. What better way to discourage women from seeking alternative ways of life than to say that not only will they be forced to change their appearance, attitudes and beliefs if they want to succeed, but they will also have to give up not only female companionship (by choosing to work in a predominantly male environment) but also sexual relationships with men?

One of the main reasons that historians still ignore such exceptional women as Grainne and Anne is because history is inherently political. As Carl Degler so correctly stated '[b]ecause men have dominated society, the history they found most useful was that which depicted the activities and institutions that interested them'.

To have women active in 'male' domains would not only challenge received history

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but it would also challenge biological essentialism. While, over time, history has altered from being consistently about the upper classes to including a variety of classes, from a white perspective to a multi-cultural perspective, male dominance has never been seriously challenged. It is only the in the last few decades that history has been forced to confront its own bias and prejudices. Realisation has not come easily and to a large degree, academia has resisted feminist historiography, viewing it as nothing more than, as G.R. Eton put it, "history written by fanatics". In an attempt to placate feminists while retaining control over the information being dispersed, faculties offer specialised women's history options. This means that unless students have a specific interest in women's history, history will continue to be studied as a history of men. The majority of men will remain ignorant of women's presence in so-called 'male domains', simply because courses which have the word 'women' in the title tend to have a preponderance of female students.

Historians have been able to argue that women aboard ships were limited or nonexistent because they have never been forced to confront the data available. They dismiss women in 'male' arenas as anomalies or freaks, refusing to acknowledge the information in front of them. Despite numerous ships logs for the 17th and 18th centuries recording births at sea, there is a stubborn denial that women were aboard these ships. Where acknowledgement is given, it is invariably tempered by saying that the women were obviously prostitutes or lovers, not real sailors or pirates. In this way they have been used to prove the rule that a woman's place is in the home.

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It is notable that Anne Bonny is typically vilified as an aggressive, avaricious female. Most biographies of her cite her last words to Rackham as typical of her hard-heartedness. There is also a strong emphasis on her tragic end. Anne, after giving birth to two children is left in prison, awaiting a hanging. When she is reprieved she vanishes into obscurity. Similarly, Grainne’s destitution in her final days often overshadows her achievements in accounts about her. This focus on the negative aspects of these women’s lives serves to reinforce the message that the sea is no place for a woman. The accounts never mention that such a fate awaited the majority of pirates, male or female, as well as ordinary sailors. Life for any seafarer was likely to be ‘nasty, brutish and short’.

Some women have argued that it does no good to women’s cause to drag women from the closets of history, unless the women rescued are paragons of virtue. I disagree. It is only by showing women’s commonality and our similarities to men that we can truly hope to change the way women are perceived. To claim that all women are angels does no-one any favours. It was the ideology of women as ‘angels of the hearth’ and keepers of morality, which led to us being restricted and confined for so long. It is unrealistic to claim that women are so superior to men; “have we not affections, desires for sport, and frailty, as men have: Then, let them use us well; else let them know, the ills we do, their ills instruct us so”9. Women have been pirates, thieves, murderers, assassins, queens, saints, priestesses, healers and one has even been a pope, just as men have been throughout the centuries. It is by creating

8 Hobbes.
differences that men have gained power over women. By asserting the similarities we have, we take away this power. By rediscovering the diversity of enterprises which women have engaged in we empower ourselves to challenge accepted 'truths' about women's lives, about our experiences and behaviour, not only in history but now and in the future.
Conclusion

We have a tendency to assume that with each century that progresses, women are more liberated and have more freedom than in previous centuries. This is clearly not the case. As our world constricts, and communication and surveillance equipment becomes more advanced, there is less and less opportunity for women to deviate from given roles by assuming different identities. Similarly, the increase in total patriarchal control of society meant that the early 18th century offered women less chance to deviate from the 'appropriate' roles assigned to them, than in the 16th century.

One of the most important issues which this dissertation has raised is the fact that the society in which we live affects women's lives to a greater extent than is or ever has been acknowledged by mainstream academia and society at large. Grainne and Anne's unusual career choice, while owing a great deal to their personalities and desire for adventure, owed a great deal more to the cultures in which they grew up. The restrictions, or lack thereof, on what women were permitted to do conditioned their behaviour.

Sixteenth century Ireland had a long history of powerful women. It also had a legal system which considered women to have the same rights as men. This meant that women could not only exist independently of men but also that a decision to do so was a legally enforceable one. This should not however be taken to mean that women who did not marry were widely found. The majority of women did marry. However,
if a husband or wife was unhappy with the situation in which they found themselves, they could simply divorce their partner. Grainne was able to demand unquestioning obedience from her crews not only because she was a good leader, a good sailor and an astute political player but also because she lived in a society which accepted women as men’s equals.

Anne could not demand such loyalty. Her crew consisted of men with only their patriarchal attitudes and their love of piracy in common. As we have seen, women in 18th century America were seen as subordinate to men. While in the 17th century, women had a large degree of freedom, by the 18th century America had settled into the traditional patriarchal roles; women as housewife and mother, man as educator and educated businessperson. This adherence to European attitudes to women only reasserted itself after it was no longer necessary to have women working on the land. During the initial stages of colonisation, women had greater freedom due to their importance in helping create new cities and societies. However, once these had been established women were expected to return to the domestic sphere and stay in the role assigned to them by their fathers and husbands. It is no wonder then, that many women chose to impersonate men in order to retain control over their own destinies.

The cultures in which both women grew up also had a major influence on their ability to attain captaincy of their ships. While Grainne came from a country which had a history of female leadership, Anne grew up in a newly established country with strong patriarchal values. While women sailors were accepted to a certain extent, a female captain would never have been tolerated. The only chance a woman had of becoming
a captain was if no-one suspected her true sex. The only pirate captain about whom this suspicion has been raised is Bartholomew Roberts\(^1\). Roberts insistence on complete privacy and his orders that his body be thrown overboard immediately upon his death, suggests that there may have been reasons other than a predisposition towards solitude for his behaviour. Another strong factor in Grainne’s favour was that she came on board ship as a knowledgeable sailor, from a seafaring family. She grew up sailing on her father’s ships, earning a reputation in later years as a good leader and a good sailor. She also owned many of the ships which sailed under her command.

There are a variety of reasons for the discrepancy in the knowledge which is available to us about these women. Although during her own lifetime, Grainne was ignored by Irish historians and, in later centuries viewed as the product of an overactive imagination because of her status as an *Aisling* figure, recent scholarship has provided us with a wealth of information about her life and career, from her birth in 1530 to her death in 1603. Anne on the other hand disappeared from the pirate scene in 1720 after her capture and nothing is known about her life after this. However, Anne and Mary Read are often the only two female pirates mentioned in accounts on pirates or maritime history simply because their lives were far less threatening than Grainne’s. Anne followed her lover to sea and could thus be dismissed as a non-threatening figure in patriarchal society. Grainne on the other hand was a significant political

\(^1\) Klausmann has suggested that Roberts was in fact a woman and provides interesting evidence attesting to this fact. (Klausmann, 1997)
Perhaps what was most threatening to patriarchy about Anne and Grainne was that they remained female throughout their careers. Their crews were well aware that they were women. While other women cross-dressed and some became transgendered, choosing to live out their lives as men, Grainne and Anne remained as female as they had been on shore. Although they adopted male roles, they did so as women, divesting themselves of contemporary ‘femininity’ but nonetheless remaining essentially female. How then do we explain their success aboard ship? They were accepted by their respective crews simply because they were good at their jobs. Grainne was a successful captain, who ensured that her crews and their families were well taken care of. Anne was a good pirate, proficient in her use of weapons and as pragmatic as the rest of her crew about what she did. At no stage is either woman recorded as showing weakness or being ‘unmanly’ in their actions. On occasion they used what are considered women’s weapons - sex, stealth and cunning, to achieve their aims. Grainne circumvented Bingham’s power by going straight to Queen Elizabeth when she had a problem with the English. Anne seduced a foolish captain in order to steal his ship. Both seem to have appreciated the need for the use of brains as well as brute force in attaining their goals.

There were of course other factors which accounted for their position in history. If Anne had not been caught and tried in court, it is possible that we would not know about her at all. However, the existence of journalists, and the growing
acknowledgement of women who disguised themselves as men in order to sail or soldier, meant that the knowledge of her existence remained in the public domain. If Grainne had not answered Queen Elizabeth’s articles of interrogatory, we would not have any information about her at all.

Just as Grainne and Anne had different reasons for becoming pirates and achieved different status among their crews, so too historians have chosen different ways of dealing with them. By ignoring them, by diminishing their status aboard ship, by describing them as prostitutes or promiscuous or lesbians, historians have cut these women out of mainstream history. Such marginalisation deprives us all of important knowledge. Few people will ever know the truth about what women have achieved, unless they specialise in women’s history, if this sidelining continues. Our job as women, and as feminists, is to ensure that the information which we have is dispersed and made accessible to everyone, not just those who can afford expensive books, or third level education, or the time required for detailed research.

Just as Anne and Grainne carved their own destiny, so too must we. The challenge which faces us today is of recovering these ‘forgotten’ heroes and of acknowledging the women of our own time who stand up to oppression and patriarchy. It is not enough to know that these women existed and exist. The information must be passed on, to our families, our friends, our children and grandchildren. To move a mountain, one begins by taking away the small stones. So too we must remove the mountain of ignorance and prejudice against women in history and society. We begin by reclaiming the women who have been ignored for so long, those who were
unorthodox in their behaviour, those who worked in male dominated arenas, those challenged the society in which they lived. We must also remember the ordinary women, those whose lives have been completely ignored by even social historians. The daily lives of the women who stayed home, those who had children, those who were traded in marriage as peacemakers, those who did not threaten patriarchal society, are equally as important. It is time for us to follow in the footsteps of these pirate women, and create for ourselves the lives that we want, not the lives that society wants us to have.
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