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Against British Influences: Home Rule and the Autonomy of Irish Popular Culture in Ireland's Juvenile Periodicals

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse a largely uncharted topic, i.e. the representation of Ireland's struggle for political and cultural self-determination in the nationalist press for Irish youth. In particular, I will examine four papers (*Our Boys*, *Fianna*, *Young Ireland*, and *St. Enda's*), which represented the various nuances within the ranks of Irish nationalism. Combining literary and historical interests, I will devote my attention to the editorials and literary contributions published in the 1910s and 1920s to illustrate how these juvenile periodicals engaged their readership in a discussion on the necessity of Home Rule and Ireland's cultural independence. Textual attention to the rhetorical and literary strategies adopted by the contributors helps to expose the nuances and shifts in the Irish nationalists' view on the issue, and how nationalist ideas were repackaged for a youthful audience. Moreover, since the four papers were meant as home-grown substitutes for the examples of British popular culture such as the *Boys' Own Paper*, their analysis will cast light on the nationalists' yearning for the development and success of truly Irish popular culture among the youngsters. The Irish periodicals waged a battle against their British counterparts — a battle which Ireland's youth was incited to fight.

Against British Influences: Home Rule and the Autonomy of Irish Culture in Ireland's Juvenile Periodicals

Elena Ogliari

The Nationalists' Need for an Autonomous Production of Juvenile Periodicals

At the turn of the twentieth century, Irish nationalists demanded the energy of Ireland's youth to carry a fundamental objective into practice: the attainment of independence. In their eyes, Irish boys and girls could participate in forwarding independence by countless means other than active combat. *Fianna* was one of several Irish periodicals intended for a juvenile readership and, in its very first issue, the editors explicitly addressed their readers about the youth's potential contribution to the cause:

Prepare yourself. There are plenty of ways you can help Ireland now that she needs you most. Do not put it off; to-morrow will be too late. Ask yourself to-day: What can you do? How can you benefit your country most?¹

Such a tone is representative of the contents of the four youth periodicals which were studied for the purpose of this article. The aim is to analyse the political and cultural relevance of this section of the publishing market, as well as the extent to which contributors and readers engaged in a discussion on the necessity of Home Rule and Ireland's independence. This analysis reveals that the notion of 'autonomy' was intended as a broad one, and that the achievement of political self-government was tightly interwoven with the thriving of an original and separate culture.

I sought to examine not the canonical works of Irish literature, nor even the literary periodicals exclusively directed to the better-educated reader, but the periodicals that informed, amused and often instructed young people across all classes of Irish nationalist society at the beginning of the twentieth century, namely *Our Boys*, *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda's*. Admittedly, a number of manuscript papers — all nationalist in tone — also appeared and disappeared during the revolutionary years besides these four periodicals, but they have been irretrievably lost due to their intrinsic precariousness and transient nature: since they were manuscripts, they were extremely small in circulation and short-lived, being poorly-designed, printed on cheap paper, and with paper, rather than cardboard, covers. Therefore, my corpus consists of the surviving juvenile periodicals concocted in Ireland, which buttressed nationalist ideology and reached wide circulation in the early twentieth century. Although that segment of the market was then dominated by British products, they managed to reach high sale figures, selling thousands of copies per issue.²

1 'From the Editors', *Fianna* (February, 1915): 3.

2 In the early twentieth century Ireland was part of the British distributive system and free public libraries were not widespread in rural Ireland, being mostly located in urban areas. In this cultural vacuum, newsagents and private lending libraries flourished, and they thrived on a wealth of weekly newspapers, periodicals and cheap novels, which were sold in abundance and came from Britain. See Síle de Cléir, *Popular Catholicism in 20th-Century Ireland. Locality, Identity and Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 2-3.

The periodicals have been analysed in the wider social and cultural context they came from. As noted by Raymond Williams, story papers need to be read and understood as part of the culture and society from which they emerged, and ‘within the actual means and conditions of their production’.³ Therefore, I have tried to see the periodicals not in splendid isolation, but as products and ‘makers’ of their age; the texts are seen as inseparable from the historical, political and cultural specificities of the period around 1900 in Ireland, when debates about the implementation of Home Rule and cultural autonomy were paramount.

As Patrick Maume has observed, the 1890s and the earliest decades of the twentieth century were punctuated with a series of cultural and political events that influenced the drive for Irish national autonomy achieved in 1922.⁴ The establishment of the Free State was the culmination of multiple and intertwined cultural, social and political processes that were engendered by the demise of Charles Stewart Parnell. His repudiation by the Irish Party in 1890 resulted in a political vacuum in which no single, strong voice was capable of emerging. In the following years, dissident voices would continue to rise and the Irish population would split into several minor factions: the supporters of Home Rule, those placing social and economic development above it, and the radical advanced nationalists.⁵

The end of Parnell also represented a watershed in Ireland’s cultural history, insofar as, after it, people started seeking out new modes of expressing and reviving Irish culture.⁶ Literature and culture flourished thanks to a rekindling of interest in the country’s past, fuelled by the publication of Standish O’Grady’s works, the activities of William Butler Yeats and his acolytes, and the campaign to preserve the ancient Gaelic language started by Douglas Hyde.⁷ Yet highbrow literature and the Gaelic language were not the only cultural items to undergo an upsurge in interest. Popular literary and publishing genres came to the fore among the concerns of Irish people, especially nationalists. They yearned for the development and success of a truly Irish popular culture among the youngsters, and for the emergence of Irish-made periodical literature for juveniles. As I am going to illustrate, the nationalists were at pains to create an autonomous production of juvenile periodicals as they were persuaded of their high educational value and political relevance.

The broadening field of Irish Youth Studies has highlighted the debates surrounding the role of boys and girls in the long struggle for national self-determination around 1900. Then, as Gavin Forster has observed, ‘the meaning and value of youth underwent a radical transformation in nationalist political discourse’.⁸ Throughout the nineteenth century, Irish youth occupied the lowest strata of the social status hierarchy and they were subject to the

3 Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1983), 210.

4 See Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life, 1891-1918* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

5 Drawing on Ben Novick’s studies, by ‘advanced nationalists’ I mean those men and women who were interested in a greater degree of separation from London than that offered by Home Rule. Cf. Ben Novick, *Conceiving Revolution: Irish Nationalist Propaganda During the First World War* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2001), 15.

6 F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 27.

7 For further details on the Gaelic Revival see Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 23-25.

8 Quoted in John Countryman and Kelly Matthews, *The Country of the Young. Interpretations of Youth and Childhood in Irish Culture* (Dublin: Four Court Press, 2013), 52.

authority of parents, employers, the clergy and other elders. But young Ireland's bleak status was enhanced for the better when youths began to be valued in terms of their relationship to Ireland as its future builders and citizens — in other words, nationalists were now identifying Irish youth as the main agents of both the struggle for independence and nation-building. In this new perspective, both formal and informal education of Ireland's youth became a matter of concern for the nationalists.⁹ The Irish soon recognised the influence juvenile literature could have on its readership and that the periodical press could be an educational and political instrument. So, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, intellectuals and politicians were concerned that the young would read the right things so as to meet the demands of becoming responsible citizens and, possibly, the builders of a new independent nation.

For instance, Patrick Pearse had a very broad idea of education, as evidenced by his own observations in the pamphlet *The Murder Machine*. In his view, de-Anglicised periodical literature was an educational instrument that could promote the general betterment of Irish youth as much as schooling.¹⁰ An insightful element in Pearse's speculation was the assertion that juvenile periodical literature had to be employed to spread particular ideas about Irish nationalism in an agreeable manner. And, in 1909, he founded a college paper, *An Macaomh*, which denoted an earnest commitment to national self-determination, conveyed through a literary vehicle that was designed to assure sympathetic attention from boys.¹¹

Pearse's ideas on education, and his concomitant views on juvenile periodicals, stand out as a body of theory fundamental to a deep understanding of the nationalists' interest in the matter at the turn of the twentieth century.¹² Nationalists shared with Pearse a chief common preoccupation with the deluge of 'trashy' magazines from Britain.¹³ Those contributing to the nationalist press cautioned their readers to regard the British periodicals modelled on *The Boy's Own Paper* as a corrupting force, alienating the Irish youngsters from their own culture. This type of literature was in fact successful on both sides of the Irish Sea: Ireland was then part of the British distributive system and British juvenile reading material could boast of a wide circulation on the island.¹⁴ Thus, the author of the article 'The Return of the Fianna' praised the exceptional education provided by *St. Enda's* to its pupils inasmuch as it gave them the chance to become familiar with myths and legends they would

8 'Informal' refers to all educational activities outside school such as reading and sporting practice.

10 Patrick Pearse, *The Murder Machine* (Dublin: Whelan, 1916), 14.

11 *An Macaomh* was published at St. Enda's School, Rathmines, but could be ordered also by people not associated with Patrick Pearse's school. In his plans, it had to be published twice yearly, at mid-summer and at Christmas, but the publication was actually discontinuous due to financial problems.

12 Brendan Walsh, *Boy Republic: Patrick Pearse and Radical Education* (Dublin: History Press Ireland, 2013), 11-12.

13 For example, in a 1909 article of *Bean na hEireann*, the author deplored the 'deluge of trashy foreign literature in Ireland'. 'Editorial Notes', *Bean na hEireann* (April, 1909): 8.

14 One should take into account the following note published in *Fianna*, which explicitly mentions the huge success enjoyed by British story papers: 'Killing Irish Nationalism. That — and worse — is what the English boys' periodicals are doing. Now, these English weeklies and monthlies have a very large circulation in Ireland — practically every boy reads them'. *Fianna* (March, 1915): 4. Of some interest might be also the article 'Editorial on the Circulation of British Sunday Newspapers in Ireland and How to Stop it', *The Catholic Bulletin* (November, 1911): 513-15.

not usually have been exposed to. In other schools, they would have known ‘only “Tom Brown”, “Dick Turpin” and ‘Crusoe”’.¹⁵

Likewise, snippets in the memoirs and autobiographies of Irishmen born at the end of the nineteenth century or slightly later show these men remembering reading English magazines in their youth. For instance, in *An Only Child* (1961), Frank O’Connor casts light on the cultural dislocation and self-negation experienced — albeit unconsciously — by Irish young readers at the turn of the century as he recalled how his early childhood was saturated with imperial fictions and felt that his spiritual homeland was England, for it was the home of all the imaginary friends whom he daily encountered in magazines such as *The Gem*, *The Magnet* and *The Boy’s Own Paper*.¹⁶

From a nationalist perspective, there was no suitable reading material in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. This absence, then, became a hot topic. Nationalist writers began to insist on the need for the introduction of home-grown substitutes of the likes of *The Gem* and *The Magnet* into the Irish publishing market. They also took an active interest in promoting an autonomous production of story papers, which would free youngsters from British influences. At last, in the rapidly evolving paper landscape of the 1910s, four periodicals for the Irish youths were established. Competing for the cultural allegiance of the Irish youth there were *Our Boys*, *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda’s*.

A Look at the Corpus: Similarities and Differences

All four periodicals promulgated nationalist values and the de-Anglicisation of the country by waging a battle of images and words against their British counterparts. Their contributors faced the challenge of imagining the future Irish state, which, they hoped, would be characterised by both political and cultural independence. They consciously followed in the steps of the great revivals of the past, those of the mid-eighteenth century and of the experimentations of the Young Ireland movement. In particular, the latter implemented a programme of both political and cultural action.¹⁷ They saw themselves as leading and articulating the collective will of the Irish people. Through their newspaper, *The Nation*, they asserted the existence of an Irish national identity that was separate from Britain. They wished for a regeneration of Irish life by means of a large-scale return to its traditional literature, lore and language.¹⁸

In their wake, *Our Boys*, *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda’s* carried out a political and cultural programme by catering for both the delight and instruction of Ireland’s youth. More precisely, each paper catered for a specific segment of the young readership. The selected juvenile papers, though all upholding nationalist values, reveal a great variety of opinions that mirrors the broad spectrum of both Irish nationalism — marked by various

15 ‘The Return of the Fianna’, *An Claidheamh Soluis* (27 March 1909): 11.

16 Frank O’Connor, *An Only Child and My Father’s Son: An Autobiography* (London: Penguin, 2005), 118. Cf. Janette Condon, ‘“A Quaking Sod”: Ireland, Empire and Children’s Literary Culture’, *New Voices in Irish Criticism*, ed. P. J. Matthews (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 192.

17 Joseph Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish National State* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 76.

18 Hutchinson 96.

shades of persuasions — and the intellectual ferment at the time. A paper such as *Our Boys*, which emerged in the 1910s, advocated the de-Anglicisation of Ireland at the cultural level, while maintaining a distinctive constitutional stance; at the other end of the spectrum, the short-lived *Fianna* called for complete separation from England, both cultural and political.

The monthly magazine *Our Boys* was the first to be published, in September 1914, thanks to the commitment of the Christian Brothers, who were determined to shape the future of Ireland in a Catholic and anti-British direction. Conceived as an educational auxiliary to the Christian Brothers' work in schools, *Our Boys* was the medium through which the Brothers cultivated a holy patriotism in their readers.¹⁹ Its editors and contributors held moderate positions, endorsing the policy of John Redmond, whose central objective was legislative independence from Ireland through Home Rule — 'a measure overdue to Ireland for seven hundred years'.²⁰ By virtue of the Brothers' editorial sagacity, the periodical became the most popular of its days. Not only did the first issue sell 30,000 copies, but the monthly circulation rose rapidly to 40,000, with an estimated readership of 100,000 throughout the country and the Irish diaspora abroad.²¹ The first issue was an unqualified commercial success, being read both abroad and in the trenches of the Great War, and the later numbers scored a greater success not only with the readers but with many subsequent writers and editors of periodicals.

Challenging *Our Boys* in its heyday were the other papers. *Fianna* was founded in 1915 by a number of able, and until that time obscure, fervent ex-Boy Scouts with literary ambitions. The group included Patsy O'Connor, Percy Reynolds and others of lesser reputation. These young men all shared a nationalist, non-denominational stance on Irish politics and membership of the Irish Boy Scouts. The paper they founded was designed to mirror and popularise the principles of the nationalist Irish Boy Scout organisation, called *Na Fianna Éireann* in Gaelic.

Na Fianna Éireann was established in 1909 and 'its object was stated in its constitution to be the re-establishment of the Independence of Ireland'.²² Given that, it is clear to what extent *Fianna* differed from *Our Boys*. Above all, the former represented a much more radical viewpoint as it was the mouthpiece of the advanced nationalists from its inception. *Fianna* explicitly declared the intention to keep its focus squarely on Ireland's national affairs: its objective was 'to train the youth of Ireland to work mentally and physically for the independence of their country'.²³ Home Rule was not enough. Full independence was the only goal and could be attained also by embracing weapons ('physically'). The opinion articles, editorials and fictional stories featured in *Fianna* were all geared to provide youngsters with a 'rebellious' model. Thus, the stories with foreign

19 Dáire Keogh, 'Our Boys: The Christian Brothers and the Formation of Youth in the "New Ireland" 1914-1944', *History of Education* 44.6: 700.

20 *Our Boys* (Christmas Number, 1916): 100.

21 Barry Coldrey, *Faith and Fatherland: The Christian Brothers and the Development of Irish Nationalism, 1838-1921* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), 27. See also *Our Boys*, October 1914, in which the paper's editors make similar calculations.

22 *Fianna Handbook* (Dublin: The Central Council of Na Fianna Eireann, 1914), 12.

23 *Fianna* (March, 1915): 3.

settings were meant to ‘give boys ideas of how other countries run revolutions’.²⁴ Similarly, in keeping with *Fianna’s* goal, historical adventure tales fuelled the readers’ conviction of Ireland’s right to independence, by focusing on the way Ireland had been treated in the past by unscrupulous British rule. These fictional writings centred on the Irish history of resistance, usually resulting in a praise of the long line of patriots who vainly attempted to throw off the British yoke: Wolfe Tone, the leader of the abortive Rising of 1798, was commemorated in a long story set in Bodenstown;²⁵ Robert Emmett, who instigated the failed insurrection of 1803, was depicted as a saint prophesying Ireland’s freedom from the scaffold of his own execution; and the Fenians of 1867 frequently recurred throughout the pages of *Fianna*. The 1915 July issue was devoted to the commemoration of O’Donovan Rossa, and the whole compound of issues featured a serialised story by Patrick Pearse, *The Wandering Hawk*, which romanticised Fenian plots and whose character, nicknamed ‘Little Captain’, was presumably loosely based on William Francis Lomasney.²⁶ The brutal treatment reserved to past rebels was supposed to mobilise new resistance and incite the Irish Boy Scouts to prepare themselves for the possibility of a war against Britain.

Political independence at all costs was the objective for Ireland’s youth put forward by both *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda’s*. Both emerged after the Easter Rising, when a succession of short-lived separatist periodicals intended for juveniles failed to shake the British magazines’ hold upon the imagination of Ireland’s youth. *Young Ireland* was founded in April 1917 by the publicist Aodh de Blacam and was edited under the supervision of Arthur Griffith as the instrument to spread Sinn Féin’s ideology among the youth. De Blacam had the task of setting forth in clear and simple language the arguments that Sinn Féin was defending in the years around the General Elections of 1918. The Constitution of Sinn Féin, simply stated that the party’s primary objective was the ‘independence for Ireland’ – the attainment of which depended on the duty of every citizen to work for the creation of a ‘prosperous, virile, and independent nation’.²⁷

Therefore, it was no coincidence that *Young Ireland* not only featured accounts of Sinn Féin’s political battles in its pages, but also stood for complete and absolute separation of Ireland from the United-Kingdom. It was one of the mouthpieces of complete separation not only at a political level, but also economically and culturally. It should not be neglected that Griffith himself served as *Young Ireland’s* editor for a time, albeit discontinuously – his arrest after the Bloody Sunday of 1920 inevitably forced him to leave the post he had occupied the previous year – and that he was not the only leading figure of Sinn Féin to get involved in *Young Ireland*. Herbert Moore Pim also occasionally signed articles under the pseudonym A. Newman. He was a committed Sinn Féiner and even served three months in Reading Jail for participating in the Easter Rising. These men shaped the periodical according to their ideas and beliefs.

24 ‘The Siege of Zaragoza’, *Fianna* (April, 1915): 3.

25 Dalcassian, ‘From a Long Way to Bodenstown’, *Fianna* (July, 1915): 1-2.

25 Born the son of Irish immigrants in the US, Lomasney was a member of the Fenian Brotherhood who, during the Fenian dynamite campaign of the nineteenth century, was killed in a failed attempt to blow up London Bridge.

27 A replica of the 1907 Constitution of the National Council can be found at the following link: <https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland//images/uploads/further-reading/Ed101-SinnFeinConstitution1907-VN.pdf>

This multifarious landscape was completed by *St. Enda's*, which appeared in March 1918. *St. Enda's* was Brian O'Higgins's²⁸ attempt to rally younger fellow nationalists through the pages of a periodical that was largely an amateur operation. Many of its reporters and composers were university or high school students. Its title is significant as it was a tribute to both the homonymous saint and the Easter Rising leader Patrick Pearse. Saint Enda, after whom the paper is named, was heralded as the ideal model: 'because he was not only a glorious saint and a brilliant scholar, but a brave soldier as well; and because in our own day a saintly man and a cultured scholar and a fearless soldier, who gave his life to save his native land, selected St Enda as a model for the youth of Ireland'.²⁹ As evidenced in this quotation, the editors and contributors of this periodical admired Pearse without reserve. O'Higgins set a clear editorial line, which was centred on the promotion of highly specific notions of national activism inspired by the teachings of Patrick Pearse. There should be no doubt about the stance they adopted on the possibility of Home Rule.

One common trait of all these periodicals deserves to be emphasised. All four were meant to win the youths' hearts, to spread the ideology of the faction they represented among the future nation builders in an entertaining package. Each paper had to be 'a lively, attractive, Irish Magazine'³⁰ to seduce the largest possible readership. Thus, the four story papers were not a tedious propagandistic read; nor was their content mere propagandistic jingoism. Their editors demonstrated their belief that the principal facts and notions had to be imparted in an easy and agreeable manner, by counterbalancing instruction with pleasure. Although denigrating the demoralizing British story papers, from that tradition they wisely retained the employment of suspense, mystery, tight episodic plotting, the old tricks of passion and fancy, and crime subjects. They also admitted their use of page-turning, thrilling stories as the 'package' for their messages, because they were convinced that youths, 'as a rule, like to have their reading spiced with story and anecdote, and the more highly spiced the better they like it'.³¹

Nonetheless, everything was refashioned in a distinct Irish way to buttress a nationalist agenda. For instance, *Our Boys* featured the serial 'A Trapper's Adventure in the Rocky Mountains' about the Irish-born cowboy Francis 'Pancho' O'Hegarty', the son of an exiled man who 'had been one of those who sided with Ireland' and because of his Fenian past 'had to cross the ocean to a strange country'; yet he would never forget his homeland and Pancho grew up with 'his father telling wonderful stories of that far-away land, the wrongs that were done to it, and the men who had fought to defend it'. As an obvious consequence, Pancho would announce his intention of going to 'work for Ireland when he would be a man'.³²

28 Before launching *St. Enda's*, O'Higgins had already served as an illustrator and ballad-writer for many nationalist magazines and newspapers. In 1922 he was arrested and served a month in jail for his political activities. Until his untimely arrest, however, O'Higgins had provided many editorials, opinion articles and stories for *St. Enda's* and soon after release, he resumed his position as editor of the juvenile monthly.

29 *St. Enda's* (March, 1918).

30 *Young Ireland* 1 April 1917: 1.

31 *Our Boys* (September, 1914): 2.

32 'A Trapper's Adventure in the Rocky Mountains', *Our Boys* (June, 1917): 124.

Similarly, to whet the desires of their readership, the contributors to *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda's* kindled the imagination of thousands of boys and girls with formulaic stories, such as school-stories and detective stories, which were the most widely read and rapturously remembered.³³ In the wake of Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands*, *Fianna* published a story entitled 'The Spy Peril', which mocked British anti-German propaganda and the phenomenon of spy-fever in Irish society.³⁴ For *Young Ireland*, Pim created the character of the private detective Philip O'Brien, a Hibernian Sherlock Holmes: deduction skills, cold logic and the ability to disguise themselves are indeed the *forte* of both characters. *St. Enda's* published popular stories, which dealt with contemporary events and were set in Ireland. Their settings ranged from the trenches of the Great War to the countryside battlefields of the Anglo-Irish war; their protagonists were young boys or girls — they could easily be surrogates for their readers — who, at a young age, had to face British brutality first hand. The tales offered plenty of action and suspenseful plots keeping readers spellbound.

Convinced of its political and educational value, the nationalists did manage to achieve popular success and autonomy in the newly-born publishing genre of juvenile periodicals. *Our Boys* was often 'Sold Out' and 'the demand so great' that its publishers 'were altogether unable to meet it'.³⁵ *Fianna* and *St. Enda's* constantly managed to scarp together sufficient money to continue publication, although the establishment of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) in August 1914 made life difficult for the so-called 'seditious' press in the 1910s-early 1920s; indeed, if the 1918 June issue of *St. Enda's* carried the alarming notice 'A Crisis', the headline of the 1921 September issue proudly announced that *St. Enda's* had been 'sold out last month four days after the date of publication'. O'Higgins's monthly managed to recover and even grew in size in the course of the early 1920s.³⁶ Also *Young Ireland* achieved considerable stature and influence in the country; it is known that the periodical was selling well in 1917 to the point that its publishers had to increase the number of copies printed by several hundreds, hire new contributors and move their headquarters to Dublin.³⁷

Home Rule? Portraying John Redmond in the Juvenile Press

The four periodicals provided their young readerships with an arena where one could publicly discuss national matters, although the editors strove to control 'the direction' of the debates and to mould the views of Irish boys and girls. The 'direction' varied according to the periodical, as they upheld different stances on the future of Ireland, politically and culturally.

Fianna and its editors were committed to exerting a marked influence upon the youth's morale, to instil national pride in their readers and spur them to fight for national

32 Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3-7.

34 'The Spy Peril', *Fianna* (February, 1915): 12.

34 'Editorial Notes', *Our Boys* (January, 1918): 123.

35 *St. Enda's* (June, 1918): cover page; *St. Enda's* (September, 1921): 1.

36 *Our Boys* (November, 1917): 59.

self-determination. The option of Home Rule was deemed inadequate: *Fianna* enacted all the strategies to persuade its readership that full independence from Britain was the ultimate goal and that it could not be reached gradually. At the same time, they strove to demonstrate that the prospect of Home Rule was simply an illusory promise made by a malevolent man, John Redmond. The editors and authors' opinion of Redmond is exhaustively condensed in a passage written by J.H. Rice, who wrote that 'the first thing to be done is to free Ireland from the mill-stone which is dragging her down; in short, Redmond must go'.³⁸ The party leader was working for Britain, not for Ireland, as they hinted at when declaring that 'Redmond and Carson and their followers at £400 per year are the principal parts of the [British] Government's machine'.³⁹ The reputation of Redmond and his followers was likewise tainted with corruption in the pages of *Young Ireland*; they were called 'False leaders' and the Nationalist victory in South Longford in 1917 was regarded as the defeat of 'Materialism and Corruption'.⁴⁰

Young Ireland and *Fianna* vehemently criticised the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party also for his endorsement, on political and religious grounds, of Ireland's involvement in the First World War. Redmond enthusiastically supported the British war effort and his own country's participation in it, linking the sacrifice of Irish people with the implementation of Home Rule and the defence of Christianity against German brutality.⁴¹ This belief brought harsh criticism on the party leader. In the 1915 July issue, for instance, the contributors of *Fianna* aimed to expose Redmond as a vile politician, who had lured Ireland into the Great War for his own benefit. As *Young Ireland* would put it, he was a 'Corruptionist'⁴² who brainwashed Irish youth. In 1915, the editors of *Fianna* expressed their mind on a message Redmond had sent 'from Ireland to the Small Nationalities, through the medium of the Sunday edition of the *London Times*'. Besides exposing 'the ignorance [that] Mr. Redmond here displays', the writers tried to show the inconsistency in his speeches and actions, which would point to the unreliability of the Irish politician and, by extension, of his promises. Incidentally, the publication outlet chosen by Redmond was duly mentioned by the editors with the intention to hint at Redmond's presumable allegiance to Britain.

The party leader was accused of having changed his mind over foreign affairs. In the message to the *London Times*, Redmond claimed that 'England's attitude towards its small nationalities is an honourable contrast to the attitude of Germany and Austria towards their small nationalities'. Yet his opinion on this matter had been different a few years previously. The editors argued that in 'the *Home Rule Handbook*, published in 1912, Mr John Redmond eulogises the German Government for its treatment of Alsace-Lorraine, citing the fact the Alsatians have Home Rule with manhood suffrage and that the small minority of French speaking Alsace-Lorrainers possess equal rights for their language.' Moreover, 'in *Reynold's Newspaper* of November, 11th, 1911, Mr Redmond [...] asked England to follow the liberal example of Germany in dealing with small nationalities'. Given that, the conclusion casts a negative light on the politician as it reads: 'from this, the reader can judge whether Mr John

38 J.H. Rice, 'Editorial', *Fianna* (July, 1915): 3.

39 *Fianna* (May, 1915): 7.

40 *Young Ireland* 26 May 1917: 1.

41 Jérôme aan de Wiel, *The Catholic Church in Ireland, 1914-1918: War and Politics* (Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 1-41.

42 *Young Ireland* 2 June 1917: 1.

Redmond's message that England's treatment of small nationalities is honourable as compared with their treatment by Germany and Austria is or is not true'.⁴³ The obvious question a young reader should have asked was: 'Is Redmond, who changes his mind so quickly, trustworthy?'. For the editors of *Fianna*, the answer was clearly no.

Similar opinions were voiced by Maire Nic Chearbaill, the editor of a column in *Young Ireland* entirely devoted to the Irish *cailíní* ('girls' in Gaelic).⁴⁴ In the poem 'The Battle of Longford', she invited her young readers not to trust 'who put Home Rule on the Statute Book', because those were the politicians who dragged Ireland into total conflict by giving the youths false hopes. In her view, the war would not have positive consequences for Ireland: quite the contrary, as the poem reads 'The cause of Small Nations / With zeal our heart doth fill, / So let's partition Ireland, / And make her smaller still'.⁴⁵ This pessimistic sentiment was echoed in another poem, less prosaic in tone, which dealt with a spider and a fly joining an imaginary Peace Conference, where they will have 'a splendid spread/ Of Conciliation Syrup / On Home Rule Partition Bread'.⁴⁶

Certainly, the Great War represented a turning point in Irish history that could not pass unnoticed in the periodicals. The discourses on the First World War were tightly intertwined with those on Home Rule. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that the Christian Brothers editing *Our Boys* looked favourably on those youngsters who enrolled to fight in Europe, among whom were some of their readers and former students. Their arguments in favour of Ireland's military effort were the same as Redmond's. In their view, the Irish servicemen's sacrifice was necessary: the Irish who were dying or still fighting on the Continent deserved admiration because they were fulfilling the duty of any patriotic and Catholic Irishman by fighting the Germans. All the stories published between 1914 and the spring of 1918 represent the Irish soldiers in the British Army under a positive light: they are shown respect, although this is signalled through stories that extol not their bravery, but their commitment to Ireland and the Church.

Up to Redmond's untimely death in 1918, the trust *Our Boys* confided in the party leader never abated. Actually, their stance towards Redmond and his actions would bear negative consequences for the story paper at a certain point. For all its previous success, *Our Boys* did not maintain the cultural allegiance of its established reading public in the aftermath of the Easter Rising. The great 'Turning Point'⁴⁷ in Irish history undermined the reputation of *Our Boys* and would later cause major shifts in its editorial policy. The editors of *Our Boys* failed to understand the enormous changes in people's attitude towards the

43 *Fianna* (July, 1915): 6.

44 *Young Ireland* was the only paper also devoted explicitly to girls and, since its inception, it featured a column devoted to Irish *cailíní*, which was distinguished by its preoccupation with the girl's position in relation to wider, national society. Here girl readers could discuss 'their duties in the service of Ireland', like saving the national language and promoting home industry. See *Young Ireland* (26 May, 1917): 43.

45 'The Battle of Longford', *Young Ireland* 26 May 1917: 1. In the very same issue, while commenting on an essay written by one of her readers, Nic Chearbaill also declared that Eithne (the author of the essay) showed 'shrewd political wisdom' because there was 'No Home-Rule-on-the-Statute-Book humbug for Eithne', while adding: 'no, nor for any of the *cailíní* of Ireland. A Nation's Rights are their minimum claim'. See 'The Right Spirit', *Young Ireland* 26 May 1917: 3.

46 'The Convention Spider and the Peace Conference Fly', *Young Ireland* 30 June 1917: 1.

47 Thomas Hachey, *Turning Points in Twentieth Century Irish History* (Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2011), 1.

Empire and the prospect of Home Rule brought about by the uprising. Although the revolt was initially deplored by the majority of the papers still in print and by most Dubliners, the ensuing prolonged series of executions turned the tide of public opinion: England's brutal over-reaction drove many people to a more radical stance on Irish politics.⁴⁸

Yet the Christian Brothers were late in questioning their views on Irish nationalism after the Easter Rising and its aftermath of violence. In March 1917, an article devoted to Irish politics reported passages from a speech by James O'Connor listing the reasons why Irish people should still believe in Home Rule.⁴⁹ However, as the political atmosphere became increasingly tense, resentment grew at the editors' moderate Home Rule stance, their failure to acknowledge the Easter Rising — let alone its significance — and their continued support of Ireland's military involvement in the Great War.⁵⁰ The absence of any reference to the Rising and its protagonists in the pages of *Our Boys* in the months following the dramatic event is indeed striking, especially if we take into account that many among the leaders of the rebellion had been educated by the Christian Brothers in their youth. *Our Boys* also showed remarkable apathy towards the possibility of political change. In April 1918, it still lingered on high praises for John Redmond after the latter's death. Redmond was described as a 'great Irishman, a distinguished parliamentarian, and a notable figure in world politics'; his good intentions were not questioned because 'he laboured earnestly, and he strove honourably for the attainment of his ideals. He gave a lifetime of love and sacrifice to the land of his birth'. Unfortunately, 'he died before the fruits of his years of sowing had reached their period of rich ripeness', but there is no doubt that the 'purpose' which he 'pursued with rare honesty and unflinching tenacity' would become real.⁵¹ This obstinacy in supporting the moderate nationalist party presumably shook the loyalty of many of its readers, unwilling to keep buying the now out-dated paper. And sales plummeted to few thousands.

Our Boys provides us with a good example of the fact that the readers' opinion, albeit moulded by the reading material, may in turn influence the editorial line of a newspaper: since newspapers are businesses depending on sales and advertising, they ultimately rely on the opinions of their readership, which are variable.⁵² In the case of the Christian Brothers' paper, the beliefs of their purchasers — the youngsters or their parents — contributed to modifying the editors' attitude towards Irish politics according to the line already adopted by the other three papers.

48 Jonathan Githens-Mazer, *Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 136.

49 *Our Boys* (March, 1917): 204.

50 Keogh 704. The first reference to the Rising, moreover, is contained in a full-page notice sent to *Our Boys* by the editors of the renovated *Freeman's Journal* which reopened in December 1916 after the 'calamity of April'. The *Freeman's Journal* was a Redmondite newspaper and their view on the rebellion was anything but positive. See *Our Boys* (Christmas Number): 115. Interestingly, albeit unsurprisingly, *Young Ireland* defined the *Freeman's Journal* 'unclean' and 'shoneen', 18 August, 1917: 4.

51 *Our Boys* (May, 1918): 203.

52 Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 6.

In 1920, detachment from the prevailing attitudes in Irish politics — marked by increasing radicalisation and polarisation — was no longer a wise strategy, and the Christian Brothers were compelled to jettison any ambiguity or reticence towards the contemporary political situation. The advanced nationalist Brother Canice Craven, a friend of Patrick Pearse and his own teacher of Irish in Westland Row in the 1890s, was appointed editor of the monthly. With him, *Our Boys* began to address contemporary events in its fictional pieces: for instance, *Tragedy and Comedy* is a story set at Mountjoy Prison during the course of a hunger strike of Republican political activists, who demanded the recognition of their status as political, rather than criminal, prisoners. The piece is noteworthy in the sense that it was the first occasion that contemporary events were addressed in the magazine, as the hunger strike described in the story had taken place the previous month; it also denotes the unambiguous radical nationalism of Brother Canice Craven and, by extension, of the renovated periodical.⁵³

A Broad Notion of National Autonomy

For all these differences with regard to politics, the papers shared some similarities, especially when it came to forms of independence other than political. The story papers put forward a broad idea of national autonomy, which also encompassed economic self-reliance and cultural independence. With regard to the papers' view on Ireland's economy, all launched campaigns for economic renewal, often characterised by autarchic protectionist drives that would lead, after independence, to protective tariffs. Scorn towards those selling and buying foreign goods was a common feature, usually accompanied by the extolment of the products made in Ireland (or even better in 'Ould Erin').

Young Ireland was quite the exception in this respect, because it did not only doggedly endorse a 'Buy Irish' campaign, but also championed the doctrines on economic matters of Arthur Griffith, who 'in the pages of *Sinn Féin*, preached [...] the policy of self-reliance and endeavour'.⁵⁴ As an economic theoretician inspired by Frederick List,⁵⁵ Griffith placed the need for protective tariffs above all programmes for free trade, which he deemed an economic ruin for Ireland; in particular, he implemented a plan for the development of Irish industry and trade that *Young Ireland* duly reported. Through a series of lectures published in the paper in the course of two years, 1917-1918, readers were provided with a full picture of Griffith's economic theories, especially his desire to transform Ireland into a self-reliant and dynamic industrial nation. Griffith and his disciples were convinced that economic autonomy and political freedom were interconnected, as evidenced in the extract below:

Home Rule would not allow us freedom to protect our markets from England, and so to build up our own industries. Thus complete freedom is necessary if Ireland is to grow prosperous, and again she must maintain prosperity if she wishes to remain free.⁵⁶

52 Michael Flanagan, *True Sons of Erin, Catholic/Nationalist Ideology and the Politics of Adventure in Our Boys 1914-32* (Dublin Institute of Technology, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, 2006) 13.

54 *Young Ireland* 2 June 1917: 7.

55 *Young Ireland* 9 June 1917: 3. List's economic doctrine and policy were examined in the following number, published on 16 June.

56 *Young Ireland* 9 June 1917: 3.

What the papers really shared, however, were demands for acknowledging Ireland's originality and its equal (if not superior) status at the cultural level with Britain and other European powers. They wished to awake enthusiasm for the hitherto neglected Gaelic heritage, to instil national pride and patriotism by pointing to the wealth of Irish traditions and their cultural distinctiveness from British ones. Ultimately, the awakening would spur youths to 'work' for Ireland.

The papers waged a battle, or 'crusade',⁵⁷ to promote Irish literature, long overshadowed by English literature, because the latter was very successful and appreciated in Ireland, and taught in the national schools. The success of English literature enraged the papers' contributors, who sometimes verged on the point of chauvinism in comments such as 'it is worth contrasting Dante's exquisite pride and refinement here expressed with the non-Catholic coarseness of Shakespeare and other English literary figures, whose works (God help us) are used for educational purposes in Irish Catholic schools instead of Dante and his like'.⁵⁸ Certainly, religious differences were not alien to these observations, an aspect that is easily explained: *Young Ireland* purported to be 'devotedly Catholic from cover to cover' and identified in Catholicism a quintessential element of Irishness. The weekly aimed to contain 'nothing "shoneen", nothing West-Britainish, no stage-Irish jokes, nothing derogatory to the faith and ideals of the proud nation of the Gaels'.⁵⁹

Incidentally, many of its contributors noted that the reading public had given a most fervent admiration to the works of Lord Tennyson, an 'enemy' of 'the proud nation of the Gaels', conferred in 1850 with the title of Poet Laureate. His reputation came to suffer enormously among the Irish nationalists, who made him their own polemical target. In their view, Tennyson's work embodied a derogatory attitude towards Irish people, society and culture. In *Young Ireland*, Nic Chearbaill professed herself unable to find a positive aspect in the whole of Tennyson's oeuvre: Tennyson — a 'bumptious, ignorant, and irreverent snob' — was not only racist in his attitudes towards the Irish, but also disrespectful to women in *The Princess*.⁶⁰ This issue brought up by Nic Chearbaill is also amplified by the editor's notes, where it is asked why the Irish should study anti-Catholic authors.⁶¹

To counteract these British influences on the literary level, the periodicals set out to search for authentic Irish cultural products. Their authors looked at the Irish past to pinpoint those authors and works that deserved to be preserved and handed down to the following generations, as a source of inspiration for the blossoming of Irish culture in the future. *St. Enda's* and *Young Ireland* regularly made space for editorials on the importance of retrieving Irish literature from oblivion, for reviews of literature and periodicals written in Irish; the

57 'Editorial', *Our Boys* (October, 1914): 42-43.

58 *Young Ireland* 30 June 1917: 6. In the same line, in August 1920, *St. Enda's* published a letter to the editor by a girl who extolls Irish literature and even says that Dante was inspired by the visions of an Irish saint when writing his *Commedia*. See, *St. Enda's* 6 August 1920: 10.

58 'The Times We Live In', *Young Ireland* 21 April 1917: 1.

60 *Young Ireland* 2 June 1917. In a following issue, Nic Chearbaill continued her polemic against Tennyson, defined 'a snob, an ignoramus, an anti-Christian pantheist, a jingo and anti-feminist savage'. See *Young Ireland* 14 July 1917: 3.

61 *Young Ireland* 26 June 1917: 8.

latter republished poems featured in ancient manuscripts in the recurring fixture *Poems of the Fianna*. By making their readers appreciate ‘the lovely delicacy of Irish poetry at that time’,⁶² they strove to demonstrate that Irish literature in Irish was no less vibrant than its English counterpart.

In keeping with the same strategy, *Fianna* launched the column *Quarter-Hours with Ireland’s Best Authors*, aimed to highlight the contribution of eminent men and women to the development of a truly Irish literature and, by extension, to the nation’s progress. The first instalment was devoted to Owen Mac An Bhaird (or Red Owen Ward) and it was clearly stated that the objective of the column was

to educate in a necessary direction those of our readers who still remain under the impression stamped on their minds by the enemy, that we descended from a race of ignorant people, who were saved from barbarianism, and educated by those, whom they themselves really educated. Truly, England, like most of the nations, produced great authors, but that Ireland did not, as they would have us believe, is a falsehood that we want to make perfectly clear. Our literary ancestors were classed among all the great men of the world in their time.⁶³

In order to achieve the same goal, the story papers also reprinted the works of Thomas Moore and Thomas Davis. Their poems, in the editors’ views, would not only teach the principal facts of the history of Ireland in an easy and agreeable manner, but they would ‘serve to build up your [the readers’] character’. The following extract, drawn from *Our Boys*, well encapsulates the notion that Moore’s and Davis’s poems would forge the readers’ character along sanctioned lines, while making clear that it was the Irish youngsters’ turn to live up to the legacy of the past generations celebrated in the poems. The fictional pieces in *Our Boys*, the editor says,

will make you love that country which your ancestors loved so well — the island of saints and scholars and patriots — that country for whose sake, in the years long dead, brave men trod the scaffold or fell with their faces towards the foe. [...] You must ever keep in mind as a sacred and cherished thought, that you are the children of saints and martyrs, that you have grand and holy traditions by following in the footsteps of your fathers so faithfully that your names may be handed down to posterity, as the worthy sons of noble sires.⁶⁴

The transmission of the heritage, as one famous commentator of the time noted, implied making Ireland’s youth aware of its legends, songs, history and literature so as to instil ‘pride in the past and a sense of responsibility for the future of their country’.⁶⁵

At the same time, besides retrieving Irish authors from oblivion, the editors and authors of the periodicals were aware that they had to provide the Irish readership with a set of new popular cultural products alternative to those then streaming from the presses of England. This is the reason why, conscious of potential impact of ballads on Irish

⁶² *Young Ireland* 25 August 1917: 5.

⁶³ *Fianna* (July, 1915): 7.

⁶⁴ *Our Boys* (October, 1914): 32-33.

⁶⁵ Eveleen C. Nicolls, *Nationality in Irish Education* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1910), 4.

imagination, the editors retrieved this kind of versification by unleashing a flow of original ballads about the Fenians of 1867, prophecies about freedom from British rule and even sporting themes. Often, these ballads were unashamedly didactic, if not pedestrian. Nonetheless, they proved to be extremely successful, becoming a regular feature of the papers: for instance, *Young Ireland* from its very first number⁶⁶ introduced the recurring feature of *A Ballad-History of Ireland*, in which foundational events in Irish history were sung and extolled.

Conclusion

Certainly, these papers turned out to be valid alternatives to the flourishing British periodicals, but their emergence did not completely resolve the problem of suitable reading material for Irish youths. In 1935, in an article entitled 'What Shall the Children Read', Aodh de Blacam expressed grave concern at the extent to which the Irish juvenile imagination was still essentially colonised by the 'alien' medium of English cultural images and forms; thus, he sought to inform his readers that they ought to embark on a cultural 'crusade' to save the youth from the seductions of English culture and juvenile literature. He spurred his readers to attend to the nationalising of youth and suggested that the fact of political independence meant little if the new generations of free Ireland were allowed to grow up as 'West Britons', with little consideration for their Gaelic heritage and cultural traditions. He believed that the 'foundations of culture [were] laid in youthful reading' and he wished the Irish youths to become familiar with the historical tales and sagas so that it would 'grow up, as it were, with Fionn and Columcille as companions'.⁶⁷

The battle waged by the four periodicals was far from over.

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66 *Young Ireland* 21 April 1917: 3.

67 Aodh de Blacam, 'What Shall the Children Read?', *The Irish Monthly*, 63.748 (October, 1935): 680-88.

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