THE POLITICS OF IRISH WRITING

Edited by

Kateřina Jenčová, Michaela Marková,
Radvan Markus and Hana Pavelková

Prague
Centre for Irish Studies, Charles University
2010

FACULTY OF ARTS
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE

Academic readers: Prof. Margaret Kelleher, Prof. Shaun Richards

Cataloguing in Publication Data

The Politics of Irish Writing. Edited by Kateřina Jenčová, Michaela Marková, Radvan Markus and Hana Pavelková.–1st ed.
p. cm.
ISBN (pb) 978-80-254-6151-8
1. Irish Studies. 2. Irish Literature.
I. Jenčová Kateřina, Marková Michaela, Markus Radvan, Pavelková Hana. II. Title.

Printed in the Czech Republic by HRG, s.r.o., Litomyšl.
Cover design by Andrea Jandová. Copy editor Linda Jayne Turner. Typeset by OP.

ISBN 978-80-254-6151-8

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements 6
Foreword 7
Introduction 9

IRISH CLASSICS THROUGH NEW PRISMS

Adam Putz
Continental Thinking, Continental Living: W.B. Yeats, James Joyce and Cultural Politics of Appropriating Shakespeare 14
David Vichnar
"Corrupt Paris, Virgin Dublin": Joyce's Tale of Two Cities 27
Eoghan Smith
After Joyce and Beckett: Art and Authenticity and Politics in the Fiction of John Banville 36

COLONIZED ISLAND, DECOLONIZED MINDS?

Giulia Bruna
"I Like Not the Rags from My Mother Country for to Tickle the Sentiments of Manchester": Synge's Subversive Practice in *In the Congested Districts* 46
Katrina Morgan
"English in Taste, in Words and Intellect": An Investigation into the Politics of the Irish National School Books 57
Ciaran O'Neill
Pearse, Parnell or the Priests? The Politics of Identity in the Irish Schoolboy Novel 69

language and culture, but this diffusion could lead to conflict as the child took on board lessons of equality rather than subservience, whilst the presence of a more problematic underlying narrative could produce further anti-colonial tensions. As Homi Bhabha has argued, resistance to authority may indeed surface from such textual ambiguity:

> [Resistance is] not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the "content" of another culture ... It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power.[37]

As this essay shows, the texts carried messages of unionism and the socialization of the subject but also contained an underlying discourse which had the potential to disrupt any colonial endeavour. It is also important to recognise that there is no one simple and straightforward explanation in education as a basic strategy of central social mechanism. Although it can be said that learning to read and write was of little importance in itself – children had to be instructed in their relative duties within society in order for the education they received to be beneficial – each of them would have also been a family child, a working child, a street child, an urban or a rural child, a child whose social class and other experiences may not have been identical to those of his or her classmates. Hence, it becomes almost impossible to predict the message each individual child would have gained from the national texts. Thus, my interest here has been in the thinking behind the national system as displayed through its books, in order to draw attention to ambiguities present within the narrative. Perhaps then, when Douglas Hyde criticized his fellow countrymen for "ceasing to be Irish without becoming English,"[38] he was implicitly referencing a schism of identity brought about by a national education system that was indeed devoid of Irish literature and tradition, but that failed to fully Anglicize the subject due in part to the textual ambiguities described above.

[37] Homi K. Bhabha, *Signs Taken for Wonders* 153.

[38] Douglas Hyde, "The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland" (1892), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Vol. II, gen. ed. Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day, 1991), 527.

PEARSE, PARNELL OR THE PRIESTS? THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN THE IRISH SCHOOLBOY NOVEL

Ciaran O'Neill
(University of Liverpool)

By the end of the nineteenth century, there were only two novels that can be properly said to conform to an "Irish schoolboy novel" template – that is, a novel based primarily on life at an Irish boarding school for boys.[1] By the beginning of World War II, eleven novels had been written about boarding school life in Ireland, with all but two of them taking their inspiration from attendance at a leading Catholic school. These novels ranged from simple replications of earlier English schoolboy novels to the later and much more subversive takes on the genre, which include much more famous, and perhaps much more important texts, such as Francis Hackett's *The Green Lion* (1936), and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Despite the popularity of juvenile fiction in Ireland and Britain, the majority of these novels have been critically ignored, even in recent surveys of the period.[2] The Irish schoolboy novel is best understood in relation to the Irish *Bildungsroman* tradition – but this article will

[1] We can make a rather speculative case for William O'Brien's *When We Were Boys*, published in 1890, although it is really more of an overtly nationalist Bildungsroman, and indeed, Percy FitzGerald's *School Days at Saxonhurst* (1867), also merits a mention, although it is based on Stonyhurst College in England.

[2] For example, John Wilson Foster finds no room for them in his excellent recent survey *Irish Novels 1890-1940: New Bearings in Culture and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

focus purely on the Irish schoolboy novel's negotiation of history, politics and identity in relation to two of the later texts, Francis Hackett's *The Green Lion* and Kathleen Pawle's *We in Captivity*, both published in 1936. Juvenile literature tends to lionize and to denigrate – in short, it needs its heroes and its anti-heroes, and unlike other, more stable genres, it has licence to create and recreate history in order to appeal to the imagination of a youthful audience. What results is a sometimes glorious, sometimes comical, rewriting of political history.

As literary subgenres go, the schoolboy novel is relatively easy to pin down. It began in 1857 with the publication of a book that enjoyed enduring popularity through the second half of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth.[3] Written by Thomas Hughes, an old boy of Rugby College, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* came to define public school education, and allied it to what David Newsome has called the ideals of "godliness and good learning."[4] By the time Hughes died some forty years later, over seventy editions had been printed, with popular editions appearing as late as the 1950s.[5] The book, though didactic and self–consciously moral, did much to popularize and publicize English public school education. Hughes had created something of a monster, and an entirely new market. As the nineteenth century came to a close, the genre was firmly established, so much so that the novelist Henry James was led to question its merit and usefulness in 1900:

> The literature, as it may be called for convenience, of children, is an industry that occupies by itself a very considerable quarter of the scene. Great fortunes, if not great reputations, are made, we learn, by writing for schoolboys...[6]

[3] There were earlier examples, but none so popular. See Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

[4] David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* (London: John Murray, 1961) 28-92.

[5] E.C. Mack, *Thomas Hughes: The Life of the Author of 'Tom Brown's Schooldays'* (London: Benn, 1952) 90.

[6] Henry James, "Future of the Novel: An Analysis and a Forecast," *The New York Times* 11 August 1900: BR 13.

From the original stuffiness of the early schoolboy novels such as *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, or *Eric, or Little by Little*, by Dean Farrar, the genre proved elastic enough to incorporate the popular stories of writers such as R.M. Ballantyne and G.A. Henty, all of whom generally concentrated their novels more on Empire adventure themes. The quality of these stories may well have been dubious, and subject to the derision of authors such as James – but very often they outsold him.

The genre had a definite impact in Ireland, too. By the 1870s and 1880s, periodicals such as *The Boys Own Paper* were widespread and available cheaply all over the island of Ireland. The Intermediate Education Act of 1878 had also helped to create a coherent schoolboy audience in Ireland by increasing child literacy and by encouraging school attendance. In the 1909 issue of the Castleknock College Chronicle, J.M. Sheehy remembered that in his small town in the 1870s, he and his fellow classmates had access to titles such as *The Boys of England* or *Young Men of Great Britain* and *Our Boys Journal*, and he attributed his interest in literature to the 'Harkaway Series,' to which he was exposed in *The Boys of England*. Sheehy remembered:

> Jack Harkaway was my hero. I followed him from his schooldays, to his adventures after schooldays by sea and land. I went with him to Oxford and keenly enjoyed his university career. I next accompanied him into the army, and among the Italian brigands. Finally, I shared his son's adventures and his own around the world. Now, they were but poor stuff really, as literature, but they were stories about boys. That was enough.[7]

There can be no doubt as to the fact that there was a market for such material, but the Irish market was tiny in comparison to the English one, where great fortunes, as Henry James put it, were easily made.

Those educated at Irish schools depicted in the Irish schoolboy novels, generally in the period 1860-1920, represented a mix of both the established elite and the rising middle and merchant classes, whose sights were trained on elite status or at the very least upward social mobility. This desire for equality under empire motivated a

[7] J.M. Sheehy, "The Need of an Irish 'Boys' Paper," *The College Chronicle, Castleknock* June 1909: 32.

systematic and deliberate reduction of obvious difference between an education received at English elite schools and at the Irish schools that sought to emulate them. This reduction of difference, which may also be read as imitative or emulative behaviour, depended mostly upon superficial factors, such as the acquisition of a particular accent, expressions, sense of fashion, and ability to compete in certain field games. In postcolonial studies, this behaviour is often referred to as either mimesis or mimicry, and is seen as an effect of power relations between colonizer and colonized. Such obvious emulation was held as suspicious by Irish nationalists of every hue, and reviled by the more advanced. The still recognisable tags of West Briton, Shoneen and Squireen were attached to the typical product of these schools. First among those who publicly denounced the schools for their imitation of English models was the journalist D.P. Moran in his nationalist weekly, *The Leader*, where he frequently referred to his own Alma Mater, Castleknock College, as "that cricket and ping-pong College," and a "brake on the Irish wheel."[8] By 1936, the year that Hackett and Pawle published their schoolboy novels, Ireland had changed irrevocably. What was now necessary to confirm and solidify the foundation of the young Irish state was the creation of a young Gaelic hero, centrally involved in the core events of a green history. That they chose to do this within an established pro-Empire genre, and based upon schools very far from sympathetic to the cause, makes for an often conflicted narrative, and sometimes, outright confusion.

The Green Lion is loosely based on the author's own childhood in Kilkenny City in the late nineteenth century. Hackett himself attended the prestigious Jesuit school at Clongowes Wood in Co. Kildare between 1897 and 1900, before emigrating to America in 1901, where he wrote for numerous American magazines including *The New Republic*. His schoolboy novel is best interpreted as an attack on the limiting effect of the Catholic Church on Irish society and is set against the backdrop of the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell, the pre-eminent figure in the Irish Home Rule movement in the 1880s. The action unfolds before the eyes of a precocious young schoolboy, Jerry Coyne, the illegitimate child of a seminarian, and the impressionable daughter of a local farmer. Jerry is abandoned by his separated and

[8] James H. Murphy and Michael M. Collins (eds.), *Nos Autem: Castleknock College and Its Contribution* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996) 101-102.

scandalized parents, who have fled to Australia and America respectively. Jerry's understanding of Ireland in the Revival era is influenced by his exposure to rural Ireland, which he venerates, and cosmopolitan Ireland, which he gradually comes to despise for being in thrall to English mores. The novel opens with Jerry's idyllic early years in rural Kilkenny, living with his mother's family, the Coyne's. His influences are recognizably Gaelic, with pastimes such as hurling and traditional dancing to the fore. This comfort is short-lived, however, and Jerry is soon thrust into cosmopolitan Ireland, under the care and guidance of a Parnellite family in Kilkenny City, the Laracys.

Humphrey Laracy, Jerry's new guardian, is a committed Parnellite, and references to the contentious leader dominate the narrative in its early stages – so much so that Parnell himself makes a guest appearance in Kilkenny late in Chapter Two, offering us a glimpse of the powerful nationalist figure late in his career. The blame for the downfall of Parnell, seen here as a heroic figure and beyond reproach, is placed squarely on the unwelcome interference of the Catholic Church. This is explicitly referred to on several occasions. At one point, a friend of Humphrey's declares within earshot of Jerry: "We may not win under Parnell. He's wore out, God help the man. But we'll go on, and then we'll give Maynooth what-for."[9] Naturally, all this has a significant impact on Jerry's ideas of Irishness and Irish history. When his aunt insists that he be sent to Clongowes Wood for his education, Humphrey Laracy foresees Jerry's reaction: "He'll find the Jesuits West Britons instead of Irish, and he'll hate them for it. I don't think it matters, do you? They'll make him work and give him a good education."[10] With this clear and stark proviso, Jerry enters the most prestigious Catholic school in Ireland.

At Clongowes, identified as St Ignatius throughout, Jerry discovers an education that seems alien to his rural Gaelic roots. At Clongowes, the boys play cricket, the Irish language is dismissed as the "language of the kitchen." This Catholic conservatism very much offends the Irish-Ireland sympathies of our young Gaelic hero, and he reacts accordingly. His friends are few and the reader is informed that "Jerry ached at the loss of his liberty."[11] He immerses himself in nationalist

[9] Francis Hackett, *The Green Lion: A Novel of Youth* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1936) 76.
[10] Hackett 207.
[11] Hackett 230-36.

history, working backwards, the reader is informed, from Parnell to the rebels of '48 and the economic theories of James Fintan Lalor, thus establishing the process of his radicalization as a reaction to the alien and imposed Anglocentric ethos of the school.[12] This reaction reaches its full conclusion with Jerry's decision to leave Ireland altogether. Disillusioned with the state of Irish nationalism in the vacuum left by Parnell, and filled with outright hostility towards the Catholic Church, our hero is forced to migrate to America, at which point the novel ends. Hackett creates an anti-Tom Brown in *The Green Lion*. Jerry's nationalism isolates him at a school that leans towards outright exaltation of Empire. As the product of an illicit and badly advised tryst he is cast out from rural and peasant Ireland, seen in *The Green Lion* as firmly controlled by the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Ultimately, despite his stringent moral code and wide-eyed enthusiasm for the cause of Irish nationalism, he must escape Ireland.

The second novel considered in this article has a much less controversial history than *The Green Lion*, which was censored in 1936, prompting Hackett to leave Ireland in a fit of pique – thus emulating his protagonist. Kathleen Pawle, author of *We in Captivity*, based on Blackrock College in South Dublin in the run-up to the Easter Rising of 1916, is unique among the 13 authors in the Irish genre, and stands apart from the other authors as both a woman and, consequently, as a writer with no direct experience of boarding at an Irish school for boys. As with Hackett's novel, much time is spent describing the young Irish hero, magnificently named Ignatius Proudfoot, as a bland Irish boy, surrounded by momentous social change. Ignatius is born to a handsome Parnellite and his snobbish wife in the village of Moyrath, Co. Meath. The opening chapters are devoted to establishing the local priest, Father Farley, as an active opponent of Irish nationalism, mirroring Hackett's dismissal of the Catholic Church as a block to national progress. Ignatius himself is entirely ambivalent to both religion and nationalism; it takes his youthful attraction to a local flame-haired girl called Maureen McCarthy for him to question his identity in the community. Having won a scholarship to study at Rochenoir, the name itself a direct reference to Blackrock College, Maureen ridicules Ignatius for what she calls his "shoneen name ... because he was clean and respectable and because his father was a supporter

[12] Hackett 286.

of the Irish Parliamentary Party."[13] Maureen's tastes are for more active nationalism, and the greening of Ignatius is further symbolized in a key scene at the end of the section dealing with Moyrath. In this scene, Ignatius and Maureen are present at the death of an old woman named Mary the Brogue. The scene drips with symbolism, as the mantle of Irish nationalism is transferred from the Shan van Vocht of revivalist literature to the young Cathleen Ni Houlihan as embodied by the fiery Maureen. Whether any of this registers with young Ignatius is unclear, but very shortly afterwards he enters a New Ireland, like Jerry Coyne before him.

At Blackrock College, Ignatius encounters a range of characters too diverse to deal with in this article, but chief among his formative influences is a young priest with nationalist leanings named, somewhat unimaginatively, Fr Hugh O'Neill. His schoolmates range from the fiery republican Healy to the more circumspect McDowell and Finlay, to a cockney-born character named Jeremiah O'Sullivan. His schooldays are marked by exposure to Republicanism and interludes of romantic involvement with Maureen in Moyrath. Blackrock is depicted as a school largely in sympathy with the existing system, and distrustful of any nationalist sentiment, preferring instead to safeguard its success rate in the Indian Civil Service examinations. Through a series of unlikely coincidences, the boys become involved in the inner circle of the Irish Revolution. In a scene that requires a considerable imaginative leap by the reader, the four boys meet Patrick Pearse, leader of the 1916 Rising, in No. 2 Dawson St where he not only grants them a private audience – but quotes from Joseph Mary Plunkett's poem *The Dark Way*, allays the fears of the more moderate McDowell and Finlay, and even manages to capture the attention of the hitherto nonplussed Ignatius Proudfoot. Pearse is portrayed as a conflicted but resolute republican. Our first glimpse of the man shows just how far his reputation had grown by 1936. In this scene, a friend of Ignatius, Healy, meets Pearse for the first time at Dawson St:

> Healy went with the soldier. They went down the passage and stopped outside a door at the end of it. Healy was told to go in ... he was face to face with Patrick Pearse. He was around at the back of the desk before

[13] Kathleen Pawle, *We in Captivity* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1936) 21.

Pearse had time to stand up, and, falling on his knees, he seized the man's hand and kissed it.

"Well," Pearse said, "that's a fine way to be greeted."

"I can't help it, sir. I've wanted to know you so much."

Pearse motioned him to a chair in front of the desk.

"I've several dear friends among old Rochenoir [Blackrock] boys," Pearse said, and added "It's a pity you couldn't have managed to come to St Endas."

"I won a scholarship for Rochenoir, that's why."

"Ah yes, it's a fine school."

"It's a damn shoneen stronghold – I'm sorry sir."

Pearse smiled and turned to a large map of Dublin that almost covered one of the walls and a green, white and yellow flag draped over it.[14]

This scene, preposterous as it is, is not the only liberty Pawle takes with history. The symbolism of a green white and yellow (rather than orange) flag draped over the map presumably used to plan the Easter rebellion – while simultaneously dismissing the West British pretensions of Blackrock – is indicative of the dramatic shift in the school's reputation outside of its target market after independence in 1922. The reference to Pearse's own school at St. Endas also serves as a counterpoint to Blackrock by referencing this Irish-Ireland version of the public school model, and reminding us that Pearse was someone whose influence on Irish education was to assume greater importance after his death, as with Tom Arnold at Rugby School in England. Later in the narrative, Pearse is shown declaring independence from an elevated position, outside the GPO – this time on top of a table. From this point on, we are treated to a radical rethinking of the Easter Rising, through the eyes of all four boys, who have now become mixed up in the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Our young hero Ignatius now plays his part in the rebellion fighting alongside Michael Mallin and Countess Markievicz, thus completing his transformation into a republican boy-hero. Ignatius, despite shedding his shoneen past, cannot, however, live in an Ireland so enslaved by the Catholic Church, and the novel ends with his emigration to America, with Maureen naturally in tow.

The characters of Jerry Coyne and Ignatius Proudfoot were created by very different authors, but with the same intended function. To write a schoolboy novel is, naturally enough, to admit a desire to

[14] Pawle 144.

influence the youth of a nation. In effect, it is an exercise in re-imagining a past school life and foisting it upon an audience with no experience of it. In the newly formed, insular and insecure 1930s Ireland, it is significant that both Pawle and Hackett recreated the young Irish hero, and placed him within a genre of literature that was perhaps more pro-England and pro-Empire than any other. What Pawle, Hackett and other writers remembered was, in fact, an imagined and idealized childhood. The Irishness they portrayed to children may have had some basis in fact, but the placing of key nationalist figures and symbols within the text, whether it was Charles Stewart Parnell touring Kilkenny in *The Green Lion,* or Patrick Pearse declaring Irish independence in *We in Captivity,* dictates that in 1930s Ireland a heroic Irish childhood involved the rejection of Anglicization in favour of active involvement in progressive nationalism. The Irish schoolboy novel required a new kind of Irish hero – part cosmopolitan, part moralist, part rustic – but entirely nationalist. Most strikingly of all, this hero turned away from Catholic Ireland and as a result, a most radical voice emerged from the most unlikely source.