

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

The Development of Irish-American Children's Literature (1850–1940)

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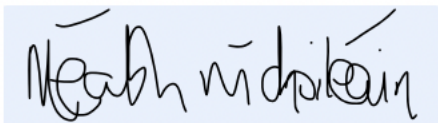
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Summary

This doctoral thesis provides the first comprehensive study of Irish-American children's literature from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The central argument of the thesis is that the selected texts, written by Irish-born and Irish-descended authors living in North America between 1850 and 1940, played a crucial, yet overlooked role in constructing and transmitting a distinct Irish-American cultural identity to young immigrant readers. The thesis further argues that, in the process, these authors also made valuable, yet previously unrecognised contributions to the development of American children's literature. By Irish-American and American children's texts in parallel, the thesis reveals how Irish immigrant authors utilised the medium of children's literature to "write back" to American children's authors, who persistently marginalised or caricatured the Irish immigrant figure, and instead portray the Irish Catholic child as an ideal figure that embodied the best of both Irish and American culture.

The four chapters of this thesis examine how Irish-American children's literature constructs a particular Irish-American identity via religious instruction, gendered ideals, and responses to cultural assimilation. In Chapters One and Two, I demonstrate how the authors Fr. John T. Roddan, Mary Anne Sadlier, and John McElgun construct boyhood, girlhood, and racial hierarchies to their shape portrayals of Irish Catholic immigrant identity in the mid- to late nineteenth century. In Chapter Three, I examine how Mary E. Mannix and Julia C. Walsh engage with themes of immigration and pluralism in the US at the turn of the twentieth century in a West Coast, rather than an East Coast context, and demonstrate the influence of Progressive-Era ideals on the selected texts. In Chapter Four, I demonstrate how a "Golden Age" of Irish-American children's literature emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century, shaped both by Progressive-Era children's literature and the

Irish Literary Revival. I argue that the pre-existence of World Friends literature, which functioned to teach American children about countries and cultures of the world in a respectful manner, played a more significant role than has previously been recognised in the later success of such authors as Padraic Colum and Ella Young.

The methodology for this thesis combines literary analysis, archival research, and historical contextualisation. My approach is primarily qualitative and interpretive, underpinned by established methods in literary and cultural studies. I examine important archival materials, including rare materials from the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University and Dublin City University, as well as an interview with Deirdre Andrews, the descendent of one of my selected authors, Mary E. Mannix. By taking a chronological approach to analysis, the thesis demonstrates how Irish-American children's literature evolved in tandem with broader social, cultural, and literary developments in Irish American history from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.

Thus, from the didactic realist novels of the Famine generation to the more optimistic and culturally distinct texts of the twentieth century, the category of Irish-American children's literature reflects important shifts in the Irish immigrant experience, and the engagement of Irish American authors with a young readership, with a view to shaping identity, values, and cultural belonging. The thesis concludes that Irish-American children's texts are integral to understanding both broader developments in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American children's literature and the cultural assimilation of the Irish in North America.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved mother, Mairéad, who sadly passed away during its writing. Though she did not see its completion, I know she would have been proud. Thank you, *a Mham*, for Paddington, Pooh, and Peter Rabbit: the seeds from which this thesis blossomed. *Beidh tú im' chroí go deo.*

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Introduction

Reclaiming and Recovering Irish-American Children's Literature

Describing the typical characteristics of Famine-generation Irish-American literature, Catherine Eagan observes that these texts “often feature a child as the hero. This child is usually faithful to his or her religion and refuses to convert or go to a mixed school” (“‘White,’ If ‘Not Quite’” 80). Eagan points to *The Cross and the Shamrock; or, How to Defend the Faith* by Hugh Quigley (1853) and *Willy Burke; or, The Irish Orphan in America* by Mary Anne Sadlier (1850) as examples of such novels featuring exemplary Irish Catholic immigrant children. A cursory survey of Irish-American literature from the mid-nineteenth century reveals a notable preoccupation with the figure Eagan describes. For example, in Charles Fanning's landmark study, *The Irish Voice: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction* (1990), which encompasses “hundreds of stories and novels” (1), they appear repeatedly. Usually, these young Irish characters have emigrated in search of prosperity, as in John McElgun's *Annie Reilly; or, The Fortunes of an Irish Girl in New York* (1873), and Mary Anne Sadlier's *Bessy Conway; or, The Irish Girl in America* (1861). Upon arrival, they often encounter anti-Irish Catholic sentiment, and must resist conversion to Protestantism, as in Fr. John T. Roddan's *John O'Brien; or, The Irish Orphan of Boston* (1850), and Sadlier's previously mentioned *Willy Burke*.

However, despite the prevalence of child protagonists in Irish-American literature, texts from this category have scarcely been treated as children's literature in criticism to date. Of course, the feature of a child protagonist does not automatically qualify a text as children's literature, and many texts from the first half of the nineteenth century, in which a child figure was often utilised as a vehicle for

social or political protest, cannot reasonably be classified as such.¹ However, textual evidence indicates that several Irish-American novels featuring a child protagonist were, in fact, written for an implied child reader. For example, Roddan's *John O'Brien* and Sadlier's *Willy Burke* emerged as direct responses to a call within the Irish-American Catholic community in 1850 for the creation of a special literature for boys. This thesis thus emerges in part to correct this critical oversight, and to reclaim and re-examine these texts and others as children's literature.

In addition to reclaiming a selection of Irish-American literature as children's literature, this thesis also recovers critically neglected works by Irish American authors. For example, Padraic Colum, Ella Young, Mary E. Mannix, and Julia C. Walsh were prolific authors of children's literature between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, yet all four are omitted from Fanning's extensive research. While critical attention has been paid to Colum's children's literature in recent years,² the most recent study on Irish-American women's literature, *The Famine Diaspora and Irish-American Women's Writing* by Margu rite Corporaal et al (2024), omits Mannix, Walsh, and Young—as does Sally Barr Ebest's study, *The Banshees: A Literary History of Irish American Women Writers* (2013), which otherwise claims to offer “the first Irish-American women's literary history” (17). Thus, this thesis also seeks to recover the work of neglected Irish American children's authors.

While this thesis identifies gaps in the study of Irish-American literature, its goal is not simply to incorporate reclaimed or recovered children's literature into an

¹ The literary “child” was a highly symbolic figure in the early nineteenth century, particularly in the British Victorian literary tradition. The novels of Charles Dickens and the poetry of William Wordsworth and William Blake utilised the child figure as a vehicle to examine social and cultural values relating to childhood, education, social institutions, and national identity. For further discussion, see Pattison (1978); Plotz (2001).

² Recent essays have examined Colum's children's literature separately from the broader study of Irish-American literature. See Clements (2011); N  Choile  in (2024); Whyte (2024; 2017; 2016).

existing category; rather, it seeks to connect nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish-American children's texts into a single tradition for the first time. In doing so, the thesis argues that, while Irish-American children's literature is naturally a part of the study of Irish-American literature, it also stands apart from it. The decision to treat Irish-American children's literature as a distinct category within Irish-American literature studies arises from the conviction that situating these texts within the critical frameworks of children's literature studies provides the most effective means of demonstrating their literary significance.

On the incorporation of children's literature into broader categories of literature, Kimberley Reynolds argues that, "[a]lthough much could be gained . . . there are potential losses too, for good research in children's literature requires good knowledge of its history, genres . . . its constructions of childhood—across cultures and periods—and . . . elements of style that have evolved specifically in response to the task of writing for the young" ("5.1 Introduction" 125). With this perspective in mind, this thesis identifies Irish-American children's literature as a category of literature in itself, encompassing the historical, cultural, and literary contexts that necessarily inform and guide its interpretation, rather than as a previously overlooked subcategory of Irish-American literature studies.

This thesis also recognises Irish-American children's literature as a fundamentally transatlantic product that is neither wholly Irish nor wholly American, but necessarily both. As its title suggests, Irish-American literature is predicated on not belonging fully to either side of the hyphen, and can thus be understood and interpreted as a literary hybrid: a category of literature in itself, but equally a component of American children's literature, having been written, published, marketed, and/or sold in the US. Rather than taking an "either/or" approach to research, which would limit analysis, this thesis has embraced the dual status of

Irish-American children's literature and looked both within and beyond the confines of the category to establish a robust framework for understanding and appreciating its historical and literary contexts.³ Such an approach diverges from that typically utilised by critics of Irish-American literature, who have largely examined the category only in relation to itself.

In examining the implications of treating Irish-American texts intended for a child readership *as* children's literature—that is, applying critical approaches and theory specific to this field of study—and recognising its hybrid status, this thesis has generated fascinating and original results. An interdisciplinary approach to research, which is characteristic of children's literature studies (Reynolds "5.1 Introduction 124), has revealed important new dimensions for considering the selected primary texts. For example, a comparative study of Irish-American children's literature and contemporaneous American children's literature demonstrates the important contribution of Irish immigrant authors to the development of American children's literature, thereby expanding, often complicating, and ultimately enriching criticism in this field.

This approach has also revealed a significant, yet previously unexamined preoccupation with the figure of the Irish immigrant child in American children's literature. Having been filtered through the perspectives of American Protestant authors and publishers, representations of this figure often perpetuate negative and problematic stereotypes of their time (e.g. lazy, dishonest, ignorant). In contrast, Irish-American children's literature constructs the Irish Catholic immigrant child as intelligent, resilient, and industrious. This arguably suggests that Irish-American authors were not only writing *for* a specific Irish Catholic immigrant child

³ For discussions on the challenges and considerations of defining and examining other hybrid American literature (e.g. German-American, Italian-American, and Russian-American literature), see Buonomo and Russo (2011); Furman (2011); Kluge (2007).

readership, but also writing *back* to the dominant cultural narratives that otherwise defined them.

Text selection process, key definitions, and parameters

The texts examined in this thesis are as follows: *John O'Brien; or, The Orphan of Boston: A Tale of Real Life* by Fr. John T. Roddan (1850); *Willy Burke; or, The Irish Orphan in America* (1850), *Alice Riordan, The Blind Man's Daughter: A Tale For the Young* (1851), and *Bessy Conway; or, The Irish Girl in America* (1861) by Mary Anne Sadlier; *Annie Reilly; or, The Fortunes of an Irish Girl in New York* by John McElgun (1873); *Michael O'Donnell; or, The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant* by Mary E. Mannix (1900); *Tooralladdy* by Julia C. Walsh (1907); and *A Boy in Eirinn* (1913) and *Where the Winds Never Blew* (1940) by Padraic Colum. I arrived at these particular texts after a comprehensive and deliberate survey of existing research on Irish-American literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the methodology and findings of which I outline below.⁴

This study focuses on the period 1850–1940, during which the majority of Irish-American children's literature, as defined here, was published. This period, which roughly encompasses the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, is the most significant in Irish American history, following the first waves of Famine-era mass immigration to the US. As historian Kevin Kenny argues, “any account of the American Irish must place the period 1820 to 1920 at its heart” (*The American Irish* 1). An encyclopaedic survey of Irish-American children's literature falls beyond the scope of this thesis, and instead it examines a representative sample of Irish-American children's literature, identifying its characteristic tropes and primary

⁴ With the exception of *Alice Riordan* by Mary Anne Sadlier, first editions of all texts have been consulted for analysis. Due to difficulty sourcing a first edition of *Alice Riordan* either in print or digitalised form, the second edition of the text (1854) was consulted.

narratives, highlighting its value as children's literature, and interrogating the implications of positioning it within the broader context of American children's literature.

Given the liminal nature of the term "Irish-American," defining Irish-American children's literature is a considerably complex process. As Avshalom Guissin and Tara Stubbs have observed of this endeavour, "the personal experience and world of reference for a second generation Irish-American writer . . . would be vastly different from that of an Irish-born contemporary poet . . . writing in America today," yet both could be classified as Irish American. Consequently, this field of research "needs constant updating to keep up with an ever-expanding scope" (572). Having reviewed all major studies on Irish-American literature, I find Charles Fanning's definition most appropriately aligns with the objectives of this thesis.⁵ In *The Irish Voice in America*, Fanning describes Irish-American literature as the work of "American writers of Irish birth or background," who "have been exploring what it means to be an immigrant or ethnic in America" (1). Fanning further clarifies that his definition excludes writers of Irish descent who do not address Irish ethnic themes in their work, as well as American writers who depict Ireland and/or Irish people without being of Irish background themselves (4). This distinction is particularly useful given the large number of texts and authors that might otherwise qualify as "Irish-American."

⁵ Definitions of Irish-American literature continue to vary in major studies. For example, Sullivan defines Irish-American literature as that "written by and for Irish Catholic immigrants to the United States" (*The Shamrock* 1), while Corporaal et al include authors "who wrote for or were descended from the Irish Famine generation" (*The Famine Diaspora* 6). The distinction between these definitions is in the words "and" and "or": where Sullivan narrows her definition to Irish Catholic immigrant writers only, Corporaal et al expand theirs to include Irish Protestant authors and American authors with no Irish ancestry (e.g. American Catholic author, Anna Dorsey). Other critics have defined Irish-American literature differently again. For example, Barr Ebest argues that Irish American authors can be identified by their surnames (10), while Casey and Rhodes argue that "Irish writers in America have defined themselves" (649).

Following Fanning's definition has enabled me to examine a broad selection of texts while maintaining clear parameters for this thesis. Accordingly, I define Irish-American children's literature as texts intended for a young audience by writers of Irish birth or background living in North America, whose work explores what it means to be an immigrant or ethnic in North America. In line with other major studies of Irish-American literature, the selected authors include first- and second-generation Irish immigrants whose writing sets them "within the diasporic conventions of a distinctly migrant culture" (Jacobson).⁶

This definition also necessitates exclusions. Texts by American children's writers of Irish ancestry who do not engage with Irish-American themes, such as Martha Finley and Maurice Egan,⁷ are excluded; likewise Irish and Anglo-Irish writers whose work was published and/or widely read in the US, such as Maria Edgeworth, Frances Browne, Anne Casserley, and Eileen O'Faolain, but who were not themselves immigrants.⁸ American writers who wrote about Irish ethnic themes, but who were not of Irish background, such as Sarah Orne Jewett, who wrote stories

⁶ In *Special Sorrows*, a landmark account on nineteenth-century diasporic imagination in immigrant groups to the US, Jacobson argues that a migrant culture is a culture "for which the experience of geographical movement and resettlement was formative." Jacobson further argues that a writer need not be a first-generation immigrant to qualify for membership of such a culture, once their work is notably shaped by it ("Note on Usage").

⁷ The American children's writer, Martha Finley, was of Scotch-Irish descent, while Maurice Francis Egan was a second-generation Irish immigrant writer. Neither identified as Irish American. As Fanning observes, "the important point about Egan is that his decision to become a Catholic American writer involved a rejection of the possibility of also being an Irish-American writer" (*The Irish Voice* 201). Writing in the *American Ecclesiastical Review* in 1886, Egan states that "[t]he German children of dear old canon Schmid, and the Irish children of Mrs. Sadlier . . . were well enough, but I wanted, and I knew others wanted, to see . . . the ways of American children," thus clarifying his identification as American (Finn 592). The same applies to the Catholic children's writer, Francis J. Finn, an American-born son of Irish immigrants, and to Joel Chandler Harris, creator of the well-known and controversial Uncle Remus stories, who was also a second-generation Irish immigrant. See entries by Keenan (222–40) and Smedman (177–85) in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Writers for Children Before 1900* (1985) for more.

⁸ For more on Edgeworth's popularity in the US in the mid-nineteenth century, see Chapter One. On the popularity of Donegal-born writer Frances Browne in the US, Aedin Clements notes that "*Granny's Wonderful Chair* . . . went through numerous editions and reprints" ("American Children's Literature" 520), while Coghlan asserts that there was demand for fiction such as . . . Anne Casserley's in the US in the twentieth century ("Writing for Children" 155). Casserley's popularity is further evidenced by her inclusion in *The Junior Book of Authors* (see Knitz and Haycraft 83–4).

for children in popular magazines such as *Scribner's* and *McClure*,⁹ Lydia Maria Child, who wrote stories in various collections for children,¹⁰ Kate Duval Hughes, who wrote *The Fair Maid of Connaught: And Other Tales For Catholic Youth* (1889), and Mary T. Waggaman, who wrote *The Transplanting of Tessie* (1905),¹¹ are also excluded. Similarly, texts by Irish writers who wrote immigrant stories, but were not themselves immigrants, such as Rosa Mulholland and James Murphy,¹² are excluded. Finally, this thesis focuses solely on original works of fiction, and therefore excludes such popular non-fiction titles as *Advice to Irish Girls in America* by Mary Frances Cusack (The Nun of Kenmare) (1872),¹³ and retellings of Irish myths, legends, folk and fairy tales, which were popular in the twentieth century.¹⁴ As discussed in the Conclusion, these texts and more would make fruitful subjects for future research on Irish-American children's literature.

⁹ Jewett's writing was likely inspired by a formative trip she took to Ireland as a young woman, as well as growing up with Irish domestic servants in her home. Notably, her stories represent the first serious (and notably sympathetic) treatment by a distinguished literary figure of the Irish in the US. See Morgan and Renza (1996). Another American children's writer who wrote Irish-themed stories was Ruth Sawyer (1880–1970), who also visited Ireland as an adult and grew up with an Irish nursemaid. See Mulholland (1983). Writing outside of their own cultural experiences, Jewett and Sawyer might be considered world writers, rather than diasporic ones. See Martin and McDaniel's entry on "Diaspora" in *Keywords for Children's Literature* for more (54–7).

¹⁰ Child's Irish themed stories featured in *The Juvenile Miscellany* (1829) and *A New Flower for Children* (1856). According to Child's biographer, "Child showed great sympathy for Irish immigrants in the 1840s," but turned against them "[l]ike many abolitionists . . . after Irish Americans embraced the Democratic party's implacable hostility to abolition and blacks. The increasing power they acquired as a voting bloc may also account for her change of attitude" (Karcher 739).

¹¹ In a review of Waggaman's text, Irish Catholic magazine, *The Irish Monthly*, stated "[t]he name of this clever writer is very American; and we would not be surprised if many readers should object to the way she manipulates the Irish element in her story. She may plead in excuse that none but an Irish ruffian could develop the good qualities required by her plot" ("Notes on New Books" 416).

¹² See Rosa Mulholland's *A Fair Emigrant* (1893) and *The Return of Mary O'Murraugh* (1908), and *The Fortunes of Maurice O'Donnell: An Irish-American Story* by James Murphy (1887).

¹³ Rosalie MacQuaide claims that "Sister M. Francis Clare's *Advice to Irish Girls in America* found its way into the hands of countless thousands of Irish working girls," and "became her most popular book, selling in the tens of thousands and going into twenty editions" (123–4).

¹⁴ Fanning points out the increasingly high demand for what he calls "Celtic" texts in the twentieth century, which he claims occupied "a money-making publishing area" (*The Irish Voice* 173). While such literature is not analysed in this thesis, its growing popularity and significance in the US in the twentieth century is discussed in Chapter Four.

While “Irish-American” is a complex term, so too is “children’s literature,” demanding equally careful attention. This thesis does not seek to define children’s literature per se (this issue is historically fraught among scholars),¹⁵ but the historical nature of much Irish-American children’s literature complicates the identification of potential children’s texts. For example, many realist Famine-era novels, which Fanning argues were written by first-generation Irish Catholic immigrants to help newly-arrived Famine refugees survive in the US (*The Irish Voice* 2), feature young protagonists and are “unambiguously didactic” (Fanning *The Irish Voice* 75) in tone. Moreover, considering “42 percent of all Irish emigrants were under twenty” in the mid-nineteenth century (Miller *Emigrants and Exiles* 296), these novels were likely read by many young Irish immigrants. While these characteristics alone do not suffice to classify a text as children’s literature, they make such a classification plausible—especially as these works emerged at a time when “children’s books were written almost as much for adults as they were for children” (Wall 147).

Classifying certain Irish-American novels as children’s literature based on implicit textual evidence would undoubtedly broaden the category of Irish-American children’s literature. For example, such texts as *From Killarney to New York; or, How Thade Became A Banker* by Sister Mary Frances Clare (The Nun of Kenmare) (1887), *Alice O’Connor’s Surrender* by Mary Elizabeth Carey (1897), *Christy of Rathglin: An Entertaining and Exciting Story of the Life of an Irish Lad* by James Riley (1907), and *Maurice O’Donnell: An Irish-American Story* by James Murphy (1887) could reasonably be interpreted as children’s literature due to their young protagonists and didactic tone. Nevertheless, this thesis prioritises texts that

¹⁵ The term “children’s literature” occupies precarious ground in academia. As Roger Sale once noted, “everyone knows what children’s literature is unless asked to define it” (1). For more on the challenges, complexities, and considerations that have preoccupied critics, see , (2011); Lesnik-Oberstein (1996); Nikolajeva (1996); Nodelman (2008); Rose (1992); Rudd (2010); Wall (1991). For concise overviews of the history of defining children’s literature in research, see Allen (2024); Hunt (2021).

explicitly and unambiguously indicate they were written *for* or marketed *to* a child audience. To this end, this thesis naturally aligns with John Rowe Townsend's practical definition of children's literature as "a book which appears on the children's list of a publisher" (10).

Twentieth-century Irish-American children's literature is much easier to identify than that of the nineteenth century. As Wall argues, single address writing, in which "narrators . . . address child narratees, overt or covert, straightforwardly, showing no consciousness that adults too might read the work" (35), had become established in children's literature by the twentieth century, thus eliminating the audience ambiguity present in earlier Irish-American texts. In this period, this thesis examines works by Padraic Colum and, to a lesser extent, the authorial figure of Ella Young—arguably the two most influential twentieth-century Irish-American children's writers. Both Colum and Young were retroactively cited as Newbery Honor Book recipients on three occasions, and regularly appeared in influential American children's periodicals, such as *The Horn Book*, and guides to American children's literature,¹⁶ demonstrating the high esteem in which they and their work, which encompassed both original fiction and retellings of Irish myths, legends, and folk tales, were held in the US.

Other definitions and parameters

Individual word choices and terminology that appear throughout this thesis require brief clarification. For example, the terms "America" and "American" occasionally

¹⁶ The guides are *The Three Owls: A Book About Children's Books, Their Authors, Artists and Critics* by Anne Carroll Moore (1928 9–15; 233–35), and the previously mentioned *Junior Book of Authors* (93–5; 389–90). The former is the second title in a series of three essay collections on American children's literature by Anne Carroll Moore. Moore's instrumental role in the championing of American children's literature in the twentieth century is praised in the *Junior Book of Authors* (xv), and she has been described as "arguably the most powerful and formative influence on books for children in the twentieth century" (Lundin 23). For a detailed account of Moore's influence on American children's literature, see Eddy (30–48).

appear in this thesis as shorthand references to the United States (US) portion of North America (and sometimes Canada), with acknowledgement that this is “technically incorrect” (Matterson 9), since these countries make up only two out of thirty-five countries in the Americas. Where possible, “the US” is used instead.¹⁷ The terms “immigrant” and “emigrant” describe people who left Ireland and settled in the US. Generally, I use the term “immigrant” when focusing on the experiences of Irish people adjusting and assimilating to a new life in the US, and “emigrant” when focusing on their experiences of leaving Ireland. I also use the term “immigrant” to denote both first- and second-generation immigrants. Following Jacobson, my use of the term is therefore “principally adjectival, not literal” (“Note on Usage”).

Following Donnarae MacCann, the term “Black American” to refer to peoples of African descent “is capitalized because it refers to a specific population, the peoples historically connected by the Black diaspora” (“A Note on Usage”).¹⁸ Furthermore, “Black” in this thesis refers to a group of people with a specific collective history in the US; by contrast, the term “white” with a lowercase letter is used solely as a descriptive term. Finally, I use the term “category” rather than “genre” to classify Irish-American children’s literature because children’s literature is arguably not a genre in itself, but rather a medium of writing that contains genres and subgenres.¹⁹

¹⁷ There is continued discourse regarding this terminology in Americanist criticism. For example, Patrick Colm Hogan argues that finding an alternative, more inclusive terms for describing the US portion of North America (rather than “America”/“American”) is challenging: “[t]here is simply not much else in the name ‘United States of America’ to use in forming a felicitous word for citizens or properties (‘Uniteans,’ ‘Statesers?’),” and “in some cases, the tone is not right if one says ‘U.S.,’ which is likely to suggest an emphasis on legal or governmental aspects of the nation rather than, say, cultural aspects” (“A Note on Usage”).

¹⁸ The term “Black American” is also recommended by the National Association of Black Journalists, an organisation that advocates on behalf of Black journalists and media professionals in the US and worldwide (National Association of Black Journalists).

¹⁹ This stance is disputed by some critics. See Nodelman (2008).

To differentiate the literature of writers from different countries of origin, racial or cultural groups, I use the term “ethnic American literature,” following the Society for the Study of the Multi-ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS), which includes “Latino, Native American, African American, Asian and Pacific American, and ethnically specific Euro-American literary works, their authors, and their cultural contexts” (“MELUS”). While Euro-American literature is sometimes excluded from studies of ethnic American literature,²⁰ such exclusion risks the implication that some cultures are normative and others deviant. As Carrie Hintz and Eric L. Tribunella argue, “[p]eople of European descent can also be understood as possessing a distinct ethnic and cultural identity. In the North American context, this means recognizing that Irish Americans, German Americans, Anglo Americans, French Canadians and so on also constitute ethnic groups” (529). Considering that Irish-American literature is “one of the oldest and largest bodies of ethnic writing produced by members and descendants of a single American immigrant group” (Fanning *The Irish Voice* 1), its inclusion in the category of ethnic American literature is all the more pertinent.

While this thesis argues for the consideration of Irish-American children’s literature as a branch of ethnic American literature, it also recognises that ethnic identity is not an unchanging fact of nature, but a malleable social construct. For example, Paul Lauter argues that

the content of the name ‘Mexican American’ changes over time, as with relationships with the country of residence, the country of origin, and second- or third-generation community, as well as within the immigrant, change.

There is, then, a certain contingency to ethnic identity: it must always be historically grounded, often regionally inflected. The meanings of ‘Italian’ or

²⁰ Atkinson and Stewart (2009), Gilton (2007), and Groover Lape (2007) notably exclude Euro-American literature in their studies on ethnic American literature.

‘Italian American’ have changed radically from the moment of Sacco and Vanzetti, to the moment of *Christ in Concrete*, to the moment of Tony Soprano. (xxii)

The same can be said of Irish-American identity, which has evolved since the mid-nineteenth century to the point that some contemporary critics argue “Irish American” no longer qualifies as a distinct ethnic group.²¹ Crucially, however, this thesis focuses on a historical period in which Irish Catholic immigrants, by virtue of not being American-born or fitting the descriptor “White Anglo Saxon Protestant” (WASP), could reasonably be classified as “ethnic.”

Discussion of the Irish Protestant immigrant experience is largely absent from this thesis due to the fact that most Irish-American children’s literature was written by Catholic immigrant writers, and thus does not reflect it. While a term such as “Irish-American Catholic children’s literature” might reflect the contents of this thesis more accurately, it would also misleadingly suggest the existence of an equivalent Irish-American Protestant children’s literature. Moreover, it would unfairly exclude such influential authors as Elizabeth Hely Walshe and Ella Young, whose striking reception in the US is discussed in this thesis, from the study of Irish-American children’s literature. The more inclusive term “Irish-American children’s literature” is therefore employed, with the understanding that this literature largely reflects the Catholic perspective.

Finally, inclusion of American Sunday School literature in this thesis is limited by methodological constraints: no full-length study of this literature exists due to the sheer volume of texts published from 1824 to the turn of the twentieth century, and countless texts are lost without trace. This situation is common in children’s literature studies, with “many children’s texts . . . forgotten over time and

²¹ See Ignatiev (2002); Kennedy (2022).

many . . . not easy to locate because they languish in uncatalogued, underused collections” (Reynolds “5.1 Introduction” 125). While it cannot be claimed with absolute certainty that all Sunday School literature portrayed Irish Catholic immigrant children negatively, as the examples in this thesis suggest, the consistent characteristics evident across the texts consulted, all of which were published between the 1820s to the 1880s, suggests that this was likely the case.

Contribution to knowledge

This thesis is the first to conduct a wide-ranging and detailed examination of Irish-American children’s literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, along with the historical, cultural, and literary factors that shaped it as a category. While some critics have employed the term “Irish-American children’s literature” already, this thesis is the first to critically examine the concept and provide a working definition.²² With the exception of essays in the last decade by Stephen Butler (2018), Aedín Clements (2017), Ciara Gallagher (2017), and Pádraic Whyte (2024; 2017; 2016), and the doctoral research of Brian McManus (2018), the children’s literature of Irish-American writers from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has overwhelmingly been overlooked or treated as adult literature, which has obscured the meaning and value of many texts.²³

For example, while Fanning suggests that Sadlier’s *Willy Burke* “augurates the most familiar pattern of Famine-generation fiction,” he otherwise dismisses the text as “a commissioned performance in which no character or situation is more than stereotypical” (*The Irish Voice* 118). However, by examining such texts as *Willy Burke* through the lens of children’s literature studies, this thesis demonstrates new

²² See Gallagher (2017); Hill McNamara (2003); McManus (2018).

²³ Although overlooked in studies of Irish-American literature, it is important to note that the influential role of Sadlier in the development of Catholic children’s fiction both in Ireland and North America has been recognised in Translation Studies. See Milan (2018).

possibilities for analysis. In this context, *Willy Burke* can be appreciated as an early iteration of the Romantic child figure in American children's literature, and one of the earliest children's texts to be set in an American city, rather than rural setting—a distinction more often attributed to Horatio Alger Jr.'s *Ragged Dick* (1867).

Although Fanning's research provides the fullest survey of Irish-American literature to date, it omits the work of Padraic Colum, Ella Young, Julia C. Walsh, and Mary E. Mannix wholesale. As previously discussed, all four writers continue to be excluded from major studies of Irish-American literature. This is especially true of Mannix, whose work has not been meaningfully engaged with at all, save for the aforementioned essay by Gallagher (2017). This is a considerable oversight, considering Mannix was the author of several novels for children, and countless magazine and newspaper stories and poems.²⁴

As part of this thesis, I tracked down and interviewed Deirdre Andrews, the great-granddaughter of Mannix, which led to the discovery that Mannix had a sister, Julia C. Walsh, who also wrote for children. This thesis examines Walsh's only novel, *Tooralladdy* (1907), for the first time, highlighting its early portrayal of peaceful racial integration in American literature during the Progressive Era. Significantly, the novel predates the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, after which "more White authors and artists entered the arena" to meet the "growing demand for realistic books by and about true-to-life Black children" (Bishop 74). In this light, Walsh's work represents one of the earliest examples of racial harmony in American literature—children's or otherwise.

²⁴ It is impossible to compile a full bibliography of Mannix's work because she often wrote under pseudonyms. According to *The American Catholic Who's Who* directory (1911), "the larger and more serious portion" of her work "has been published anonymously" (392). The interview with Deirdre Andrews sheds some light on this. See Appendix.

Due to its hybrid nature, Irish-American children's literature can, as discussed previously, be identified and interpreted as a component of ethnic American children's literature. This thesis is the first to consider the work of Irish-American authors in this context, thus enabling additional important and original findings. For example, Irish-American children's literature predates all other ethnic children's literature in the Anglo-American tradition, including that of Jewish and Chinese immigrant communities.²⁵ The Jewish Publication Society began publishing children's literature near the end of the nineteenth century—almost 40 years after the first Irish-American children's texts emerged. As Jodi Eichler-Levine notes, “[t]he earliest American Jewish children's books were a series of biographies of great Jewish exemplars of virtue aimed at young people, the first of which appeared in 1890” (*Suffer* 4).²⁶

In the case of Chinese American children's literature, Claudia Nelson and Rebecca Morris argue that “adaptations of traditional Chinese texts such as Guo Jujing's thirteenth- or fourteenth-century *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* and related tales were offered to U.S. children in and after the nineteenth century as illustrations of admirable qualities in Chinese culture” (1). They further argue that “novels and picture books by major Chinese American authors and illustrators such as Bette Bao Lord, Laurence Yep, Grace Lin, Allen Say, and Ed Young offer insight into how Chinese culture and heritage have shaped some American childhoods” (2).

²⁵ German-American children's literature, written in German, is likely the oldest literature for young readers produced by an immigrant group in the US. It first emerged in the US in an attempt to preserve the language for the next generation of German immigrant children. According to historian Gregg Roeber, “[i]n 1808, [the von Mosheim Society] underwrote the costs of a book for children as an example for other interested people outside Philadelphia. The moral tales of children dutiful to parents and attentive in German-language church services, historical explanations of who Luther was, and an ‘Amerikanisch Deutsches Lied’ were supplemented by woodcuts provided by English-language printers” (168). For more on the development of German-American children's literature, see Petty (2008; 2013).

²⁶ A valuable account of Jewish childhood in New York in the nineteenth century can be found in the writings of Irish immigrant, Myra Kelly, who worked as a teacher in Jewish-populated elementary schools. See Filetti (2015). See also Stephen Matterson's entry on Jewish American literature in *American Literature: The Essential Glossary* (114).

However, these authors and other Chinese American immigrant writers appeared only in the twentieth century, and “[c]hildren’s literature featuring Chinese Americans is rare before the 1930s” (Cutter 34).²⁷

Appearing as early as 1850, Irish-American children’s literature can thus be appreciated as the earliest example of ethnic Anglo-American children’s literature to exist, a fact that has not been recognised in criticism to date.²⁸ Indeed, gaps of this kind are not uncommon in ethnic literature, for “despite the existence of flourishing international organizations such as the International Research Society for Children’s Literature and other groups . . . whose aim it is to bring together children’s literature researchers from many nations, scholarship is sometimes more parochial than is children’s literature itself” (Nelson and Morris 2). By situating Irish-American children’s literature in the context of ethnic American children’s literature studies, this thesis thus contributes to ongoing efforts to create a fuller and more inclusive understanding of historical American children’s literature.

Finally, this thesis also recovers many examples of American children’s literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including many Sunday School literature titles, which are examined here for the first time. Despite the considerable influence of this literature at the time, Giffen and Cadwallader argue in one of few full-length studies on the subject that “non-canonical genres like Sunday School

²⁷ Martha J. Cutter identifies Edith Maude Eaton, who wrote under the pseudonym Sui Sin Far, as the earliest author of Chinese American children’s literature, publishing *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* in 1912. Although Chinese-American children’s literature in English emerged later, Xiao-huang Yin argues that literature for adults emerged as early as 1852. See Yin (2000).

²⁸ Irish-American children’s literature also predates children’s literature by Black and Native American groups, which, by the definition employed in this thesis, can both be read as ethnic literature. See Bishop (2007); Broderick (1973); Capshaw and Duane (2017); MacCann (2000); Martin (2004) for further discussion on the development of Black American children’s literature. Given its roots in the oral tradition, Native American children’s literature is not as easily defined as other kinds of ethnic literature. One of the earliest Native-authored stories for children was published in *St. Nicolas* magazine in 1881. See Deborah Reese (Nambé Owingeh) “Milestones: Indigenous People in Children’s Literature.” For further accounts of the development of ethnic American children’s literature, including that by Black, Asian, Latinx, Jewish, and Indigenous communities, see Hintz and Tribunella (521–28); Gilton (2007); Atkinson and Stewart (2009).

literature” remain “largely overlooked” in research (2). Indeed, this is true of openly didactic children’s literature generally, which is often considered a source of “critical disdain and distrust,” (Beauvais “Didactic” 59). According to Clementine Beauvais, “because didacticism is a theoretical blind spot in literary theory, corpuses of novels chosen for study by literary scholars have historically excluded didactic texts,” which in turn “leaves untouched vast quantities of fictional works, including children’s literature” (“Didactic” 59).²⁹ By examining critically neglected Sunday School texts, this thesis demonstrates their role in constructing and perpetuating an ethnographically problematic narrative of the Irish Catholic “other” in American society, simultaneously demonstrating that openly didactic children’s literature is worthy of scholarly study.

Critical approaches and theoretical framework

What it means to examine a text through the lens of children’s literature studies requires explanation. “[D]oes theory change when children’s literature is in its gaze? Not in any essential way” argues Roderick McGillis. However, McGillis also states that

[t]heory as it relates to children’s literature is interested in how society situates children at any time in the past or present, what subjects engage children at any time in the past or present and how adults and children communicate through the literature meant for children Not only do we want to understand what this literature teaches but also why it teaches what it teaches. (“Criticism” 16–7)

²⁹ Mitzi Myers similarly argues that “[l]iterary history’s stodgy readings of didactic moral tales distance themselves . . . from the noisy semiotics and cultural arguments that generated them,” but restoring didactic moral tales “to their political and literary matrix . . . revives them as juvenile literature” (“Child’s Play” 27).

Similarly, Reynolds observes that, although “researchers and critics of children’s literature have developed little in the way of a subject-specific set of critical ideas and methodologies,”³⁰ this is not reason enough for children’s literature to be absorbed into the mainstream of academic research, “for good research in children’s literature requires good knowledge of its history, genres . . . constructions of childhood — and, related to these, elements of style that have evolved specifically in response to the task of writing for the young” (“5.1 Introduction” 125).

On the key differences between children’s literature theory and that of adult or general literature, Emer O’Sullivan argues that, because “the definition of children’s literature is determined not on the level of the text itself . . . but on the level of the actions and actors involved,” it is seen “in a system-theory based approach . . . as a specific and distinct segment of the general literary system requiring a theory of its own. It has its own fields of activity in marketing, publishing, libraries, teaching, criticism, etc., which distinguish it from adult literature” (12).

Thus, McGillis, Reynolds, and O’Sullivan all acknowledge that the essential difference between children’s and general or adult literature is what O’Sullivan describes as the “asymmetry of communication” (12) between adults, who, in various capacities, assign texts to children, and children themselves. For this reason, as Karín Lesnik-Oberstein argues,

children’s literature cannot assume reading in the way that much literary study in wider terms often can and does: in relation to adult literature, questions of the author, text, reader, and reading can be (and are) certainly also raised, but they are not as fundamental and necessary as in relation to children’s literature, where the inherent difference between books’ producers

³⁰ Exceptions to this, Reynolds notes, are Peter Hunt’s “childist” criticism, and Peter Hollindale’s research on “childness” (“5.1 Introduction” 124).

(adults) and their readers (children) must be negotiated one way or another.

(“Children’s Literature” 10)

Lesnik-Oberstein further observes that this issue “remain[s] fundamental, even though [traditional theoretical] approaches can also be drawn on” in the study of children’s literature (“Children’s Literature” 10).

With these arguments in mind, this thesis draws on major areas of literary theory, such as postcolonialism and gender studies, while considering them in relation to the “asymmetrical communication” in children’s literature that enables the adult producer to “transmit dominant morals, values and ideals” to the child reader (O’Sullivan 12). Indeed, as John Stephens argues in his foundational account, *Language and Ideology*, children’s literature is “a domain of cultural practices which exist for the purpose of socializing their target audience” (8). Moreover, since, as Stephens argues, childhood can be understood as “the crucial formative period in the life of a human being, the time for basic education about the nature of the world, how to live in it, how to relate to other people, what to believe, what and how to think—in general, the intention is to render the world intelligible” (8), children’s writers “often take upon themselves the task of trying to mould audience attitudes into ‘desirable’ forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values which particular writers oppose” (3).

In other words, children’s literature is very often invested in the transmission of particular social and cultural values. To examine this cultural work more explicitly, ideological analysis must scrutinise “the cultural work a children’s story does: who it rewards or punishes (and why), how it depicts stereotypes and power-relations, and how it is oriented (as celebrating or critiquing) the existing social, political, and economic structures of the society in and for which it has been written

or produced” (Parsons “Ideology”).³¹ To this end, this thesis adopts an ideological mode of analysing how Irish-American children’s literature participates in, negotiates, and at times challenges dominant cultural discourses to portray an ideal Irish-American cultural identity, based on the understanding that children’s literature functions as a powerful site of ideological production, where values, norms, and power relations are actively constructed by authors, rather than passively portrayed.

The first major theoretical approach this thesis draws on is postcolonial theory. Recognising Irish-American children’s literature as a hybrid literature, this thesis examines it in relation to the multiple cultures in which it was produced. It argues that to claim a single provenance for the literature reduces its complexity, and that Irish-American children’s literature is best understood when treated as two things at once: both a category of literature in itself, and also a component of American children’s literature. Such an approach, which recognises the complexity of the hyphenated term “Irish-American,” has been suggested elsewhere in Irish American studies. For example, Kenny argues that “[t]he story of the great Irish migration to America makes sense only if it is examined in terms of two intersecting national histories, Irish and American, overlapping in time but divided by the Atlantic Ocean” (*The American Irish* 4). Similarly, Christopher Dowd argues that to examine Irish-American literature solely in relation to itself “provides half of the picture” (5). Finally, Fanning argues of Irish-American literature that it “has much more to do with America than with Ireland, for it is the product not of a single culture but of a collision of disparate cultures” (*The Irish Voice* 1).

³¹ Several critics have discussed the ideological function of children’s literature. For example, Clare Bradford observes that “[c]hildren’s books seek to promote sociocultural values that incorporate views about the past . . . and about a projected future in which child readers will be adults” (*Reading Race* 8). Similarly, Myers contends that “[b]ecause children’s tales perform a variety of cultural functions, they are crammed with clues to changes in attitudes, values, and behavior” (“Impeccable Governesses” 33). Foundational to scholarly debate on the ideological dimensions of children’s texts is Peter Hollindale’s essay on ideology in children’s literature (1988).

Transcultural identities and cultural hybridity are central concerns of several major postcolonial theorists and writers. For example, Salman Rushdie reflects on immigrant identity in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), recognising that transcultural identity is inevitably amorphous: “[o]ur identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools” (15). Similarly, Stuart Hall argues that cultural identity is never fixed, but is continuously shaped by time and context:

a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (225)

Irish-American children’s literature exemplifies the dilemmas Rushdie and Hall describe, with writers attempting to construct a particular identity that is grounded in an Irish past, while simultaneously reimagining it in relation to the diasporic space in which they are writing. This often produces a mixed message for the implied reader, encouraging them to inhabit two identities at once: Irish and American. Or, in a transnational context, something new: Irish-American. This duality can be understood as the “third space,” the influential concept posited by Homi Bhabha, which is particularly useful for approaching hybrid literatures.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha explores concepts of identity and culture through literary analysis, and demonstrates how cultural identity and relationships are negotiated by minority writers with multiple cultural heritages. According to Bhabha,

[t]erms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (2)

Bhabha argues that people who do not originally belong to the hegemonic culture in a society struggle to carve out a sense of identity between their home and adopted countries, and ultimately formulate their cultural identity in the “third space,” a figurative space in which the culturally hybrid subject must mediate conflicting identities alongside their status as “other.”

Irish-American children’s literature can be understood as existing in this space, particularly in realist novels, where young protagonists inhabit and construct hybrid identities. However, these characters do not inhabit the third space simply by virtue of being immigrants; rather, they actively create and modify this space in response to their situations. On the one hand, the characters typically assert their ethnic differences: they are Irish Catholic within an otherwise American Protestant society. On the other hand, they pursue middle-class respectability and participate in capitalism to achieve what is conventionally called the American Dream, albeit a negotiated Irish Catholic version of it. Positioned in the in-between, the characters oscillate between a desire to represent either Irishness or Americanness, while their authors simultaneously promote both.

The negotiation of a hybrid identity is a central concern of ethnic literature more broadly, and “forming one’s identity as a hyphenated American, or in opposition to that very classification of ‘hyphenated American,’ probably constitutes the single largest category of ethnic fiction” (Lauter xxi). Considering the historically

ideological nature of children's literature, this is perhaps especially true of ethnic children's literature. Indeed, Katharine Capshaw Smith argues that this particular category is an "intense site of ideological and political contest" (3), and an important site for "realignments of social power and in responding to ethnic stereotypes" (4). According to Smith, such literature enables writers to "recoup lost heroes, fill the gaps of historical memory, subvert ethnic stereotypes, and advance revisionary versions of cultural identity" (6). Smith further argues that ethnic children's literature often targets both "insider and outsider groups": "[f]or children of the ethnicity represented textually, authors encourage resistance to pejorative categorizations by asking the reader to reimagine herself, to identify herself with the texts' cultural models. For a reader from another ethnic group, texts often encourage cross-cultural amity and understanding as a means to dispel prejudice" (5).

Irish-American children's literature, which I have argued is a component of ethnic American children's literature, is deeply preoccupied with many of these concerns. With its "intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience" (Stephens *Ideology* 3), children's literature arguably presented Irish-American writers a medium through which to transmit particular social and cultural messages about ideal Irish Catholic identity, while also rejecting pejorative representations of Irish Catholic immigrants perpetuated by American writers.

With the latter in mind, reading Irish-American children's literature as hybrid literature necessitates a parallel reading of contemporaneous American children's literature for contextual purposes. Such a comparative approach reveals, among other things, a significant preoccupation within American children's literature of the Irish Catholic immigrant child figure. Typically portrayed as a helpless street urchin in need of rescue from corruption and Catholicism, this figure is found in the margins

of girls' texts by such prominent writers as Louisa May Alcott and Kate Douglas Wiggin, and most prominently of all in American Sunday School literature. The fact that Irish-American children's literature emerged during the same period is therefore significant, and it may be seen, in part, as a corrective to such negative representations.

Despite operating within a cultural landscape dominated by hegemonic American Protestant discourse, Irish-American children's literature demonstrates the agency of its authors, and their capacity for opposition and resistance. These writers make the Irish Catholic immigrant child figure the subject, rather than the object of their literature. In cultural production for children in a postcolonial context, Bradford argues that, while the dominant social group maintains "control and order what is deemed to be true, it is also the case that individuals and groups are not bound by dominant discourses as by a straitjacket but are capable of scepticism or resistance." ("Race, Ethnicity" 39). This is true of Irish-American children's literature, which employs strategies of negotiation and resistance against American children's literature, and thereby arguably serves a dual function of being written for one demographic group, and speaking back to another.

This thesis is also underpinned by cultural memory theory, which is particularly relevant to both Irish American studies and Irish-American children's literature, which is deeply invested in articulating a shared past and cultivating a sense of cultural identity for the next generation.³² Eminent scholars of Memory Studies, Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, define cultural memory as "a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a

³² For example, historian Richard Jensen has questioned the accuracy of Irish-American cultural memory regarding the existence of No Irish Need Apply (NINA) signs, which he claims are a "curious historical puzzle. There are no contemporary or retrospective accounts of a specific sign at a specific location. . . . Only Irish Catholics have reported seeing them in America—no Protestant, no Jew, no non-Irish Catholic has reported one" (405). Jensen's argument has since been debunked (see Fried 2016).

society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation” (126). Furthermore, they argue that cultural memory stabilises a group of people’s self-image and self-knowledge and transmits it through generations (132). This transmission of self-knowledge is imperative for the preservation of the group’s culture, and gives the group its unique identity. As Assmann and Czaplicka argue, “[t]he specific character that a person derives from belonging to a distinct society and culture is not seen to maintain itself for generations as a result of phylogenetic evolution, but rather as a result of socialization and customs. The ‘survival of the type’ in the sense of a cultural pseudo-species is a function of the cultural memory” (125–6).

The cultural memory work Assmann and Czaplicka describe above is evident in Irish-American children’s literature, as authors represent Irish American history, culture, and identity for their young readers with the intention of cultivating a sense of belonging to a particular community. Again, children’s literature is a particularly effective medium for engaging in such cultural memory work, since

adult general perception typically assumes young people to be lacking those experiences that may enable them to challenge popular or dominant interpretations of the past and present In fact, one might argue that cultural memory comes (or is brought) to the fore only once a new generation of individuals who do not possess a living memory of the past begins to come of age.” (Snell and Hutchinson 1)

Similarly, Anastasia Ulanowicz argues that children’s literature is an “ideal venue” for cultural memory work, since it “involves aligning the young reader’s consciousness with pre-existing ideological structures that not only might grant him coherent subjectivity but ensure the survival of potentially imperiled social formations—a task

that necessarily involves foisting traces of the past onto the young reader's immediate present" (6).

Irish-American children's literature can thus be understood as playing a central role in shaping cultural memory by mediating the past for readers who have no direct access to it, therefore guiding how history, identity, and belonging are understood and inherited by a new generation.

Due to its focus on constructions of boyhood and girlhood in Irish-American children's literature, gender studies, which is "among the most influential fields to provide theoretical and methodological perspectives to children's literature research" (Österlund and Warnqvist 241), further underpins this thesis. Judith Butler's foundational study, *Gender Trouble* (1990), is especially pertinent here, and demonstrates that the "reality" of gender "is created through sustained social performances" rather than any essential identity: "[i]f gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured" (141).

A gender studies framework is particularly useful for this study considering that historians of childhood and children's literature critics have identified the mid-nineteenth century as the starting point of the bifurcation of boys' and girls' literature (Hintz and Tribunella 577; Murray 51), and, with that, the emergence of gender performance in children's literature. As Chapters One and Two demonstrate, Irish-American children's literature contributed to the development of this trend in the American tradition, both perpetuating and subverting such familiar archetypes as the "bad boy" and the "saintly girl," as well as the persistent alignment of femininity with romance and domesticity, and masculinity with adventure and financial success.

Finally, because children's literature from the mid-nineteenth century can be difficult to identify, as discussed earlier, this thesis draws on Barbara Wall's influential study of narratorial address to determine whether certain texts can be classified as children's literature. Wall identifies three types of narratorial address: "single address," in which the author speaks solely to a child reader; "double address," in which both a child reader and an adult reader—positioned "over the child's head"—are addressed; and "dual address," in which separate but equal child and adult audiences are addressed. These distinctions helped to guide the classification of the texts examined in this thesis, particularly the girls' literature discussed in Chapter Two, which, as I demonstrate, is a notably slippery category.

Methodology

This thesis has taken a chronological approach to demonstrate how Irish-American children's literature developed as a category, from inception to maturation, between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Each chapter covers a distinct period, and textual analysis is grounded in relevant historical and literary context, some of which is outlined in this chapter. The thesis progressed through multiple phases over time, and involved a combination of desk-based research, use of internet resources, a video interview with Deirdre Andrews, the great granddaughter of the writer Mary E. Mannix, and archival research trips to Dublin City University, New York Public Library, and the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University. I accessed databases such as *Early American Newspapers: 1690–1922* at Yale University, and regularly utilised the *Boston College Newspapers* archive, maintained on the Boston College Libraries website. These resources were essential for locating articles, publishers' advertisements, editorial commentary, and reviews relating to my selected authors and their works. I also relied on digital collections of children's

literature, including the *Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature* (University of Florida, George A. Smathers Libraries) and *Shaping the Values of Youth: Sunday School Books in 19th Century America* (Michigan State University), both of which provided access to rare, otherwise inaccessible materials, including many Sunday School literature titles.

In addition to primary sources, this thesis blends historical accounts of Irish-American and American history and literary criticism by scholars of children's literature. Foundational texts on Irish-American history were instrumental in positioning these texts and authors within complex cultural and historical contexts. Key works include Kevin Kenny's *The American Irish: A History* (2000); Kerby Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (1985); J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey's *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States* (2006); and Timothy Meagher's *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History* (2005). These works aided my understanding of the Irish immigrant experience from the Famine era to the mid-twentieth century, and how those experiences varied according to such factors as time and geography.

Research on Irish immigrant women and girls further informed this thesis. For example, Hasia Diner's *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1983), Margaret Lynch Brennan's *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840–1930* (2014), and Janet Nolan's *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885–1920* (1986) provided valuable information and insights into employment, social expectations, and the general Irish Catholic female immigrant experience, all of which informed and enriched my textual analysis.

Like all studies of Irish-American literature, this thesis is indebted to the work of Charles Fanning, whose landmark research guided the identification of several

primary sources. Several publishers' advertisements, articles, and reference texts on children's literature were also consulted. For example, Stephen Brown's series of lists, "Irish Fiction for Boys" (1918; 1919) and Christa Ressmeyer Klein's "Literature for America's Roman Catholic Children (1865–1895): An Annotated Bibliography" (1973), include many examples of Irish-American children's literature, as do the previously-mentioned trilogy of essays on American children's literature, *The Three Owls* by Anne Carroll Moore (1925; 1928; 1931) and *The Junior Book of Authors* by Stanley J. Knitz and Howard Haycraft (1934).

This project follows a similar approach to Christopher Dowd's study, *The Construction of Irish Identity in American Literature* (2011), which demonstrates an important departure in Irish-American literature studies by analysing Irish-American texts alongside American texts, "to show the ways in which literature participated in the imagining of an Irish community in America and helped construct an ethnic boundary that redefined the country" (6). The thesis thus conducts parallel readings of American children's literature with Irish-American children's literature on the basis that "[e]thnic group identities are never constructed entirely from within, but always in interaction with other groups" (Dowd 6). To this end, literary-critical material on American children's literature has also played a key role in shaping this thesis, particularly foundational accounts on its development, such as Gillian Avery's *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621–1922* (1994); Jerry Griswold's *Audacious Kids: Coming of Age in America's Classic Children's Books* (1992); Anne Scott MacLeod's *A Moral Tale: Children's Fiction and American Culture, 1820–1860* (1975) and *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1994); and Gail S. Murray's *American Children's Literature and the Construction of Childhood* (1998).

Historical and literary contexts

As discussed, a historicist lens is central to the critical framework of this thesis, as it enables Irish-American children's literature to be analysed in relation to the historical, cultural, and social contexts from which it emerged. Such an approach is essential for understanding the complex matrix of events, attitudes, and power structures that shaped the production of the selected texts, which includes, for example, the anti-Black racism evident in some Irish-American children's literature (see Chapters Two and Three). While Irish assimilation into mainstream American society is often celebrated as a model immigrant success story, this narrative is frequently oversimplified or sanitised, and obscures the ways in which Irish social mobility in the US was facilitated and achieved, in part, by the systemic oppression of other marginalised groups, including Black and Chinese communities during the nineteenth century.³³

Historian Hirota Hidetake cautions that “anti-Irish nativism should not be exaggerated” (140), and emphasises that “[s]tudents of Irish America need to be sensitive to the context in which anti-Irish nativism unfolded when examining its historical significance” (151). By examining the selected texts through a historicist lens, this thesis confronts the racist elements present in some works, and challenges simplified or romanticised narratives of Irish-American history, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of how the literature both reflected and shaped historical consciousness. The following section provides an overview of Irish-American history between 1850 and 1940, alongside relevant aspects of US social

³³ In the last decade, there has been an increase in the spread of mis/disinformation online regarding Irish American history. The rise of the “Irish slave meme,” which historian Liam Hogan defines as “the false equivalence of indentured or involuntary servitude with: (a) the transatlantic slave trade; (b) racialised perpetual hereditary chattel slavery; and (c) its legacies that continue to affect millions of people today” (“Irish Slaves Myth” 2016), has “become increasingly visible since 2013, stimulated in part by the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement” (Kennedy 437). For further discussion on anti-Black American racism perpetrated by Irish immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century, see Kenny (*The American Irish* 121–30); Lynch-Brennan (118–19); Meagher (*The Columbia Guide* 215–32).

history, and the histories of Irish-American literature and American children's literature, to establish context for the analyses that follow.

As many as seven million Irish people have crossed the Atlantic Ocean for the US since the early seventeenth century, with almost five million arriving in the US between 1820 and 1920.³⁴ The single biggest cause for Irish immigration during this period was the Great Famine (1845–52), which resulted in approximately 1.5 million Irish men, women, and children departing for the US between 1845 and 1855 alone.³⁵ Settling predominantly in Northeastern cities, “[t]he Irish were easily the most urbanized people in the United States, for three-quarters of the American population as a whole was rural at this time. The five American cities with the largest Irish-born populations in 1860 and 1870 were New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco” (Kenny *The American Irish* 105).³⁶

The rapid arrival of so many impoverished, traumatised Irish immigrants in such a short period of time placed considerable strain on American resources, and cultural and religious differences meant assimilation into mainstream society was neither a straightforward nor seamless process. As Hidetake argues, “Protestant Americans, many of whom were of Anglo descent, viewed Irish immigrants as a menace to the religious, cultural, economic, social, and political fabrics of the United States. Opponents of Irish-Catholic immigrants disparaged them as unfit for American democracy rooted in Protestantism” (141). Similarly, Fanning explains that “[p]rejudice, discrimination, and explosive collisions were the order of the day beginning in the late 1840s, and the turbulence culminated politically in the Know-

³⁴ See Kenny (*The American Irish* xi); Meagher (*The Columbia Guide* 3); Miller (*Emigrants and Exiles* 3).

³⁵ See Kenny (*The American Irish* 97–104); Miller (*Emigrants and Exiles* 291);

³⁶ For further discussion on Irish immigrant settlement patterns in US cities, see Meagher (*The Columbia Guide* 76–80); Miller (*Emigrants and Exiles* 312–19). For accounts of Irish settlement in other parts of the US, including the South and Midwest, see Donlon (2018); Gleeson (2002).

Nothing movement of the early 1850s, when nativists swept to victory in a number of state and local elections” (*The Irish Voice* 74). The Irish, in their disadvantaged state, were thus viewed as a burden in US society in the mid-nineteenth century, and hostility towards them, fuelled by Nativist fear and negative cultural stereotypes, steadily increased.³⁷

A key characteristic of the Famine-generation immigrants is that the vast majority were Catholic, representing a notable shift from earlier patterns of Irish migration. Prior to the 1830s, “[m]ost of the migrants would come from Ulster, Ireland’s northern province, and most would be Protestant” (Meagher *The Columbia Guide* 43).³⁸ Since most classic accounts of Irish-American history concentrate on the mid-nineteenth century period, the terms “Irish” and “Catholic” are often treated as synonymous, despite the fact that “the majority of Americans calling themselves Irish in recent surveys are either Protestant or had ancestors that were” (Meagher *The Columbia Guide* 4).

Further consolidating the conflation of Irishness and Catholicism in the mid-nineteenth century was the emergence of Irish-American literature, which was written primarily by Irish Catholic immigrants, for Irish Catholic immigrants. Although the first Irish-American novel was written by James McHenry, a Protestant immigrant from Ulster in 1823 (Fanning *The Irish Voice* 39), the most influential figures in the development of Irish-American literature were Irish Catholic immigrants.³⁹ In the 1840s, “the writing of Catholic novels began to pass from the

³⁷ This hostility is examined more fully in the first three chapters of this thesis. For further discussion on anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sentiment in the US in the mid-nineteenth century, see Hidetake (140–51); Kenny (*The American Irish* 80–7); Lynch-Brennan (66–83); Meagher (*The Columbia Guide* 60–84).

³⁸ For further discussion on earlier, pre-Famine Irish immigration patterns, which were largely Protestant in composition, see Doyle (“Scots Irish or Scotch-Irish” 151–170); Kenny (*The American Irish* 7–42); Lynch-Brennan (40–2); Meagher (*The Columbia Guide* 19–41); Miller (*Exiles and Emigrants* 137–279).

³⁹ A forthcoming collection of essays entitled *Ulster-Scots and American Diaspora Literature, History and Migration, 1750–2000*, edited by Frank Ferguson and Richard MacMaster

priests into the hands of professional authors By the time these novelists began writing, there were several well-established Catholic publishing houses which were pleased to take novels and advertise them extensively” (Thorp 54).

The establishment of such publishing houses in the mid-century was “crucial for the development of a new Irish-American literature” (Fanning *The Irish Voice* 77), and the most prominent of these publishers were “in Baltimore, John Murphy and Hedian and O'Brien; in New York, Edward Dunigan, P. O'Shea, P. J. Kenedy and Sons . . . and D. and J. Sadlier, of New York, Boston, and Montreal; in Boston, Patrick Donahoe” (Thorp 54–5). What is more, “in the early years the chief sources of revenue for the Catholic publishers were cheaply printed devotional works, sold at Church missions, over the counter in Catholic supply stores, or through religious book societies. By 1850 Catholic novels were advertised prominently in the publishers' lists alongside the devotional works” (Thorp 54–5).

This literature was particularly influential in the mid-nineteenth century because it played a practical role in guiding and instructing newly arrived Irish Catholic immigrants, thereby “filling the gap caused by the church's weak infrastructure” (Sullivan *The Shamrock* 2). Following the influx of Famine-era Irish immigrants from 1845 onwards, the Catholic population in America grew exponentially, rising from roughly 300,000 in 1830 to 3.1 million by 1860. However, there were only a few hundred priests throughout the country to support this growing population, a figure that rose from 500 in 1840 to 6,000 by 1880 (Sullivan *Community in Print* 45). By the late 1840s, there was only one Catholic priest to roughly every 4, 500 parishioners in urban cities like New York, and one to 7, 000 in western territories (McDannell “True Men” 20). This cultural and religious context,

(2027), will examine the contribution made by the Ulster-Scots diaspora upon the writing of North America.

coupled with a rapidly expanding Irish Catholic readership, provided authors and publishers with the opportunity to “form the consciousness and behaviors” of a growing community (Sullivan *Community in Print* 45).⁴⁰

The heavily didactic tone of Famine-era literature demonstrates that it was intended to serve a practical, instructive function, rather than merely to entertain or provide pleasure. As Fanning argues,

[a]s Famine immigrants, these new writers wrote only . . . the traumatized refugees with whom their own experiences allowed them to identify.

Perceiving that audience to be desperately in need of guidance, the writers produced didactic, utilitarian novels with three major purposes: Catholic-tract fiction to exhort the immigrants to keep the faith on alien soil, immigrant-guidebook fiction to instruct the newly arrived on how to get along in America, and nationalistic-political fiction to aid the cause of freedom from British rule back in Ireland. (*The Irish Voice* 75–6)

The didactic nature of Famine-era Irish-American literature aligns it with children’s literature, whose didactic roots are well-established in criticism.⁴¹ Catholic immigrant writers such as Mary Anne Sadlier and Fr. John T. Roddan wrote novels directed at young Irish immigrants, often addressing their target audience in the prefaces of their work. These young protagonists are frequently confronted by hostility from Protestant adults (typically their employers), and engage in extended debates on the subject of religion, often inspiring conversion to Catholicism through their moral example.

⁴⁰ For further discussion on the development of Irish-American literature, particularly the emergence of Catholic novels and conduct books in the mid-nineteenth century, see O’Neill (*Famine Irish* 117–146).

⁴¹ This is discussed more fully in Chapter One. For an account of the origins of children’s literature as a form of moral instruction, see Demers (1982).

However, by the latter decades of the nineteenth century, this pattern began to shift. While Irish-American children's literature retained familiar themes, its tone grew markedly more optimistic, particularly in realist narratives, with authors increasingly depicting the US as a country of opportunity, thus reflecting social advancements in the Irish immigrant community, such as upward mobility, growing respectability, and gradual assimilation. As Kerby Miller asserts, "in the early 1870s Irish-America began to emerge from the destitution and discrimination which had characterized the preceding quarter-century" (*Emigrants and Exiles* 495). John McElgun's *Annie Reilly; or, The Fortunes of an Irish Girl in New York* (1873) and Mary E. Mannix's *Michael O'Donnell; or, The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant* (1900), portray immigration as a positive and promising experience, a thematic shift evidenced by the word "fortunes" in both titles.

The turn of the twentieth century brought further developments still, reflecting both social progress among Irish Americans and cultural influences from the Irish Literary Revival. By this time,

the American Irish had achieved rough occupational and educational equality with the American population as a whole, and they considerably exceeded the 'new immigrants' in social mobility and success. At the same time, they began to make their mark on American literature, played a disproportionately powerful role in the American labour movement, made a greater contribution than ever to Irish nationalism and continued to dominate both the Catholic Church and the politics of American cities." (Kenny *The American Irish* 181)⁴²

⁴² For Kenny's full discussion of social developments in Irish American history between 1900 and 1940, see *The American Irish* (181–219). See also Meagher (*The Columbia Guide* 122–148).

Fanning also notes enthusiastic American engagement with the Literary Revival, explaining that “[t]here was extensive American interest in and contribution to the Gaelic literary and cultural revivals in the last third of the nineteenth century” (*The Irish Voice* 168). To this end, “[t]he Irish had ‘made it’ to the extent that this was their first American generation to be able to afford the luxury of a purely literary self-definition” (Fanning *The Irish Voice* 170).

In the realm of children’s literature, these broader literary and cultural trends manifested in new forms. Clements notes that writers such as Padraic Colum, James Stephens, and Eileen O’Faolain produced children’s stories infused with folklore, magic, and animal narratives, helping to shape American expectations of Irish fiction (“Literature, American Children’s” 520). Similarly, Coghlan claims that there was “demand for fiction such as Máirín Cregan . . . and Anne Casserley . . . appealing to Irish emigrant families holding fast to the notion of Ireland as a country of cosy cottages rather than grim tenements from which many had come” (“Writing for Children” 155).

A notable feature of Irish-American children’s literature from this period is the reception of its authors in the US. Whereas earlier writers, such as Roddan and Sadlier, were well-known and respected primarily within relatively niche Irish and American Catholic circles (or, in the case of McElgun, remained largely obscure), later figures, including Padraic Colum and Ella Young, were regularly reviewed in high-profile mainstream publications, such as *The New York Times*. Both authors also enjoyed the esteem of influential “minders” of American children’s literature—a cohort of editors, librarians, and booksellers who rose to prominence in the early twentieth century—and were frequently featured in *The Horn Book*, as well as in curated collections, such as Anne Carroll Moore’s previously-mentioned *Three Owls* series.

However, although both Colum and Young were celebrated for their Irish-themed children's literature, which aligned with the American publishing industry's interest in the Irish Literary Revival, they were discussed in markedly different terms. Ella Young occupies a distinctive position within Irish-American children's literature due to the extent to which commentary on her work was overshadowed by descriptions of her physical appearance and supposedly ethereal qualities in American publications, including *The New York Times*. To this end, she exemplifies the allure and cultural impact of the Revival on the American imagination during the early decades of the twentieth century, with reviewers frequently attempting to embody the spirit of the movement in her persona. Yet, as one of only two Irish-American authors to have received Newbery Honor recognition twice (the other being Colum), Young played a significant role in the development of what may be considered the Golden Age of Irish-American children's literature in the twentieth century. Arguably, this contribution has been obscured by the persistent framing of Young as a *spéirbhean*-like figure. A secondary aim of this thesis, therefore, is to examine the gendered dimensions of Young's reception and to advocate for a reassessment of her work in future scholarship on Irish-American children's literature.

Having now established the development of Irish-American children's literature in the context of Irish-American history, it is also necessary to situate this literature within the broader US social and literary environment in which it emerged. The mid-nineteenth century was a period of extraordinary upheaval in the US, and these transformations profoundly affected the nation's understanding of childhood and, subsequently, the function of its children's literature. For reasons beyond mass immigration, "change seemed to come at an unprecedented pace" in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Wells 4). Between 1850 and 1900, the American Civil War

ended slavery and consolidated the United States as a single political entity; the construction of transcontinental railroads accelerated westward expansion and intensified regional disparities; technological innovation spurred industrialisation and contributed to the decline of rural life; and successive waves of European immigration brought millions of newcomers to American shores—“the Irish forming the single largest group” (Kenny *The American Irish* 104).

The speed and scale of these developments created significant cultural strain, and American writers confronted their anxieties and hopes in their work—including, and often especially, those writing for children. MacLeod argues that, “[w]ritten out of a concern for children and country, the literature could not but embody something of its authors’ expectations and apprehensions for the future of both. And so it did: in the hundreds of storybooks published in the United States between 1820 and 1860 is a record of what adults wanted of and for the next generation” (*American Childhood* 89). Children’s literature thus became a vehicle through which American writers could gain a sense of control over the rapid changes they were witnessing, and influence a new vision for American childhood at a time of significant change and new beginnings.

This climate of instability and reinvention contributed to important shifts within the field of American children’s literature. According to Griswold, “in the latter half of the nineteenth century, many writers and readers felt displaced by this rapid growth and longed to recapture the past; and they did so along the lines of the English Romantic poets in their celebrations of childhood. . . . Americans wished to recall the prewar bliss of their own agrarian childhoods” (*Audacious Kids* 20). Similarly, Avery argues that “[d]espite the Civil War, children’s books in the 1860s . . . were written with a conspicuously lighter touch. And, it seems, there was a more general desire to keep children young” (122). Thus, while earlier writers such as

Peter Parley (Samuel Goodrich) and Jacob Abbott emphasised religious instruction and sober moral guidance (see Chapter One), this approach would gradually give way to a new literary mode that idealised delight in supposedly inherent childhood innocence.⁴³

By the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the association of childhood with innocence had become a defining feature of American culture, and childhood was now understood “not as a symbol of innocence but as its embodiment” (Bernstein 4): “American sermons and child-rearing manuals widely quoted and thus circulated William Wordsworth’s representations of children as innocent, holy, and able to redeem adults” (Bernstein 4). Similarly, Murray argues that in the mid-century, “[t]he construction of childhood moved from society’s need to redeem the child to one in which the child became the redeemer” (53–4). This was also the period, as previously mentioned, in which children’s literature became sharply gendered. Boys’ books such as Horatio Alger Jr.’s *Ragged Dick* (1867) and Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876)⁴⁴ introduced new tropes, including the Americanised orphan, the rags-to-riches hero, and the “bad boy” protagonist. Meanwhile, girls’ literature, catalysed by the enormous success of Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), produced a “rash” of widely read women authors including Harriet Beecher Stowe, Martha Finley, and Louisa May Alcott (Murray 54).⁴⁵

Alongside these canonical works, the large and non-canonical body of Sunday School literature was flourishing. Originating in late-eighteenth-century

⁴³ For further discussion, see MacLeod (*A Moral Tale* 19–40); Murray (1–19); Stahl (220).

⁴⁴ Although this thesis and the studies referenced within it treat *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* as children’s literature, this classification is contested. For example, Matterson notes that while children have long read and enjoyed the novel, it “largely provide[s] an adult perspective on childhood” (43).

⁴⁵ For a discussion on the influence of Maria Edgeworth on American women writers such as Catharine Maria Sedgwick and Harriet Beecher Stowe, see Ó Gallchoir (2006).

American cities, and expanding through organisations such as the American Sunday School Union (ASSU), founded 1824, the movement sought to reform “illiterates, immigrants, Democrats, alcohol drinkers, assorted ‘sinners’” (Lynn and Elliott 17). Although early Sunday Schools imported British material, by the late 1820s they had developed a substantial domestic publishing operation (Lynn and Elliott 34; Murray 36).⁴⁶ By 1830, the ASSU could claim six million copies of small-format volumes sold (Avery 99). The popularity of Sunday School literature “helped to both create and supply a new market in children’s literature” (Gillespie 62),⁴⁷ a fact that is significant to this thesis because, as Avery observes, references to the Irish are frequent within it: “some tales dwelt on the need to be kind to Irish children, others on their conversion to Bible Christianity” (106). Indeed, the Sunday School texts analysed in this thesis confirm a recurring preoccupation with the Irish Catholic immigrant child, typically portrayed in unsympathetic and patronising terms, and which stand in stark contrast with the affirmative portrayals provided by Irish-American authors.

Chapter overviews

Chapter One of this thesis examines the emergence of Irish-American boys’ fiction in the mid-nineteenth century, arguing that novels by Fr. John T. Roddan and Mary Anne Sadlier both predate and complicate the later centrality of Horatio Alger Jr.’s rags-to-riches narratives. Although Alger’s *Ragged Dick* (1867) is often credited with creating the urban boy hero in American children’s literature, earlier Irish-American texts such as Roddan’s *John O’Brien; or, The Orphan of Boston* (1850)

⁴⁶ For discussions on the main differences between British and American Sunday School children’s literature, see Avery (104); Lynn and Elliott (35–8).

⁴⁷ For overviews of this literature, see Avery (92–120); Hintz and Tribunella (54–6); MacLeod (*A Moral Tale* 21–3); and Murray (35–7). For overviews of the ASSU’s history, see Keller Walter (1942); Lynn and Elliott (1980); Rice (1917).

and Sadlier's *Willy Burke; or, The Irish Orphan in America* (1850) had already established the figure of the immigrant Catholic boy negotiating life in American cities. Similar to Alger, both Roddan and Sadlier utilised boys' literature to shape a masculinity grounded in self-sufficiency and middle-class respectability, albeit via a Catholic framework. The chapter situates these works within broader nineteenth-century debates about boyhood and citizenship to demonstrate how they overlap with and diverge from contemporaneous American boys' literature, thus contributing distinct Catholic perspectives on the formation of moral, social, and civic identity.

Chapter Two of this thesis examines three Irish-American girls' novels: Mary Anne Sadlier's *Alice Riordan, the Blind Man's Daughter: A Tale for the Young* (1851) and *Bessy Conway; or, The Irish Girl in America* (1861), and John McElgun's *Annie Reilly; or, The Fortunes of an Irish Girl in New York* (1873). Taking a similar approach to Chapter One, the chapter situates these texts within the emergence and rapid development of American girls' literature in the mid-nineteenth century, and demonstrates that Sadlier and McElgun adapted the values associated with the so-called Cult of True Womanhood to guide the implied immigrant girl reader towards an idealised model of Irish-American Catholic womanhood. At the same time, the chapter argues that Sadlier and McElgun modelled their protagonists after the middle-class, US-born heroines of contemporary American girls' fiction, using shared conventions to elevate the social status of Irish girls in the US. This strategy becomes especially fraught in *Bessy Conway*, where Sadlier echoes broader patterns in mid-century girls' literature that linked purity and innocence to whiteness.

Chapter Three of this thesis breaks new ground by recovering and analysing the long-neglected works of two Irish-American writers, Mary E. Mannix and her sister, Julia C. Walsh. Mannix and Walsh, second-generation Irish Catholic immigrants raised in Reading, Ohio, published a significant amount of children's

fiction at the turn of the twentieth century, yet have remained virtually invisible in contemporary criticism. This chapter establishes, for the first time, their familial relationship. Key to this discovery was a video interview with Deirdre Andrews, the great-granddaughter of Mary E. Mannix, which provided crucial biographical information and confirmed the existence of Julia C. Walsh as Mannix's sister.

Examining the novels, *Michael O'Donnell; or, The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant* by Mannix (1900) and *Tooralladdy* by Walsh (1907), this chapter expands the timeline and geographical scope of this thesis. Unlike the predominantly East Coast-centred Irish-American narratives of the nineteenth century, Mannix and Walsh set their texts in the American West, and their Irish Catholic protagonists within diverse, multicultural urban environments during the Progressive Era, thus highlighting new contexts in which Irish immigrant identity was negotiated at the turn of the century.

Chapter Four of this thesis examines the emergence of Padraic Colum's early children's literature and the beginning of the "Golden Age" of Irish-American children's literature in the first decades of the twentieth century. The chapter situates Colum's *A Boy in Eirinn* (1913) in the broader context of so-called World Friends literature for the first time, a category in which American and Irish authors shared the common goal of "teach[ing] young Americans about the way of life in other countries; and (sometimes subtly, other times bluntly) [demonstrating] the superiority of American democracy and the American way of life" (Kimball "Seeing the World" 681). To a lesser extent, the chapter also examines the reception of Ella Young, another writer who was instrumental to the success of the Golden Age of Irish-American children's literature, and demonstrates the notably gendered reception of Young in the US.

Finally, the chapter charts the decline of Irish-American children's literature as a category in the 1940s and demonstrates the continued influence of Irish American

writers on American children's literature thereafter. The chapter recovers a neglected picture book, *Where the Winds Never Blew* by Colum (1940), and demonstrates that the text belongs to an emerging tradition in American children's literature in which socially progressive "minders" of the literature sought to boldly depict the flaws of American society. In Colum's case, a seemingly simplistic tale set in what looks like the Irish countryside holds a mirror to 1930s America, and reflects back an increasingly nativist and xenophobic society.

Chapter One

Bad Boys, Do-Gooders, and Independent Orphans: The Emergence of Irish-American Boys' Literature

In the opening scene of *Only an Irish Boy; or, Andy Burke's Fortunes and Misfortunes* by Horatio Alger Jr. (1894), a young American aristocrat is offended when a roguish Irish boy calls him a blackguard. The boy is Andy Burke, and he is described as "one who had a will of his own, but not inclined to interfere with others, though ready to stand up for his own rights" (3). With his shabby appearance, but upstanding character, Burke represents the street urchin hero figure for which Alger would become famous in his rags-to-riches novels in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. Indeed, the publication of Alger's *Ragged Dick* in 1868 (it originally appeared as a series in the children's magazine *The Student and Schoolmate* in 1867) has been credited with creating a new hero in American children's literature, and marking a significant departure in the category by centring the success of the underclass boy in an urban environment.¹

However, while Alger was a prolific writer of more than a hundred rags-to-riches boys' stories from the mid-nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century (Matterson 8), he was not the first to conceive of them, nor of Irish characters like Andy Burke. Appearing seventeen years prior to *Ragged Dick*, and more than forty years prior to *Only an Irish Boy*, were the novels of Irish American writers, who similarly took the urban boy for their inspiration, although to different

¹ According to Murray, "Alger's settings in urban centers represent a departure in children's literature" (72). MacLeod claims that *Ragged Dick* took American children's literature into a "new era" (*American Childhood* 149), while J.D. Stahl describes the text as a "new departure" (220).

effect. This chapter examines the novels, *John O'Brien; or, The Orphan Of Boston: A Tale Of Real Life* by Fr. John T. Roddan (1850) and *Willy Burke; or, The Irish Orphan in America* by Mary Anne Sadlier (1850), and reveals new modes of interpretation by examining them through the lens of children's literature. In particular, the chapter argues that Roddan and Sadlier wrote with the purpose of influencing the implied Irish Catholic immigrant boy reader towards a specific Irish Catholic masculinity, built around a framework of self-sufficiency, middle-class respectability, and religious responsibility.

The chapter demonstrates how, in writing about Irish Catholic immigrant boys navigating their adopted home as ethnic and religious minorities, Irish American authors made valuable contributions to the development of boys' literature in the US in the mid-nineteenth century. At this time, an awareness of boyhood citizenship had arisen, "and with this interest came ongoing attempts to define, explain, and repair boys and their problems" (Cohon *Serialized* xi). Thus, the category of boys' literature emerged. Coinciding with this literature and the dominant conceptions of boyhood contained (and created) therein, was Irish-American boys' literature, which, as I demonstrate, both intersects with and diverges from literary portrayals and histories of American boyhood, and similarly reflects the "citizen-shaping projects" of American boys' writers (Cohon *Serialized* xxiv).

The chapter also complicates and lends greater nuance to dominant critical narratives about the development of American boys' literature, which have overemphasised the significance of such postbellum boys' texts as Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *The Story Of a Bad Boy* (1870) and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) in the nineteenth century, resulting in their "hypercanonization" in American children's literature. This term was first coined by Jonathan Arac in 1997, and refers to "a very few single works [that] monopolize curricular and critical

attention: in fiction, preeminently *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Huckleberry Finn*. These works organize most American literature courses in high school, college, and graduate school; they form the focus for many dissertations and books” (15).² By situating Roddan and Sadlier’s texts in the context of pre-Civil War American boys’ literature, this chapter builds on the work of such scholars as Lorinda B. Cohoon and Ken Parille, the latter of whom argues that “exploring the antebellum period is crucial if we are to gain a fuller understanding of boyhood” (xiv). Moreover, the chapter enriches criticism on American boys’ literature, which otherwise centres predominantly on “New England boyhoods” (Cohoon *Serialized* xvii), by examining textual constructions of the Irish Catholic immigrant boy’s experience in New England and New York.

The fact that neither *John O’Brien* nor *Willy Burke* has been treated as boys’ fiction to date is remarkable considering the explicit address to a young male reader by both authors.³ Roddan asserts that his intended audience, “in a most especial manner,” is “Catholic boys who are in danger of losing their faith” (vi). Mary Anne Sadlier addresses the same demographic in her novel, stating: “I have endeavored to delineate for my young readers the part which a Catholic boy is called upon to act in society, and have shown to the best of my ability the beneficial results which may accrue from the fulfilment of his duty” (281).

Indeed, the emergence of both texts in the same year is not a coincidence, but the result of an explicit call from American Catholic intellectual and writer, Orestes

² Cohoon makes a similar point, but claims that the canonisation of some well-known American boys’ literature emerged due to discipline-related reasons: “scholars who helped establish the field of children’s literature . . . did so by choosing to study texts that were more complicated, closer in structure, style, and characterization to adult literature” (*Serialized* xiv). See also Rahn for further discussion (*Rediscoveries* xiii–xvii).

³ A notable exception to this claim is a previously-mentioned essay by Gallagher (2017), which identifies *Willy Burke* as a boys’ “home story.” Gallagher’s essay examines some aspects of gender and masculinity in the text, but ultimately classifies it as general children’s literature, concluding that it “promotes the figure of the child as symbolic of the potential for a ‘pure’ Irish Catholic identity in a plural society” (84).

Brownson, for the creation of “a tale entitled the Orphan of New York or the Orphan of Boston — the Irish Orphan or the Catholic Orphan — which should be adapted to the condition of the poor orphan boys among ourselves. Let its hero be an orphan boy” (Brownson’s emphasis) in his *Quarterly Review* magazine (“Literary Notices and Criticisms”). The *Boston Pilot* republished Brownson’s article and offered a fifty-dollar prize and serialisation to the best entry, which Brownson later judged to be Sadlier’s *Willy Burke* (“Fifty Dollars”).

Extensive reviews and advertisements, which undoubtedly influenced impressive sales figures,⁴ further demonstrate that both texts were intended to be read by boys. For example, the *Boston Pilot*—the oldest and largest Catholic journal in the US, which Roddan edited between the years 1848 and 1858—⁵ wrote of *Willy Burke*, “[t]he poor boys who read it . . . will see that the hero of the story was one of themselves, and they will, in seeing how and what he did, understand how and what they are to do. They will take him for their model, the pattern, and seek to imitate him.” (“The Fifty Dollar Prize”). A review of *John O’Brien* similarly declares that the text is “admirably calculated for its objects, which are to guard the Catholic orphan boy against the assaults and dangers which beset his path” (“Cardinal Wiseman”), while Brownson wrote in his *Quarterly Review*, “[Roddan’s] book can be read with interest by the mere child, and with instruction by the man of mature intellect” (122). The *Boston Pilot* added to a reprinting of the same article: “every boy and girl in the country should read the story We hope our young friends will lend the *Boston Pilot* to children who are too poor to purchase it, and if they lose a

⁴ Three months after its publication, the *Boston Pilot* reported that *Willy Burke* was “meeting with a rapid sale. One thousand copies have been disposed of since the first of September” (“Things of Special Note”). Fanning claims that “seven thousand copies of *Willy Burke* were sold in the first few weeks, and three editions were published by the end of the second year, 1851” (*The Irish Voice* 120).

⁵ The *Boston Pilot* was founded in 1836, and primarily owned by Patrick Donohue, whom O’Neill states was the “sole proprietor and editor by 1838, and retained control until his death in 1891.” O’Neill further asserts that the publication “enjoyed the highest circulation of any Irish-American journal” (“US Nation Building” 186).

copy by such generosity, we will endeavor to supply it gratis on application at our office.” (“The Fifty Dollar Prize”).

Despite abundant evidence that they were intended to be read by children, the texts have largely been overlooked in this context, although some critics have acknowledged that they were intended for a child audience. For example, Fanning describes Roddan’s *John O’Brien* as “clearly aimed at educating Catholic youth” (*Exiles of Erin* 97), while Sullivan describes the works of both Roddan and Sadlier as “focused on Irish immigrants and their American-born children” (*The Shamrock* 29). Willard Thorp also recognises that *Willy Burke* is written with a young reader in mind: “[t]his is [Sadlier’s] first homily: let young immigrant Irish-Catholic boys learn from Willy Burke and from his wayward brother Peter” (103).

Moreover, criticism has been somewhat dismissive of the texts’ literary merit due to their contrived origins. As mentioned previously, Fanning describes *Willy Burke* as “a commissioned performance in which no character or situation is more than stereotypical” (*The Irish Voice* 118), while Stephen Butler describes it as “obviously contrived propaganda” (166). Both texts’ treatment of boys has also been dismissed on the basis that “the most common unprotected innocents were not boys, however, but rather young female Irish immigrants” (O’Neill ‘US Nation Building’ 190).

This chapter contends that a deeper understanding and appreciation of the literary value of both *John O’Brien* and *Willy Burke* emerges when their works are examined as boys’ literature specifically. This is because “[r]epresentations of gender in children’s literature reflect and produce a politics about bodies, power, and socialization that extends beyond its pages Attention to the production of gender in literature for children suggests that the fictional child is a complex site for examining which bodies have power and which do not and who gets to decide”

(Marshall 81). Treating Roddan and Sadlier's texts as boys' fiction, rather than general adult fiction, thus reveals important ideas about power, identity construction, and gender expectations in mid-nineteenth century Irish America.

To most effectively demonstrate the value of *John O'Brien* and *Willy Burke* as boys' fiction, it is important to first contextualise boys' fiction in the US in the antebellum period, for it is in this context the texts emerged. With the exception of research by Parille and Cohoon, boys' fiction from this period has been overlooked compared to postbellum literature,⁶ and a skewed narrative of the development of nineteenth-century American boys' fiction has maintained a hold in criticism as a result. In particular, the emergence of so-called "bad boy" or "boy book" literature in the postbellum era has dominated critical narratives and perpetuated the overly simplified idea that American boys' books were "somehow products of the solitary white male genius" (Cohoon Serialized xv), when, in fact, they evolved from the antebellum tradition: "[Oliver] Optic takes what he learns from his enterprise and his creative shifts in his representations of boyhoods and packages it into a best-selling formula for Horatio Alger" (Cohoon Serialized xxvi).

This so-called "white male genius" literature includes such texts as *The Story of a Bad Boy* by Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1870) and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain (1876). It has aptly been described by Kenneth Kidd as follows:

[t]he Bad Boy genre defined itself against advice writing and domestic fiction. On the one hand, the Bad Boy author energetically insists that he is opposed to didacticism and domesticity Rather than grant men sentimental influence, the Bad Boy author declares boyhood's independence

⁶ Parille and Cohoon's respective studies are the most comprehensive on antebellum American boys' literature to date. The subject has also been considered in the context of the Civil War. For example, Frances M. Clarke and Rebecca Jo Plant's study on boyhood in the Civil War era includes a chapter on antebellum literature: "[h]elping to prepare boys for battle, this material steeped them in martial exploits, instructed them in military nomenclature, and pictured them in uniform" (93). See also Fahs (2001).

from all things feminine, including advice writing. His story of the Bad Boy is often also his own life story, the story of his own evolution from gentle boy-savagery into both manhood and literary vocation.” (52)

So influential was this literature that critical accounts of American boys’ literature “often begin in 1870 because it is the year in which Mark Twain’s friend Thomas Bailey Aldrich published *The Story of a Bad Boy*, the first novel in the genre that would become known as the ‘boy book,’ a group of post-Civil War novels by Aldrich, Twain, Charles Dudley Warner, William Dean Howells, and a few others” (Parille xiv).⁷

Indeed, a survey of American children’s literature criticism reveals a strong connection between the emergence of such authors as Twain and Aldrich and the arrival of a new boys’ literature. For example, MacLeod argues that “the two Toms are harbingers of a new era in American writing for children. Gone are the moral lessons that justified the very existence of fiction; gone the ruling concept of character formation through experience” (*American Childhoods* 74). Similarly, Murray argues that the publication of Twain’s story, “The Story Of The Bad Little Boy That Bore A Charmed Life” (1865), “turned the Sunday school formula of bad-behaviour-brings-punishment on its head” (75). Finally, Anne Tropp Trenskey claims that “the origin of the bad boy genre owes much to a conscious reaction against the sentimental and pious child literature. Many of the authors declare explicitly that

⁷ Curiously absent from, although eligible for inclusion in discussions of “bad boy” literature is Alger’s *Ragged Dick*. Kidd suggests a reason for this exclusion is that Alger’s characters, despite being streetwise and mischievous, “are often orphans or of less secure social class . . . they also live and work more overtly in the world of adults than do their Bad Boy cousins” (200). Kidd further argues that Alger was an “outsider” in the “East Coast literary culture that created the genteel but masculine Bad Boy. Alger was perceived as too commercial and crude,” and did not have “the right stuff to be a Bad Boy author” (200). Conversely, MacLeod aligns Alger’s *Ragged Dick* with the Romantic child, rather than the “bad boy”: “Alger’s books, if not themselves “romantic,” did contribute in their own way to the creation of a children’s literature which was romantic about children” (“From Rational” 148–9).

their aim is to rectify the false image of children drawn in the American domestic novels as well as in their European counterparts” (“The Bad Boy” 505).

Such focus on postbellum “bad boy” literature, whose inspiration is contested,⁸ likely finds its roots in Leslie Fielder’s major critical work, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), which described Tom Sawyer as the quintessential “good bad boy” of American literature (266).⁹ However, while criticism of the “bad boy” book offers important insight into changing trends within American boys’ fiction in the latter half of the nineteenth century, this is only a partial picture. Parille argues that boys’ fiction from the antebellum period—which includes the work of Francis Forrester, Lydia Sigourney, Louisa May Alcott, and Oliver Optic (the pen name of William T. Adams)—was not as different from girls’ fiction as most influential criticism on the subject suggests:

[t]he categories of the ‘boys’ adventure novel’ and ‘girls’ domestic novel’ have been staples of children’s literature scholarship, but . . . they are misleading for a number of reasons, the most important being that many boys’ novels situate the protagonists in domestic environments and replicate some of the values of girls’ novels. . . . The freedom valued by canonical male writers such as Melville, Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Twain, and the male critics who canonized them . . . has wrongly been seen as an essential feature of boys’ fiction. (xx)¹⁰

⁸ The Civil War has been posited as being instrumental in the emergence of the “bad boy” book and the demise of the kind of literature Parille analyses. See Griswold (1992); Jacobson (1994). Conversely, Shawn Thomson’s essay on American masculinity in the nineteenth century suggests an illustrated edition of *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe from 1835 was significant in influencing the kind of boyhood depicted in postbellum literature, and “offered a newfound sense of independence from feminine domesticity. As a masculine adventure in the open air, *Robinson Crusoe* stirred within young boys the impulse to experience manly freedoms in the backwoods” (141).

⁹ For further discussion on Tom Sawyer as the original “bad boy” in American literature, see Asayama (2004); Gribben (2017); Prchal (2004).

¹⁰ Cohoon’s study also challenges the dominant status of the “bad boy” book in American literature, arguing that these texts “were not produced in isolation from other texts,” but rather build on a previously established depiction of American boyhood as found in popular

Rather than advocating freedom, pleasure, play, and self-reliance, as “bad boy” literature often did, Parille’s study demonstrates that antebellum boys’ fiction was more often concerned with advocating social responsibility, involvement in public and domestic life, and self-governance—much like girls’ fiction of the time.

What is more, antebellum boys’ literature, unlike its postbellum equivalent, was often written by women, who had a vested interest in the development and disciplining of boys. As Sarah Robbins’ study on nineteenth-century women writers as “literacy managers” demonstrates, the antebellum period was the heyday of the domestic literacy narrative, a form which centred on “education practices, and gendered social roles” in a variety of literary modes, including “sentimentalism, advice literature, and protest writing such as abolitionist texts” (11). According to Robbins, the most influential writers of the category were Lydia Maria Child, Lydia Sigourney, and Catherine Sedgwick—all of whom were especially invested in American boyhood and, as Parille points out, “wrote at length about boys and the ‘boy problem’” (xxv). Due to the prominence of this trend, which was a feature of what historian Linda K. Kerber describes as “Republican Motherhood”—a movement that was “dedicated to the nurture of public-spirited male citizens” (Kerber 11)—antebellum boys’ literature can thus be understood as performing a very different function to postbellum “bad boy” literature.

The ideals of antebellum fiction are reflected in Irish-American boys’ literature in many ways. For example, in his call for the creation of a special boys’ literature, Brownson demonstrates a belief that boys and girls required the same guidance in the mid-nineteenth century, and that boys had been neglected in this regard:

periodicals from the 1830s and 40s. Cohoon argues that this fact has been overlooked in studies because “until the late twentieth century, the importance of the periodical in shaping U.S. literary histories had not been extensively examined” (*Serialized* xv).

[o]ur modern writers take much more pleasure in depicting the piety of girls than boys. This comes, we suppose, from the fact that piety in females is prettier and more sentimental than in the other sex, and therefore more within the comprehension of an effeminate and sentimental, not to say sensual, age. Yet boys have souls as well as girls, and were equally redeemed by the Man-God Take, then, a boy from the class of poor orphans in one of our large cities, and conduct him step by step from very childhood through the actual difficulties, dangers, and temptations which beset boys of his class, up to virtuous manhood. Let there be nothing strange or marvellous; be simple and natural, keep within the sphere of every-day life, and show how such a boy may preserve, in a country like ours, his faith, his innocence, and gain a livelihood, respect, and a solid manly character. The poor boys who read it will not be carried out of their sphere of life, they will see that the hero of the story was one of themselves, and they will, in seeing how and what he did, understand how and what they are to do. ("A Good Subject")

I purposefully include this long quotation because it effectively captures not only Brownson's concerns regarding the development of the Irish Catholic orphan boy, but also the central tension that undergirds the categories of girlhood and boyhood in the mid-nineteenth century. Brownson's call suggests a boys' fiction that replicated the same values of girls' literature because he recognised boys and girls as having the same needs and thus requiring similar guidance from literature. This further complicates the dominant difference-based criticism of boys' and girls' literature that Parille's research challenges, and further demonstrates that a strict binary of boy-girl difference in nineteenth-century American children's literature (i.e. adventure stories for boys and domestic fiction for girls) is overly simplistic and thus misleading.

As this chapter demonstrates, a shared emphasis on the “every-day sphere” (i.e. domestic sphere), the goal of staid middle-class respectability, and, to quote Brownson above, the development of a “strong manly character” connects Irish-American boys’ fiction with its American counterpart from the antebellum period. However, crucial differences also exist between the two. Most notably, the boy figure in American boys’ fiction can be understood to be American-born and Protestant, while the boy figure in Irish-American boys’ fiction is Catholic and an immigrant. These differences complicate the experiences of the protagonists in *John O’Brien* and *Willy Burke*, and the motivations of their writers as guides for their readers. Consequently, the texts expand and enrich the category of antebellum boys’ literature by centring the “other” (i.e. the non-native, non-WASP boy) as he was portrayed by Irish immigrant authors. This is valuable in itself, and also significant when compared with the portrayal of immigrants in American children’s literature from the time, which I briefly describe in the following section.

By the time *John O’Brien* and *Willy Burke* were published, Irish characters were an increasingly common fixture in American children’s literature. For example, *Lessons of Profit, and Stories of Truth* (1840) by an anonymous author features a story entitled “The Irish Brothers” about two Irish immigrant boys who are industrious and dutiful sons, despite the difficult circumstances of their poverty. The author holds them up as models for an implied American reader, the suggestion being that, if such desperate boys as these can behave respectably, so too can (and should) the American boy. The story effectively demonstrates the function of the immigrant character in American children’s literature in the mid-nineteenth century, which was to inspire sympathy from the implied American reader and/or present the immigrant’s low socio-economic status as essential. Moreover, such stories also functioned to portray the poor “as objects of cautionary tales—to show individuals

what might happen if they were to become lazy or dependent in a society which promoted strong individualism and the Protestant work ethic” (Elbert 25).

As demonstrated in the Introduction, the increase of immigrant characters in American children’s literature corresponded with the sustained arrival of millions of European immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century. According to MacLeod, between the 1840s and 50s, immigrant children began to “appear in children’s stories, sometimes in books, sometimes in such periodicals as different as the staid *Youth’s Companion* . . . and the lively *New York Ledger* . . . in the popular column written by ‘Fanny Fern’ (Sara Parton)” (*American Childhood* 145). Such characters, MacLeod argues, “were neither models for character development nor examples of rational child nurture, but only vehicles for social protest; their stories were intended to move the public” (*American Childhood* 148). Moreover, as Michael Moon argues of such American dime novels as George Lippard’s *The Quaker City* (1845) and Ned Buntline’s *Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1848), they functioned to provide readers with a “vicarious experience of the supposed color and romance of underclass life while reassuring them not only that the ‘honest’ or ‘deserving’ poor could readily transcend the worst effects of poverty but also that the squalor and violence of their lives could be readily contained—in slums, workhouses, charity wards, and prisons” (91).

This new child figure thus served to persuade middle-class American readers to consider the lowly immigrant urchin in a more compassionate light, and to open their eyes to the social corruption and injustice at play in American cities.¹¹ However, children’s literature was also a tool for keeping the immigrant from rising beyond

¹¹ The novels of Charles Dickens, particularly *Oliver Twist* (1837), were also hugely influential in the US in the mid-nineteenth century, and played a part in the rise of sentimental fiction with a social aim, especially following Dickens’ tour of the US in 1842. See Bivona (2012) for an account of Dickens’ reception in the US in the mid-nineteenth century.

their low socio-economic status: “these narratives assume the authority of ‘the truth’ about immigrants, as they inform their young readers about the specific positions of agency and identity the immigrant may assume in relation to American socio-economic structures” (Harde “‘What Should We Do’” 70).¹²

The emergence of Irish-American boys’ literature in 1850 is thus significant in how it reclaims and reimagines the figure of the Irish immigrant child. In Roddan and Sadlier’s texts, the poor Irish boy is the subject, rather than the pitiable or symbolic object of the author’s eye. Where he is merely gazed upon in American children’s literature and the recipient of charity (or, as this chapter demonstrates, an object of religious conversion), he is an active agent of his own destiny in Irish-American children’s literature. While Sadlier’s *Willy Burke* is considerably more sentimental in tone than Roddan’s *John O’Brien*, neither is intended to move an implied American reader to think differently about the hypothetical Irish immigrant boy figure. Rather, both are concerned with equipping an implied Irish Catholic boy reader with the tools for his own success in the US; to guide him beyond the labouring class, through boyhood, and towards an ideal Irish Catholic manhood.¹³ As Roddan clarifies in his preface, “if a Protestant reads the book, and totally misunderstands it, it is no affair of mine: the book was not written for him” (v).

¹² Harde’s essay about the negative portrayal of immigrants in nineteenth-century children’s stories features texts centred on young Irish immigrant protagonists, including “The Irish Emigrants” (1830) and “Rosy O’Ryan” (1856) by Lydia Maria Child, and “The Little Captive Maid” by Sarah Orne Jewett (1891). All three stories reinforce Harde’s argument that nineteenth-century immigrant stories by American authors, despite gesturing towards democratic inclusiveness, keep the immigrant in the labouring classes.

¹³ Evidently, reviewers imagined that Roddan’s *John O’Brien* might serve a similar function to American children’s texts featuring immigrants. For example, a review of the novel in the *Boston Pilot* claims that “[t]he purpose of the author has not been to exhibit a perfect character, but to give a true picture of the poor Catholic orphan boys, or virtually orphan boys, so numerous in our city, to interest our sympathies in their behalf” (“Book Notices”). Orestes Brownson makes a similar observation in his review: “Mr. Roddan has undertaken to show . . . that these boys are by no means so depraved as is commonly supposed, and that, with a little vigilance, and a little judicious kindness, they might easily be made an honor to our community, instead of being its plague-spot” (123).

What follows in this chapter is an analysis of *John O'Brien*, and then of *Willy Burke*. Although both texts emerged as responses to the same call for a unique Irish-American boys' fiction, the authors' respective approaches are distinct. Rather than comparing them with each other, the chapter situates the texts alongside American boys' fiction performing similar cultural work. For example, *John O'Brien* shares more in common with the traditional boys' self-made success narrative, while *Willy Burke* more closely resembles a boys' conduct book. Moreover, *John O'Brien* exhibits some elements of the "bad boy" book, while *Willy Burke* shares more characteristics with the American orphan story. Crucially, neither text is merely a variation of its American counterpart; rather, both reflect the unique motivations of their Irish American authors to present and promote a particular Irish Catholic masculine identity in their writing, and to teach the Irish Catholic boy how to become a good Irish Catholic man.

From rags to riches: John O'Brien and the Irish Catholic boys' success story

Stephen Matterson describes the American success story thus:

[o]ften considered a specifically male form, the narrative usually includes a series of conventional gestures, such as concentration on the decision to leave home, a consideration of the alternative life the protagonist might have otherwise led, and a contrast of two points in the protagonist's life, usually involving revisiting as a success a location associated with failure or poverty. (216)

Like others, Matterson describes the work of Horatio Alger Jr. as being a particularly influential model of the fictional success narrative in American literature (216).¹⁴

¹⁴ Similarly, Alice M. Jordan claims that "[t]he name Horatio Alger . . . is a synonym for the success story" (32). Some descriptions of the success narrative vary. For example, Kelly describes the Alger formula as "a boy who struggles with little success to achieve a measure

The rise of the fictional success story in the mid-nineteenth century reflects economic developments at the time, and new possibilities for the individual man. In an essay on Nathaniel Hawthorne and American masculinity, T. Walter Herbert explains that, in Colonial America, which was “composed of small-scale communities that were governed by face-to-face networks of familial connection . . . a man’s eventual place in society was pretty much determined at birth” (61). However, in the early nineteenth century, this pattern was displaced “as the expanding capitalist and industrial economy of the new republic created opportunities . . . in rapidly growing urban centers. To individual men, this unstructured and anonymous new environment seemed like a turbulent and unpredictable ocean, as full of danger as of promise” (61).

The birth of the American “self-made man” is traced in detail in Michael Kimmel’s study on the cultural history of manhood in the US. According to Kimmel, in the early nineteenth century, “America was entering a new age, and men were free to create their own destinies, to find their own ways, to rise as high as they could, to write their own biographies” (17). E. Anthony Rotundo traces this same history in a separate cultural study, claiming that, by the late-eighteenth century, “the individual citizen—with all his rights and interests—was now the source of power in the American republic” (16). In other words, the man himself could now determine his own fate, rather than bloodline hierarchy. With this possibility, a new success mentality captivated American society, resulting in the emergence of “many popular guidebooks for young men trying to make their way in this world” (Herbert 61).¹⁵

of respectability and security until a fortunate encounter provides him with a powerful benefactor” (*Mother Was a Lady* 34).

¹⁵ Herbert references *The Spring-Time of Life: Or, Advice to Youth* by David Magie (1852) as one success manual for young men. Other advice manuals for boys from the antebellum period include Daniel Eddy’s *The Young Man’s Friend* (1855), Rufus W. Clark’s *Lectures on the Formation of Character, Temptations, and Mission of Young Men* (1853), and W.W. Everts’ *Manhood: Its Duties and Responsibilities* (1854).

This chapter argues that Roddan's *John O'Brien* serves as an early iteration of the American success narrative in the antebellum period, and functions to illustrate to an implied Irish Catholic boy reader how he, too, might stake a claim in his adopted home and be successful. Crucially, however, success for his protagonist, John O'Brien, is not merely the achievement of financial security and middle-class respectability, but the preservation of his Catholic faith in a hostile environment. Demonstrating to the implied Irish Catholic boy reader how to maintain one's Irish Catholic identity and remain loyal to the Church in the US is thus a primary function of Roddan's success narrative.

Recognising that the future of the Catholic Church in the US rested on the shoulders of the next generation, Roddan goes to lengths to convince his young readers of the institution's legitimacy, and to demonstrate how to protect one's faith by dispelling feelings of internalised shame about Catholicism, and avoiding conversion at the hands of seemingly benevolent Protestants. Just as traditional success narratives in American literature emphasise the importance of hard work and endurance for financial success, Roddan demonstrates the importance of these traits for maintaining one's Catholicism. Moreover, he connects the preservation of faith with financial success, suggesting to the implied reader that maintaining one's Catholicism will reward him materially in the long run.

John O'Brien's struggle to maintain his Catholic faith is emphasised throughout the text, and he laments his lack of courage in defending his faith against Protestants, whose constant attacks gradually wear down his resolve: "I think that if a child were to show that he really had this courage, he would not often be required to test it" (127). John is also ashamed of his faith as a child, and works hard to overcome this as he matures. As an older John recalls his childhood days, he laments his father's refusal to allow him to socialise with fellow Irish Catholics as a child:

“Fort Hill school was full of Catholic boys and he was determined that I should not associate with any of them. Poor man! It was a terrible mistake. I believe that it was the only great fault of his life, and he paid dearly for it. So have I.” (51).¹⁶

Not only is John segregated from his Catholic peers because his father believed were “not the right sort of companions” (48), but his companions in childhood were Protestants which lowers John’s opinion of Catholics even further: “[m]y companions were the children of my father’s friends, and he selected them for me because they lived in large houses, and wore clean clothes My idea of a Paddy was that he was a low, dirty, and vulgar fellow, who always swore, drank, fought, and couldn’t speak plain English” (58). It thus becomes John’s life work to undo this negative impression of Irish Catholics, and to overcome anti-Catholic sentiment. John is often told such things as “Catholics are not fit to live with civilized *humans*” (101), and that “it’s a pity that sich [sic] a bright boy as you are should a been brought up in that way” (87). Although he almost “lose[s] courage” (129), John ultimately maintains his Catholicism and is rewarded for doing so: he marries a Catholic woman who steers him towards a job as a clerk in a Catholic firm, and, after four years, he is promoted to partner there (275).

John’s newfound middle-class respectability is thus directly linked to his Catholic faith. Unlike an Alger hero, he does not inherit a fortune or meet a generous benefactor along his journey; rather, his loyalty to his faith, and the hard work it took to maintain it in boyhood, rewards him and enables him to become a respectable Catholic man. What is more, Roddan demonstrates that although John is a victim of anti-Catholic sentiment, he is not held back by this. He might have more to overcome

¹⁶ Roddan’s emphasis on the father figure is noteworthy. According to Cohoon, antebellum texts in which the father figure prepared boys “to become citizens prepared to promote the stability of local and national adult organizations” (*Serialized* 66), are outliers, and that a mother figure more typically fulfilled this function.

in achieving it, but John has the same right to success as his Protestant counterpart, Roddan suggests.

As well as reaping the rewards of maintaining his faith throughout his childhood, John O'Brien also demonstrates that a good Catholic man takes responsibility in helping other young Catholics to keep their faith, too. As a young adult, John meets a boy named Patrick—"a very bright little fellow, about twelve years old" (257)—who, like him, is the orphaned young son of Irish parents living in Boston. John asks Patrick if he goes to Church, to which the boy replies, "I don't want to go to a *Paddy* church!" (258). John challenges Patrick thus: "[t]ell me, my boy, if your father and mother could come back here, would you be *ashamed* of them? . . . Would they not say, Is *this* our boy? and is it thus he insults God, disgraces his Church, scandalizes his country and tears our hearts?" (259). After listening to John, Patrick concedes, "I felt pretty bad once, passing by the church, and watching the boys come out. So you've made me feel very bad; but, somehow, I'm glad you spoke to me about it." (259).

Through carefully constructed dialogue between John and Patrick, Roddan demonstrates that John O'Brien's duty to his faith lies both with himself, and with the wider Catholic community. Once he is grown, it becomes part of his manly responsibility to nurture the next generation of young Catholic boys, and ensure that they do not lose their faith. Thus, Roddan's message is that a good Catholic man looks after himself *and* his Church. Evidently, the ideals of individualism and self-reliance as promoted in much postbellum boys' literature do not apply to the text in this instance, and it aligns more squarely with the antebellum tradition, which similarly emphasised that the boy was merely "one wheel in the vast machine."¹⁷

¹⁷ This is a reference to Oliver Optic, whom Parille observes often used the wheel metaphor in his texts to demonstrate to boys their place and role in society (10).

Upholding social and religious responsibility is thus partly what defines success for the Catholic man, as well as recognising oneself as part of a larger community.

Roddan emphasises the importance of community for the proper guidance and training of Catholic boys throughout the text. In addition to the individual taking responsibility for the welfare of Catholic boys, Roddan also highlights the importance of Catholic societies for protecting and nurturing the Catholic community. According to his protagonist, the good done by such societies “when they are well managed, is not to be estimated” (238):

[a] boy of seventeen has a world of curious fancies in his brain; and, if his thoughts do not get a safe direction, he will be likely to go astray Of course, the confessional is the best and safest of all schools But, in speaking of merely human means, which may be used by God in keeping a boy from bad company, I rank these societies very high. (239)

Roddan claims that parents “would do well in encouraging their boys to take an active part in such societies,” for such societies “make a *man* of a member” (Roddan’s emphasis) (240), and a man is shaped “by the nature of his thoughts” (240). A boy’s thoughts should therefore be disciplined under the correct influences so that he may grow up to become a good Catholic man.

Success for the Irish Catholic immigrant boy can thus be understood as hinging on three factors: middle-class respectability (transcending the labouring classes), Catholic self-sufficiency (not abandoning one’s faith to get ahead in American society),¹⁸ and religious responsibility (duty of care to the Church and next generation of Catholics). Through his protagonist, Roddan demonstrates to the

¹⁸ This has been described as carving out a “Catholic niche” by Sullivan, who argues that many Irish-American authors “showed that good men achieved this upward mobility within a Catholic economic niche, as owners or partners of their own establishments, without integrating into the mainstream economy” (*The Shamrock* 219–20). For Sullivan’s full discussion on economic success for male and female characters in nineteenth-century Irish-American literature, see *The Shamrock* (219–46).

implied boy reader that his Catholic faith is an essential tool for achieving success, and that his duty lies in preserving and protecting it in himself and others.

While Roddan's novel is staunchly pro-Catholic, it is also virulently anti-Protestant, thus further distinguishing from its American counterpart, which was written with an implied Protestant boy reader in mind (Hilkey 1; Cohoon *Serialized* 1). This hostility, discussed below, can be interpreted as both a reaction against the "exceptionally strong anti-Catholic and anti-Irish tradition" in Massachusetts during the 1850s (Hidetake 146), and as an attempt to consolidate Catholic influence in the US by galvanising the next generation of Irish Catholic men.

To convince his reader of the dangerous threat Protestants pose, and to help him protect his faith, Roddan describes historical events in which Protestants inflicted violence on Catholics. Because the implied reader is a child with no living memory of the events described, Roddan is well-positioned to shape their understanding of the past in ways that serve his ideological aims. As Hintz and Tribunella argue, "while historical fiction might be thought useful for teaching children about history, it might also rely on historical ignorance for its success" (286). Roddan thus depends on his implied child reader's limited historical experience to construct and legitimise his particular version of the past.¹⁹

¹⁹ Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to do so, it is possible to read Roddan's text and other examples of Irish-American children's literature as historical fiction. Irish-American authors often insist that the period in which their texts are set (usually thirty years in the past) was significantly different to the present—a primary function of historical fiction. However, there is no universal definition for historical fiction, thus complicating this argument. For example, Hintz and Tribunella argue that historical fiction must take place "much earlier" than the period of its composition: "[s]imply being set before the life of the reader does not qualify a work as a historical novel" (272). Conversely, Suzanne Rahn argues that placing time limits on historical fiction is futile, especially in the case of children's literature: "such parameters seem as artificial as an Elizabethan prescription for the unities, particularly when one turns to historical fiction for children" ("An Evolving Past" 2). Rahn argues that to limit when historical fiction can be set in order for it to qualify as legitimate would exclude a host of children's texts about such major historical events as World War 2, which are clearly intended to educate children about a particular period in history, even if that period occurred less than two generations ago. To this end, Rahn would likely agree that many examples of Irish-American children's literature, including Roddan's novel, could be read as historical fiction.

Roddan draws the reader's attention to the historical setting of his text on a few occasions, suggesting that the time in question was vastly different to the present day: "[a]t the time I speak of, in the year 1829, there were not many Catholic children in Boston . . . they scarcely filled the space between the front pews and the sanctuary railings" (95). Although his depictions of the past align with historical fact,²⁰ Roddan's intention is not to present an impartial account; rather, he seeks to repel the reader against Protestantism and teach him to regard Protestant company with suspicion. To achieve this, he recalls historical events such as the burning of the Ursuline Convent in Charleston by an anti-Catholic Know Nothing mob, which took place in Massachusetts in 1834, in vivid, emotionally-charged language:

I remember that one man . . . told the story in great glee. He was very eloquent about the destruction of the ornaments of the altar, and especially about the desecration of the crucifix of our little Jesus, as he called it. Yes, they took your little Jesus, and smashed his head against the wall. And then someone sung out, like an auctioneer, How much for the little idol?
Going, going, gone! And he tossed your little Jesus into the fire! (196)

By emphasising the gleeful mockery of the convent burning, Roddan heightens the emotional impact of the incident to encourage the implied child reader to associate Protestantism with cruelty.

However, Roddan's emotional account of this event omits the significant efforts of Protestant groups who overwhelmingly condemned the convent burning and sought to support the Catholic community. As Morgan observes, many prominent Protestants were appalled by the attack and advocated compensation for the Church. For example, "George Ticknor Curtis, brother of supreme court justice

²⁰ In 1800, the number of Catholics in Boston "hovered somewhere between 700 and 1000. By 1820, the number was estimated at over 2,000, and in 1825 at about 5,000" (Sanders 9). However, by 1850, this number reached between 35,000 and 50,000 (Handlin 55–6).

James R. Curtis, was an especially outspoken advocate for indemnification in the Ursuline case, and it cost him politically” (99). By ignoring the evidently many acts of Protestant solidarity, Roddan crafts a selective historical narrative that reinforces his ideological purpose: Protestants are depicted as uniformly hostile and Catholics as uniformly victimised so as to encourage the implied young reader to distrust Protestants.

To further dissuade his implied reader from trusting Protestants, Roddan repeatedly demonstrates the supposedly deceptive conversion tactics of Protestants to convert the vulnerable Irish Catholic boy. Recalling his old Protestant schoolmaster, Deacon Mills, John O’Brien claims that “[h]e did not attack openly. O, no! If he had shown his colours, he would have been less dangerous Now, it was one of his maxims, that more flies are caught with honey than with vinegar. So he never said anything against the church, or against her children.” (59–60). John also condemns a member of a Protestant society that claims to support young Catholic children: “this man is full of zeal for the perversion of Catholic youth He makes his company, and his chapel, very pleasant to children. He never mentions the Church, for good or for evil. He makes them *forget* it. He labors assiduously in directing the tastes of the children in a way that would make them shrink from any contact with Irish people” (259).

Although portrayed in highly emotional terms, Roddan’s portrayal of Protestant conversion tactics is not unfounded, and concerted efforts to convert Catholic immigrants were widespread across the East Coast at this time. For example, Diana Loercher Pazicky notes that, “[i]n Philadelphia, fifteen new private charities, four of them for children, were established between 1840 and 1854, and most of them were under the auspices of reform-minded, evangelical Protestants anxious to convert Irish Catholic immigrants and save them from intemperance as

well as poverty” (145). Moreover, as the following section of this chapter demonstrates, American children’s literature often promoted the conversion of Irish Catholics in the mid-nineteenth century—particularly Sunday School literature. In this context, Roddan’s text can be understood as a warning against the dangers of conversion to his implied reader, and also a counternarrative to American portrayals of the Irish Catholic child.

The representation of the Irish immigrant child in American children’s literature has already been touched upon in this chapter. Although some texts depict Irish children without mention of Catholicism or conversion, such examples are comparatively rare. American children’s literature that featured Irish characters, particularly that written for Sunday School societies, very often “dwelt” on the issue of Irish Catholic conversion (Avery 106).²¹ Indeed, in an historical account of the American Sunday-School Movement, Edwin Wilbur Rice states that juvenile literature “forcibly brought to the attention of the American people the religious instruction which should be given to the young immigrants pouring into America from every nation of the world” (135).²² Situating this literature and Irish-American children’s literature in the same context reveals starkly different representations of

²¹ Secular children’s literature also featured the religious conversion of Irish Catholic characters. For example, Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) features the conversion of a young Irish boy to Protestantism on his deathbed (24). *The Wide, Wide World* was a hugely significant text that critics have argued sparked the creation of a distinct girls’ literature in the mid-nineteenth century. See Chapter Two.

²² While Rice refers to immigrants generally, evidence suggests that Irish immigrant characters were more negatively portrayed in Sunday School literature than their European counterparts due to their Catholic faith. For example, *Carl, the Young Emigrant: A Memoir of Schools and Schoolmasters* by James Waddell Alexander (1851) tells the story of a young German boy assimilating among his American classmates. As a Protestant, Carl is not the subject of conversion, and his German heritage is admired: “[t]here is something very pleasing in the power of Christian hymns over the German mind. The Protestant emigrants, who come by thousands to New York and New Orleans are seldom without their pocket-hymn books Those who visit German Christians in humble life should learn their tunes” (66). In this instance, a shared faith enables positive cultural exchange.

the Irish Catholic child figure, and adds a new dimension to novels such as Roddan's.²³

Portrayals of young Irish Catholic immigrants in Sunday School literature are strikingly uniform, typically depicting them as helpless, ragged, and ignorant children born to negligent, often alcoholic parents. For example, *Boys At Sandover; or, Life In a Public Institution* (no author c.1868), tells the story of two Irish brothers, Terence and Jimmy Malone, whose "clothing was scanty and poor" (7) and whose father "was a drinking man, and a brute when he was in liquor" (6–7). The boys are saved by kindly Protestants and enrolled in the kind of institution Roddan warns his readers about: "[t]heir entrance upon the kind of life at this institution was as much the birth of a new world of observation and feeling" (13). At Sandover, the Irish boys are civilised and "the seeds of a noble life [are] made to germinate under the gentle ministration of Christian love" (264). In other words, they are saved from their Catholicism and given a chance to prosper in Protestant American society.

A notable aspect of Sunday School literature is that it often reflects openly on the process of converting Irish Catholic children, instructing readers that such conversion must be approached with careful strategy, rather than overt confrontation. For example, in *The Shamrock Flower; An Irish Girl in America* (c.1853), the author declares, "[o]h, what a solemn responsibility is upon us in regard to these poor exiles One harsh word, one unjust act, may drive them away from the truth, while gentleness and love may win their souls to Christ" (30). In *The Transplanted Shamrock; or, The Way To Win an Irish Heart* (c.1860), a similarly gentle approach

²³ Irish Catholic immigrants are not the only subjects of conversion in Sunday School literature. For example, in *The Choctaw Girl* by B. George Ulizio (1835), a young Native American girl is converted to Christianity by missionaries after her tribe "move[s] to another part of the country" (3) from Mississippi in 1831. The author states that "this afflicted child was glad to hear of the Savior, and did not, like some children, refuse to become his disciple" (6). The text is notable for its early reference to the Trail of Tears, the ethnic cleansing and forced displacement of Native American tribes from their ancestral homes, which commenced in 1831.

is modelled: “[c]ould ridicule, or scorn, or censure have won this simple-hearted child thus to Jesus? Oh, no; it would have closed her ear and barred her heart against him, and been, perhaps, her ruin” (138).

In Lucy Ellen Guernsey’s *Irish Amy* (1854), about a young Irish girl adopted by a kindly Protestant family, the author implores her young reader to “think whether they cannot make room and find work for a little boy or girl out of the city, and train them up to be happy and useful, instead of becoming miserable vagabonds, useless to the world, and breeding a moral and physical pestilence wherever numbers of them are brought together” (312). Finally, in *The O’Brian Family; or, Fruits of Bible Reading* (1855), a character declares: “[p]ray don’t join in the outcry against the Irish, for I am well convinced that if they were treated with kindness and consideration, instead of being regarded as the off-scouring of the earth, we should soon find them to be as intelligent and as trustworthy as any other people” (6).²⁴

By comparison, Roddan’s text (and Irish-American children’s literature generally), presents a strikingly different portrayal of the Irish Catholic child figure. This is particularly evident when John O’Brien attends a choir concert in Boston on St. Patrick’s Day, performed by five hundred Catholic girls whom he observes are “dressed with extreme neatness” (97) and sing with such extraordinary gift that “those philanthropic Protestants who *do* love to talk to charitable old male and female women about Irish dirt and misery . . . will not believe his eyes, which tell

²⁴ By contrast, Irish Protestant characters are depicted in a respectful manner in other Sunday School texts. For example, in a text entitled *The Emigrant Boy; Substantially A Narrative of Facts* (1850), a young Irish immigrant, Willie Richardson, endures hardship in the US on account of being a lowly Irish orphan, but his fear of God enables him to persevere in a Protestant society. Another example is *Lyntonville; or, The Irish Boy in Canada* (1867), in which Irish boy, Philip Quin, is upheld as an example of Christian devoutness. In “The Lost Irish Boy”, a story in a collection entitled *Grandma Merritt’s Stories* (1868), a young orphan boy is taken in by a kindly American family who feed and wash him. Little Johnny, who is from Derry, “fulfilled the scriptures” and lived “the true life of a Christian” (47). For this reason, he is considered an exception to the author’s low opinion of Irish people: “Well, that’s the first handy creature I ever saw come out of Ireland” (32).

him that Celtic blood is running in all those young veins” (97). Such a group of children would be “a curiosity in any city, not even excepting Rome” (97), according to John, suggesting that it is their Irishness, as well as their Catholicism, that distinguishes them. Such a portrayal of the Irish Catholic immigrant child figure is unrecognisable from that in American Sunday School literature. Thus incorporated into the category of American children’s literature, Roddan’s text disrupts dominant representations of Irish Catholic immigrant children, and provides a vastly different alternative.

As demonstrated, Roddan’s text shares many previously unidentified similarities with other antebellum boys’ literature in how it sought to guide the implied boy reader towards success in adulthood, and promoted particular “masculine” values regarding social responsibility and moral character. In doing so, Roddan’s text also provides an alternative portrayal of the Irish Catholic child than could otherwise be found in American children’s literature, particularly Sunday School texts. Still other important modes of interpretation reveal themselves when *John O’Brien* is analysed through the lens of children’s literature. For example, unlike the antebellum texts Parille and Cohoon analyse, there are traces of the “bad boy” book in *John O’Brien*. Considering this literature would not emerge as a fully-fledged category for almost another two decades in the US, Roddan’s early iteration of it is significant. The fact that Roddan centres the concerns of the Irish Catholic immigrant boy complexifies his portrayal of a “bad boy” character, and complicates critical narratives about the development of this literature, as demonstrated in the next section.

John O'Brien, Irish-American bad boy

In an 1870 review of Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *The Story Of A Bad Boy* in *The Atlantic*, William Dean Howells declares the text, which is a fictional autobiography of boyhood, an "absolute novelty, on the whole." Howells further claims that, prior to now, "[no] one else seems to have thought of telling the story of a boy's life, with so great desire to show what a boy's life is, and so little purpose of teaching what it should be; certainly no one else has thought of doing this for the life of an American boy" ("The Story"). As previously discussed, Aldrich's text has been identified by critics as a pivotal moment in the evolution of American boys' literature, which ushered in the category commonly referred to as the "bad boy" book. In *Being A Boy Again*, a study on postbellum "bad boy" literature, Marcia Jacobson argues that "all future boy book writers owed a debt" to Aldrich's text, which "evolved a genre that allowed for a reevaluation of boyhood" (43).

However, while Aldrich's use of fictional autobiography to tell the story of an average American boy's life is, indeed, significant—especially considering the influence it would have on later writers, including Mark Twain—it is important to note that Roddan did similarly for the Irish Catholic immigrant boy twenty years prior.²⁵ What is more, Roddan received similar to praise to that which Howells pays Aldrich for his "true" and "authentic" portrayal of boy life in the US. As a review in the *Boston Pilot* from 1850 states,

John O'Brien is no creation of the poet's brain; he is a real character, with flesh and bones, whom we may meet and converse with in our city any day of the week. He is not a moulded character; he has grave faults The purpose of the author has not been to exhibit a perfect character, but to give a

²⁵ In his doctoral thesis, Brian McManus argues that Herminie Templeton Kavanagh's Darby O'Gill character can also be read in the context of the postbellum "bad boy" due to the similarities with the "roguish hero" figure Kavanagh promotes (50–1).

true picture of the poor Catholic orphan boys, or virtually orphan boys, so numerous in our city. (“Book Notices”)

Indeed, there are many similarities between *John O’Brien* and the canonical postbellum “bad boy” books, and John O’Brien’s “bad” credentials are emphasised throughout the text. For example, in the text’s opening scene, he describes how he would “coax and tease” his mother to get his own way (3), and later describes how he loses his lodgings due to “mischievous pranks”: “I tormented [the cook] with my tricks; and I was very saucy withal” (102). By his own admission, John is not an “infant phenomenon in the way of sanctity” (114), has a “humor for mischief” (85), is prone to “deviltry” (92) and is “of average character” (128). What is more, he literally refers to himself as a bad boy throughout the text: “I have been a bad boy” (39); “I was such a bad boy” (146).

Further aligning John O’Brien with his postbellum American counterpart is Roddan’s resistance to present him as a model boy, or a problem to be corrected. Parille notes that mischievous boys were sometimes a feature of antebellum boys’ literature, but that stamping out behavioural problems and the boyish spiritedness of a character was often the focus of authors: “[d]idactic books like *Ralph Rattler; or, The Mischief-Maker* (1853), *The Village Boys; or, How to Teach Boys Not to Quarrel* (1836), and Abbott’s *Rodolphus* (1852) . . . all portray the troublesome nature of boys as a problem to be solved” (108). However, in Roddan’s text, John O’Brien simply outgrows his mischievous behaviour as he grows up. He is not forced to quash boyish dreams of freedom and pleasure, nor is he punished for or shamed out of his boyish nature; he simply matures, or becomes “sensible” as his future wife, Mary, puts it, holding down a job, advancing steadily in it, and eventually being able to support a family (263). In this way, Roddan’s antebellum boys’ text can be appreciated as doing something quite novel.

John O'Brien further resembles the postbellum “bad boy” book because it is a fictional autobiography, meaning “it imitates the conventions of an autobiography” (Vandevoorde 603).²⁶ Indeed, according to Jacobson, what distinguishes the “bad boy” book from the “story for boys” is that the “bad boy” book is “essentially autobiographical” (20): “[w]e expect a degree of imaginative license appropriate to fiction; we also expect the boy book to honor what Philippe Lejeune has called ‘the autobiographical pact’—the promise that what we will be reading is an account of the life of the author, a promise we apprehend, ideally, without recourse to the world outside the printed text” (17).²⁷ By comparison, the “story for boys” has “clear didactic aims” and “require[s] the author to treat childhood recollections as mere background to his moralistic concerns” (Jacobson 18). *Willy Burke*, as I shall demonstrate, can be interpreted as a “story for boys,” but *John O'Brien* more squarely fits the category of “bad boy” book.

The extent to which Roddan’s personal experience informs his fictional autobiography of John O’Brien is impossible to ascertain, but as Fanning reasons, “[l]ike John O’Brien, the hero of his only novel, Father Roddan was eight or nine when his father died, and he experienced great poverty as an Irish boy in Boston. It is fair to assume that *John O'Brien* contains many autobiographical elements” (*The Exiles of Erin* 97). Indeed, in his preface, Roddan explicitly informs the reader about the referential status of his narrated story, claiming to have “exaggerated nothing” in his account of a young orphan’s childhood in Boston. Moreover, the text is a “tale of real life,” as the subheading states,²⁸ and Roddan insists that “the incidents set forth

²⁶ For further discussion on the history and function of the fictional autobiography, see Genette (1991) Gibbons (2022); Pennington (2018).

²⁷ Jacobson is referring here to the French academic, Philippe Lejeune, who termed the coin “autobiographical pact”—a literary concept that posits a contract between the author and reader in the genre of autobiography. See Lejeune (1975); Missinne (2019).

²⁸ It is worth noting that, in the nineteenth century, fictional prefaces in which authors performatively defended the facticity of their work were a popular trend intended to lend aesthetic irony to novels. Often, they functioned to distance the real author from their own authorship and hide the fictionality of their work. See Genette (1997).

in this book are for the most part real; and I have embodied in the life of John O'Brien things which have happened to twenty persons I could name. There are individuals in and around Boston who, if they read this story, will say that in some passages I have told their histories" (vi).

Arguably, Roddan's motivation to write in the form of a fictional autobiography stemmed from the same source as that of his successors, who looked to their own pasts to confront the present. According to Jacobson, "a particular crisis of male adulthood is the motive and the shaping force behind each of the boy books," and "[t]he mixture of attitudes that the boy book comfortably encompasses makes the retreat to boyhood a retreat from and a critique of present difficulties" (24). In a post-Civil War context, these difficulties included a new economic situation that was "particularly hard on boys, whose adult lives would differ more from those of their fathers than girls' lives would from those of their mothers" (Jacobson 9). However, where American writers sought to retrieve "something lost" in writing about boyhood at a time now past (Cohoon *Serialized* xix), or to "recall the prewar bliss of their own agrarian childhoods" (Griswold *Audacious Kids* 24), Roddan was future-oriented: the present-day crisis of male adulthood he sought to address was arguably related to his concerns for the future of the Catholic Church in the US and the role of young Irish immigrant men in securing it.

Jacobson argues that the individual life experiences of canonical "bad boy" authors played a decisive role in drawing them to the medium of fictional autobiography, and contends that examining the personal histories of these authors "should make it possible to identify the concerns of the adult that most likely prompted his reengagement with his childhood and that, in turn, shaped the book he wrote" (25). Jacobson's research is distinctive in its psychological analysis of authorship and its focus on post-Civil War writers' retrospective engagements with

boyhood, and her autobiographical paradigm offers a valuable and innovative framework through which to consider Roddan's *John O'Brien*. According to Jacobson, moments of personal crisis or transition, such as the prospect of parenthood, the death of a child, or the illness or death of a parent, often prompted "bad boy" authors to return to representations of their own childhoods in fictional form.

Although relatively little biographical information survives about Roddan, the available evidence nevertheless situates *John O'Brien* plausibly within this autobiographical framework. As discussed, Roddan himself experienced orphanhood in Boston, and his response to Brownson's call for a narrative centred on precisely such an experience makes the choice of fictional autobiography particularly apt. Roddan's sustained involvement in the education and moral formation of orphan boys further supports this reading. In the decade prior to the publication of *John O'Brien*, Roddan served as an officer of the Young Catholics Friend Society (YCFS), whose mission the *Boston Pilot* describes as follows: "[t]wenty-four teachers, members of the Society, devote every Sunday to the instruction of an average attendance of three hundred and fifty boys, who are variously classed according to their age and capacity, from the prayer to the higher catechism classes" ("Young Catholics"). Roddan also references the YCFS directly in the novel, noting that the society "laboured so zealously for the Catholic boys of Boston" (245). While Roddan does not specify a single real-life model for John O'Brien in his preface, his sustained interaction with boys through the YCFS provides a concrete social context for the novel's concerns, and may account for the immediacy and intensity with which Irish Catholic boyhood is depicted.

This sense of personal urgency aligns with what Jacobson identifies as a defining feature of the "bad boy" book, which she argues "informed the genre as it

originally developed” (21). Moreover, *John O’Brien* exhibits what Jacobson terms a degree of “psychological truth” (154) that distinguishes it from more formulaic narratives of boyhood, such as Sadlier’s *Willy Burke*. As Jacobson explains, the author’s choice of the fictional autobiographical mode ensures that “the protagonist’s story will be presented in such a way as to engage our emotions and imaginations and so speak a deeper truth than a mere transcription of fact” (3). For this reason, “we can better understand what the boy book is if we look to both sides of it—first to the fictional ‘story for boys’ and then to the autobiographical account of childhood” (Jacobson 17).

The medium of fictional autobiography also enabled Roddan to engage in cultural memory work, and intervene in dominant representations of Irish Catholics in the mid-nineteenth-century US. In *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States: Five Versions of the Italian American Experience* (1982), the earliest study on immigrant autobiography in the US, William Boelhower positions immigrant autobiography as a genotype of American autobiography and identifies its distinctive “perspective revolutions” (63). Among these is its function as an act of “self-justification” for the immigrant writer, and its capacity to challenge the implied American reader to “go beyond the stereotypes created by nativist American congressmen, through which the [immigrant] is an object seen from the outside, to a new reading of him as a subject defined from within” (63). Edith Gnanadass et al. observe that the fictional autobiography, since the fourteenth century, “has served the purposes of emerging classes and disadvantaged groups . . . to bring forth their stories and to make them into vehicles for political change (41). Read in this light, *John O’Brien* participates in a broader tradition of immigrant life writing that seeks to challenge externally imposed identities.²⁹

²⁹ As previously mentioned, Roddan was a second-generation immigrant born to Irish parents. While Boelhower includes second-generation autobiographies under his rubric of

The fact that *John O'Brien* is a fictional autobiography of childhood, rather than of adulthood is also significant. According to Kate Douglas, autobiographies of childhood are especially powerful sites of cultural memory, functioning as “products of, and confrontations with, ‘cultural memory’—the collective ways in which the past is remembered, constructed, and made intelligible within culture” (20). Douglas argues that such texts are particularly suited to minority cultural groups, as they can “work to dispel socially constructed myths” and contribute to the process of “instating new cultural memory” (35–6). Moreover, cultural memory is often refused and replaced in multicultural autobiographies of childhood that bring minority histories of childhood into mainstream consciousness: “individuals and cultural groups are constantly offering counter-memories and histories that challenge existing cultural memory, and may, in turn, become part of cultural memory” (23).

Situating *John O'Brien* in the context of American boy's fiction from the same period thus opens up new critical approaches for one of the earliest examples of Irish-American children's literature. In several respects, Roddan's text aligns with the antebellum boys' texts examined by Parille and Cohoon. Like these texts, Roddan promotes a model of masculinity that is grounded in social responsibility and middle-class respectability, albeit via a distinctly Irish Catholic perspective. At the same time, the mischievous nature of his boy protagonist, combined with Roddan's refusal to eradicate or correct this aspect of his nature, sets the text apart from other antebellum literature.

Despite emerging more than twenty years before the hugely influential postbellum “bad boy” book, *John O'Brien* bears striking resemblance to this particular subcategory of American boys' literature, which has dominated critical

“immigrant autobiography,” it is worth pointing out that other critics of immigrant autobiography oppose this view. According to Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, “to say that [first- and second-generation immigrants] manifest an identical steep structure presupposes a rather static concept of culture” (149).

accounts to date. For example, Roddan's preface bears striking resemblance to Twain's in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, which reads: "[m]ost of the adventures recorded in this book really occurred; one or two were experiences of my own, the rest those of boys who were schoolmates of mine. Huck Finn is drawn from life; Tom Sawyer also, but not from an individual—he is a combination of the characteristics of three boys whom I knew." Both texts' endings are also similar. Roddan writes, "[my] story is told. At this time I am speaking of, I was nearly eighteen years of age. A boy thinks that he is a man at age . . . Then I must stop, because the story is told of a boy" (261). Twain writes, "[s]o endeth this chronicle. It being strictly the history of a boy, it must stop here" (221). Thus, reading *John O'Brien* as boys' fiction illuminates important new ways of interpreting the text, and demonstrates Roddan's early contribution to the development of American boys' literature. Similar gains can be made by applying this interpretive framework to Sadlier's *Willy Burke*, which is examined in the following sections of this chapter.

Mary Anne Sadlier and the Irish-American story for boys

While Roddan's *John O'Brien* exhibits characteristics of "bad boy" literature, Mary Anne Sadlier's *Willy Burke*, a sober and moralising work of realist fiction, aligns more with the category Jacobson describes as "story for boys." According to Jacobson, such literature has

clear didactic aims, which limit their appeal to a juvenile audience and require the author to treat childhood recollections as mere background to his moralistic concerns. It is fair to say that these authors take advantage of the credulity of their young readers. The realistic settings command assent, but the gullible reader finds himself in a world inhabited by familiar character

types and governed by the most improbable plot coincidences, which in turn make possible sentimental scenes and moralistic observations. (18)

In simplified terms, the author of “bad boy” literature presents the boy as he supposedly “is” (i.e. playful, mischievous, spirited), whereas the “story for boys” author is concerned with representing the boy as he “ought” to be. In their search for an Irish Catholic boy hero whom young boy readers could take “for their model, the pattern, and seek to imitate” (“The Fifty Dollar Prize”), Brownson and the *Boston Pilot* clearly envisaged a narrative that conforms to Jacobson’s definition of the “story for boys.” Sadlier’s hero, an unfailingly devout and mannerly boy of thirteen who overcomes many trials in his first year as an immigrant in New York, fulfils this mandate effectively.

Being a more conventional story for boys, *Willy Burke* has more frequently been classified as children’s literature than *John O’Brien*, although it has still received limited critical attention. Gallagher’s aforementioned essay remains the sole analysis of the text as children’s literature, although Stephen Butler’s essay considers its influence on young readers. Butler cites a letter published in the “Uncle Jack’s Talks with Boys and Girls” column of the *Sacred Heart Review* (1896), in which a Henry O’Brien of Clinton, Massachusetts, writes that “Mrs. Sadlier’s books are very good. I like ‘Willy Burke’ the best; it is much like real life, though I am afraid few boys are as good as ‘Willy Burke’” (166). These essays are valuable for their framing of *Willy Burke* as a text written for child readers, and thus provide a useful critical foundation for the following analysis.

Overtly didactic in tone, *Willy Burke* fits more squarely within the tradition of antebellum boys’ literature than Roddan’s *John O’Brien*, particularly that written by American women authors. As previously discussed, Parille’s study demonstrates that a “tremendous amount of influential writing about boys was produced by women, a

fact obscured by the critical emphasis on . . . the male-authored sociological material about boys that began to emerge in the 1880s (xxv). Sadlier's *Willy Burke* similarly demonstrates the role of women authors in "commenting on childhood citizenship and intervening in the education of boys" (Cohon "Sigourney and Sedgwick" 15) during this period in the US. For example, in her preface, Sadlier addresses "the young sons of my native land," and urges her "young countrymen" to take Willy Burke for their model so that they may understand that they have "a noble part to play over all the earth, — that of spreading the true faith" (iii).³⁰ This bears striking resemblance to the preface of Lydia Sigourney's *The Boy's Book* (1845), which reads:

[s]ons of my people—this book has been constructed for you, carefully, and with pleasure. May it bear on its pages, a blessing to you, who now, under the discipline of education, will so soon emerge from its tutelage, to take the places of the fathers. Then, may you stand forth . . . cheering and enriching those around,—like the oak, transmitting its honours to a future age." (iv)

Rooted in the didactic tradition popularised in the early nineteenth century by Anglo-Irish writer, Maria Edgeworth, whose books imparted "information through exemplary children," (Murray 55),³¹ *Willy Burke* is overtly concerned with boyhood

³⁰ Although not focused on Sadlier as a children's writer, Marjorie Howes' essay on the function of Sadlier's popular adult fiction is worth noting here, as it similarly draws a comparison between Sadlier and her female American contemporaries: "Sadlier's works participate in and revise some of the didactic traditions of the massively popular sentimental fiction by women that dominated the literary marketplace in the US during this time, culminating in what literary historians have called the 'feminine fifties'" ("Discipline" 147).

³¹ Maria Edgeworth was hugely influential in the US in the mid-nineteenth century. According to MacLeod, "many [American] children read her books with pleasure, apparently absorbing their reasonable messages without objection. It is not surprising, then, that in the second decade of the nineteenth century, when American authors began writing for American children, it was Maria Edgeworth's fiction which furnished the prototype for their work" ("From Rational" 142). Avery also asserts that Edgeworth's "writing for the young was probably more influential in America than in her own country . . . Maria's stories in particular seemed to have been designed for a new, young country . . . and the Edgeworth ideal of alert, independent, socially minded young people, taking an informed interest in the world around them, became the model for American heroes and heroines" (65). Edgeworth's popularity is reflected in the previously mentioned Sunday School text, *The Transplanted Shamrock* (1860), in which a Protestant child remarks to her brother, who is sceptical of the family's

discipline, and reflects Sadlier's interest in promoting literary and pedagogical dialogue about the functions of boys. Like her American counterparts, Sadlier's text imparts "adult ideas about what boys should know" (Cohoon "Sigourney and Sedgwick" 14), and her hero is intended to be a role model for an implied boy reader, who should, as her preface declares, "practise the lesson to be found in these unpretending pages" (iv).

Like Roddan's text, Sadlier repeatedly demonstrates how an implied young Irish Catholic boy reader must overcome prejudice and hostility to protect his faith. Following the death of their mother (their father died on the journey to New York), Willy Burke and his brother, Peter, go to live in a men's boarding house, where they are subjected to taunting and hostility over their faith. Willy and Peter must endure their fellow boarders' bullying for saying their prayers and repeated attempts to emasculate them: "they are actually praying away as if they were two old women; and to the Virgin, I protest!" According to Gallagher, such all-male spaces in children's literature were "typically zones where adventures occur rather than settings of the home or domestic story," in which "threats and temptations representative of the larger world and the vast, new society in which they are placed are deeply felt" (75). For Willy and Peter, these men represent Protestant American society, and are a larger, stronger force against which the boys must assert both their masculinity and Catholic identity.

To guide the boy reader towards the correct behaviour and ideal masculinity, Sadlier compares her protagonist, Willy's actions to those of his older brother, Peter. While Willy is a proud and devout young Catholic, Peter is ashamed of his faith and seeks to distance himself from it. Despite the taunting from his fellow borders, Willy

new Irish domestic servant: "[w]hy, Joe, did you not know that Miss Edgeworth, whose books you like so well, was an Irish lady?" (16). See also an essay by Ó Gallchoir (2006), which demonstrates the influence of Edgeworth on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

remains steadfast towards his faith: “[a] crimson glow overspread Willy’s cheek — it was the glow of indignation — but, making a violent effort to subdue his anger, he resumed the Litany, as though nothing had happened” (122). When Peter insists that they stop praying before they are further ridiculed, Willy argues: “Didn’t you often hear my mother an’ the priest himself say that we ought never to be afraid or ashamed to say our prayers? . . . I wouldn’t care if they were laughin’ at us till tomorrow night. Just let them laugh away” (123).

Feeling “overwhelmed with shame” (124) over his faith, Peter temporarily abandons Catholicism to get ahead, while Willy does not falter: “young as he was, he was fully aware that the gift of faith is indeed a priceless blessing” (37). Although Peter eventually realises his mistake, claiming “the veil fell from my eyes, and now I can see the fearful danger I was in” (270), Sadlier makes clear which character’s example they should follow. By standing his ground, Willy emerges as the ideal Catholic boy, his religious conviction securing his masculinity, rather than threatening it.

Like her American contemporaries, Sadlier demonstrates a keen interest in boys’ education and literacy throughout the text. For example, the discussions of reading in *Willy Burke* attest to the importance given to literacy in the mid-nineteenth century, which was a hugely influential source for a boy’s ideas about masculinity. As Kimmel argues, “boys’ literature found avid young male readers” (95), and “some writers posed masculinist strategies for coming of age as men, offering vicarious accounts of young men being tested and proving themselves” (97).

Aware of the potential influence of literature on the boy, American authors channelled their anxieties and opinions about appropriate reading through their writing. A female writer particularly invested in this was Lydia Sigourney, who worried that “often-endorsed kinds of reading would make a boy want to be too

manly; that is, they would encourage him to emulate an ideal of masculinity that was socially irresponsible and ultimately self-destructive” (81). Sadlier demonstrates similar concern about boys’ reading in *Willy Burke*,³² but while Sigourney was concerned that historical and fictional adventure narratives might encourage the boy reader “to admire the ambition, ‘bold pursuit,’ and industry of male historical figures” (Parille 81), Sadlier’s concerns are tied to Catholicism. Yet again, she compares the behaviour of Willy Burke to his brother Peter to guide the implied reader towards the correct behaviour.

When the local priest, Father Fitzherbert, steps in to guide the Burke brothers’ religious education after they are orphaned, he grants them access to his private library, where they can access “useful” reading material (100–01). However, Peter “had no love for reading” of the kind Father Fitzherbert encourages, and complains to Willy: “if a body had a story-book, or something that way, it wouldn’t be so bad; but no, it’s the Lives of the Saints, and Bible History, an’ such things that Father Fitzherbert gives us . . . it’s only fit to make one dull and down-hearted” (130). Naturally, Willy disagrees with his brother, and explains to him that reading about saints “teaches us how to save our souls, and, besides, how to live in this world” (130). Rather than ghost stories or fairy tales, or such boys’ adventure novels as *The Irish Rogues and Rapparrees* that Peter favours, Willy insists that religious non-fiction is edifying and appropriate reading, and is sorry for Peter’s “wilful rejection” of their library access, which later leads him directly towards the “grievous temptation which he had not strength to resist” (131).

While religious reading reinforces Willy’s faith, Peter’s avoidance of it makes him weak-willed and susceptible to the lure of Protestantism. Thus, Sadlier suggests that the right reading material is crucial for the boy reader in securing his faith, and

³² The theme of reading is particularly prevalent in Sadlier’s second novel, *Alice Riordan* (1851), discussed in Chapter Two.

promotes reading about influential Catholic figures to learn how their lives could be applied to the reader's own. Like her American counterparts, Sadlier evidently believed that "the goal of literacy was to educate boys in the primacy of self-governance and social responsibility" (Parille 89). However, in an Irish-American context, a boy's reading also strengthened his Catholic faith and guided him towards a strong Catholic masculinity shaped by the lessons of the Bible and lives of (presumably male) Catholic saints.

In addition to appropriate reading, a good education is also essential for the preservation of an Irish boy's Catholic faith. Sadlier was deeply interested in boys' education, and recognised it as a specific way in which the boy was entitled and empowered. Sadlier claims that domestic work is not appropriate for boys: "being boys, they could do nothing, it is true, to assist their mother in the house; but the two girls, although only ten and eight respectively, were so docile, and so industrious, that they did much to lighten her labor" (29). For this reason, Willy's sisters are not formally educated, but rather work until they marry, demonstrating Sadlier's gendered expectations of success.³³ By contrast, the Burke boys' education is prioritised by their mother, who understands that a man's success hinges on a good education: "[i]f you had a year or two's more learning, then you'd be better able to work your way through the world" (30).

However, not all education is equal, and Sadlier rejects any education that jeopardises one's Catholicism. For example, when the family's Protestant neighbour, Mrs. Watkins, offers to pay for Willy's schooling, Mrs. Burke is initially overjoyed: "tears of joy streamed from the eyes of the fond mother as she painted in glowing

³³ Formal education is similarly not a priority in either of Sadlier's girls' novels, with *Alice Riordan* (1850) and *Bessie Conway* (1861), further indicating Sadlier's conviction that education was a male pursuit. However, educated young women feature in other Irish-American children's literature, including both *John O'Brien* and John McElgun's *Annie Reilly*. John O'Brien's future wife, Mary, is a school teacher, while McElgun's Annie Reilly is described as being "the best scholar" in her school (83).

language the advantages thus opened to her darling son” (33). However, when it later transpires that one of Willy’s new textbooks is critical of Catholics, Mrs. Burke removes him from his new environment immediately: “[s]ure they thought we were so ignorant that we wouldn’t know nor care anything about religion, but they’ll soon find their mistake; or my name’s not Biddy Burke” (37).

Willy’s education is subsequently presided over by Father Fitzherbert, who arranges for him to attend evening-school after work and gives him access to his personal library (129). With formal education increasingly the norm for middle-class boys and essential for middle-class employment,³⁴ Sadlier demonstrates how the Irish Catholic immigrant boy could also participate in this cultural shift without having to sacrifice his faith.³⁵ Provided he avoided Protestant-led education, the Irish Catholic immigrant boy could receive the education necessary for his advancement in American society, and still ensure his equal standing with his American-born Protestant counterparts.

In these ways, *Willy Burke* can be understood as a variation on a theme: an Irish Catholic version of a narrative established by American women writers for an implied American boy reader. However, it is also more than the equivalent of its American counterpart. While, in his unfailing goodness and innocence, Willy Burke resembles the flat, unrealistic kind of Sunday School character Mark Twain mocked in his story, “The Story Of A Bad Little Boy” (1865), or Jacob Abbott’s *Rollo* series,

³⁴ In 1837, “Massachusetts passed a law . . . that made a certain amount of education compulsory,” a first step which eventually led “to the establishment of public schools in other states” (Cohoon *Serialized* 5). American boys, in particular, were impacted by the establishment of formal education, and “middle-class children had once been educated at home but now increasingly went to school” (Kimmel 36). This new emphasis on formal education also applied to the working classes, and Rotundo’s study discusses the role of youth organisations in educating young men who “lacked a decent education and not a few from the cities who needed to brush up on basic skills required for middle-class work” (68).

³⁵ Sadlier’s emphasis on education also reflects attitudes of the Irish immigrant community in the US at the time. According to Lynch-Brennan “Irish parents became aware of the link between education and success in America,” and recognised that “education was seen as necessary for the Irish to flourish in America (44). Lynch-Brennan further argues that immigrant women were particularly invested in their children’s education, a concern “evident as early as 1846” (156).

which “consistently promotes the virtues of obedience, industry, duty, and order” (Berry 100),³⁶ *Willy Burke* also represents something novel in 1850: an early iteration of the Romantic child in boys’ literature.

In her landmark study, *From Instruction to Delight: An Anthology of Children’s Literature to 1850*, Patricia Demers argues that

[t]he year 1850 is not merely an arbitrary frontier date; it marks the beginning of a period of remarkable artistic productivity. Although most works for children at this time . . . wagged a disapproving finger against idleness and mischief . . . by the mid-nineteenth century their tone was less uniformly repressive and more sympathetically expressive than that of previous children’s books. As the balance began to tip in favour of delight, striking changes occurred in the content. (xvi)

In a similar vein, MacLeod argues that a “shift occurred around 1850” in children’s literature, after which “the children of children’s fiction, rational, sober, and imperfect at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had become innocent, charming, and perfect: the rational child had become the romantic child” (“From Rational” 141). Appearing precisely at the century’s halfway point, *Willy Burke* embodies elements of both the rational and Romantic child, standing one foot in the Edgeworthian didacticism of the first half of the century, and the other in an emerging tradition inspired by Romanticism, as demonstrated in the next section.

³⁶ By contrast, Parille has argued that the *Rollo* texts “are structured around scenes of misbehavior. They feature a willful, lazy, and impatient Rollo constantly disobeying his parents and constantly getting punished for it” (108). See also MacLeod (“From Rational” 143).

Willy Burke as the Irish-American Romantic child

The Romantic child figure has its origins in the celebration of childhood that first developed in the early eighteenth century and was solidified by the mid-nineteenth century.³⁷ The figure was beautiful, innocent, and inherently good; distinctly different from its more rational predecessor from the first half of the century, and created an image of childhood “as remote as it possible to be from the sober rationality of earlier literature” (MacLeod *American Childhood* 155). In American children’s literature, the most renowned Romantic boy figure is the hero of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1885).

Similar to *Willy Burke*, Burnett’s text, which “took the country by storm” upon publication (Jordan 136), is also set in New York, and tells the story of a lowly semi-orphan boy, Cedric Errol, who is later discovered to be an Earl. Exhibiting “American egalitarian attitudes” (Stahl 223), Cedric is the ideal American Romantic child, who “treats his formidable grandfather the Earl of Dorincourt with exactly the same respect as Mr Hobbs [the grocer]” (Townsend 74).³⁸ Although beautiful and innocent, his most Romantic quality is his power to redeem adults. Crucially, Cedric is also distinctly a child, and “[w]hile the text praises Fauntleroy’s manliness, it is

³⁷ It is well-established in children’s literature studies that the emergence of Romanticism and the movement’s view of childhood had a substantial effect on children’s literature in the mid-nineteenth century. See Gubar (2021); Lesnik-Oberstein (2024); Murray (52–4) for more.

³⁸ Burnett’s combining of Romantic thought and democratic values is significant, and reflects a distinctly American interpretation of the Romantic movement. In an American context, Matterson points out the Romantic movement’s support for “the ideals of democracy and republicanism derives from a fundamental belief in human equality, while as an optimistic, utopian, philosophy, romanticism also envisions the perfectibility of the individual and of society through self-realization, progress and reform,” and argues that “Romanticism is crucial to American culture, to the extent that the very creation of the United States has been considered an expression of romantic thought” (190). Avery also points out the distinctly American ideals as represented in the text by comparing it to Victorian English children’s literature: “[t]his concept of children as masters of their own destiny, which was not at all how Victorians in England saw them, naturally appealed to young readers . . . Who would not prefer to read of little Fauntleroy, lapped in luxury and doted on by all, rather than of Charlotte Yonge’s shy, awkward Countess Kate, who has to be beaten . . . to shape her for her new station in life?” (156).

careful to show his boyishness as though to avoid any suggestion that his associations with adults have worn away his innocence” (Cohoon *Serialized* 125).

The exaggerated sweetness, generosity, and charm of young Cedric “achieved the full flowering of romantic childhood in children’s literature” (MacLeod “From Rational” 151), and demonstrated a new way of interpreting the needy or vulnerable child. As Marah Gubar argues, where such authors as Charles Dickens “used the figure of the pitiable child to protest the toll that industrialized capitalism was taking on the bodies and minds of the poor and disenfranchised, many fin de siècle artists . . . represented children as adorable autocrats who wrap everyone they meet around their little fingers” (“Innocence” 107). Of such texts as *Fauntleroy*, Gubar adds, “[f]ar from being harmed by systemic social problems, the child heroes . . . solve them by melting hearts and bringing together members of previously opposed groups” (“Innocence” 107).

Burnett’s Cedric was also intended to represent a new kind of American masculinity, although ultimately his distinctive clothing derailed this. In an essay tracing the evolution of American masculinity via Burnett’s text, Katherine L. Carlson argues that, “Burnett repeatedly describes her character as a sturdy, real-hearted noble boy,” and uses his signature costume, which includes a lace collar and velvet suit, to reflect his secret nobility. However, as the text emerged “in the midst of a shift in sexism” (59), this costume would eventually typecast Fauntleroy “as a sissy and a fop” (41), and he would be reviled for his prissiness and effeminate appearance. This reflects changing attitudes in American society regarding American masculinity, the increased “vilification of maternal influence on male children,” and an emerging view that saw “women as anti-American ‘others’ and implies that American ideals are fundamentally masculine” (Carlson 50).³⁹

³⁹ Sarah Robbins similarly argues that “even as this ideological construction of feminized literature . . . being advanced, an alternative ‘masculine’ model was also beginning to be

Emerging earlier in the century, Sadlier's hero would not have endured the same cultural resistance, for antebellum boys' literature, as discussed, was significantly shaped by respected women writers who "were deeply interested in boys and the many ways in which the culture thought about the education of males" (Parille 102), and whose "domestic literacy narratives were already well established as a literary genre" (Robbins 5). Despite being less sweet, sentimental, and overtly effeminate in its portrayal of a Romantic boy, Sadlier's text nonetheless aligns in many ways with Burnett's, and performs similar cultural work in its depiction of the redemptive Romantic child. Not only does it achieve this much earlier in the century, before the Romantic child had fully emerged in American children's literature, but it does so from an Irish Catholic perspective.

Whereas Cedric's moral goodness enables him to dispel adult cynicism and social corruption, Willy's virtue functions to inspire conversion to Catholicism. Within Sadlier's ideological framework, this outcome is presented as an equivalent form of moral redemption, and is most explicitly articulated in the novel's conversion narratives. For example, on his deathbed, Willy's employer, Mr Weimar, declares: "I want to die a Cat'lic, Willy Burke, an' den per'aps I'll have a chance . . . it was you make me tink first about religion . . . I see you not like oder boys at all, but good very good; and den when I found out you so good Cat'lic . . . I said to my own self, 'I must see what dis religion of his is,' and den God gave me de light to see" (244).⁴⁰

promulgated . . . The gradual triumph of this competing masculinized model played a major part in the suppression of the domestic literacy narrative from 'official' American literary history" (33). By the turn of the century, Kimmel argues that "*manhood* was replaced gradually by the term *masculinity*, which referred to a set of behavioral traits and attitudes that were contrasted now with a new opposite, *femininity*. Masculinity was something that had to be constantly demonstrated . . . lest the man be undone by a perception of being too feminine" (120). For more on the reception of *Fauntleroy*, American masculinity, and gendered clothing, see Wilson (1996).

⁴⁰ According to Christopher Cusack and Lindsay Janssen, deathbed scenes in Irish-American literature are significant, and "function as paradigmatic indices of identity that

Similarly, Dawson, one of the boarders who taunted Willy initially, has a change of heart after spending time in Willy's company: "I am another convert of Willy Burke's making . . . I saw him so pious and so regular in going to church, and yet always so gay and cheerful . . . when I put all together, and compared it with the conduct of all the boys of his age I had seen, I began to think that the religion he professed, and lived up to, must be the right one" (248–9). Dawson tells Willy that he believes "the Catholic religion is the best of all" (231), to which Willy replies with characteristic humility: "there's nothing more delightful to all true Catholics than to see them that's outside the Church comin' in, where they know they'll find a safe shelter" (232). Dawson eventually marries one of Willy's sisters, thus solidifying his conversion and new way of life (279).

While one of the primary functions of Famine-generation Irish-American literature was to "enlighten English and American Protestant characters as to Catholicism's respectability and sophistication" (Eagan "'White,' If 'Not Quite'" 68), *Willy Burke* subverts this trope by positioning a young child as the redeemer of Protestant adults. Rather than relying on instruction or argument to defend his faith against Protestants, Willy's inherent goodness and innocence inspires them to convert to Catholicism. To this end, Willy embodies the essential qualities of the Romantic child, a figure with the capacity to "improve the adult moral character" (Murray 54). Sadlier's text also reverses the typical dynamic of Sunday School literature in this regard, in which the helpless Irish Catholic child was often converted by the benevolent Protestant adult. The text thus serves as an early and innovative example of the Romantic child figure at play in American children's literature.

consolidate diasporic figurations of Irishness" ("Tis Yourself" 1). O'Neill also examines the significance of the deathbed scene (*Famine Irish* 97–8).

Willy Burke's orphan status further aligns him with the Romantic child, as it emphasises his vulnerability and renders his inherent goodness more admirable in light of the hardship he has endured. As one secondary character in the text declares of the Burke brothers, "they are orphans, and have, therefore, a double claim on all Christians" (116), thus explicitly linking orphanhood with virtue. In this respect, Sadlier's orphan is similar to the orphan figure that would be solidified in American children's literature by the late nineteenth century, whose "function is often didactic, facilitating the production of lessons about proper middle-class values, or good citizenship" (Troy et al 32). Although the British Victorian tradition (particularly the work of Charles Dickens) "helped insinuate the orphan into the American imagination" (Loercher Pazicky 156), the trope acquired new meaning in an American context, reflecting such distinctly American ideals as independence, self-sufficiency, and upward mobility. For example, in an essay comparing Charles Dickens' Pip from *Great Expectations* and Mark Twain's Huck from *Huckleberry Finn*, Hana Wirth-Nesher argues that "[o]rphanhood in American literature is a clean slate, self-reliance and often enchanted solitude that veers dangerously close to real loneliness" (261). By contrast, "[w]hile English literature has no shortage of orphans, they are usually on a quest to find a place for themselves in society, rather than arranging for a romantic exit" (Wirth-Nesher 261).⁴¹

This reimagining of the orphan figure by American writers can, as Griswold argues, be traced back to ideas of nation building and identity construction: "[b]efore the Civil War, American writers would celebrate America as the fatherless child: *sui generis*, entirely new, 'emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry,' at the beginning of time, separated from the past and connected only with the future" (*Audacious Kids* 101). According to Griswold, as the US was "always making itself

⁴¹ For an overview on the specific differences between American and British boys' literature in the mid-nineteenth century, see Avery (184–95).

anew” and “had no enduring sense of continuity between generations” (*Audacious Kids* 101), tales about parentless children, who were required to demonstrate resilience, individuality, and independence in order to thrive in society, were highly appealing—so much so that “[t]he American childhood story is almost always the story of an orphan; think of Tom Sawyer, Dorothy Gale, Pollyanna, Toby Tyler, and Tarzan” (*Audacious Kids* 5).

Griswold’s argument resonates with that of Claudia Nelson, who, in a study of the origins of the orphan figure in American children’s literature, contends that “[i]n nineteenth-century America, it does not ‘take a village’ to bring up a child.” Rather, the self-sufficient orphan, who “earns by honest toil all the benefits he receives from his new parents,” comes to embody the values of “sturdy independence and upward mobility that Victorian America persistently valorized” (“The Orphan” 83). In other words, the nineteenth-century fictional American orphan, like the ideal American citizen, reflects the power of the self: they create their own destiny, and, provided they are willing to work hard, will be met with fortune and success. They reflect distinctly American Romantic ideals, which Matterson argues includes “an admiration for the individuated hero who has broken from social restraints” (190). The American orphan tale can thus be interpreted as a celebration of individual prosperity and upward mobility in the mid-nineteenth century, and the orphan figure as a promotion of the enterprising child citizen, rather than a vulnerable waif figure in need of saving.

With their freedom of movement in the public sphere, the typical American orphan is often also male, and “free to fashion his own identity, to create his own destiny, and, in so doing, to realize national myths including that of the American Dream” (Troy et al 40).⁴² Sadlier similarly directs her boy orphan protagonist

⁴² This is not to suggest that female literary orphans did not exist; on the contrary, they were also abundant in American children’s literature, but “have not figured as prominently in

towards independence, but she does so not as an end in itself, but as a means through which Willy can preserve his Catholic faith. Like Roddan's engagement with the American success narrative, Sadlier adapts and reconfigures the orphan trope to instruct her implied boy reader in how to sustain Catholic identity within a hostile social environment.

A key way in which Sadlier preserves Willy's Irish Catholic identity is by preventing his and his siblings' adoption into a new family. When Willy's younger sisters, who are taken in by a Catholic family following the death of their mother, are made offers of adoption by wealthy Protestant women, which would see them being brought up "so that they'd never have to do a hard day's work," Willy protests: "[w]ell, I don't want to have them made ladies of . . . I want them to get their decent trade learnt so that they'll be able to do for themselves; and I'd rather a thousand times see them working hard . . . than to have them sitting up in idleness" (187). His fear of his sisters becoming "rich ladies" is that such a lifestyle would encourage them to "turn up their noses at their best friends" and make them ashamed of being Catholic. Willy would rather "beg the clothes to cover me" (187) than be tempted by a situation, however appealing otherwise, that might put his or his family's Catholicism at risk.

Prevention of adoption on religious grounds adds a distinctive dynamic to the orphan narrative in American children's literature. Typically, as Nelson argues, the social class of the orphan is usually what enables their adoption into a new family, consequently demonstrating that American orphans are not all created equally:

[m]iddle-class Tom may rely on his aunt to fill the void left by his parents' deaths, and [Sara Crewe]'s aristocratic demeanour attracts the attention of the wealthy guardian who has long sought his missing ward, but Huck is a pariah

literary history . . . because they have typically appeared in genres like the domestic novel that were devalued until the last decades of the twentieth century" (144).

to the adults of St. Petersburg until he comes into money, and Anne [of Green Gables] exchanges life as a street waif for a congenial job rather than for adoption.” (“Drying” 53)

Nelson further argues that orphans “whose class or gender or age might make them difficult to integrate into the middle-class home are presented primarily in terms of their relation to work” (“Drying” 54–5). However, for Willy Burke and his siblings, it is religion, rather than class, that ultimately complicates the prospect of their adoption. Adoption into a respectable middle-class American household would likely require the abandonment of Catholic faith. Consequently, Willy and his siblings reject the opportunity.

Sadlier’s embrace of the American ideal of independence as a means for preserving Willy’s Irish Catholic identity is significant because it directly counters dominant narratives of Irish Catholic orphanhood in American children’s literature (particularly Sunday School titles), in which orphaned children like the Burkes could only achieve social mobility through conversion to Protestantism. As Loercher Pazicky observes, in traditional American orphan tales, “one does not find the reality of orphanhood but instead self-serving reassuring middle-class fantasies about inclusion in the family of the republic. Class was a reason for and a means of keeping the insiders in and the outsiders out. The outsiders were Indians, immigrants, Catholics, Negroes—cultural orphans reviled for their differences and used as scapegoats for the poor” (177). By reclaiming the Irish Catholic orphan as independent and capable of self-sufficiency, *Willy Burke*, like Roddan’s *John O’Brien*, offers a counter-narrative that contests these exclusionary models, and thus expands the representation of the orphan figure in American children’s literature in the mid-nineteenth century, and challenging current critical narratives.

Loercher Pazicky further observes that “noticeably absent from the orphan tale . . . are the immigrants who made up such a high proportion of their numbers. Despite the numbers of immigrants pouring into America and the widespread concern over immigration, immigrants are left out of sentimental fiction, just as they were left out of the dominant culture” (173). Stories in which immigrant orphans do feature “covertly [focus] on the middle class by casting those who perform acts of benevolence as instruments of God’s will” (176), and “reflect the complex nature of benevolence during this period in which genuine sympathy and nativist prejudice vie for dominance and achieve an uneasy truce in rationalizations of heavenly reward” (177). Sadlier’s portrayal of an Irish Catholic orphan who is not pitiable or helpless, nor saved by a Protestant family and converted, and who achieves middle-class respectability without having to compromise his Catholic faith, thus makes a distinct and valuable contribution to American children’s literature.

Conclusion

In his cultural study on the evolution of masculinity in the US, Kimmel argues that “[i]n antebellum America, Irish immigrants were especially stamped with a problematic masculinity. Imagined as rough and primitive, uncivilized and uncivilizable, the Irish were ridiculed as a subhuman species, born to inferiority and incapable of being true American men” (23). As demonstrated, American children’s literature from this time (particularly Sunday School literature) reinforced this notion, with Irish Catholic immigrant men often depicted as violent drunkards incapable of providing for their families or contributing to American society. Irish-American boys’ literature, by comparison, provides an alternative literary representation of the Irish Catholic immigrant man as responsible and industrious—

as in *John O'Brien*. Moreover, it seeks to guide an implied boy reader towards such a version of masculinity—as in *Willy Burke*.

Establishing their aims and objectives clearly in their prefaces, both Roddan and Sadlier attempt to inculcate specific religious values in an implied male young reader, and utilise the medium of children's fiction as a vehicle for ideal socialisation that will prepare him for his future role as a leader of the American Catholic community. The overt pedagogical agenda of both authors is unambiguous, both having been prompted by Orestes Brownson's call for a special literature for and about Irish Catholic orphan boys in 1850. In analysing the novels of Roddan and Sadlier as boys' literature, this chapter has arguably brought the true value of their work to light.

Evidently, the texts both diversify the category of American children's literature by centring alternative literary portrayals of the Irish Catholic child figure not previously recognised in criticism, and demonstrate the valuable contributions of Irish immigrant writers to the development of children's literature in the US, which was otherwise overwhelmingly "[d]esigned for a northern middle-class Protestant audience" (Cohoon *Serialized* 1). For example, Roddan's *John O'Brien* can be appreciated as an early iteration of the hugely influential postbellum "bad boy" text, as well a distinctly Catholic version of the American "success story." Meanwhile, Sadlier's *Willy Burke* clearly aligns with much antebellum boys' literature, in that it was written by a female author with a vested interest in the education and future citizenship of boys—in this case, the Irish Catholic immigrant boy. Moreover, *Willy Burke* can be appreciated as a Catholic reimagining of the Romantic child and orphan figure in American boys' literature.

This chapter complicates current critical narratives in the study of American boys' literature, whose understanding of American boyhood overwhelmingly reflects

WASP figures, and is therefore limited. It also challenges criticism within Irish American literary studies, which has arguably underestimated the literary value of Roddan and Sadlier to date. By incorporating *John O'Brien* and *Willy Burke* into the study of American boys' literature, this chapter demonstrates the influential role of Irish American authors in culturally constructing nineteenth-century American boyhood, and shows that this concept is much less stable than previously understood.

Chapter Two

Saintly Girls, Transatlantic Heroines, and White Innocence: The Emergence of Irish-American Girls' Literature

Outside the Immigration Museum on Ellis Island, New York stands a life-size bronze statue of Annie Moore, the seventeen-year-old Irish girl who sailed from Cobh, County Cork in December 1891, and was the first immigrant to be processed at the new federal immigration depot on Ellis Island on January 1st, 1892. Young, single, and unaccompanied by parents or guardians, Miss Moore, whose statue depicts her smartly dressed and holding her hat in the harbour breeze, epitomised the Irish female immigrant, a figure who dominated Irish emigration patterns from the mid-nineteenth century.¹ Sculpted by Jeanne Rynhart and unveiled in 1993 by President Mary Robinson, the statue is one of two of Miss Moore, with the second one based in Cobh. The latter statue depicts her standing with her two younger brothers, but on Ellis Island she stands alone. A statue in both countries arguably reflects the dual identity of Annie Moore as Irish and American. The fact that she stands alone in New York emphasises her significance as a young, unaccompanied, Irish female immigrant—the figure at the heart of this chapter.²

This chapter examines three Irish-American girls' novels, two of which were written by Mary Anne Sadlier: *Alice Riordan, the Blind Man's Daughter: A Tale for the Young* (1851) and *Bessy Conway; or, The Irish Girl in America* (1861). The third

¹ Meagher argues that, "for no other immigrant group was the proportion of single women among the migrants so high" and that, by the turn of the century, "the proportion of single Irish immigrant women was . . . running to about half of all Irish immigrants" (*The Columbia Guide* 174). This trend would continue into the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. According to historian Janet Nolan, "between 1885 and 1920, females outnumbered males among the 1.4 million people leaving Ireland by almost twenty thousand" (49).

² For more on Annie Moore's biography, see Murphy (2018).

novel is *Annie Reilly; or, The Fortunes of an Irish Girl in New York* by John McElgun (1873). The earliest of these texts, *Alice Riordan*, tells the story of a twelve-year-old Irish immigrant making her way as a seamstress in Montréal, Canada, while both *Bessy Conway* and *Annie Reilly* centre on young female immigrants working as domestic servants in Protestant households in New York.

Taking a similar approach to Chapter One, this chapter argues that these texts are most effectively understood when treated as children's literature, and breaks new ground by analysing them as girls' literature specifically. The chapter demonstrates how Sadlier and McElgun adapted the values and ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood to guide the implied immigrant girl reader towards an ideal Irish-American Catholic womanhood.³ The chapter also demonstrates how Sadlier and McElgun modelled their Irish Catholic immigrant girl protagonists after their middle-class, US-born, Protestant counterparts in American girls' literature as a means of elevating their social standing in American society and, in the case of *Bessy Conway*, asserting racial superiority.

Due to their focus on the figure of the Irish Catholic immigrant girl, these texts align with "many, perhaps most" other Famine-era Irish-American novels (O'Neill *Famine Irish* 120), in which "single women become the focus . . . reflecting changing patterns of immigration" (Sullivan *The Shamrock* 195). This is evident in such novels as Charles James Cannon's *Bickerton; or, The Immigrant's Daughter: A Tale* (1855) and Peter McCorry's *The Lost Rosary; or, Our Irish Girls: Their Trials, Temptations and Triumphs* (1870), and non-fiction titles such as *Advice to Irish Girls*

³ The term "Cult of True Womanhood," also referred to as the "Cult of Domesticity," was coined by historian Barbara Welter in a 1966 essay, and will be discussed more fully throughout this chapter.

in America by Sister Mary Frances Cusack (1872), who wrote under the pen name, The Nun of Kenmare.⁴

However, while the Irish girl figure is evidently “very popular” in Famine-era literature (Corporaal et al 3), not all texts in which the figure features can be considered girls’ literature—even though, considering immigration patterns, girls likely made up a significant proportion of their readers.⁵ This is due to a lack of textual evidence that girls were the intended readers of these texts. As Wall explains, “[i]f a story is written *to* children, then it is *for* children, even though it may also be for adults. If a story is not written *to* children, then it does not form part of the genre *writing for children*, even if the author, or publisher, hopes it will appeal to children” (2). As this thesis focuses solely on texts in which a child reader is identified either by the author or the publisher (see Introduction), most examples of Irish-American texts featuring young female protagonists cannot reasonably be considered girls’ literature, and are therefore ineligible for inclusion.

By contrast, the texts analysed in this chapter contain explicit evidence of address to a young reader. For example, Sadlier claims *Bessy Conway* “is simply an attempt to point out to Irish Girls in America . . . the true and never-failing path to success in this world” (xi). McElgun explains in *Annie Reilly* that “[a] great difficulty with which the Irish girl in New York has to contend, is the fanatical bigotry of some of the mushroom employers” who “take advantage of the dependent station of a Catholic girl.” McElgun thus asserts that “it devolves upon every intelligent Irish girl to study thoroughly the truths of her religion, that she may be able to repel the foul

⁴ Two novels by Rosa Mulholland, *A Fair Emigrant* (1896) and *The Return of Mary O'Murrough* (1908) demonstrate that the figure of the young Irish female immigrant had captured the imagination of writers in Ireland, too.

⁵ Not only was the Irish female immigrant ubiquitous in the US at this time, but she was notably young. Miller claims that the proportion of female emigrants in their teens and early twenties rose steadily and between 1861 and 1870, with fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds making up 65% of all female emigrants (*Emigrants and Exiles* 352). For more, see Glasco (1975).

slanders against her creed, as Annie Reilly did” (7–8). Finally, the subheading of *Alice Riordan—A Tale for the Young*—clearly identifies it as a children’s book. It is on this basis that these texts have been selected.

Yet, while *Alice Riordan* unambiguously meets Wall’s definition of “single address”—a text in which a narrator “will address child narratees, overt or covert, straightforwardly, showing no consciousness that adults too might read the work” (35)—*Bessy Conway* and *Annie Reilly* do not. Rather, these texts align more closely with what Wall describes as “dual audience” texts, whose “narrators address child narratees . . . using the same ‘tone of seriousness’ which would be used to address adult narratees, or confidentially sharing the story in a way that allows adult narrator and child narratee a conjunction of interests. Concern for something other than purely children’s interests dominates their stories” (35). Explaining the narratorial differences between these texts according to Wall’s theory is important because the term “girls’ literature” is notoriously unstable, a fact which has likely contributed to the critical neglect of Irish-American girls’ literature to date.

On the surface, the term “girls’ literature” appears self-explanatory, but closer inspection reveals its many complexities. In *The Rise of American Girls’ Literature*, Ashley N. Reese defines the term as “a book written about a girl, for a girl reader, with a targeted audience identified in its name, similar to children’s or young adult literature” (6). While this definition is straightforward and can be applied relatively straightforwardly to the primary texts under examination in this chapter, it also begs the question: who is the girl? As Kristine Moruzi argues in a study on Victorian girls’ periodicals, “[b]ecause girlhood can be, and was, seen as a transitional state between childhood and adulthood, defining the ‘girl’ is both a challenge and a contradiction” (9). Separately, Sarah Bilston argues that there is “a lack of consensus about what the awkward age actually is: is it a period of physical change Is it heightened or

even created by familial and social influences? Is it a concept available only to girls of the middle and upper classes And when does it occur?" (2).⁶

Indeed, determining an age bracket for girlhood is arguably the most challenging aspect of defining girls' literature. For example, in an essay analysing two texts by Rosa Mulholland centred on young female protagonists (incidentally, both are Irish immigrants), Margot Hillel argues that "it is difficult to determine the intended age of earlier children's books Some of the books discussed from the nineteenth century might well have been for a slightly younger audience than that which we might now designate as young adult. On the other hand . . . the boundaries between adult fiction and that for young adults were also blurred" (73–4). The implied audience of Mulholland's novels is not explicitly identified, but as the author's fiction "often included a young woman . . . whose concerns and feelings were thus reflected in the narrative," Hillel reasons that "this appealed to older girls, the likely audience of her books" (74).

Hillel's categorisation predicament is not uncommon in the study of girls' literature. Although critics are broadly in agreement that the term "girlhood" usually refers to girls aged between their mid-teens and mid-twenties, an exact age bracket is not universally accepted. For example, in her landmark essay, "The Cult of True Womanhood," Barbara Welter argues that "[a]dolescence in the nineteenth-century was, for most young women, a relatively brief and stormy period, marked on the one hand by her first menstruation at fourteen or fifteen, and on the other by her marriage at eighteen to twenty" (3). According to Peter Stoneley, in nineteenth-century girls' fiction girlhood "is seen to extend between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four" (6),

⁶ Bilston's use of the term "the awkward age" refers to a phrase from Victorian times to describe the transitional period between childhood and womanhood. The term is also the title of a novel by Henry James (1899).

while Moruzi asserts that “the ideal girl reader” of this period “is likely between 15 and 25” (9).

Thus, because “the category of girl is constantly shifting and cannot be linked to a fixed age” (Harris 2004 185), it is arguably more effective to define nineteenth-century girlhood as a social stage, rather than a particular age, as other critics have demonstrated effectively. For example, MacLeod defines girlhood as “the decisive moment in a girl’s life as that time when she left behind the relatively undifferentiated personality of childhood to take on the required characteristics of an adult woman” (*American Childhoods* 14). In a similar vein, Lynne Vallone argues that girlhood refers to a dangerous time in which the “moral values of childhood are tested”: “[t]he girl’s journey from marriageable to married, maiden to matron, is the focus and fascination of many literary texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (2).⁷

Girlhood, therefore, should be taken as an “elastic term” (Cadwallader and Giffen *Saving the World* 6), encompassing the experiences of both younger children and older adolescents alike. Rather than neatly fitting within a particular age bracket, the girls of girls’ literature are united by the “potentiality, optimism, and expectation for the future that are inscribed upon the signified female figure” (Cadwallader and D’Amico *Reading Transatlantic* 13).⁸ It is with this perspective that the texts in this chapter have been grouped together, despite the fact that Sadlier’s Alice Riordan is more childlike at twelve than McElgun’s Annie Reilly is at sixteen, or Sadlier’s

⁷ Sally Mitchell puts forth a similar argument in her study on girls’ culture in England, claiming that, from the mid-nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century, “girls increasingly occupied a separate culture . . . a great many more girls had some period of transition between ‘child at home’ and the assumption of wholly adult responsibilities” (3).

⁸ See Cadwallader and D’Amico (0–16); Harris (*Future Girl* 185–187); Driscoll (1–12); Blue (3–6) for detailed discussions on the challenges and complexities of defining girlhood in literature and culture. It is worth reiterating in this chapter that the concept of “boyhood” is similarly complex, but there have been fewer attempts to define it in children’s literature studies to date. See Parille (xvii–xix) for an overview of how critics have historically defined boyhood.

Bessy Conway is at an unspecified age. Such grouping expands and complicates current discussions of girlhood in American children's literature by considering representations of the Irish Catholic immigrant girl (as portrayed by Irish-American authors, rather than American authors) for the first time.

A key reason why analysing Sadlier and McElgun's texts as girls' literature is a particularly fruitful endeavour is that they emerged at a significant point in history when the figure of the girl had captured the imagination of the US. At this time, Welter argues that a "girl fetish" had taken over the country: "[t]he girl was exalted as the symbol of the nation while the American matron sat on the shelf and the American male built his bridges and his empires" (*Dimity Convictions* 3). Welter further argues that this "girl worship" was partly rooted in the US' love of youth and the child-centred home, but also reflected "prevailing cultural configurations of nineteenth-century American society" (*Dimity Convictions* 3). Women inhabited what Welter famously called the "Cult of True Womanhood," a term that describes the nineteenth-century cultural schema of separate spheres for men and women, whose attributes "could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (*Dimity Convictions* 21).

Arising in the aftermath of the American Revolution, in which Great British North American colonists won independence against Great Britain, the Cult of True Womanhood played a crucial role in defining women's roles in the newly formed US as mother, wife, homemaker, and caretaker. In a foundational account on the rise of domesticity in the US, Glenna Matthews argues that after the Revolution, "[m]any people believed that the new nation would require the support of a uniquely public-spirited citizenry. If citizens must learn to place a high value on the public interest, this was a lesson they would need to begin in childhood." (6–7). Thus, as Welter

argues, “[t]he role of dutiful daughter was clearly defined and urged upon the American girl from her earliest years” (*Dimity Convictions* 4).

In her youth and innocence, the girl both resembled the US at an early stage in its formation and was critical to securing its future success as a nation. American girls were the country’s future women, and an effective way of reaching and socialising them was through a specialised girls’ literature. Indeed, “many memorable young female characters were created at this time,” and “North American writers were particularly good at creating books with dynamic and engaging girl characters” (Reynolds *Children’s Literature* 18).⁹ Titles such as Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), *The Lamplighter* by Maria S. Cummins (1854), and *Elsie Dinsmore* by Martha Finley (1867) were instrumental in developing this new category of American girls’ literature, and paved the way for such writers as Kate Douglas Wiggin and Louisa May Alcott, whose enduringly popular *Little Women* (1868) is arguably the quintessential American girls’ novel.¹⁰ Emerging alongside significant advancements in printing technologies, which spurred what historians refer to as the “reading revolution,”¹¹ this new girls’ literature was hugely influential, and marked a significant moment in the development of American children’s literature.

⁹ Similarly, Cadwallader and Giffen point out that, “[o]ne need only make a cursory overview of nineteenth-century literature to recognize that it is teeming with girls. In fact, this literature is overwhelmingly engaged with girl readers, girl writers, and, of course, girl protagonists” (1).

¹⁰ According to Reese, *Little Women* sold its entire first printing of 2,000 copies in only two weeks, and since then has sold approximately 10 million copies, not counting abridged or pirated versions (27).

¹¹ Barbara Hochman describes this phenomenon thus: “[h]istorians coined the phrase ‘reading revolution’ to posit a transformation of reading habits in both Europe and the United States early in the nineteenth century when a significant ‘print culture’ came into being with the help of new technology that facilitated paper-making, printing, distribution, and marketing” (7). According to Jennifer Phegley, “2,500 magazines were issued between 1850 and 1865” in the US, and the reading of them was “characterized as [a] primarily feminine [pursuit]” (2). For more on the nineteenth-century reading revolution, see Cohoon (*Serialized* xv-xvii).

Beginning with an analysis of Sadlier's *Alice Riordan*, and following with analyses of *Bessy Conway* and McElgun's *Annie Reilly* thereafter, this chapter demonstrates the ways in which Irish American authors interacted with the values and ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood, adapting them to align with Irish Catholic values. Just as the American Protestant girl represented the future of the US, the Irish immigrant girl represented the future of the Irish Catholic community in the US, with Sadlier and McElgun utilising girls' fiction as a way of defining and refining idealised constructions of Irish-American Catholic girlhood. As this chapter demonstrates, both authors depict the ideal Irish immigrant girl as religious, intelligent, industrious, and exhibiting a careful balance of Irish traditional values and modern American ones. Their model of girlhood is created within popular tropes of marriage and domesticity, mirroring their American counterparts, yet crucially reflect a view of Irish Catholic femininity defined by expectations about work, duty to family and God, and service to the community.

Alice Riordan and the ideal Irish Catholic domesticity

Appearing initially in the *Boston Pilot* on a weekly basis between July and September 1851 (a year after the publication of *Willy Burke*), and published thereafter by the Boston-based publisher, Patrick Donahoe, *Alice Riordan* likely represents the earliest of Famine-era Irish immigrant literature to centre on a young female protagonist. As with *Willy Burke*, the novel was written while Sadlier was living in Canada, where she first immigrated to,¹² and was warmly recommended in the *Boston Pilot* for young readers upon publication: "[t]his very interesting little story is well adopted for young persons, who may be placed by unavoidable

¹² Sadlier emigrated from her hometown of Cootehill, County Cavan, in 1844. She settled in Montréal, where she married the publisher, James Sadlier. Fourteen years later, the couple and their family moved to New York. For a comprehensive overview of Sadlier's biography, see Fanning, *The Irish Voice* (114–54).

circumstances in the employment, or in the society, of apathetic, or irreligious persons, or under the control of persons of a different religion” (“Barney McGinnisken”). The text is also the least analysed of Sadlier’s eight Irish-American novels, and does not feature at all in Fanning’s *The Irish Voice*.¹³ Recovering Sadlier’s novel and demonstrating its literary merit as girls’ literature is therefore a key function of this chapter. In particular, my analysis of the text demonstrates how Sadlier drew on such gendered themes as domesticity and homemaking to promote an ideal Irish American Catholic womanhood for an implied girl reader.

That *Alice Riordan* was both written and set in Montréal, yet is included in this thesis, warrants some clarification. While the definition for Irish-American children’s literature set out in the Introduction includes texts from North America, this text is the only one set in Canada, rather than the US. While its Canadian setting might appear to place it outside the scope of an Irish-American literary study, and instead into the study of Irish-Canadian children’s literature, its publication history and intended readership complicate this. First published in the *Boston Pilot* and subsequently by Patrick Donohue in the US, the text was clearly produced for, and circulated among, an American readership.¹⁴ As such, it participated in the same American print culture as Sadlier’s other works examined in this thesis.

Moreover, although the text is set in Canada, Sadlier’s depiction of Montréal is notably generic and does not suggest that the immigrant experience there differed in any substantive way from that of Irish Catholics in the US in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, Sadlier refers to Canada as “America” within the text (210; 276),

¹³ While this is possibly due to the fact that the text is set in Canada, it is worth noting that another of Sadlier’s novels, *Elinor Preston; or, Scenes at Home and Abroad* (1861), which is also set in Canada (and more vividly so), features in Fanning’s study, although it and *Alice Riordan* are excluded from O’Neill’s list of Sadlier’s Irish-American novels (*Famine Irish* 103).

¹⁴ For an overview of the history of Irish-Canadian literature dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, which, notably, does not include Sadlier, see Urschel (2010). For an account of contemporary Irish-Canadian children’s literature, see Ó Gallchoir (2013).

indicating that she interpreted the Irish immigrant experience across North America as broadly comparable. Her emphasis in *Alice Riordan*, as in *Willy Burke* and *Bessy Conway*, is more on the shared challenges faced by young Irish Catholics in “the countries of the New World” (*Alice Riordan* 6).¹⁵

Although *Alice Riordan* is not explicitly identified as girls’ literature (rather, it is written for “the young”), I analyse it as such on the basis that it was more likely written to guide and instruct an implied girl reader, rather than a general child. Textual evidence supports this reading. For example, Alice’s father refuses to let her drink punch on the basis that it isn’t “a seemly thing for a female” (14). Alice’s reaction to a painting of a woman with bare shoulders similarly indicates that there is a special code of behaviour for girls to follow, this time concerning dress: “Here’s one, father, of a most beautiful lady with flowers on her head . . . but then I think her neck is too much stripped for she hasn’t a stitch on her shoulders at all” (17).

More broadly, the text fixates on perils of the New World that threaten the girl specifically. For example, while reading for pleasure is frowned upon in *Willy Burke*, as demonstrated in Chapter One, in *Alice Riordan*, it diminishes a girl’s modesty and hurts her future prospects as a respectable wife, as I shall demonstrate. It is a distinctly gendered threat that positions Alice not as a general child, but specifically a girl subject to particular social expectations and constraints. Read in this light, *Alice Riordan* arguably functions as a work of girls’ literature concerned with the

¹⁵ As a recent essay by Jason King points out, trauma possibly inhibited Sadlier from writing about Montréal with more specificity at the time *Alice Riordan* was published: “Sadlier’s apprehensions about Protestant encroachment became so pronounced in 1850s Montréal that they inhibited her memory of the Famine migration as a source of literary inspiration for decades to come” (51). Indeed, Sadlier’s other novel set in Montréal, *Elinor Preston; or, Scenes at Home and Abroad* (1861), which was published ten years later, contains a much stronger sense of location, with Sadlier describing Montréal as “the chosen city of Mary” (220). For a valuable insight into the experiences of Irish Catholic immigrant women in Montréal in the nineteenth century, see Cross (1997). For an example of a novel by an Irish immigrant children’s writer in which Canada is explicitly compared to and portrayed as being distinctly different from the US, see *Cedar Creek: From the Shanty to the Settlement: A Tale of Canadian Life* by Elizabeth Hely Walshe (1863).

regulation and refinement of female behaviour within an Irish Catholic immigrant context.

As the earliest example of Irish-American girls' literature, *Alice Riordan* holds particular significance for its early and relatively rare depiction of Irish-American Catholic domesticity. Indeed, it would be another three decades before a distinct Catholic domestic ideology would be properly developed and promoted in the US. This is because, as Colleen McDannell argues in *The Christian Home in Victorian America*, prior to 1880, most impoverished Irish Catholic immigrants "could not afford to purchase and decorate a house in order to express their family's character" (58). What is more, foundational Catholic guides that promoted the tenets of True Catholic Womanhood, such as the influential *Mission and Duties of Young Women* translated by Charles Ignatius White (1858) and the popular Catholic family magazine, *Ave Maria*, in 1865, appeared after the publication of *Alice Riordan*.¹⁶ Thus, Sadlier's first girls' novel was not only a pioneering work of Irish-American girls' literature, but also a formative contribution to the development of Catholic domestic ideals in the US.

Drawing on the tenets of the Cult of True Womanhood, Sadlier demonstrates how the implied girl reader can become an ideal Irish Catholic woman in her adopted North American home through the domestic home she creates for herself and her family. Throughout the text, as I shall demonstrate, Sadlier repeatedly uses the domestic space and material objects to convey powerful ideological constructs of

¹⁶ An essay by Penny Edgell Becker demonstrates that *Ave Maria* was a hugely influential source for the promotion of True Catholic Womanhood: "a systematic examination of *Ave Maria* from 1865 to 1889 reveals that two-thirds of the articles reproduce some version of the official ideology of the True Catholic Woman" (55). Another essay, by Joseph Mannard, examines the influence of Charles Ignatius White on the development of Catholic domesticity in the antebellum period: "White served as a mid-century bridge between an older culture reflective of the native-born, largely Anglo-Catholic elite and that of an emerging immigrant church" (4). Although White's translation of *Mission and Duties of Young Women* in 1858 was his "most important contribution to the construction of a Catholic domesticity in the 1850s" (15), the *Catholic Mirror* magazine, which he founded eight years earlier in 1850, also highlighted "different facets of Catholic womanhood" (12).

domesticity. In this way, Sadlier aligns with American women writers of the same period, whose “popular fiction and didactic literature glorified the role of women in altering the household environment, raising the task to the status of an almost holy endeavor” (Ferris Motz 1).¹⁷ But while both American Protestant and Irish American Catholic authors like Sadlier emphasised the significance of the domestic space in girls’ literature, there are crucial differences between both versions of the ideal home—particularly in the mid-nineteenth century, when *Alice Riordan* emerged.

A key distinction between the ideal Protestant home and its Catholic counterpart lies in their relationship to the church: whereas the former deliberately aligned itself with ecclesiastical architecture and symbolism, the latter was conceived as a separate space from religious institutions. One consequence of this alignment was the greater ornamentation of the Protestant home, which often featured design elements such as stained-glass windows and vaulted arches (Halttunen 159). The Protestant middle-class home also reflected the increasing influence of consumerism and the rise of mass-produced goods, which enabled families to furnish their homes in ways that aligned with emerging cultural ideals. Material objects such as “center tables, window draperies, and sets of matching chairs” (Grier vii) were not merely decorative, but seen as expressions of moral values, social respectability, and cultural refinement, and played an active role in shaping and reinforcing a Protestant vision of domesticity in which faith and material culture were closely intertwined.

By contrast, the ideal Catholic home maintained a clear separation from the church. As McDannell explains, “Catholics did not stress family worship” in the way Protestants did, and “the strong parish life of American Catholicism lessened the

¹⁷ Similarly, Reese argues that, by the 1820s, “the home as a microcosm for the country becomes central to women’s literature” (13). See Reese (13–23) for a full discussion on domesticity in nineteenth-century American girls’ literature. For an excellent account and historiography of domesticity in American women’s writing, including children’s literature, see Ryan (1982).

home's function as a religious centre" (*The Christian Home* 64–5). Aside from modest visual symbols of faith, such as a St. Bridget's cross or small statues (*The Christian Home* 69), the Catholic home was typically more austere than its Protestant counterpart, and the absence of ornate decorations and textiles prevented it from becoming overly comfortable. It also reflected the material reality that "the majority of Irish Catholics lived in poverty" (*The Christian Home* 52), and that many young Irish immigrant women worked as live-in domestic servants in Protestant households and often "had no home but their church" (Beecher and Beecher Stowe 332).¹⁸ According to McDannell, the ideal Irish immigrant Catholic home was a neat and orderly environment that showed the work ethic of the family and maintained "the tradition that the home had a productive role" (*The Christian Home* 61). It was a place of rest and repose, but not to such a degree that it encouraged women to "become leisured, idle objects" (*The Christian Home* 61).

The differences between Protestant and Catholic homes are evident both in Sadlier's text and canonical works of American girls' literature. For example, after the eponymous Alice arrives in Montréal with her father, Cormac, a blind widower, the pair move in with Alice's uncle, Henry Malone (known also as Harry in the text), the brother of her late mother. Although Henry and his Protestant wife, Lizzie, live in a fine house with as many windows "as there was on the *big house*, at home" (Sadlier's emphasis) (10), Alice is reminded by her father not to be deceived by its supposed ideality. Alice is charmed by the "beautiful things" in the house, such as the mahogany furniture, the looking glass over the fireplace, and the figurines and

¹⁸ In the hugely influential *The New Housekeeper's Manual* (1865), Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe discourage American women from attempting to convert live-in domestic servants (presumably Irish Catholics), stating: "we are far from recommending any controversial interference with the religious faith of our servants. It is far better to incite them to be good Christians in their own way than to run the risk of shaking their faith in all religion. . . . The general purity of life and propriety of demeanor of so many thousands of undefended young girls cast yearly upon our shores, with no home but their church, and no shield but their religion, are a sufficient proof that this religion exerts an influence over them not to be lightly trifled with" (332).

paintings (15–6), but Cormac points out that there are no religious artefacts in the home: “I’m afeard it’s little religion there is in the same house” (17).

Although Alice is initially enchanted by Protestant middle-class domesticity, she learns that, as an Irish Catholic girl, it is not appropriate for her to covet it. She later repeats this lesson back to her father: “there’s no such fine furniture in our own old house at home as there is in my Uncle Harry’s, nor there’s not near so many windows, but then some way I think it’s better to be there” (26). The “quiet comfort” of her home in Ireland, Alice realises, with the “cheerful piety of its humble inmates,” (27) is the more appropriate domestic setting for her to aspire to.

Conversely, the very kind of domesticity Sadlier disapproves of was strongly promoted in American girls’ literature. For example, in Susan Warner’s hugely successful *The Wide, Wide World* (1850),¹⁹ which appeared a year before *Alice Riordan*, a similar environment to Alice’s uncle’s home is positively portrayed: “Ellen was . . . admiring the brightness of the mahogany, and the richly-cut and coloured glass, and silver decanter-stands, which were reflected in it” (283–84). In this instance, an ornate, well-furnished home reflects refinement and good taste, and is therefore the aspirational home.²⁰ Thus, while Sadlier critiques the ornate domesticity celebrated in Warner’s text, she uses this contrast to define and promote an alternative Catholic ideal. By initially placing her heroine in a richly decorated home that represents affluence and leisure, Sadlier then offers her readers a clear vision of the “right” kind of home: one that is plainly furnished and purposeful, and where faith and piety take precedence over comfort and display.

¹⁹ Warner’s was the first American novel to sell more than a million copies. See White (1990).

²⁰ As Grier asserts, “[w]hat Victorians labeled the ‘decorative arts’—furniture, textiles, ceramics and glass, silver, and all the other ornamental yet ostensibly functional objects that filled their rooms—were an integral part of the group of symbols contained within the larger symbol of ‘home’” (18).

Interestingly, the ideal Catholic interior, intended to signify humility and piety, is depicted by Sadlier not via domestic spaces, but religious ones, such as the seminary where Alice's father is being cared for until Alice can support him herself. On two occasions, the sparseness of this setting is remarked upon in the text: "[t]he floor was composed of large flags of stone, and the only thing that the room contained in the shape of ornament was an old painting of the crucifixion, which hung between the windows. The walls were simply whitewashed, and there was no other furniture than the benches aforesaid, and a very common writing desk" (55). A similar description appears later in the text: "Alice was taken to the parlor — a large, square room without other ornament than its extreme cleanliness — its white walls, and painted benches, and a few rare plants which grew and flourished in boxes in the one window which the room contained" (93).

Such a restrained environment is evidently a symbol of piety in Sadlier's text, but in Warner's, it is distinctly unhomely. Describing her young protagonist's sleeping quarters in the home of a wicked aunt, Warner states that "the floor was without the sign of a carpet, and the bare boards looked to Ellen very comfortless The room was very bare of furniture, too. A dressing-table . . . stood between the windows, but it was . . . altogether of a most awkward and unhappy appearance" (102). It is a bedroom distinctly at odds with another the girl inhabits in the text: "[i]t made Ellen's heart very glad when they got there, to find a good-sized, cheerful-looking bed-room, comfortably furnished, with a bright fire burning, large curtains let down to the floor, and a nice warm carpet upon it" (84). Unlike the bare, uncarpeted rooms of both the aunt's home and Sadlier's seminary in *Alice Riordan*, this environment is cosy and comforting. Thus, the domestic ideals actively promoted by Protestant writers such as Warner were consciously resisted by Catholic

authors like Sadlier, who sought to represent an alternative vision of domesticity founded upon distinct religious and cultural values.

Significantly, the austerity of Catholic domesticity, as exemplified in *Alice Riordan*, was strategically deployed by certain American girls' writers to advance anti-Catholic sentiment. For example, in a Sunday School text entitled *Winnie Malone* (1863), about an Irish girl who takes up work as a babysitter in a Protestant household in an unnamed American city, a "cozy, home-like" domestic space is used to entice the young Irish girl: "[t]here was a stand of handsome plants in blossom before a window, books and papers upon the table, and a cage of birds hanging in a sunny corner . . . and to Winnie it seemed like fairy-land" (59). The house is a place in which Winnie's employer, Mrs. James enjoys an occasional "leisure day" during which she sits and sews (59), and is vastly different to Winnie's own "dark and cheerless" home that inspires "gloomy forebodings" (77). The anonymous author thus demonstrates an awareness of the stark contrast between the austere, unadorned Irish Catholic home and the more aspirational Protestant domestic environment, in which the young girl evidently experiences greater comfort.²¹

The austerity of the Catholic home is also weaponised in works by Martha Finley, whose well-known *Elsie Dinsmore* series and broader canon, Allison Giffen argues, "demonize Catholicism through depictions of perverse Catholic domesticity" (*Suffering Girls* 4). For example, Giffen describes Dinsmore's *Casella* (1868), in which a priest "relentlessly tortures [a] child, isolating her for weeks in a blank, white room that he calls the 'Chamber of Penance' and starving her on a diet of brackish water and moldy bread" (*Suffering Girls* 9). Notably, these events take place not in a convent or other religious setting, but within a domestic environment,

²¹ In this instance, the cold and bare Irish home is more likely the result of poverty. However, later in the text, the family moves and adopts the middle-class domesticity Winnie has been exposed to in her Protestant employer's home, suggesting a lack of "proper" guidance was the cause of their undesirable home previously. See *Winnie Malone* (103–04).

the intention being to characterise the Catholic family “as everything the US Protestant middle-class family is not: aristocratic, selfish, deceitful, secretive, and foreign” (Giffen *Suffering Girls* 8).

Considering *Alice Riordan* within the broader context of American girls’ literature thus offers deeper insight into both what Sadlier sought to distance her implied reader from, and how Catholic domesticity was perceived by American authors. Evidently, while Sadlier presents Catholic domestic ideals as promoting piety and humility, American writers often interpreted such environments as unsettling or even suspect.²² Yet, despite Sadlier’s resistance to American Protestant models of domesticity, her depiction of Alice’s eventual home—a modest two-bedroom dwelling rented for herself and her father after she begins earning wages—nonetheless incorporates certain modern features. The space remains largely plain and utilitarian: “[s]he had two good bedsteads, bedding and all, and several other articles of furniture” (207), but one detail—a new stove—signals a degree of modernity that diverges from the traditional Irish cottage, a form typically upheld by Irish American writers “as a symbol of the righteousness of old-world homes” (McDannell *Christian Home* 59), and the ideal domestic setting.²³

Sadlier’s inclusion of a stove in Alice’s home is significant, as it arguably signals a blending of traditional Irish Catholic domestic ideals with elements of modern North American innovation, and thus a divergence from typical portrayals of domesticity by Catholic writers. As McDannell observes, such Catholic writers as

²² Sadlier’s emphasis on the modest decor of the Seminary can also be read as an attempt to dispel the myth among Protestants that priests were very wealthy and lived in lavish surroundings. When Alice’s kindly Protestant employer, Mrs. Finlay returns from a visit to the Seminary, her young son assumes it must have been a very “gloomy,” but “grand” place, and asks if she saw “great iron chests.” His mother replies, “[p]eople who talk in that way about the Seminary, and about the priests, know very little of either one or the other, and will not take the trouble to see for themselves” (153). As Eagan notes, famine-generation Irish-American authors “were careful to arrange dialogues” such as this “to refute myths about Catholicism” (“‘White,’ If ‘Not Quite’” 142).

²³ Cusack similarly argues that cottages “are romanticized as symbols of a version of rural life defined by simplicity, communitas and faith” (54).

Sadlier were acutely aware that their readership often lacked the financial means to establish homes resembling those of middle-class Protestant women, characterised by ample furnishings and soft textiles; thus, they deliberately elevated the image of the traditional Irish cottage, which “supported the Catholic contention that old was better than new, grace better than ostentatiousness, and tradition better than change” (*Christian Home* 71).

Central to the cottage was the hearth, regarded as the “lynch-pin” of the Irish home (O’Reilly 193), whose “almost indistinguishable” pronunciation from the word “heart” “fortuitously capture[es] the significance of the main fire for the traditional household” (O’ Reilly 206). Alice herself nostalgically recalls this setting in the text: “[d]o you remember how comfortable and cosy we used to be, father, when Catty an’ me would have the vessels washed up, an’ we’d all sit down around the big turf fire — you’d be in one corner makin’ creels or baskets, an’ poor Uncle Dinny would be smokin’, his dhudeen” (27). On another occasion, Alice recalls, “I used to read them out to them all in the evenin’ when they’d be sittin’ around the fire” (77).²⁴

In the New World, however, the hearth, although a powerful symbol of Irish Catholic domesticity, is represented by Sadlier as outdated and inefficient, subtly giving way to more modern technologies such as the stove. Sadlier first hints at the inefficiency of an open fireplace in the text when Mrs. Dempsey asks her daughter, Ellen, one day if dinner is ready. The girl wearily replies: “I’ve been hurrying with it as fast as I can — I’ve been nearly all the time since you went out, puffing and blowing at that fire, and I can’t get it to light up — to look at it now, you’d think I was only just putting on the wood — I declare I’ve got a bad headache by it” (103). When Alice moves into her new home, there is no mention of an open fireplace, and instead she saves for weeks to buy “a handsome new stove” (221). It is the most

²⁴ The hearth is also romantically portrayed in *Bessy Conway* (284; 286).

mentioned material item in Alice's home, with several characters involved in discussions concerning it (207–08; 217; 221–22; 225; 231).²⁵

While the stove may be interpreted as a practical choice reflective of the text's Canadian setting,²⁶ its inclusion warrants further consideration given that *Alice Riordan* was both serialised and subsequently published as a novel in the US, where it reached a predominantly American readership. In *From Fireplace to Cook Stove: Technology and the Domestic Ideal*, Priscilla J. Brewer argues that, “as consumer's reliance on stoves increased in the mid-nineteenth century, a chorus of antistove rhetoric arose among northern, middle-class Anglo Americans” (95).²⁷ According to Brewer, these critics “were among those who responded to industrialization, urbanization, and immigration by creating a ‘cult of domesticity’ that constructed the home as a refuge from the frenzied, amoral world of business,” and “were reluctant to advise women to embrace modern appliances” (95). Thus, in direct resistance to the stove, the hearth was often explicitly evoked as a powerful symbol of domesticity in mid-nineteenth century American literature.

For example, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's story “Fire Worship” (1843), the narrator declares that, “while a man was true to the fireside, so long would he be true to country and law, to the God whom his fathers worshipped, to the wife of his youth, and to all things else which instinct or religion has taught us to consider

²⁵ The second most mentioned material item in Alice's new home is an armchair. It is Alice's “greatest treasure, and one of the happiest moments in her life was that when she led her father up stairs, and seated him in it” (207). Jane Nylander asserts that the armchair symbolised the “influential patriarch” (7) in the mid-century American home. It was also the subject of a popular song, ‘The Old Arm Chair’ (1840), in which it served as a “symbol within the larger symbol of home and neatly encapsulated its own range of meanings” (Grier 10–11).

²⁶ Unlike the US, the stove was more readily embraced in the early-nineteenth century in Canada, and does not appear to have been viewed as a threat to cultural values as it was in the US. This is likely due to the length and severity of Canadian winters, which rendered the stove a valuable necessity in households, and thus a welcome development in technology. See Sandwell (2018).

²⁷ See Brewer (95–117) for a full discussion on anti-stove rhetoric in popular culture in the mid-nineteenth century.

sacred” (132–33). According to Joel Pfister, the hearth in Hawthorne’s story “is romanticized as a symbol of the orderly, pre-industrial community within which beliefs and bonds of allegiance were unambiguous and firm,” while the stove “symbolizes the incursion of a fast-changing industrial world into the home” (328). For Hawthorne, the stove, which he describes as an “iron prison” (131), “not only connotes anxieties about industrial transformations of work, it signals a new kind of air-tight domestic arrangement. The narrator links the obsolescence of the hearth to the emergence of a new domesticity characterized by the emotional isolation of individuals from one another” (Pfister 328). Susan Van Zanten Gallagher similarly argues that “Hawthorne fears that the unique personal interactions prompted by the need to gather at the earth will be lost Conversation, jokes, even creative reflection, will all cease without the influence of the domestic fire” (4).

Katherine C. Grier observes that the arrival of the stove in the 1850s was initially met with resistance from influential domestic tastemakers: “architectural and domestic advice books voiced a common litany against parlor stoves, which made rooms considerably warmer and less drafty than did open fireplaces. The authors disliked parlor stoves at least partly because of the symbolic meanings attached to the open hearth” (117). Among these writers were Andrew Jackson Downing, architectural reformer and author of the influential *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850), and the previously mentioned Catharine E. Beecher. Brewer points out that pro-hearth rhetoric also appeared in American children’s literature:

as the editor of *The Young Ladies Class Book* (1831) noted, ‘the domestic fireside is the great guardian of society against the excess of human passions.’ Samuel Goodrich echoed this view, reminding readers of *Fireside Education* (1839) that ‘the fireside . . . is a seminary of infinite importance There are

few who can receive the honours of a college but all are graduates of the hearth.’ (100)

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the hearth functions as a particularly potent symbol of home and familial values in girls’ literature, a category that often reinforced the ideological framework of the cult of domesticity.

In Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World*, the hearth is a site of comfort and homeliness: “[j]ust the same tidy, clean swept up, a good fire, and the same old red-backed chairs standing round on the hearth in a most cosy fashion. It seemed to Ellen a perfect storehouse of comfort; the very walls had a kind face for her” (201). Martha Finley’s *Elsie Dinsmore* similarly romanticises the open fireplace as a cosy and comforting setting: “she found it pleasanter to sit beside the bright wood-fire in her own room, with her fond old nurse for a companion If she had no lesson to learn, she usually read aloud to Chloe, as she sat knitting by the fire . . . and then when she grew weary of reading, she would often take a stool, and sitting down close to Chloe, put her head in her lap” (55). The significance of the hearth is also apparent in Alcott’s *Little Women*, in which the author “suggests that this spirit of the hearth extends into the public realm when she describes the facade of the house with Marmee’s face in the window so that a female presence lingers in the girls’ minds when they enter the world of work and school” (Watters 188).

As within the context of Catholic domesticity and the romanticisation of the traditional Irish cottage, the hearth thus emerged in American literature as “an important symbol of family unity, even as iron stoves or central heating greatly improved upon its original function” (Nylander 15). It is all the more notable, therefore, that in *Alice Riordan* the hearth overlooked for a stove. Evidently, the stove did not evoke the same sense of domesticity as the hearth, but it was practical and efficient. Moreover, Sadlier does not suggest that it might negatively impact

family interactions, but demonstrates repeatedly that the stove is a useful addition to Alice's life. The stove thus complicates Sadlier's depiction of Catholic domesticity, and hints that the ideal Irish-American home—and the ideal Irish-American woman, by extension—may represent a blend of tradition and modernity. The home and the woman have their roots in traditional Irish Catholic values, but can embrace American progress, too.

Evidently, the home reflected the values of its inhabitants, and girls' literature was, as Reese argues, an ideal site for American writers "to set an example for female readers" (13). For Sadlier, girls' fiction became a vehicle for instructing the implied Irish Catholic immigrant girl reader in how to resist the allure of middle-class Protestant domesticity, and instead cultivate a specifically Irish Catholic ideal. This involved maintaining a home that was practical and productive, free from superfluous decoration that encouraged idleness or diverted attention from religious duty. Yet, just as the material space of the home had to be carefully regulated, so too did the intellectual and moral formation of the girl herself. As such, the act of reading becomes a central concern in *Alice Riordan*, scrutinised by Sadlier for the particular threat it poses to Irish Catholic immigrant girls when not properly guided.

Books in the parlour reflected taste and refinement in the middle-class Protestant home. According to Margaret Lynch-Brennan,

[i]n the parlor women found a place of their own from which they could extend their 'influence' outward to the world. Here, intellectual improvement took place through reading books that, like magazines and newspapers, were more widely available at lower prices after 1830. With more materials available, reading, which was intended to improve minds, increasingly also provided entertainment. (62–3)

This is evident in *Alice Riordan*, when Alice “looked wistfully at the glittering annuals on the table” (120), and also in *Winnie Malone*, when the young Irish girl excitedly tells her mother about all she saw in her new Protestant employer’s home: “[s]he told of the flowers, the birds, the books; and papers” (79).

Although books were a central feature of idealised Protestant domesticity, Sadlier viewed unsupervised or “leisure” reading as a serious threat to the moral well-being of the Irish Catholic immigrant girl. Aware that many young Irish Catholic girls were employed in Protestant households, where they were likely to encounter a wider range of reading materials,²⁸ as illustrated in the texts discussed above, and that literacy among this demographic was increasing in the mid-nineteenth century,²⁹ Sadlier takes deliberate steps to guide her implied reader toward appropriate reading practices. In particular, she seeks to promote texts aligned with Catholic values and to warn against literature that might compromise a girl’s prospects of becoming a respectable Irish Catholic woman.

Sadlier was not alone in her concern about young women’s reading habits in the mid-nineteenth century, and by the 1850s “many ministers, educators, and other commentators had deep reservations about fiction, precisely because of its growing popularity” (Hochman 1). Particular anxieties surrounded the effects of novel reading on girls and women, which was believed to “excite the passions, and stimulate the female imagination” (Lyons 319). While Sadlier shared these broader cultural concerns regarding the moral dangers of inappropriate reading, which “threatened chastity and good order” (Lyons 319), *Alice Riordan* expresses a notably heightened

²⁸ In Montréal, where the text is set, Irish women “dominated domestic service,” and, more generally, “domestic service in 19th century Canada became identified with Irish women” (Barber 6). It was similar in the US. See Diner (74–94); Lynch-Brennan (2014).

²⁹ In the period 1851 to 1860, “approximately 29 percent of female Irish emigrants and 40 percent of male Irish emigrants were literate,” and by the end of the century, “English-language literacy was almost universal In fact, such basic literacy was actually more commonplace among females” (Lynch-Brennan 44).

sense of urgency on the matter. Approximately half of the text is dedicated to illustrating to the implied reader the critical distinctions between beneficial and harmful literature. In this respect, Sadlier aligns with many contemporary American girls' writers in her didactic portrayal of proper reading, presenting it as essential to the ideal formation of the Irish Catholic girl.³⁰

According to LuElla D'Amico and Tanja Stampfl, "[w]holesome and moralistic literature in particular constituted an important part of nineteenth-century education for girls and is the primary focus of American literature for girls" (52). They point to such texts as *The Wide, Wide World*, *Elsie Dinsmore*, and *Little Women* as examples in which young women are "depicted as reading voraciously" (52). Crucially, these texts are highly moral and could be related to the Bible. For example, in *The Wide, Wide World*, Warner is clear that only a particular type of reading is appropriate for young girls and women. When describing her protagonist's new books, she writes, "[t]here was no fiction in them, either; they were as full of instruction as of interest" (464). The ideal American girl was therefore not reading the immoral sentimental novels detested by conservative American society in the mid-nineteenth century, but edifying literature that would benefit and protect their minds and souls.³¹

In *Alice Riordan*, novel reading is portrayed as a particularly perilous activity for the Catholic girl. The seriousness of this danger is illustrated by Father Smith's admonition upon discovering the girls' engagement with novels: "their condemnation

³⁰ By contrast, there is only passing reference to reading for pleasure made in *Bessy Conway*, and it is clearly unconcerned with content in the same way "[i]t was a real pleasure for Bessy, too, to . . . read some pious or entertaining book while Fanny worked" (152).

³¹ Domestic manuals were also a source of guidance on children's reading habits. For example, in *The New Housekeeper's Manual* (1869), Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe write: "[t]he most successful mode of forming a taste for suitable reading, is for parents to select interesting works of history and travels, with maps and pictures suited to the age and attainments of the young, and spend an hour or two each day or evening, in aiming to make truth as interesting as fiction. Whoever has once tried this method will find that the uninjured mind of childhood is better satisfied with what they know is true, when wisely presented, than with the most exciting novels, which they know are false" (293).

shall be all the greater, if they persist in such a course. Catholics are more rigorously judged than others, if they do not follow the lights held out to them!" (105). Aware of the strong appeal that reading held as a leisure activity among young girls and women, Sadlier utilises her narrative to instruct the implied girl reader on the moral distinctions between appropriate and inappropriate literature, a lesson primarily conveyed through the depiction of the young women with whom Alice works, whose reading habits serve as cautionary examples.

For example, when Alice is placed with an Irish Catholic woman, Mrs. Dempsey, to learn her trade as a dressmaker, she is initially pleased to find herself working alongside four other Irish Catholic girls, and thinks nothing of it when they entertain themselves by reading aloud from such novels as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (82).³² Indeed, Alice soon becomes enthralled by the "wild and thrilling narrative" she hears: "so completely did it rivet her attention that her work fell from her hand, and she sat with her eyes wide open and fixed on the reader" (83). However, when she learns that reading novels is frowned upon and that Mrs. Dempsey actively discourages it because of the ill-effects it has had on her fifteen-year-old daughter, Ellen, Alice learns to resist it, despite the reputational damage it causes her among her peers: "I suppose we've got a little priest in petticoats here. Very well, Miss Prim ! you can go if you choose, since you're so desperately afraid of novels" (99–100).

³² Although Sadlier depicts Irish girls reading to demonstrate the dangers of it, it can be argued that, by doing so, she also subverts the stereotype perpetuated in American girls' literature that Irish girls were illiterate. For example, in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Means and Ends; or, Self-Training* (1839), the narrator declares: "[t]hink, my dear young friends, of the difference that is made in the character of a human being, simply by reading. Compare an Irish girl who comes to this country at fifteen or sixteen, who has never been taught to read, with one of your own countrywomen in the humblest condition, of the same age, who loves to read, and who has the books within her reach!" (238). For more on the depiction of literacy management of Irish domestic servants in American literature by women writers in the nineteenth century, see Robbins (84–9).

Sadlier's primary concern regarding novel reading lies in its perceived capacity to corrupt a young girl's moral and spiritual purity, a danger she demonstrates through her protagonist's initial naivete. When asked by her new employer whether she has ever read novels, Alice replies: "[w]hy, indeed, I don't know, ma'am . . . I never heard of them before. I never read many books — only three altogether, I think" (77). In her innocence, Alice remains unaware of the "infection" that novels are believed to instil (86), an effect illustrated in Mrs. Dempsey's daughter, Ellen, who is described as "always pining and fretting and looking as careworn as though she had a weight of years on her back and of sorrow on her heart" (86). By highlighting the degeneration of the other Irish girls as a consequence of their novel reading, Sadlier affirms Alice's purity: "while the minds of the other girls was [sic] submerged in the stagnant pool of iniquity, and filled with the hateful images . . . which kindled the blush of shame on the cheek while they pursued their internal work of defiling and corrupting the heart: Alice . . . was equally engrossed with thoughts and visions of purity and peace" (102). Although her initial ignorance renders her vulnerable, Sadlier presents Alice's eventual rejection of novels as essential to the preservation of her modesty.

The rejection of novels in *Alice Riordan* is essential to safeguarding a girl's virtue during adolescence, and critical to securing her future prospects as a respectable wife. This is illustrated through the character of Margaret, Alice's fellow seamstress, whose compulsive novel-reading ultimately leads to her disgrace. Despite repeated warnings, Margaret continues to read and borrow from the library—an institution described by Sadlier as "a wholesale warehouse of poison for the soul, a lazar-house reeking with corruption" (89). Margaret's excessive reading is shown to have both moral and physical consequences, affecting her appearance and producing a "*cattish* look in her eyes" (Sadlier's emphasis) (115). She becomes

involved with a disreputable man who “kept her reading books that he selected for her in the library, until he quite turned her head, and then took her away with him ; the Lord preserve us all in the state of grace, for when once we lose it, and cast it from us, there’s no saying what we’ll come to” (177). Sadlier thus positions novel reading as a profound threat to the moral, physical, and social integrity of the Catholic girl, capable of undermining her reputation and future respectability.

While Sadlier condemns the types of reading deemed inappropriate for Catholic girls, she also provides a clear framework for distinguishing between good and bad literature, thereby educating her implied reader on how to make such judgments themselves. For example, reading for the purposes of religious instruction is strongly endorsed in the text, particularly when guided by authoritative figures such as the priest, Father Smith, who asserts: “[g]ood books, Mrs. Dempsey, are the greatest blessing that can be given to the young, as bad ones are the greatest curse. I know my little ward here has never been contaminated by reading anything dangerous to faith or morals, and I depend on you to see that she is preserved from such studies” (105). Alice is subsequently encouraged to read religious texts that will deepen her understanding of her faith and prepare her to defend her faith in a predominantly Protestant society.

Although the reading of novels of all kinds is discouraged throughout the text, there is particular concern about romances:

[o]h! fearful is the effect of novel and romance reading on the young, unformed mind — wresting it away from the fresh, and smiling, and pure creations of life’s early clay, and fixing it with basilisk attraction on the unreal and delusive, and often impure images emanating from a morbid and

diseased imagination, making it familiar betimes with the follies and vices, and intrigues of what is called the world.” (102)³³

Considering the text itself ultimately became a romance novel, Sadlier’s explicit contempt for romances is ironic.

When it first appeared in serial form in the *Boston Pilot*, *Alice Riordan* did not end with courtship and a wedding, nor did the first edition of the book, which the novel’s preface confirms “was printed from the newspaper type” (4). However, when a second edition of the text was published in 1854 (the edition analysed in this thesis), it appeared with a preface in which Sadlier wrote: “I have added another chapter to the original work, as a sort of magic glass whereby those who were so anxious to know ‘what became of Alice’ can have a peep into the privacy of her after-life (4). The original version of the novel concluded with a sixteen-year-old Alice successfully making her way and caring for her father; however, readers evidently desired more than this, and, consequently, Sadlier added Alice’s marriage to the revised edition.

In the final chapter of the second edition of the text, Sadlier hastily introduces the character of Tom Richardson, an Irish Catholic immigrant “with a frank, open countenance, somewhat bronzed from exposure to the weather, and a well-formed, manly figure” (274). Tom is conveniently respectable in every sense, and Alice’s family are eager for her to marry him, which she does a month later. Virtually no interactions between Alice and Tom are portrayed in this chapter, and Alice’s own consent to be married is not sought once her father has approved of the arrangement: “Alice, my child, I needn’t ask what you have to say in this matter” (282). Indeed, Alice does not speak again after this point, despite another eight pages following in

³³ In *John O’Brien*, Roddan is also critical of romance novels, with the protagonist’s future wife, Mary, telling him: “I don’t believe in love in a cottage, and all that, because I hate novels. I can’t live on looking at a man, though I love him ever so dearly. He and I must have something to eat” (264).

the text. Rather, emphasis is placed on her beauty on her wedding day: “the dress well became the delicacy of her fair features, and the slight, graceful proportions of her figure” (285), and her fittingness for the role of wife, as noted by her father: “Tom Richardson, I charge you take good care of Alice, — she was the best of daughters, and I’m sure she’ll make one of the best of wives” (289).

This new, romantic conclusion to the text reflects Sadlier’s awareness of the expectations of her young readers in 1854, which were likely shaped by the popularity of the very romance and sensation novels Sadlier critiques throughout the text. In this way, Sadlier embodies a typical contradiction of Irish Catholic authors, who, on the one hand, as Joseph Mannard argues, “joined their non-Catholic counterparts in dismissing novel-reading as . . . a wasteful practice,” but who also “willingly published popular fiction” (13). However, while the revised ending was written to satisfy her readers, Sadlier’s priority was still promoting her own ideological framework. It is not Alice’s happiness that is the focus of the new chapter, but rather her eligibility as wife for a “a young man of whose attentions any girl in his own station might well be proud” (274). Alice’s respectable marriage can thus be understood as a reward for her restraint and obedience in girlhood. Sadlier also utilises her new ending to supply her young reader with practical information about marriage in the New World: “[g]oing to the church, the bridegroom and bride never go together in this part of the world” (286).³⁴

Thus, despite grudgingly succumbing to the conventions of the very kind of literature she disapproved of girls reading, Sadlier remains committed to transmitting the ideals of True Catholic domesticity, and demonstrating the acceptable and

³⁴ The additional chapter in *Alice Riordan* can also be interpreted as a means for asserting Irish racial superiority, and encouraging readers “to identify with Irish Catholic characters in matters of love,” as Catherine Eagan points out: “[t]he lovers, distinguished by the flawless physical traits of their race . . . engage the reader’s sympathy” (“‘White,’ If ‘Not Quite’” 149). The ways in which Irish-American authors asserted white and Irish racial superiority is examined in the next section of this chapter.

respectable trajectories available to the implied girl reader as the future of Irish-American Catholic womanhood. This priority would remain unchanged in the coming decade, when Sadlier published *Bessy Conway*, which I examine in the following section of this chapter.

Bessy Conway and the white innocence of the Irish immigrant girl

Published in 1861, *Bessy Conway; or, The Irish Girl in America* became Sadlier's most successful novel, going through six American editions in the nineteenth century (Fanning *The Irish Voice* 134).³⁵ It is also her most analysed novel, with critics usually treating it as romantic or domestic literature.³⁶ Set in 1838, seven years before the Great Famine, it tells the story of a young woman from Tipperary who seeks her fortune working as a domestic servant in New York. Although Bessy's age is not stated, she is likely somewhere between fourteen and twenty-four years of age, the so-called "awkward age" in girlhood when a girl is no longer considered a child, but not yet considered a woman in society's eyes, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Like Alice Riordan, Bessy Conway embodies the virtues of the ideal Irish Catholic immigrant girl and is intended as a role model for the implied reader to aspire to. She is industrious, staunchly Catholic, and makes sacrifices for her family. For example, she regularly sends money home to her family in Ireland (an expectation that was placed more often on young female emigrants than male),³⁷ and

³⁵ Conversely, Liz Szabo contends that "reliable sales figures for *Bessy Conway* are difficult to find" (198).

³⁶ See Corporaal et al (2024); Cusack et al (2021); Fanning (1987, 1990); Murphy (1998); Sullivan (2016); Szabo (1996).

³⁷ As Bessy points out in the text, "[s]till there's a good many girls that save money and send plenty home" (136). The contributions of real Irish immigrant girls and women to the Irish economy are significant. Irish servant girls who sent money home helped to account for remittances in staggering amounts: "[t]he British Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners calculated that remittances from America transmitted through shipping and banking firms totaled at least 1,730,000 pounds in the single year 1845" (Dudden 61).

stays in regular contact with them by writing letters home.³⁸ However, despite many commonalities between the inherent goodness and moral superiority of both heroines, Sadlier's second girls' novel varies in significant ways from her first. In particular, there is greater emphasis in *Bessy Conway* on the protagonist's Irishness than in *Alice Riordan*, a characteristic Sadlier directly links to whiteness.

Significantly, anti-Irish Catholic sentiment had increased substantially in the years between the publication of both texts in the US (see below), and I argue that Sadlier, who was now living in New York, having moved from Montréal, utilised her second girls' novel to promote Irish racial superiority via the influential figure of the girl at a heightened point in Irish American history. To contextualise these arguments, I offer a brief overview of the changing social and political landscape for Irish Catholic immigrants in the US in the mid-nineteenth century below.

In 1850, the year before *Alice Riordan* was first published in the US in novel form, the Know-Nothing nativist party, which was "obsessed with the threat of immigrants, particularly Catholic immigrants," was founded, and "rose like a rocket in 1853 and 1854. By the former year they had a million members. By 1854, they either had control of the legislature or had won governorships or both in Massachusetts, Maine, and Pennsylvania, and were powerful in Indiana" (Meagher *The Columbia Guide* 82).

In his foundational account of nativism in the US in the nineteenth century, *Strangers in the Land*, John Higham argues that the emergence of the party was primarily fuelled by the rise of Catholic immigrants:

[n]ativists, charged with the Protestant evangelical fervor of the day, considered the immigrants minions of the Roman despot, dispatched here to

³⁸ Maintaining written correspondence with family in Ireland was often a priority for domestic servants, and demonstrated the emotional attachment Irish girls felt to their homeland. For a discussion on letter-writing and the Irish domestic servant, see Lynch-Brennan (121–126).

subvert American institutions Surely such creatures were unfit for citizenship. Anti-Catholic nativism, aiming at stiff naturalization laws and exclusion of Catholics and foreigners from public office, completely overshadowed every other nativist tradition. (6)

As the Know-Nothing party came to prominence, tensions also increased between Irish Catholic immigrants and Black Americans, which first erupted in the 1830s, “when Irish immigrants believed themselves to be in job competition with Black Americans.” Thereafter, “ongoing conflicts between Irish workers and African Americans in the 1850s and early 1860s . . . culminated in the draft riots of 1863” (Kenny *The American Irish* 124).³⁹

Both the rise of the Know-Nothing party and increasingly violent tensions between Irish Catholics and Black Americans reflected a drastically altered social and political landscape in the US since *Willy Burke* and *Alice Riordan* were published. By 1861, Sadlier was now writing into a landscape more fraught than ever, and *Bessy Conway* demonstrates as much. This is evident in a striking subplot in the text, which illustrates the hostile dynamics between the various employees of the household in which Bessy works as a domestic servant. Bessy works alongside two other Irish immigrant women, Bridget and Sally, and also a Black American man named Wash. According to O’Neill, the scenes that occur between these characters, which I analyse closely below, are designed to “[fix] Bessy’s status as the moral and

³⁹ The Draft Riots of 1863 occurred when a mob of Irishmen violently attacked Black Americans in New York over a period of four days, beating, injuring, and lynching hundreds. According to Kenny, “[d]uring the Draft Riots of July 1863 in New York City, Irish mobs systematically attacked innocent African Americans and went so far as to burn down the city’s Colored Orphan Asylum. In so doing, they consolidated a reputation for violence that cannot be reduced to a figment of the nativist imagination and exhibited a virulent form of racism that was too extreme even for a northern society that was driven by divisions over the Civil War and contained a substantial pro-slavery contingent other than the Irish” (*The American Irish* 124). For more on negative relations between Irish Catholic immigrants and other non-WASP groups in the US, see Barrett, who argues that “[the Irish] contributed extensively to the racialization of Black and Chinese people and other immigrant workers throughout the nineteenth century, driving them off the docks and out of building sites, mobbing them during strikes, and by the early twentieth century, excluding them from craft unions” (312).

intellectual superior in the room” (*Famine Irish* 124). They are particularly significant because they represent a new departure in Irish-American literature: “with the publication of Sadlier’s *Bessy Conway* . . . Irish Catholic American writers began staking a claim for Irish Catholics within respectable *white* society at the expense of African Americans and other non-whites” (Corporaal et al *The Famine Diaspora* 8).

Sadlier’s “unsubtle” view in *Bessy Conway*, which contends that “the Irish in America are white and thus superior to all African Americans” (O’Neill *Famine Irish* 124), reflects the issues of race and citizenship being contested at the time. As Eagan argues, the novel, as a form, was a space for Sadlier and other Famine-era writers to “allay concerns over Irish racial incompatibility with whiteness,” and to “[elaborate] Irish whiteness through narrative reminders of the European, Christian, civilized, and free history of the Irish in Ireland and America” (“‘White,’ If ‘Not Quite’” 142). Consequently, “the Irish-American novel . . . makes it clear that ‘whiteness’ was an identity to which Irish Americans not only felt entitled, but actively pursued” (Eagan ‘White if “not Quite”’ 140).

While this subplot in the text has evidently received some critical attention, this chapter builds on these efforts by treating the text as girls’ literature for the first time. It argues that the girls’ novel was an ideal site for asserting white supremacy, and suggests that reading *Bessy Conway* through this lens enables fuller understanding of Sadlier’s motivations for intentionally perpetuating a racial hierarchy via the figure of the girl.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the American girls’ novel served a special function in asserting and promoting the racial superiority of the middle-class, WASP girl, who functioned as a symbol of the nation, as previously discussed. First coming to prominence during successive waves of immigration, the girls’ novel “often tries to work out an accommodation of relations between a preponderantly white Anglo-

Saxon Protestant middle class and an anomalously ‘foreign’ other or others”

(Stoneley 4). Girls’ literature thus became an ideal site for American writers (usually women) to express and explore ambivalence and anxiety about the effects of mass migration, and to reassert native superiority via negative representations of the “other,” “who are perceived as marginal, problematic, threatening, or quite simply diseased,” and whom “the role and importance of the American girl is modulated in relation to” (Stoneley 121).

This is evident throughout American girls’ literature from the mid-nineteenth century, with girl characters frequently tasked with caring for, correcting, and/or civilising the “other.” For example, in Alcott’s *Little Women*, “[t]he March sisters . . . give their Christmas breakfast to a poor family . . . but characters like this poor family are mentioned only in passing and primarily exist to show the values Marmee is teaching her children” (Cadwallader and D’Amico 50). Crucially, the immigrant Hummel family are “not main characters but tertiary ones; they are there to support the development of the heroines rather than to be a part of the core community” (Cadwallader and D’Amico 50).

Arguably the most influential example of the girl-saviour in American literature is Little Eva from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851). Although not written originally as girls’ literature, the centring of an angelic white girl’s benevolence towards an enslaved Black man in Stowe’s text made it a “touchstone” for subsequent authors of girls’ literature (Reese 85). The text was hugely popular and instantaneously successful, and “may have been the most widely read book in the antebellum United States, with the possible exception of the Bible” (Hochman 2).

Consequently, Little Eva became a foundational figure in exemplifying how the authority of white girlhood could be mobilised to serve larger ideological

purposes. A deeply politicised figure, Little Eva represents what Robin Bernstein describes as “racial innocence”: “[b]y the mid-nineteenth century, sentimental culture had woven childhood and innocence together wholly. Childhood was then understood not as innocent but as innocence itself; not as a symbol of innocence but as its embodiment. The doctrine of original sin receded, replaced by a doctrine of original innocence. This innocence was raced white” (4).

Indeed, Little Eva’s whiteness is her most powerful characteristic, and is, as Bernstein observes, portrayed in highly romantic language: “the deep spiritual gravity of her violet blue eyes, shaded by heavy fringes of golden brown . . . marked her out from other children” (143). What is more, “everything in Eva’s bedroom, from statuettes and pictures, to the bed and bedside table, to the girl’s corpse itself, was draped in white” (5), further emphasising her whiteness. Little Eva’s overtly emphasised whiteness simultaneously marks her separation from Tom and solidifies her moral superiority, positioning her as an embodiment of racial purity and steady belonging within the American national identity. While Sadlier also utilises her young heroine in this way, the critical distinction between both heroines lies in the identity of Bessy Conway, who is not a middle-class, American-born WASP girl, as Little Eva is, but a poor Irish Catholic immigrant. However, while Bessy diverges from her American counterparts in terms of ethnicity and religion, she shares in their whiteness. It is this point of similarity that Sadlier strategically exploits to construct an exemplary Irish Catholic girl whose whiteness enhances her respectability within a predominantly WASP cultural landscape.

Sadlier elevates Bessy’s social standing in her adopted country via her whiteness in three key ways. Firstly, she explicitly links Bessy’s whiteness to her Irish upbringing, suggesting that the girl’s whiteness is more than a physical trait, but an ideal cultivated and reinforced by the landscape of her home country. In the

following quotation, Sadlier emphasises the unique wholesomeness and purity of the Irish landscape on which Bessy was reared:

[t]he green fields of Erin were covered with their spring carpet dotted over with white daisies and yellow buttercups, the pale primrose – flower of sweetest memories! – was peeping forth on every sunny bank; the modest violet gave its faint perfume to the air, and the graceful blue-bell waved its fairy petals in the gentle breeze; the earth was balmy with the breath of opening flowers, and the trees were donning their summer foliage through the sunny showers of April. (298)

More than simply decorative terms, the “white daisies,” “pale primrose,” and “modest violet” Sadlier describes are arguably emblematic of the racialised and gendered virtues ascribed to Bessy. The landscape cultivates and nurtures a feminine whiteness in Bessy that is distinctly Irish, and Sadlier thus suggests that to be raised in Ireland is to be imbued with superior racial and moral characteristics. Thus, emerging as naturally from the “green fields of Erin” as the daisies and primroses, Bessy’s whiteness represents a vision of Ireland as both racially pure and morally superior.⁴⁰

Girls’ literature was an ideal site for Sadlier to effectively demonstrate the racial superiority of Ireland via the landscape, for this was a typical function of the American girls’ novel, whose heroines often moved from modest, rural backgrounds to affluent urban ones so as to perform “a series of otherwise awkward manoeuvres: between country and metropolis, ‘uncouth’ and ‘unspoilt,’ modern and anti-modern” (Stoneley 1). Representing purity and times past, the country heroine “could serve as a preferred image for a society that was ever more deeply immured in the guilt and

⁴⁰ For analysis on the pastoral idealisation of the Irish landscape as a point of ethnic identification for immigrants to recollect and reconstruct a sense of Irish identity in such Famine-era Irish-American literature as *Bessy Conway*, see Corporaal (2010).

dirt of industrial urbanization” (Stoneley 107). Seizing upon the trope of the rural, morally unspoiled girl thus enabled Sadlier to align Irish identity with whiteness, if not reflect a superior version of it. Arriving from the unspoilt Irish countryside to the dirty, corrupted American city, Bessy represents a purity now lost or diluted in the US, arguably making her young heroine’s whiteness superior to the American girl’s.

The second way Sadlier establishes Bessy’s whiteness is by creating her heroine in the image of her middle-class, American-born WASP counterpart, thus distancing her from the negative stereotypes of Irish immigrants perpetuated in American children’s literature in the process (see Chapter One). This is evident in the text’s frontispiece, featured below (fig. 1),⁴¹ which features an illustration of a young woman sitting in a full-bodied skirt, hands gracefully set upon her lap as she glances over her shoulder. As Eagan observes, Bessy, in this image, “possesses a pale white skin color and noble physiognomy, with a high forehead, Roman nose, and severe facial angle . . . surely close to physiognomist Pieter Camper’s Greek ideal of ninety degrees” (“Irish Sentimentality” 83). What is more, aside from the shamrock border surrounding her, there is nothing to distinguish her as Irish Catholic and not American.⁴² Far from the ragged and dirty Irish children typically depicted by American children’s writers, Sadlier’s heroine instead appears as refined, well dressed, and graceful as such archetypal American heroines as Alcott’s March sisters later would.

⁴¹Illustration from *Bessy Conway* by Mary Anne Sadlier, New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1861. Public domain. Digitised by University of Alberta Libraries and made available via the Internet Archive (archive.org/details/cihm_94767/mode/2up).

⁴² By contrast, in McElgun’s *Annie Reilly*, the young heroine is depicted in the frontispiece with her fingers laced in prayer and a set of rosary beads upon her lap, emphasising her Catholic identity.



Figure 1. Frontispiece from *Bessy Conway*, 1861.

Indeed, Sadlier's heroine is entirely unlike the uncivilised Irish children that would later be depicted in such popular girls' texts as Kate Douglas Wiggin's *The Birds' Christmas Carol* (1888), who eat like "little gorged boa constrictors" (57), and whose mother tries to change their appearance, "feeling that the number of freckles to the square inch was too many to be tolerated in the highest social circles" (36–7). Rather, Bessy resembles the text's American heroine, Carol Bird, whose golden hair and white forehead remind the Irish children in Wiggin's text of "the angels in the picturebooks" (51), and who delights in helping the needy immigrant family: "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (58). By aligning Bessy with the angelic American ideal later epitomised by such influential authors as Wiggin in girls'

literature, Sadlier positions her Irish heroine as the embodiment of white, moral superiority.

Significantly, *Bessy Conway* is one of two of Sadlier's Irish-American novels to feature a frontispiece, the other being *Elinor Preston*, which was published the same year. It is significant that, in both instances, these visual representations centre the image of the girl. Arguably, Sadlier (and/or her publisher) recognised the unique power of the girl figure, and sought to remind her implied Irish Catholic girl reader that, although she varied from her American counterpart in significant ways, she was not physically different from her. In fact, with careful consideration of her appearance and manner, she could even pass for her, as Bessy does in this illustration. Undoubtedly aware of the deeply entrenched negative stereotypes of Irish girls and women being brutish, unrefined and even non-white in American media in the mid-nineteenth century, which functioned to "signif[y] her distance from the refined, civilised women who employed her and were responsible for her supervision" (Urban 272),⁴³ Sadlier demonstrates through Bessy how the Irish immigrant girl could counteract the negative image of Irish females—particularly domestic servants—by carrying herself like a middle-class American Protestant girl.

Sadlier's emphasis on appearance and conduct as tools of assimilation is reinforced throughout the text, as Bessy exhibits the manners, speech, and habits associated with middle-class American femininity. This is observed by other characters, who are often surprised to learn that Bessy is a working-class Irish girl. For example, her former mistress, the respectable Mrs. Walters declares: "[w]ell, Bessy, I'm quite sure that you don't belong to the lower regions" (77). Similarly, an American woman, "by birth and also by parentage, as she often boasted," takes "quite an interest in the young Irish girl "'just come out,' . . . seeing that she was

⁴³ See Lynch-Brennan (66–83); Palumbo-DeSimone (2014); Schultz (2013); Urban (2009) for discussions of stereotypes of Irish women in the US in the mid-nineteenth century.

naturally smart and intelligent” (64). Even Bessy’s fellow Irish servants, Sally and Bridget, who Sadlier makes clear do not represent the ideal Irish American woman, recognise that Bessy is different from them: “Bessy Conway was not long in the house when they discovered that she was not ‘one of *them*’” (120).

Bessy is consistently depicted as possessing an ineffable quality that marks her as superior to those around her. I argue that this distinction lies in her refined manner and cultivated self-presentation, which align her with the ideals of middle-class American girlhood, and serve to reinforce and elevate her whiteness. Once this whiteness is established, Sadlier consolidates it by positioning Bessy in contrast to a racialised subordinate figure: the Black American. As previously discussed, this dynamic is expressed through the character of Wash, a fellow employee in the Hibbard household. Through the portrayal of Wash, Sadlier secures Bessy’s place within the dominant racial hierarchy by juxtaposing her against a racialised other.

Tension arises between Wash and Bridget, another Irish servant, due to Wash’s claim that Catholics attempt to buy their way out of sin by paying priests at confession, an assertion that Bridget finds profoundly offensive (88). While such arguments often appear in Irish American literature, as Irish Catholic characters attempt to “refute the myths about Catholicism spread by everyone from sensationalist writers to elected officials” (Eagan “‘White,’ If ‘Not Quite’” 142), it is race as much as religion that is the cause of tension in this scene. In the text, Bridget describes Wash as “the black devil” (88), and the narrator, as O’Neill points out, “prefers a patent racial slur to the more respectful term of the period, ‘negro’” when describing him (*Famine Irish* 124). Wash is also described as “sly” (75) and “provoking” (89), suggesting a menacing quality, and his speech is depicted in eye-dialect, rather than the standard English of the other characters, suggesting that he is less civilised and intelligent than them.

Echoing the dynamic between Little Eva and Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the relationship between Bessy and Wash reinforces racial hierarchies by positioning the white girl as inherently virtuous and redemptive. Through her presumed goodness and innocence, Bessy exerts authority over Wash, who is ultimately reduced to a figure of charity (see below). To this end, Sadlier aligns with many white American authors of the period, who “promote the myth of Black inferiority” by presenting Black Americans as child-like and in need of protection by virtuous white people, who often happen to be children (MacCann 116).⁴⁴

This is demonstrated in the text when Bessy's fellow servant, Fanny Powers, loses her job for refusing to do the laundry of Wash. Bessy is appalled to learn that Fanny considers herself superior to anybody else, and rushes to Wash's defence:

‘Well, but, Fanny!’ said Bessy, in her most persuasive tone, ‘poor Wash has always had his washing done in the house, and cross as Bridget was I never heard her object to it.’

‘I don't care what any one objects to,’ said Fanny loftily. ‘Nobody can teach *me* what is right or what is wrong – thank God! I know my duty, and I'm willing to do it at all times, but I didn't engage to wash for that old darkey, and *I shan't do it*’ (Sadlier's emphasis). (197)

Bessy then stands up for Wash, stating, “[b]ut don't you know it's a charity, even, to wash the poor old man's clothes? He has no one to do it for him, and he couldn't very well afford to be paying out for it . . . still my notion is, that it's just as much charity to do our old man's washing, and help to keep him clean and comfortable” (197–98).

⁴⁴ Beyond Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, such dynamics are evident in such well-known texts as Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and Martha Finley's *Elsie's Motherhood* (1876), which, although anti-slavery or abolitionist in theory, nonetheless perpetuate racist hierarchies. See MacCann (109–116).

While Bessy's charity may appear well-meaning, by portraying a relationship between a white girl and a Black man thus, Sadlier ultimately reinforces their fundamental difference. Despite both being employed by the same middle-class mistress, Bessy's whiteness, in Sadlier's portrayal, marks her as inherently superior to Wash. By providing charity towards a member of an oppressed and marginalised group to assert and reinforce her own racial superiority, Sadlier's heroine engages in similar cultural work to other heroines of American girls' literature, who "ha[d] a duty to aid and improve the other" (Stoneley 109). Regardless of the motivation, whether benign or hostile, in girls' literature, "there is always a deeply ingrained racial and ethnic aspect to the fiction's articulation of social and financial power" (Stoneley 4).

Crucially, however, Sadlier's heroine is an Irish immigrant girl, rather than a native-born American, a distinction that warrants critical examination given the pronounced preoccupation with the Irish immigrant figure in American girls' literature, as well as in contemporaneous Sunday School literature. In the following overview of American girls' texts, I illustrate how American authors strategically utilised the figure of the Irish immigrant to enhance the status of their young heroines. This overview serves to demonstrate the significance of *Bessy Conway* as a subversive work that ultimately rewrites and reclaims the representation of the Irish immigrant within this literary tradition.

The depiction of Irish immigrants in American girls' literature varied from condescendingly sympathetic to explicitly antagonistic. Although unconcerned with conversion (unlike Sunday School literature), girls' literature nonetheless "always assumes and confirms a hierarchy" (Stoneley 109). For example, in *Isabel; or, Trials of the Heart: A Tale For the Young* by Margaret C. Conkling (1845), a young American heroine comes to the rescue of the "ignorant and helpless beings" that are

a local Irish family when their father almost drowns. The family and their Irish neighbours are incapable of looking after the man themselves and attempt to restore him with alcohol, forcing Isabel to step in with more “suitable sustenance” and “save [her] patient from . . . that fabled panacea of the children of unhappy Erin” (127).

A similar dynamic is evident in *Ellen and Maria, Or, Children Doing Good*, which, although written for the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society (1836), focuses on its American heroines’ goodness, rather than the religious conversion of its Irish characters. In this tale, two sisters make charitable calls to the needy, including a young Irish girl dying of a lung infection in the squalid single room she shares with fifteen other Irish immigrants. Upon witnessing the scene, one of the sisters thinks, “[p]oor girl . . . how can she live! Laying dangerously ill in *such* a room! . . . and then to lay there suffering and witness . . . Irish men and Irish women filling the house and disturbing her rest with their jokes and rude mirth.” (15). Like Conkling’s text, it is the young American girl who comes to the salvation of the helpless Irish, thus affirming her own moral superiority while reinforcing a hierarchy that situates the Irish immigrant as subordinate.

While some authors stopped short of expressing overt disdain for the Irish, portraying them as pitiable and defenseless rather than explicitly contemptible, others articulated their hostility more directly. For example, in *Means and Ends; or, Self-Training*, an instruction guide for American girls by Catharine Maria Sedgwick (1839), the author makes several overtly hostile references to the Irish immigrant population: “[t]hese Irish children are, I know, now ignorant, dirty, rude, and repulsive; but in them you see the future citizens of your country, and on native Americans it must depend whether they shall be the supporters or violators of its laws, a blessing or a scourge” (259). Although the Irish are “half savages, running

about without employment, and without instruction,” the author implores her reader to think, in a manner similar to Lucy Ellen Guernsey in *Irish Amy* (see Chapter One):

[n]ow suppose some dozen or twenty good and sensible women in these neighbourhoods were to associate together, and take upon themselves to turn, the instruction of these children; teach them not only to read, write, and cipher, but acquaint them with the condition and institutions of the country in which they are to live; sow the seeds of virtue and religion; train them to self-preserving habits, and subdue them to civilization. Four hours in a week, given by each member of the society, might do this— and would it not be a good work ? (259)

Sedgwick implies that the American girl possesses a special ability necessary to correct the perceived problem of the Irish in the US, and that she has a patriotic duty in rising to this challenge.⁴⁵

The Irish are beyond redemption in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, and depicted as the “sworn foes” of Amy March and her school friends (72). What is more, they are a ubiquitous, annoying presence throughout the text: “[h]urrah for Miss March, the celebrated American authoress’ cried Laurie, throwing up his hat and catching it again, to the great delight of two ducks, four cats, five hens, and half a dozen Irish children” (152–53). In a letter to Marmee and Beth, Jo recalls dropping gingerbread nuts over her seat while travelling to silence the “roars” of a family of Irish children behind her (324). Unlike the other examples described here, Alcott’s text suggests that even the American girl cannot help the Irish: despite being surrounded by “little Irish children” (72), the March sisters famously offer their charity to a German immigrant family.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Sedgwick was one of the most influential authors of her time in the US, and “regularly identified by American critics as the ‘first lady author of the day.’” (Damon-Bach 22).

⁴⁶ Alcott’s particularly harsh depiction of Irish immigrants possibly stems from personal prejudice. As Camille Cauti argues: “[e]ven though Alcott . . . made a point of defending and

Evidently, the Irish immigrant figure had captured the imagination of American girls' writers, who often depicted them as a problem for the American girl to solve. This is evident in Sedgwick's *Means and Ends*, in which the author asserts that "women are the natural dispensers of these mercies; and I beseech you to give your minds to the subject, that you may select the most important charities, and make them effective" (260). Thus, Sadlier's *Bessy Conway*, in which an Irish Catholic immigrant girl is created in the image of the good, charity-bestowing American girl, rather than depicted as the object of her charity, provides a powerful counternarrative to the dominant portrayals of Irish immigrants in American girls' literature. By adapting the conventions of American girls' literature, Sadlier depicts the Irish Catholic immigrant girl as morally superior, and utilises her to align Irish identity with whiteness and middle-class virtue. To this end, *Bessy Conway* can be interpreted as a radical force of racial positioning, and the figure of the Irish immigrant girl, especially, as an effective tool to stake a claim to white supremacy.

Annie Reilly and the Irish transatlantic heroine

I turn now to the final text to be examined in this chapter: *Annie Reilly; or, The Fortunes of an Irish Girl in New York* by the relatively obscure John McElgun,⁴⁷ published by J.A. McGee in 1873. Dismissed in Fanning's *The Irish Voice* as one of many "indistinguishable" "immigrant-guide novels" (84), the novel has since

accepting the humanity of other persecuted groups of the time . . . the Alcotts dismissed the Irish as being lazy, dirty, and unwilling to help themselves in order to improve their situation" (473–4). In 1874, Alcott published a newspaper article about her "servant girl problem" and firing an Irish domestic servant due to "the faults of her race." See Young (2020).

⁴⁷ As Corporaal has pointed out, "few facts" are known about McElgun's life ("Golden Hills" 334). A report in *The New York Herald* of the author's arrest for alleged libel in *Annie Reilly* in 1873 reveals that he lived in New York and was "a native of Milltown, near Belturbet, in County Cavan" ("Arrest of an Irish Author"). According to the report, shortly after the publication of *Annie Reilly*, a charge of libel was made against McElgun by John G. Carey, a painter who claimed a character of the same name as him in the text was based on him. McElgun denied this, claiming that the character was imaginary.

received some critical attention demonstrating its literary merit.⁴⁸ However, it has not yet been treated as girls' literature—a context I argue reveals important new modes of interpretation. In particular, I argue that *Annie Reilly* reflects the changing function of the immigrant girl figure in Irish-American literature, who embodied an ideal Irish Catholic identity, and, more pertinently, reflected immigration as a catalyst for building a resilient, capable, and physically strong female character. To this end, McElgun's sixteen-year-old heroine can be read as a "transatlantic girl," a figure whose "girlhood is developed through transatlantic travel" (Cadwallader and D'Amico 11). Through Annie's transatlantic journey, McElgun frames immigration not as a perilous path to financial gain, but as a catalyst for building physical and mental strength, thus forging a new vision of female potential in Irish-American literature.

In terms of narrative and themes, *Annie Reilly* bears many similarities to Sadlier's girls' novels. Like *Alice Riordan* and *Bessy Conway*, the text centres on an exemplary young woman whom the implied girl reader may take for her role model. McElgun's preface is also similarly instructional to Sadlier's in *Bessy Conway*: "[a] great difficulty with which the Irish girl in New York has to contend, is the fanatical bigotry of some of the mushroom employers of the city," who "take advantage of the dependent station of a Catholic girl, to insult and trample on her most sacred feelings." Since "such wretches are not few, even in free America . . . it devolves upon every intelligent Irish girl to study thoroughly the truths of her religion, that she may be able to repel the foul slanders against her creed, as Annie Reilly did" (7–8).

Despite these similarities, and the significant fact that Annie Reilly has no choice but to leave Ireland to save her family, McElgun ultimately portrays the US as a place where the Irish girl's character can be improved, thus distinguishing *Annie*

⁴⁸ See Corporaal (2010); Strating (2020); Sullivan (2016).

Reilly from Sadlier's more cautionary depictions of the New World. Where Sadlier emphasises the threats of religious conversion and cultural assimilation to such an extent that Bessy Conway ultimately returns home to Ireland,⁴⁹ McElgun frames the US as a site of potential, where the Irish girl's character is strengthened through her encounters and experiences. Where Sadlier depicts Irish girls as either successful or doomed by their experiences of emigration in both of her girls' novels, McElgun offers a more optimistic vision of the Irish immigrant experience for young women, depicting several female characters leading fuller, happier lives than would have been possible in Ireland.

While McElgun doesn't overlook the hardship of emigration, acknowledging that "there is no sadder sight" than that of forced exile (88), the New World is ultimately a source of hope in the text: "[w]hat a moment it is for those kept down with poverty and oppression at home . . . when their weary eyes first rest on America's shore! Once there, they know tyranny can claim them no more, and that every advantage, every justice allowed an honest people on earth, will be their share" (129). Indeed, when Annie meets an old neighbour in New York who has built a successful life for himself, she thinks he "must be the happiest man in the world" (146). Once defined by displacement and hardship, the Irish immigrant narrative was now beginning to reflect progress, integration, and even prosperity—as is evident by the word "fortunes" in McElgun's title.

This development reflects changing historical circumstances for Irish immigrants, who, by the 1870s, had begun to establish more stable communities, achieve political influence, and gain access to upward mobility in American society.

⁴⁹ Fanning describes this as one of Sadlier's "least plausible plot resolutions": "Bessy's return is motivated more by Sadlier's pessimism about American city life for Irish Catholics than by the demands of realistic fiction. Moreover, the picture of a successful immigrant girl returning to Ireland to rescue her family in 'the terrible year of the Famine' is formidable wishful thinking" (134). For insight into the phenomenon of the "Returned Yank"—Irish emigrants returning to Ireland—see Lynch-Brennan (57–9); Schofield (2013).

According to Miller, “[b]etween 1870 and 1921 Irish-America emerged from the near-ubiquitous poverty and crippling prejudice of the Famine decades. The process was slow . . . but by the early twentieth century Irish-America was a relatively mature and exceptionally diverse society, enjoying some real prosperity, far greater security than in 1850–70, and inordinate influence in politics and organized labor” (*Emigrants and Exiles* 492).

Similarly, Kenny argues that, “[b]y the 1870s there was already a small but significant upper and upper-middle class of Irish Americans.” Although “most new arrivals continued to occupy the lower rungs of the social ladder,” the fact that impoverished immigrants increasingly lived in the same cities as “well-established middle-class Irish Americans of the second and third generations” demonstrates the emergence of class distinctions in the Irish immigrant community (*American Irish* 149). Indeed, this is evident in McElgun’s text, when Annie meets the Sweenys, a middle-class Irish immigrant family who, having emigrated decades previously, “accumulated money enough to purchase [a] cottage and live comfortably” (140).⁵⁰

The evolving Irish immigrant experience led to the depiction of Irish immigrants in Irish-American as capable agents navigating the American landscape and successfully staking a claim in it. Moreover, the New World was a place where immigrants, both male and female, could reach their potential. For example, in *From Killarney to New York; or, How Thade Became a Banker* by Sister Mary Frances Cusack (*The Nun of Kenmare*) (1878), which was also published by J.A. McGee, a note at the beginning of the text reads: “[t]his tale was written . . . at the request of the publisher . . . to typify an incident in Irish American life” and its “generally successful development under the genial influence of American institutions and

⁵⁰ Kenny also observes that “military participation of the Irish in the Civil War worked in favour of their acceptance and assimilation” (123). See Kenny (*The American Irish* 121–124).

customs” (3). Where considerable energy was devoted in earlier Irish-American literature to cautioning readers against potential pitfalls in North America, later literature evidently reflects a growing confidence in the immigrant’s ability to adapt and thrive without the same obsessive fear of moral or religious compromise.

That McElgun, like Sadlier, chose to depict this shift via the figure of the Irish immigrant girl is significant. In earlier texts, whether written for a young or adult reader, the survival of the heroine depended on strict adherence to her Catholic faith. Consistently represented as a role model for the implied reader, as in Sadlier’s texts, she is never genuinely imperilled by failure, thus preventing the possibility of a meaningful character arc. Rather, such novels as Sadlier’s depict young women’s “steadfastness and ability to maintain good character in the face of prejudice and temptations” (Sullivan *The Shamrock* 198). Although they find success in the New World, such heroines as Alice Riordan and Bessy Conway are not otherwise improved by their experiences of emigration, having had nothing to learn in the first instance.

By contrast, Annie Reilly reflects a heroine whose character is enhanced by emigration. Rather than merely resisting the corrupting influences of her new environment, Annie actively engages with it, demonstrating that the immigrant girl can both preserve her Irish Catholic identity in the US *and* be improved by the challenges of emigration. For this reason, as discussed at the beginning of this section, McElgun’s heroine can be read as a transatlantic girl, a figure defined by “self- and re-self-formation” (Cadwallader and D’Amico 4).

Significantly, the transatlantic girl’s “struggle for self is often manifested in the choices she makes when confronted with those who are different from her” because “an understanding of self is tied with an understanding of national origin” (Cadwallader and D’Amico 11). In Ireland, Annie Reilly’s identity is defined by

gendered expectations that restrict her agency and make her weak, anxious, and passive (see below). However, in the US, she must be physically strong, assertive, and courageous to survive. The drastic change of environment compels her to explicitly develop resilience and a sense of autonomy. Indeed, immigration often held this appeal for young Irish women, who, along with their families, “regarded America as a place of opportunity more than exile, a place where personal ambition and hopes could be met as well as decent living conditions secured for themselves and their families left behind” (Meaney et al 103–04).⁵¹ While Sadlier’s girls’ novels focused on the latter, McElgun’s demonstrates how emigration could be the making of the girl as an individual, rather than merely a means of economic support for her family.

This is initially evident through the character of Kitty Brady, Annie’s childhood friend who emigrated some years before Annie. On the eve of Annie’s departure, Kitty’s mother praises Mrs. Reilly for her “good wisdom in sending Annie to America,” and assures her that “[m]y poor daughter . . . that had neither education nor much ability of any kind, see how well she is doing” (83). Indeed, when Annie is reunited with Kitty in New York, she scarcely recognises the “neatly-dressed, bright-eyed, intelligent-looking girl, who looked so totally unlike the Kitty Brady she remembered that she could not believe it was the same” (139). While Kitty is thriving in New York and earning enough money to support her family at home—as her mother remarks, “[s]ince she went to America, I have never known the want of a shilling” (83)—her success is also linked to her character development in New York.

⁵¹ Nolan similarly argues that “[r]ather than accept their newly marginal lives as celibate dependents on family farms . . . more and more women left Ireland In view of Irish women’s increasingly restricted lives, their decision to emigrate becomes a remarkable example of female self-determination (3). Similarly, Lynch-Brennan argues that Irish women emigrated “in search of husbands, employment and more adventure than they thought was available to them in rural Ireland” (59).

For example, when the girls are out walking and Annie is harassed by a man she met on the boat, Kitty confidently advises her: “[n]ow, Miss Reilly, you must not be so easily alarmed as that, or you cannot well live in New York. You will see more frights than him before a week” (144). Kitty also advises Annie to leave her place of work immediately when it becomes hostile, recognising the environment as unsafe, and assisting her friend in packing her belongings without delay (195). Unlike Annie, who is timid and uncertain, Kitty has developed resilience and pragmatic attitude in the perilous landscape of New York, enabling her to confront danger without hesitation and thrive in her adopted home.

What is striking about a secondary female character like Kitty is that she functions to reinforce the message that emigration improved the Irish girl’s life. Whereas in *Alice Riordan* and *Bessy Conway* Sadlier utilises such characters as Margaret, Sally and Bridget to demonstrate the ill-fate of immigrant girls who deny their Catholic faith and ignore the sound advice of their elders, Kitty is not a cautionary tale. Rather, she is rewarded for the independence and worldliness she has cultivated in New York. This is evident, for example, when she returns to Ireland for a visit and everyone finds her “so well informed and so intelligent” (221). Such is the potential of the female transatlantic experience, which can be understood as “a dynamic means of expressing contradictions within, alternatives to, ambivalence about, and reformations of varied controlling conditions” (Wesley xvi). Not only does “her journey inscribe a place for women in the world, but by challenging the range of privileges and restrictions authorized by gendered spatial orders, the trope of the woman’s journey is a narrative reconstruction of the meanings of that world. As her own subject, the woman traveler goes beyond subversion to construction of alternative possibility” (Wesley xv).

Brigitte Bailey similarly argues in *Transatlantic Women: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and Great Britain* that “[n]ineteenth-century American women writers moved—culturally, intellectually, and geographically—in a transatlantic world” (xiii), and, as such, many American women-authored texts “reveal the ways in which travel writings engage and critique . . . normative nineteenth-century categories as nation, race, class, and gender” (xv). More generally, in *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*, Judith Hamera and Alfred Bendixen argue that “American travel writing, like travel itself, is constitutive, a tool of self- and national fashioning that constructs its object even as it describes it” (1).

Characters like Kitty Brady thus represent a departure from the secondary characters who came before her in Irish-American girls’ literature, and align with Wesley’s notion of the female traveller as “tentative deviser of her own destiny through movement on her own terms” (xviii).

Significantly, *Annie Reilly* emerged at a point in time when fictionalised travelogue was “taking root in American literature” (Cadwallader “Everything, So Indiscernible” 162). Such texts as Mark Twain’s *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) and Adeline Trafton’s *An American Girl Abroad* (1872) serve as evidence of a “burgeoning field of literature, including fictional and nonfictional travel writing, as well as works that are a combination of both, by female and male writers” (Cadwallader “Everything, So Indiscernible” 162–63).⁵² Not only was there a rise in travel writing in the post-Civil War period, which “often reflected a greater cosmopolitanism, a greater openness to the possibility of foreign influence” (Bendixen 124), but Alcott’s *Little Women*—which can be understood as the “benchmark, canonical . . . transatlantic novel about girlhood” (Cadwallader and

⁵² For more on the development of American children’s travel literature see Nesmith (2014). The subject is also examined in Chapter Three.

D'Amico 5)—was published. Imbued with references to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the novel is "a global story that depicts young women's identities being transformed because of transatlantic contact" as the famous March sisters "learn that their national origin makes them part of who they are personally, while their interactions . . . afford them room to grow" (Cadwallader and D'Amico 8–10).

Being an immigrant story, *Annie Reilly* bears little in common with *Little Women* on the surface. Indeed, unlike Amy March's Grand European Tour in Alcott's text, which is intended solely to refine and improve her character, Annie Reilly has no choice but to leave Ireland to save her family from poverty. The circumstances are vastly different, yet "formally, historically, racially, and socially diverse works are related in that a focus on thematics of movement and stasis operates to overturn the conventionalized expectations reinforced by the lenses of standard genres or periods. In each case, the enactment of journey reveals values unavailable within the terms of the dominant culture" (Wesley xv).⁵³ Thus, despite their differing circumstances, McElgun's immigrant girls and Alcott's March sisters both demonstrate that transatlantic travel facilitates a transformative opportunity that enables the girl figure to negotiate and develop her character.

I now turn to examine the transformative effects of transatlantic travel on McElgun's heroine. In Ireland, as mentioned, Annie Reilly is portrayed as a figure of emotional and physical fragility, burdened by the weight of familial expectations and socioeconomic hardship. After her family is threatened with eviction, Annie feels compelled to suppress her own despair in order to support her parents, choosing to "guard" her emotions and do "all in her power to comfort her father and mother" (42–3). Although she attempts to present herself as "the happiest one of the family" (61–2), Annie's physical appearance, marked by "pensive blue eyes" (11) and "pale,

⁵³ It is worth noting that Wesley's study considers a wide range of "travel" narratives, including narratives of captivity, slavery, immigration and voluntary travel.

quivering cheeks” (48), frequently betrays the toll of her emotional burden and internal distress. For reasons left unexplained, Annie is described as being too frail to walk during childhood and must be carried to school by her brother and future husband (16), further emphasising her initial dependence and delicacy in the text.

In presenting Annie as weak and frail in Ireland, McElgun sets the stage for a narrative of growth and reinvention through the opportunity of emigration. In particular, he suggests that emigration strengthens the Irish girl, both physically and mentally, and that it is her newfound strength, rather than solely her Catholic faith, that enables her to thrive. This is evident in the first scene in New York, when Annie arrives off the boat at Castle Garden and must retrieve her suitcase from the excited crowd. The narrator declares that “[i]t was only the strong and rugged could save their share in such a place . . . a person looking on at one of these scenes could not help thinking that any strong enough to carry away their effects . . . were able to get along in America as far as muscle was concerned” (133). In her very first moments, Annie thus learns that survival in the US demands more than virtue or piety: it requires assertiveness and physical stamina.

McElgun’s depiction of physical strength and general health as a distinctly female virtue is striking. It appears throughout the text, most significantly in a comical exchange recounted by the character of Miss Talbot, about two women competitively describing their daughters and granddaughters. One boasts of “her daughter’s accomplishments, and how beautiful and healthy she was,” to which the other woman replies:

[t]alk of your daughter’s beauty, and her shoulders not the breadth of her hand. Talk of her health. Why my granddaughter wasn’t a day sick in eleven years, when she had the shakes, and your daughter was home two weeks lying with you last fall. And speak of accomplishments: my granddaughter

knows how to eat like a Christian, and has the best appetite of any young lady in New York. I would put her for fifty dollars against yours, starved and thin as she is. (207–08)

The women become so competitive that their girls engage in an eating competition to determine the strongest of them, rendering one of them physically sick. Miss Talbot explains that “[s]he is not much better yet; but her grandma is so proud of her that she’ll spare no cost to bring her round. And why would she? See how admired Bella’ll be now in society” (209). Physical health is thus upheld as a marker of a young woman’s social value within McElgun’s text. Unlike traditional models of femininity that prioritise delicacy or passive suffering (see below), McElgun presents strength, appetite, and visible vitality as virtues to be celebrated, even competitively displayed.

From the outset, Annie learns the value of mental and physical strength for making her way in New York, and soon rises to the challenges set before her. For example, when she encounters the man from the boat for a second time, she is not “pale with terror” and “clinging to her friend” for protection as she was the first time (127–28), but courageous: “‘How dare you annoy me this way!’ Annie said, her terror giving her courage. . . . Let me pass now, or I’ll call the police’” (144–45). On her first day in New York, Annie has no issue undertaking a “pretty long walk” (140), something she would have struggled to do at an earlier point in her life in Ireland, and is also determined not to be idle in seeking employment in New York: “[n]otwithstanding that Mr. Sweeny, Mrs. Sweeny and Kitty Brady did all in their power to persuade Annie to take a few weeks’ rest, she advertised for a situation . . . the second day after her arrival in New York” (157).

Indeed, Annie’s industriousness is commended: “[w]hy, bless you, Annie! . . . what a greedy little thing you are! If ever anybody made a fortune in America, you

will. The husband that gets you may take the world easy” (203). Annie is also capable of meeting the physical demands of her work as domestic servant: “Annie spent a very laborious morning. There was no system in the ‘mansion,’ which made the work even harder. Mrs. Phillips would call her from the range to smooth a collar, and from that, before it was finished, to run up-stairs or out to the shop for something she needed ‘desperately,’ as she always added, to hurry Annie” (160–61).

These examples demonstrate a significant character arc for Annie Reilly: New York has tested her mental and physical resilience, and demanded her to be strong in order to survive. Unlike her initial portrayal in Ireland as fragile, passive, and emotionally overburdened, Annie’s experiences in the US enable her to forge a new identity rooted in independence, resourcefulness, and good health.

McElgun’s iteration of the strong Irish immigrant girl as a catalyst for transformation and empowerment is significant for many reasons. Firstly, it aligns with a development in girls’ literature, both American and British, in which the presentation of a girl’s health, as Kristine Moruzi argues, was now “an important facet of her femininity” (83). According to Moruzi, the “successful expansion and redefinition of girlhood to include health” arose in the latter decades of the nineteenth century to accommodate such realities as the fact that more young women now worked: “female health was . . . vital for women who sought paid employment to support themselves and their families” (83). It was also influenced in part by “racial degeneration fears of the Social Darwinists” (86), following the publication of Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* (1871), and a consequential desire to assure the production of “healthy mothers” to protect against racial degeneration (84).⁵⁴

In the US, Griswold points out a similar “concern in so many American childhood classics with the subject of physical health.” While Griswold attributes an

⁵⁴ The tomboy figure also emerged in girls’ literature at this time for the same reasons. See Chapter 3.

“obsession” (*Audacious Kids* 17) with the motif of physical health to general children’s literature, it was evidently a particular concern in American girls’ literature. This reflected a newfound societal concern with women’s health in the US in the mid-nineteenth century, as demonstrated by the emergence of such publications as Catharine Beecher’s *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness* (1855). In this 200-page manifesto, Beecher expresses grave concern about the health of American women: “if a plan for destroying female health, in all the ways in which it could be most effectively done, were drawn up, it would be exactly the course which is now pursued by a large portion of this nation, especially in the more wealthy classes” (7). Beecher also expresses concern for American children, the future of American society, whom she believes have been failed by parents who “have done almost everything they could do to train their children to become feeble sickly and ugly In consequence of this dreadful neglect and mismanagement, the children of this country are every year becoming less and less healthful and good looking” (8).

Beecher’s manifesto coincided with what Diane Price Herndl describes as the “widespread cultural acceptance of women’s innate unhealthiness” in the mid-nineteenth century, which was “believed to be both woman’s lot because of her feminine role as a mother and her lot when she violated the feminine role and refused motherhood” (21).⁵⁵ Significantly, “[t]he sickly woman emerged as a figure in American society just as the sickly woman became a predominant literary figure. There have, of course, always been ill, suffering, and dying characters in literature, and many of them have been women, but in the mid-nineteenth century, the female invalid became a standard feature of much American fiction” (Herndl 21–2).

⁵⁵ Welter similarly points out that “doctors were concerned with the feeble health of America’s girls” in the mid-nineteenth century” (*Dimity Convictions* 12).

Indeed, there are countless examples of female “invalids” in American literature from the mid-nineteenth century, with the figure often inscribed upon the body of a girl. Notable examples include young heroines from texts previously discussed in this chapter, such as Little Eva from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Beth March from *Little Women*, and Carol Bird from *The Birds’ Christmas Carol*. In these texts, illness is linked to virtue, thus leading to the dominant trope in girls’ literature of the “saintly child” or “dying maiden.” According to Anne Tropp Trensky, the hugely popular saintly child figure originated in the early nineteenth century, and portrayed “the confrontation between an innocent child and a corrupt society, and the demonstration of the ultimate power of innocence” (389). Trensky further points out that the child saint figure followed a similar pattern in the hundreds of texts in which it appeared. The figure was often female, their inner grace “marked either by pale skin and golden curls or by a spiritual glow that transforms otherwise plain features” (389). Most importantly, the child saint ultimately dies, making them, as Welter argues, a figure “literally too good for this world” (*Dimity Convictions* 11).

It is against this cultural backdrop that McElgun’s novel emerges. Annie Reilly most closely resembles the “saintly child” or “dying maiden” figure when in Ireland, where she is depicted as delicate in health and disposition. Significantly, after the family learns that they are to be evicted, Annie’s mother’s health deteriorates immediately: “[Farrell] saw his wife reclining in her daughter’s arms, while a stream of blood poured from her nose and down over her face and breast” (66). Demonstrating extreme frailty, Mrs. Reilly’s physical decline can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of Annie’s own fate of suffering had she remained in Ireland. However, Annie’s new life in New York thwarts this trajectory. By leaving behind the physical and emotional burdens embodied by her mother, Annie escapes the

decline and suffering of the dying maiden figure, instead pursuing a path of resilience and survival as a modern transatlantic heroine.

That McElgun depicts the US as a site of health and survival for the immigrant girl figure is also significant, and marks an important departure in Irish-American literature, which previously perpetuated the opposite message. For example, in Sadlier's texts, the New World puts the girl's health at risk, as is evident in *Bessy Conway* when Bessy's former colleague, Sally, following a series of poor choices, "lay down on a bed of sickness from which she never rose" (229). Bessy's neighbour from Ireland, Ally, who emigrated with her and later opens a public house in New York with her alcoholic Irish husband, is similarly sapped of her health in the US: "[a]ll that hearty plumpness that poor Ally brought with her from the healthful plains of Tipperary had gone, leaving nothing behind but skin and bone . . . that contrasted painfully with the neat, tidy 'round-about' little woman that Ally used to be" (216).⁵⁶

The figure of the Irish girl losing her health to emigration also appears in the lyrics of popular Irish ballads, as a way to deter young women from emigrating. As Lynch-Brennan highlights, "[e]migration was not endorsed by all sectors of Irish society" and the Catholic Church "warned young Irish girls against the dangers of immortality that faced them in the United States" (42). Such ballads as "The Irish Peasant Girl" by Charles Kickham (c.1859) and "Noreen Bawn" by J.M. Crofts (c.1910) "describe beautiful young girls, popular in their own places, gentle and generous, whose health is destroyed by emigration. Kickham's heroine dies in America; Noreen Bawn returns home to Ireland with consumption, the disease of

⁵⁶ Sadlier's depiction of Ireland as a site of health and vitality is also evident in *Alice Riordan*, when the narrator remarks of the Irish passengers setting sail, "Irish . . . by the rosy hue of health on their weather-bronzed features" (6). It is possible that in overtly associating Ireland with health that Sadlier was attempting to distance the country from associations with the Famine, which was ongoing when *Alice Riordan* was published.

poverty that brought not only death but shame” (Murphy “The Irish Servant Girl” 135). Such portrayals of “the curse of emigration,” to quote Crofts’ song, reflect increased disapproval of the trend in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the figure of the Irish emigrant girl evidently often bearing the brunt.⁵⁷

By contrast, in *Annie Reilly*, McElgun makes the US a site of health for his heroine, and Ireland one of illness. For this reason, Annie Reilly can be understood to represent the transatlantic girl, a figure, as Christiane E. Farnan puts it, “whose staunch physical fitness serves as a necessary foundation for the maintenance of her national, spiritual, and moral identity” (26). In an essay examining the physical strength of the literary transatlantic American girl, Farnan argues that this figure “must motivate themselves to be physically fit, self-reliant, and self-sustainable” (32) to withstand “the physical demands of a transplanted transatlantic life” (35). Annie Reilly embodies the emergence of a new Irish-American transatlantic girlhood as one that portrays emigration as a source of resilience, rather than ruin, and challenges dominant associations of the Irish immigrant girl with illness and weakness.

Conclusion

In her research on North American women’s fiction, Nina Baym argues that “we have tended to let writing by a group of New England born, protestant and middle-class White women stand for all women,” when “[o]nly their great popularity gives them some claim to be representative” (*Woman’s Fiction* 11). This chapter has demonstrated the multiplicity of voices writing about girlhood in the US in the mid-nineteenth century by highlighting the valuable contributions of Irish immigrant authors to the development of American girls’ literature. The works of Mary Anne Sadlier and John McElgun evidently complicate and expand our understanding of

⁵⁷ For more on anti-emigration stances in Ireland in the nineteenth century, see MacDonagh (1947); Miller and Boling (1990).

what constituted “girlhood” in the US in this period, revealing it to be a more diverse experience than previously acknowledged.

Recognising *Alice Riordan*, *Bessy Conway*, and *Annie Reilly* as examples of Irish Catholic girls’ literature broadens and enriches the canon of American girls’ literature, and also demonstrates the necessity of including immigrant perspectives in historical narratives of American identity and literary production. In grouping the texts of Sadlier and McElgun together and identifying them as girls’ literature, this chapter has demonstrated important new ways of reading and interpreting them. For example, the chapter has shown that the texts share much in common with such American girls’ texts as Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World*, and that reading them in parallel with American girls’ texts enables a fuller appreciation of their narrative complexity, particularly regarding their portrayals of such themes as the Cult of True Womanhood, white supremacy, and the transatlantic heroine. Evidently, Sadlier and McElgun engaged with the conventions of girls’ literature of the period to negotiate and ultimately elevate the status of the Irish Catholic immigrant girl, who represented the future of the Irish Catholic community in the US, to be equal, if not superior, to that of her American-born, middle-class Protestant contemporary.

In many of the contemporary studies of American girls’ literature this chapter has drawn on, critics have repeatedly recognised the need for more inclusive studies on American girls’ literature. For example, Cadwallader and D’Amico acknowledge that their study on transatlantic girlhood “is defined as much by the lack of stories within it as by those included” (16), while Reese points out that “the white, middle-class girls’ story is not a complete picture of the publishing market at this time” (3). Finally, in an essay on American girls’ literature, Reese and Dawn Sardella-Ayres point out that “absent or silenced” are the writers whose work does not represent “white, middle-class, heteronormative, abled, and Protestant” experiences (34). By

focusing on the works of Irish immigrant authors whose works centred on fictional portrayals of Irish Catholic immigrant girlhood, this chapter directly addresses some of those silences and brings to light narratives that have existed in the shadows of the canon. By considering such writers as Sadlier and McElgun in this context, our critical understanding of girlhood in nineteenth-century America advances beyond narrow representations, and begins to account for the ethnic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic diversity that truly shaped it.

Chapter Three

Heading West: Irish-American children's literature at the turn of twentieth century

Sprites were here when ample camels ambled

And tigers cocked a weather eye for rain.

Then fairies sailed with Gaspar de Portola,

Coming in old galleons from Spain.

After that some Irish elves came traipsing

Down the world to see what could be seen;

Settling on a mushroom dotted mesa,

Tempted by a greener shade of green.

— Monica Shannon, *California Fairy Tales* (1926)¹

Sweet groves, green pastures; buzz of bee

And scent of flower; a dash of foam

On rugged cliffs; the blessed sea,

And then—the lights of home!

— Mary E. Mannix, “The Return to California” (1909)

¹ Monica Shannon was an Irish-American author born to Irish immigrant parents in Canada in 1893. Her children's novel, *Dobry*, won the Newbery Medal in 1935. See Conclusion.

Thus far, this thesis has examined a selection of boys' and girls' texts from the mid-nineteenth century by first- and second-generation Irish immigrant writers in the US. Drawing on the foundational research of leading Irish-American literature critics, including Charles Fanning, Eileen P. Sullivan, Marguerite Corporaal, and Peter D. O'Neill, the thesis has examined novels by Fr. John T. Roddan, Mary Anne Sadlier, and John McElgun as children's literature, and demonstrated important new ways of interpreting and understanding them in this context. The thesis now turns its attention to two writers who have been almost entirely overlooked in Irish-American literature criticism to date, and omitted from every major study on the subject. They are Mary E. Mannix and her sister, Julia C. Walsh—second-generation Irish Catholic immigrants who grew up in Ohio, and made significant contributions to the development of Irish-American literature at the turn of the twentieth century.

With the exception of the previously discussed essay by Gallagher, which examines *The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant* by Mary E. Mannix alongside Sadlier's *Willy Burke*, Mannix and Walsh have fallen into total obscurity in contemporary criticism of Irish-American literature. Moreover, the familial connection between the authors has not previously been identified. Through a video interview with Deirdre Andrews, the great-granddaughter of Mary E. Mannix,² I learned that Mannix likely had a sister named Julia Walsh, though no record in the family archive could confirm this. Separately, while reviewing the publisher's advertisements in the back matter of one of Mannix's children's novels, I encountered a children's novel by a writer named Julia C. Walsh. Subsequent archival press material, located in the Library of Congress *Chronicling America* digitised newspaper archive, confirmed that Julia C.

² I identified Ms Andrews, who lives in California, online while researching Mannix. After making contact with her initially via email, I learned that she and her family have a small, private archive of correspondence and other material relating to Mannix, which she was happy to discuss with me. I then sought permission from the School of English Ethics Committee at TCD to carry out a formal video interview, the transcript of which is included in the Appendix.

Walsh was, in fact, the sister of Mary E. Mannix.³ This thesis therefore establishes, for the first time, the familial connection between two long-neglected Irish-American writers, and recovers many examples of their work.

Identifying and analysing works by Mannix and Walsh advances this thesis considerably. Not only were both authors publishing works for children at the turn of the twentieth century, thus introducing a new historical period through which to examine the development of Irish-American children's literature, but both situated their work in the American West, rather than the East, thus offering a new regional perspective that broadens the geographical scope of this study. Together, the works of Mannix and Walsh reveal new ways in which Irish-American history and identity were constructed and negotiated in children's literature across varying times and landscapes.

The texts to be examined in this chapter are *Michael O'Donnell; or, The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant* by Mary E. Mannix (1900) and *Tooralladdy* by Julia C. Walsh (1907). Both were published by Benziger Brothers, a Catholic publishing firm with offices in New York, Chicago, and Cincinnati ("Our History"). Similarly, both texts centre on Irish Catholic orphan boys making their way in multicultural western cities during the period usually referred to as the Age of Reform or the Progressive Era in the US. Compared to earlier Irish-American children's literature, the tone of both texts is strikingly different, and neither is as overtly didactic as the texts discussed thus far.

Whereas earlier authors felt compelled to prepare and instruct the implied young reader as they adapted to their new lives in the US, both Mannix and Walsh's texts resist such overt instruction, which now represented an older tradition in American children's literature (see Chapter One). Indeed, Mannix demonstrates this

³ A report in *The Catholic Times* claims that the writer "Miss Julia C. Walsh of Cincinnati . . . was a sister of the noted author, Mary E. Mannix of California." See Hammel (1960).

very development when she writes, “[t]he most ‘advanced’ of my readers may now be tempted to turn from further perusal of what they are apprehensive is to be a ‘goody-goody’ story” (37–8). Mannix is clearly aware that young readers at the turn of the twentieth century “demanded a healthy dose of adventure and not just moral instruction” (Woodside 56).

Anti-Catholic sentiment is also largely absent from both texts, marking another significant departure from earlier Irish-American children’s literature. Rather, Catholicism is depicted in both texts as a neutral strand in the broader fabric of American national identity—integrated into, rather than separated from, the pluralistic communities the protagonists inhabit. To this end, the texts arguably reflect the ideals of multicultural harmony endorsed by reformers of the Progressive Era. The following section offers a brief overview of the impact of the Progressive Era and the Reform movement on American children’s literature to contextualise the texts within this broader historical framework.

Between 1890 and 1917, roughly, the US went through a period of political, social, and economic reform that has come to be known as the Progressive Era.⁴ According to Lewis L. Gould and Courtney Q. Shah, “increased industrialisation, urbanisation, and immigration in the post-Civil War decades “fundamentally changed life in the nation’s major cities, where an exploding population and powerful political machines forced people to recognize the urgent social problem facing urban dwellers” (38). A significant consequence of these intense social developments was the emergence of a generation of reformers who “followed in the

⁴ While specific years can vary according to different critics, the Progressive Era occurred roughly between the final two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century. For example, David Brian Robertson argues in *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Social Policy* that the Progressive Era occurred between “the 1890s and early 1920s” (41). In *The Age of Reform and Industrialization, 1896–1920*, Roman Espejo argues that the defining years of this era were 1898, which marked the end of the Spanish-American War, and 1914, the end of World War I (15).

footsteps of European reformers” (38), and were committed to promoting education, community action, and government reform on behalf of all citizens, both native and immigrant alike. For example, the establishment of Hull House, a settlement house in Chicago, saw influential reformers, Jane Addams and Ellen Starr, live alongside impoverished European immigrants, bringing education and social activities to the neighbourhood,⁵ while the Social Gospel Movement sought to address social problems through the promotion of Protestant values. Together, such social movements “embodied a real sense of concern about the plight of the disadvantaged and the direction of society as industrialism became more prevalent” (Gould and Shah 40).

The Progressive Era was also preoccupied with children, who represented the future of American citizenship. Notably, children’s librarianship also emerged as a profession during this time, with many involved in this field aligned closely “with other professions with a particular interest in children, such as social workers and those involved in the settlement house movement” (Kimball “Seeing the World” 677). Described as the “minders” of children’s literature by Leonard S. Marcus and the “bookwomen” by Jacalyn Eddy, this group of predominantly female editors, librarians, and booksellers “helped to shape the specific economic and cultural niche of the modern children’s book industry between 1919 and 1939” (Eddy 3), and were “critically important for the future direction of children’s books in America” (Schmidt xii). Under their influence, children’s literature developed considerably during the Progressive Era, with a particular emphasis on literature intended to make

⁵ Charlotte J. Rich expands on the history of Hull House and the broader Settlement Movement in her study on women in the Progressive Era: “Beginning in 1889, settlement houses based on models in London slums sprang up in low-income areas of American cities These establishments were usually operated by women with college degrees who sought work with a social purpose, hoping to aid poor and often immigrant urban citizens by living among them and offering instruction, recreation, and cultural activities” (13–14).

conscientious citizens of American children, especially in relation to the native-born and foreign “other.”

Considering, as James Marten argues, that the attitudes and efforts of the Progressive Era reflect “the first time anyone had tried to shape and mold young Americans with quite so modern intentions and methods” (2), it follows that children’s literature was harnessed as a tool to reflect and instil the values and civic ideals of the period. Several examples of American children’s literature produced during the Progressive Era demonstrate how narratives for young readers were adapted to promote ideals of citizenship and social responsibility, while also reflecting broader debates about immigration, cultural pluralism, gender expectations, and national identity. For example, Sarah E. Clere argues that *The Little Colonel* series by Annie Fellows Johnston, published between 1895 and 1912, effectively represents “the shifting contours of childhood and adolescence over the course of the Progressive Era as Johnston depicts the growing influence of the middle class and the increasingly public roles played by its girls and women” (102). Such texts as Johnston’s emphasised collective female organising and marked a shift away from the promotion of individual charity (see Chapter Two) to the establishment of local and national networks, such as the King’s Daughters, “a Protestant ‘circle’ whose members perform charitable acts for the ill and indigent” (Clere 112).

Gwen Athene Tarbox similarly asserts that Progressive Era girls’ literature “emphasiz[ed] the importance of female collaboration and support” and argues that *Two College Girls* by Helen Dawes Brown (1866) was a significant influence on this development: “[i]n 1893, *Two College Girls* was in its fourteenth edition and had been joined by hundreds of texts written by other clubwomen authors who had discovered an effective medium for broadcasting social and political messages to the

next generation of young women. Working independently, yet informed by the same traditions, they created heroines who lived their lives beyond the limited realm of the domestic sphere” (3).⁶

Children’s literature from the Progressive Era also celebrated modernity and the many technological advances of the time, demonstrating the forward-thinking outlook of Progressive reformers. For example, in an essay examining the popularity of *The Brownies*, “a merry band of good-natured gnomes created by Canadian American writer and illustrator Palmer Cox, who made their first appearance in the children’s magazine *St. Nicholas* in 1883 and subsequently inspired a consumer craze that lasted well into the twentieth century” (171), Christina Meyer argues that the Brownies are “captivated by all aspects of modernity, and they render modernity a playful adventure” (180). Tales in which the Brownies delight in discovering microscopes and telephones promote the message “that science serves to better the Brownies community (by learning and gathering knowledge, and overcoming initial fears), and figuratively, American society. The Brownies narratives, then, are based on and further the ideal of science as a tool for individual and social progress and advancement” (181).

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the Irish-American children’s writers, Mary E. Mannix and Julia C. Walsh, performed similar cultural work to their American counterparts in their respective Progressive Era texts. Beginning with *The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant*, I examine the ways in which Mannix, among other things, embraced the ideals of the Progressive Era to promote a vision of Catholicism that was not explicitly linked to Irishness, but instead depicted as a unifying faith shared across diverse, multiethnic immigrant communities. In doing so, I argue that Mannix positioned Catholicism as a transethnic identity that could assert legitimacy and

⁶ For a study on Progressive Era orphan narratives, see Nelson (2001).

promote pluralism in the US, thus continuing the tradition of earlier Irish-American children's writers, while also reflecting the emphasis on social harmony and collective progress endorsed by many reformers, writers, and educators of the Progressive Era.

In my analysis of *Tooralladdy*, I examine how Walsh similarly promotes a multicultural vision of the US through the depiction of a diverse, yet harmonious neighbourhood in which the children of formerly enslaved Black Americans and European immigrants are depicted as being equal to the white, middle-class children with whom they share a neighbourhood. I argue that Walsh's emphasis on co-operation in relation to race, ethnicity, and class reflects key Progressive Era values, particularly the belief that social reform and civic education could foster harmony within an increasingly pluralistic nation. At the same time, *Tooralladdy* perpetuates certain negative racial stereotypes, demonstrating that even texts with progressive intentions could reproduce the biases of their time. To this end, I argue that Walsh also participated in a broader tradition of American children's literature from the period, in which works promoted civic and moral ideals, while simultaneously reflecting and perpetuating the prejudices of the society from which they emerged.

In addition to reflecting the values of the Progressive Era, the works of Mannix and Walsh are also notable for their depiction of the American West—particularly Mannix. This marks another important departure in Irish-American children's fiction, which was otherwise set in major Eastern cities such as New York and Boston until then, as demonstrated in Chapters One and Two. It also reflects a development in Irish-American literature more generally, which had begun to reflect more of the West in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The primary example Fanning provides of Western-set texts in *The Irish Voice* is George H. Jessop's *Gerald Ffrench's Friends* (1872), a collection of stories he claims “provide a detailed

rendering of the California Irish, as seen through the eyes of Gerald Ffrench, a young Protestant Irish graduate of Trinity College, newly arrived in San Francisco to try his fortune” (*The Irish Voice* 183).⁷ Some novels feature characters who move West in search of gold, such as *Widow Melville’s Boarding House* by Dillon O’Brien (1881), or briefly mention the West, such as Mary Anne Sadlier’s *Con O’Regan; or, Emigrant Life in the New World* (1864): “the lands I mean are away out West in some of the new States, such as Wisconsin, Iowa and others. In fact, there are vast tracts of country still unoccupied in all the Western States” (120). The works examined in this chapter thus broaden the geographical scope of Irish-American literature, and demonstrate greater prominence of the American West in the category than has previously been recognised.

Beyond the category of Irish-American literature, the Western element of Mannix and Walsh’s writing also contributes, as Nina Baym would argue, “to the project of getting women’s voices into the western record” (*Women Writers* 5). In *Women Writers of the American West, 1833–1927*, Baym observes that “the West was a subject reserved for male authors” whose works typically adhered to “the violent male plots typical of the dime novel and its successor, the movie western” (3). However, Western writing by women often “showed women making lives for themselves in the West—what they gave to the West, and what it gave to them” (Baym 2). This is true, for example, of Kate Douglas Wiggin’s *A Summer in a Cañon: A California Story* (1889), a rare example of a girls’ book set in the West, which “dwells much on the beautiful climate and flora. It provides occasional glimpses of Franciscan friars, señoritas with fiery dark eyes, and splendid Spanish horsemen. There are campfire stories about the forty-niners, the overland trek, and

⁷ Fanning also points to such novels as Jessop’s *Judge Lynch: A Tale of the California Vineyards* (1889) and James Doran’s *Zanthon: A Novel* (1891), although neither of these novels depicts the Irish immigrant experience.

the cattle ranches of yore” (Baym *Women Writers* 202).⁸ In this context, Mannix and Walsh can thus be understood as participating in the broader tradition of Western literature by women, with their works illustrating how two Irish immigrant women writers imagined the West as a place of ethnic and religious cooperation and social possibility.⁹

However, while both texts examined in this chapter represent the American West, Mannix engages more explicitly with this setting in her work.¹⁰ In *The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant*, Mannix describes the social and political dynamics that shaped Californian life at the turn of the twentieth century, and engages in questions of assimilation, community, and cultural identity in the region.¹¹ By contrast, Walsh’s depiction of the West does not meaningfully extend beyond her description of the setting in *Tooralladdy* as a suburban street on “what is now the commercial center of a large western city” (10).¹² For this reason, my analysis of Mannix’s text focuses on depictions of the American Western landscape, both

⁸ See also Lundin “The Cultural Work of Kate Douglas Wiggin.” Levy and Mendlesohn also refer to May Wentworth’s *Fairy Tales from Gold Lands* (1867) as an example of West-based children’s literature “which contains tales set in California, many of them taken from the folklore of the local Spanish, Indian and Chinese peoples” (56).

⁹ Baym’s account of women writers also recovers two Irish-American authors absent from Charles Fanning’s foundational study, Mary Elizabeth (née McGrath) Blake and Jennie Anderson Froiseth. Later in the twentieth century, Monica Shannon would also publish California-themed children’s literature, including *California Fairy Tales* (1926) and *Eyes for the Dark* (1928). See Conclusion.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that definitions of the American West are contested by critics. In Baym’s study, the West constitutes “one tier of states over from the Mississippi River” (6), while in the *Encyclopaedia of Women in the American West*, Gordon Morris Bakken and Brenda Farrington state that “[f]or us the West is west of the 100th meridian” (xxiii) (i.e. a longitudinal line that runs further west than the Mississippi river). For an account outlining the scholarly debate regarding the changing definition of what constitutes the West, see Bakken and Farrington (2001).

¹¹ Some of Mannix’s other children’s texts, which do not qualify for analysis in this study due to their lack of engagement with Irish ethnic themes, also participate in literary representation and construction of the West. While it is beyond the scope of this project to analyse such texts as *The Children of Cupa* (1905), *Cupa Revisited* (1909), and *Pancho and Panchita: A Tale of the Southwest* (1899), they would make excellent subjects for future study on Irish-American children’s literature, American children’s literature and American Western literature.

¹² A Western setting features in some of Walsh’s other works. For example, in a serial short story entitled “Forty Years and More,” published in *The Catholic Columbian* in 1908, Walsh tells the story of an Irish immigrant woman who “took up her abode in one of the Western states” in the US. See Walsh (1908 15).

natural and social, while my analysis of *Tooralladdy* emphasises Walsh's explicit engagement with the broader social ideals of the Progressive Era. In doing so, I demonstrate the multiple ways two critically neglected Irish-American sisters contributed to contemporary debates about identity, community, and belonging in the US at the turn of the twentieth century via the medium of children's literature.

The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant *and the American West in Irish-American children's literature*

I begin this section with a brief biographical overview of Mary E. Mannix based on my interview with her great-granddaughter, Deirdre Andrews. To my knowledge, this record accounts for the most extensive biography of Mannix in the public domain, a function previously served by such brief and limited accounts as that included in Georgina Pell Curtis' directory, *The American Catholic Who's Who* (1911).¹³

Born in New York in 1846 to Irish immigrants, Michael and Margaret (née Mansfield) Walsh, Mannix relocated with her family to Reading, Ohio, as a girl, where she first began writing hymns, poems, sketches and stories. Notable early works are the musical compositions, "Bring Flowers of the Rarest," and "The Black Hawk Waltz," both of which Mannix wrote and published at the ages of fifteen and seventeen respectively. After marrying John Baptist Mannix, an Irish attorney who emigrated from Ballybunion, County Kerry, as a young boy, Mannix moved from Ohio to California in search of new professional opportunities and to rear a family.¹⁴

¹³ While there is no entry for Julia C. Walsh in this directory, a "Miss Julia Walsh of Cincinnati, O." is thanked by the Editor in the preface for her assistance (Pell Curtis). Other brief accounts of Mannix's life can be found in newspaper articles, including obituaries for Mannix and her husband. See "The Late John B. Mannix" (1913); "US Catholic Letters" (1938).

¹⁴ According to Andrews, the move west might also have been prompted by legal controversy in which John B. Mannix was embroiled in Ohio. While Andrews was uncertain as to the nature of this controversy, archival press material confirms that Mannix was

Mannix continued writing prolifically throughout her life, publishing at least seven original books for children, countless stories, poems, and hymns for various American Catholic publications, including *Young Catholic Messenger*, *Ave Maria*, *Catholic World*, and *The Catholic Columbian*, and translating texts for children from French. In the above-mentioned biographical entry, Georgina Pell Curtis claims that “the larger and more serious portion” of Mannix’s output was published under pseudonyms (392), two of which Andrews suggests might have been Sylvia Hunting and Sarah Ashburton.¹⁵ Although a full oeuvre of Mannix’s work is impossible to identify due to her apparently frequent and wide use of pseudonyms, this thesis recovers some previously neglected pieces of writing and situates them within the context of Irish-American children’s literature for the first time.

As mentioned, Mannix wrote at least seven original books for children, including novels, short stories, and a biographical account about Catholic saints. Of these books, two have an Irish focus: *The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant* (1900), which I examine below, and *The Tales Tim Told Us* (1898).¹⁶ Two texts for children with an Irish focus suggests that Mannix was considerably influenced and inspired by her Irish ancestry. Indeed, her great-granddaughter notes that the family continues to strongly identify as Irish-American, and have made trips to Ireland over the years. A poem by Mannix’s mother, Margaret Mansfield Walsh, “The Dreamer,” published

charged with embezzlement while residing in Ohio. See “The Case of John B. Mannix” (1886).

¹⁵ A poem by Sylvia Hunting was published by the *Boston Pilot* in 1896. See Hunting.

¹⁶ The latter is a collection of eleven stories originally published individually in the *Ave Maria* magazine, and later published as a book by the same publisher. In the book, the stories are connected by Mannix through use of a frame narrative and central narrator: an Irish storyteller named Tim, who tells “tales, legends of Ireland,—to a group of children between whom and himself there is a strong bond of affection and the excellent understanding that exists between all simple minded folk” (“New Books” 4). Unfortunately, this text has proven the most challenging of Mannix’s to access, and has been excluded from the thesis on this basis. Considering the striking resemblance between the text and such titles as *The Big Tree of Bunlahy* by Padraic Colum (1933), future studies on Irish-American children’s literature would undoubtedly benefit from analysis of it, including a comparative study alongside Colum’s work.

in the *Norwich Bulletin* in 1922, expresses the enduring connection to Ireland, opening with the lines: “[o]h, witch winds, why did ye bear me away, from the greenest isle of the Sea, where the bards of old, their harpstrings told, the songs that live in me?” (6). Julia C. Walsh’s serial short story “Forty Years and More,” set in Ireland and the US, further reflects the family’s Irish immigrant identity, as does an advertisement for *The Tales Tim Told Us*, which states that the stories are “supposed to be told by a . . . faithful retainer in the author’s family” (“Publications”).

Evidently, the Walsh-Mannix literary tradition was deeply rooted in a nostalgic and romanticised idea of Ireland, and poetry and storytelling were ways for the family to nurture, sustain, and arguably perform, their Irish-American identity through the generations. Of such wistful portrayals of Ireland, Fanning is wary: “as ‘Emerald Isle’ sentimentality and nostalgia became rampant they led to unhealthy romanticizing of even the least attractive aspects of Irish life” (*The Irish Voice* 170). What Fanning refers to as the “Celtic twilight” vision of Ireland, which emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, “allowed Irish Americans in the literary life to be both Irish and respectably romantic at once, and also to ignore unpleasant aspects of the contemporary world” (170–1).

However, while it is reasonable to assume *The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant* was inspired by Mannix’s Irish ancestry, it would be imprudent to dismiss it as the “backward look, wistful, nostalgic, and lamenting” that was characteristic of much Irish-American literature from this period (Fanning *The Irish Voice* 78). Rather, I argue that the text is valuable for its rare literary portrayal of the immigrant experience in California at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly that of young boys. To demonstrate this effectively, a historical overview of the Irish Catholic immigrant experience in California is provided below, with special attention

paid to the establishment of juvenile reform schools that frequently targeted immigrant boys.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Irish Catholic immigrant experience in the US had evolved by the latter decades of the nineteenth century and was considerably more positive than that of Famine-era immigrants. Several factors contributed to this development, including Irish immigrant efforts in the Civil War, as well as the gradual assimilation of Irish immigrants in the US over several generations. Building on the historical overview provided in Chapter Two, this chapter demonstrates the positive impact of the American West on the Irish Catholic immigrant experience, which is reflected throughout Mannix's text.

While historians of the Irish in the US "have not undertaken sustained inquiry into the differences between the East and West" (Campbell "California, Race" 232), there is broad agreement that the American West was a considerably more hospitable environment than the East coast from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. According to Meagher, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, "New England remained the most difficult place for Irish immigrants to make any upward progress and California the easiest" (*The Columbia Guide* 102).¹⁷ This was especially true for immigrants who, like the Mannixes, settled in California, "the favoured western destination . . . with 60 per cent of that state's Irish population living in San Francisco in the period 1870–90" (Kenny *The American Irish* 143).

The promises of the Gold Rush reinforced the idea of the US as a land of prosperity in the mid-nineteenth century, making the West a particularly attractive and exciting destination in the imagination of Irish immigrants. Coinciding as they did with the Great Famine's horrors, "the 1848 California gold strikes at least temporarily

¹⁷ This is echoed by Campbell, who asserts that "the historical record supports this view that conditions in California were more benign than those encountered in the major East Coast cities" ("California, Race" 237).

reinvigorated the old image of America as a land of easy riches” (Miller *Emigrants and Exiles* 562).¹⁸ More importantly than gold, however, it was the early arrival of Irish Catholic immigrants in a novel society that was critical to their success, and enabled them to secure “a position of legitimacy in a society where nascent political, economic, and social structures were fluid” (Campbell “Ireland’s Furthest Shores” 66).

Through its assertion of difference and newness, California “paved the way for fuller participation of the Irish than existed elsewhere across the diaspora, and this difference was celebrated enthusiastically by the immigrants” (Campbell “Ireland’s Furthest Shores” 85). As J.J. Lee observes of the California Irish, “the Irish flourished under a sunny sky from the start, symbolized by [San Francisco] having their first Irish mayor as early as 1867” (12). Thus, whereas Irish immigrants on the East coast faced significant challenges assimilating into an established WASP society, the West presented a more hospitable landscape in which Irish immigrants could actively shape and contribute to the development of a nascent society.

A spirit of adventure also distinguished many West-bound immigrants from those on the East coast. One reason for this is that these immigrants were not solely escaping the Famine, as the majority of their East-coast contemporaries were, but often “moving from the gold fields in Victoria to the ‘gold mountain’ of California” (Meagher *The Columbia Guide* 85). Rather than fleeing the trauma and hardship of Ireland in the 1840s and 1850s, they were willingly travelling from elsewhere in search of prosperity, a fact that is reflected in Mannix’s text, with Michael O’Donnell, having read of California in the newspapers at home, deciding to “follow the star of empire,”

¹⁸ Miller refers to the popular nineteenth-century emigrant ballad, “Muirsheen Durkin,” whose lyrics state “as sure as me name is Carney, I’ll be off to California, where instead of diggin’ praties, I’ll be diggin’ lumps of gold” as an example of the Irish enthusiasm for Western emigration (561). Other primary sources also suggest a positive impression of the West Coast among Irish people, such as the letters between two young domestic servants described in an essay by Ruth-Ann M. Harris, in which they describe being able to earn good money for reasonable work in California, learn to cook, enjoy holidays, and take piano lessons (214–15).

believing that “one has a better chance here” (9). Notably, Michael first arrives in New York, but decides to keep going, as many Irish immigrants did. For this reason, “California’s Irish, many migrating onward from New York, Massachusetts, or Pennsylvania, were familiar with the routines and disciplines of urban life and came with skills learned in years of residence in those states” (Campbell “Ireland’s Furthest Shores” 83). Indeed, as Michael declares: “I’m none the worse for my travel, and what I’ve learned along the way” (9).

Mannix’s young protagonist’s experience of California is vastly different to that of Roddan, Sadlier, and McElgun’s protagonists on the East coast in earlier decades. An exchange with an Irish-American policeman, Donovan, upon Michael O’Donovan’s arrival demonstrates that Irish immigrants were well-established in California in the late nineteenth century, when the text is set, and the policeman tells Michael to “never deny . . . or be ashamed” of his “good old Irish name” (9). Although Michael does encounter some anti-Irish prejudice along the way: “[b]e off with you, Paddy!” (19), he is optimistic about his new life in the US, telling Donovan, “[they] have kind hearts in America, I think” (13). Michael is generally well-received by the strangers he meets, and quickly finds a job and lodging in an unnamed Californian city that can be interpreted as San Diego.¹⁹ Significantly, it is an Irishman who shares the same name as him that takes him in, telling him, “O’Donnell is by no means an uncommon name” (21), further emphasising the ubiquity of the Irish in California by this time.

Another crucial factor in the success of Irish immigrants in California is the fact that Catholicism was a long-established and accepted religion by the time they arrived. Writing in 1869, the editor of the San Francisco *Monitor*, California’s longest-

¹⁹ Mannix does not explicitly identify the Californian city in which Michael makes his home, but his correspondence in the text reveals that it begins with the letter ‘S’ (253; 261). Textual reference to San Miguel Mountain, which is in San Diego County (131), and the fact that Mannix lived in San Diego suggests the unnamed city is very plausibly San Diego.

surviving Irish and Catholic newspaper, stated that Catholicism “has struck as firm a root in California as in any part of the United States . . . and, as probably over a third, if not a full half, of the population of our State belong to her fold, Catholics need not fear the loss of their faith or want of Churches and Catholic associations, even in the more thickly settled districts” (qtd. in Burchell *The San Francisco Irish* 4).²⁰ Catholicism had existed for centuries in California, long before the conquest of the state by the US following the Mexican-US War (also known as the “United States intervention in Mexico”) between 1846 and 1848.²¹ This history directly impacted the reception of Irish Catholics in California from the mid-century onwards, as “the prior presence of Roman Catholicism and the diversity of faiths present after the mid-century ensured that there was no fertile ground for the nativism that Irish immigrants confronted in the East” (Campbell “Ireland’s Furthest Shores” 85).

Particularly striking about Mannix’s representation of Michael O’Donnell’s immigrant experience is that it is not defined by anti-Catholic sentiment, as the texts discussed in Chapters One and Two are. Although passing reference is made to the ongoing struggles of Catholics in the US (77), Michael is not forced to defend his faith against Protestant employers as the protagonists of Roddan, Sadlier and McElgun are,

²⁰ A final important factor in the success of the Irish in California that I wish to address was “the presence in the city of a substantial Chinese population, the effect of which was to produce a racial configuration distinct from that encountered in other North American cities” (“California, Race” 238). While Mannix’s narrative does not address anti-Chinese sentiment, such racial tensions were nonetheless a defining aspect of the Irish immigrant experience in the California she describes, shaping social dynamics and opportunities in ways that extend beyond the scope of this chapter. Not only did the presence of Chinese immigrants in California enable Irish immigrants to live “within the relatively charmed world of the white city dwellers” (Campbell “California, Race” 238), but it led to “fears of displacement in the workforce and an underlying racial ideology that emphasized the inferiority of the Asian population,” which in turn led to violent anti-Chinese racism (Campbell “California, Race” 239). Meagher points out that “[i]n California in the 1870s, Cork-born Irish immigrant Denis Kearney thrilled the crowds on the San Francisco sandlots with his attacks on Chinese immigrants. There and on a tour across the nation, the pugnacious Kearney ended every speech with the booming refrain: “the Chinese must go.” In the middle of the nineteenth century then, Irish Americans earned a reputation as being among the most intensely racist people in America” (*The Columbia Guide* 214). For more on Irish immigrants and anti-Chinese sentiment in California in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, see Fong and Markham (2002); Kenny (*The American Irish* 157–158); Moynihan (2023).

²¹ For more on the origins of Catholicism in California, which dates back to 1598, see Matovina (2019).

nor is he discriminated against for it. Since Catholicism is not explicitly linked to Irishness in the text, Michael finds his faith connects him to a much broader community in California, including other European immigrants and Native Americans. For example, Mrs. Olsen, who invites Michael to live with her, is a Swedish immigrant who converted to Catholicism while living in the US. She expresses the joy of being part of the multiethnic Catholic community to Michael:

I believe I am the only Swedish woman in this whole city who is Catholic But I don't feel no difference, for with God it is all the same And it seems to me beautiful—that feeling that I never have felt till I became a Catholic—that we are all one people. Mrs. Brown, next door, she is Scotchwoman . . . and you are Irish; and Father Beauvais he is French; and Father Ramon he is Spanish; and we are all like one in the Church. (55)

The power of Catholicism as a shared multicultural faith is further emphasised when Michael, having wrongfully been accused of theft and expelled from his new home, considers approaching a Native American encampment for help: “[h]e felt no fear of them; for he knew that, though poor and ignorant, they were good, honest folk, Catholics like himself” (132).²² Thus, in many ways, California is depicted by Mannix as a kind of utopia for Michael, with the text endorsing the ideals of

²² Native American Catholics, also known as “Mission Indians,” were indigenous people forcibly converted to Catholicism following the Spanish Missions in California. The Spanish Missions began in the late 18th century as an effort to convert Native Americans to Catholicism and expand European territory. See Deagan (2024). Another of Mannix’s children’s texts, *The Children of Cupa* (1905), closely depicts the Cupeño tribe in California. While the text is critical of their displacement at the hands of the American government: “[h]ow can the government be so unjust as to put those Indians out, when they have always lived there?” (15), it also romanticises their conversion to Catholicism: “[c]omfortable and happy they were while under the control of the mission Fathers” (17). In this way, along with *The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant*, the text aligns with such American Sunday School titles as *The Tame Turtle*; or, *Georgie McGregor’s Trouble* by Lucy Ellen Guernsey (1875), which similarly portrays Mission Indians as content under the control of missionaries, and as kind-hearted, but ignorant people. For more on Mannix’s personal connection to the Cupeño Tribe, whom she and her family regularly spent time with, and whom her husband provided legal aid to, see the interview with Deirdre Andrews in the Appendix.

multicultural harmony promoted by many Progressive Era children's writers, albeit through a distinctly Catholic lens.

However, while Michael does not suffer significant anti-Irish or anti-Catholic prejudice, his status as a young immigrant puts him in danger in his new home. Specifically, Michael is at risk of being incarcerated in a reform school, an institution Mannix suggests only served to further disadvantage the already vulnerable and marginalised immigrant child. As Mrs. Olsen tells Michael, "[i]n this country those reform schools ain't much good, anyway. They mix up poys [sic] and girls that got no homes and is good with those that is bad; and that spoils the good ones" (71). Mannix's engagement with reform schools in the text is significant, and arguably reflects the author's concern with these institutions in relation to Irish immigrants, particularly young boys like her protagonist, who were evidently targeted by them.

First established in 1859, when the California Legislature passed the Industrial School Act, Daniel Macallair explains that these institutions were considered "an enlightened response to the surging numbers of 'idle and vicious' youths wandering the streets of San Francisco" (39). In the decades following the Gold Rush, Macallair argues that the city's leaders became concerned "that the growing juvenile population would increase the city's already existing social problems," and that reform schools would "be the youths' escape from the corruption of the outside world" (40). Significantly, immigrant children were integral to the establishment of reform schools: "[t]he city's leaders feared that many of these children would inevitably threaten the social order by forming a permanent pauper class. Seeking a solution to this potential menace, the city's leaders . . . described the plight of California immigrant children and the urgent need for California to follow the example of New York" (49).

The threat of reform schools looms large over the young immigrant characters in Mannix's text, including Reggie Curtin, a young Irish boy who torments Michael upon his arrival. After Reggie is discovered to have committed a crime and it is suggested that "a sojourn in the Reform School would serve him well" (231), Donovan argues: "I've had some experience with that class, and it's little reforming they do, I can tell you. The best way is to keep the boys in at night. That's the time they learn mischief" (232). Despite the fact that Reggie is guilty of theft, Donovan, whose personal feelings on the matter "conquered those of the guardian of the law" (199), decides to cover for him, in the hope of saving him in the long term. He further tells Reggie "[y]ou ought to be jailed for this job; but for the sake of your decent grandmother that has her place in heaven this day . . . I'll try and get you out of this scrape" (208). In this instance, Mannix reflects an immigrant community protecting their own in a city that treats them unjustly.

Just as Reggie narrowly escapes the fate of reform school, so too does Mannix's protagonist after he is wrongfully accused of theft. Thrown in a cell for the night after being arrested for allegedly stealing from Mrs. Olsen, Michael is horrified to be told that "this time tomorrow night, you'll be snug in a bed at the Reform Farm" (149). Michael's arrest shocks and panics those around him, including Mrs. Olsen, who worries about the boy's "dreadful future" upon hearing that he will be sent to the Reform Farm: "in her mind, and not unreasonably . . . she already saw dangling the ghastly form of a young man bearing, though brutalized, the outward semblance of the bright, cheerful, guileless boy she had known" (158). Donovan similarly worries about the gloomy, high walls inside which Michael will be locked up (161).

Although Michael's name is ultimately cleared, the threat of reform school again casts a shadow over the text, particularly with regards to young boys. Indeed,

juvenile delinquency appears as both pervasive and inescapable: for Donovan, “it was nothing unusual . . . to arrest a boy” (159), while Mrs. Olsen voices anxiety about the uncertain future of her infant son: “I think of my little fellow there, and how soon I may leave him alone I don’t know; and then what?” (72). The persistent anxiety that Michael might “learn mischief from the others” (42) further reinforces the fear of impressionable boys succumbing to delinquency. In this way, Mannix’s narrative engages with broader cultural anxieties of the period, particularly the concern that, due to emerging theories in childhood studies, American boyhood was in crisis, and that the immigrant boy was particularly at risk. The turn of the twentieth century ushered in a new ideal of American childhood defined by play and leisure, spearheaded by various Progressive Era reformers, including the psychologist, G. Stanley Hall, who “sounded the alarm that teenagers were growing up too fast” (Chinn 16).²³

In his two-volume study, *Adolescence* (1904), which built on his influential work from the 1890s, Hall outlined the many threats to contemporary boyhood, including increased industrialisation, which “compromised the adolescent need for activity” (Chinn 19). This marks a notable shift from the promotion of self-denial and self-restraint in the latter half of the nineteenth century (see Chapters One and Two), and reflects a new focus on recreation and amusement at the turn of the century: “[r]eformers, politicians, and social scientists all agreed, in G. Stanley Hall’s words, that for young people ‘to have a good time is felt to be an inalienable right. The joys of life are never felt with so keen a relish; youth lives for pleasure, whether of an epicurean or an esthetic type’” (Chinn 20).

²³ In addition to emerging theories of the child-study movement, Marten argues that a drop in family sizes in the decades after the Civil War also contributed to changing attitudes towards American childhood, and “was accompanied by the rise of a child-centered, nurturing form of childrearing that emphasized emotional intimacy and sought to extend the innocence and dependence of childhood through schooling and through shielding children from economic responsibilities until well into their teens” (7).

Thus, the highly influential concept of “adolescence” emerged, and with it the idea that there “was a stage of life between childhood and adulthood with its own needs and dangers At one level it made Americans aware of a developing ‘youth’ culture separate from that of ‘grownups’” (Marten 5). Coupled with increased urbanisation, children of the expanding middle- and upper-classes were now “given more room—literally and figuratively—and enjoyed greater privacy and opportunities to develop their own interests” (Marten 7).

However, as Mannix’s text suggests, “the idea that childhood in a civilized society ought to be prolonged and protected—a time for personal growth and development—was a luxury of the privileged.” (Brumberg 12). While leisure and play benefitted the middle-class American child, the poor, immigrant child, by comparison, was perceived as being at risk of corruption by it, thus resulting in the overrepresentation of immigrant boys incarcerated in reform schools. The contrast between middle-class boys, for whom leisure signified cultivation, and poor immigrant boys, for whom it supposedly threatened delinquency, demonstrates how ideas of childhood varied in the US according to class, race, and ethnicity. What is more, the American West, both as a symbol and a lived environment, had a considerable influence on boys at this time. Heavily romanticised in boys’ dime novels, it emerged as a particularly charged site, representing both the promise of adventure, and the risk of corruption, further consolidating the unique challenges faced by the immigrant boy in the West.

Ideas of youth and the frontier began to co-mingle in the American imagination towards the end of the nineteenth century, culminating in Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” “which enshrined the idea of the frontier as the defining feature of the American ethos” (Woodside 4). Significantly, “youth” was distinctly gendered in this context,

and the promise of the West was overwhelmingly directed towards boys. This is evident in popular culture from the time, including the popular hymn, “Where Is My Boy Tonight?,” about the concerned parents of American boys who had adventured west, and the influence of Horace Greeley, the well-known New York City newspaper editor, who “gave currency to the idea that young men should deliberately uproot themselves in order to make a better life ‘Go west, young man; go west, young man,’ was a fine promotional slogan for stimulating interest in the settlement of the region and in the construction of a transcontinental railroad to the Pacific” (Brumberg 66–7). The frontier was thus imagined as both a site of danger and opportunity for young boys; a space where they could become “outlaws or heroes, delinquents or homesteaders” (Woodside 14).

By far the most influential medium of all for attracting young boys west was children’s literature. This is largely because

[t]he Gilded Age and Progressive Era remain particularly significant in the history of American childhood because they were periods characterized by the development of the first truly national market for juvenile mass culture. Before the turn to radio and television, interlinked railroads and roads, when combined with improved printing and paper-making processes, allowed for distributors to saturate young audiences with widely available and inexpensive books, magazines, and newspapers. (Rouleau 24)

Brian Rouleau observes that these inexpensive books, known as dime novels,²⁴ demonstrated “particular appetite for Western-themed material,” which “meant that a large percentage of what American children were reading from roughly 1870 to 1900

²⁴ For more on the history of the dime novel in the US, see Denning (1987); Sullivan and Schurman (1996).

was set along the frontier” (24). Henry Nash Smith similarly observes that “there was probably greater emphasis on Western adventure” in early dime novels (99).²⁵

Although “soundly criticized because they were thought to lead readers, usually boys, to expect adventure around every corner” (Kimball “Seeing the World” 678), dime novel Westerns became so popular that even well-known, “respectable” authors such as Hamlin Garland and Mark Twain borrowed the formulas of such texts as their inspiration: “Garland confesses to maintaining a steady diet of dime novels during his prairie boyhood. Likewise . . . Mark Twain . . . had no reservations about dime novel Westerns, which he read voraciously while working on *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer among the Indians*” (Woodside 49).²⁶ Thus, dime novels became a powerful source of Western mythmaking, embedding an impression of the “West” in young male imaginations.

Considering the particular appeal of dime novels among young boys, Western tales of heroes and outlaws, often sensational in their graphic depictions of violence and bloody theatrics, agitated many American adults, who expressed concern for their bad influence on young boys: “middle-class adults worried considerably about boys running away to the frontier in the nineteenth century. For many, the unpredictability of the unsettled West was a threat to the growing boy and the sanctity of the family unit” (Woodside 15). Moreover, attempts to “suppress, outlaw, or burn what some educators branded as ‘printed poison’ proved futile in the face of children’s unquenchable thirst for frontier romance” (Rouleau 24).

²⁵ For more on the influence of dime novels on literary constructions of the West, see Henry Nash Smith (1950).

²⁶ Twain never completed this novel, arguably “highlights the author’s inability to reconcile his ideas of frontier violence and child development.” (Woodside 39). Joseph L. Coloumbe also examines Twain’s ambivalence towards the West: “Twain was largely ambiguous about the territory, and his private and public writings revealed him struggling to integrate diverse regional conventions into a public persona that would facilitate his departure from the West as well as maintain his popularity in a new region with an expanded audience” (2).

Mannix was evidently among this cohort of concerned citizens, and describes the young boys Michael is repeatedly warned against befriending thus: “they liked to imagine themselves outlaws, after the manner of those of whom they were in the habit of reading, and whom they wished to emulate” (134). These fictional boys move as a pack throughout the text, causing fights and worrying their parents by running off to secluded areas where “they could enjoy themselves in the gypsy fashion they affected, as well as elude the observation of their parents and guardians, likely to be more or less concerned about their doings after nightfall” (135).²⁷

However, as discussed, Mannix’s concern is not the moral corruption of her boy characters, but the specific threat of reform school against him. As discussed, the turn of the century was a heightened time for immigrant boys, who were perceived by reform school advocates as having “evil associations” and “vicious indulgences” from which they needed to be saved (Macallair 49–50). What is more, high-profile cases of immigrant boys committing crimes in the West also contributed to harsher judgement of the demographic as a whole. For example, Charley Miller, the son of German immigrants, took inspiration from the many dime novels he read and nicknamed himself Kansas Charley. In 1892, at seventeen years of age, he was hanged for murdering two young men aboard a boxcar. His victims were affluent American boys who had also been seduced by the romance of dime novels and wanted to “tramp it” west for adventure.²⁸

The immigrant status of Mannix’s young male characters is thus significant because it is what distinguishes them from their American counterparts and puts

²⁷ The boys’ imaginative play-acting reflects Rouleau’s argument that real children were considerably influenced by dime novel Westerns at the height of their popularity: “[e]ven more indicative of the impact Western adventure fiction had on adolescent lives was young readers’ insistence that stories of past frontier feats inspired them in the present They seem to have read works set in the West and featuring young protagonists as scripts or cues by which they might model their own behavior” (33).

²⁸ See Brumberg (2004) for a full account of Miller’s life and legacy.

them at a disadvantage socially. As Martin Woodside argues, “[f]or white middle-class boys in the idealized small town, acts of mischief fit the script of ‘savage play’ . . . On the other hand, for immigrant and other lower-class boys, white or otherwise, acting ‘bad’ connoted juvenile delinquency and served as a threatening harbinger of future criminal behavior” (46).

With these differences in mind, Mannix’s text can be read as a cautionary guide for the implied male immigrant reader, echoing earlier trends in Irish-American boys’ literature. Moreover, Mannix aligns with her American contemporaries in this regard, who, during the Progressive Era, sought “to teach both native-born and immigrant children . . . what it meant to be an American” (Woodside 58). During this time, “a diverse array of writers, educators, and organizers came to see . . . the development of boys as especially relevant to the future of the nation, many of these efforts were focused on boys” (Woodside 58).

The emergence of the Progressive Era led to so-called “Americanization efforts” of immigrants, which were “often centred on children, who were thought to more easily adapt to life in a new country” (Kimball “Seeing the World” 676). Mannix’s text can be interpreted as such an effort to Americanise the Irish immigrant boy, whom she encourages to assimilate in order to succeed. For example, although proud of his Irish cultural identity, Michael O’Donnell is also excited by the prospect of learning from and being enriched by the culture of the US. He is fascinated by American food, telling Donovan “you have a great many tasty dishes in America, that we never see in Ireland” (13), and trying every new delicacy he encounters with enthusiasm. When Mrs. Olsen presents him with buckwheat cakes for breakfast, she explains to a curious Michael that “[f]irst you put on the butter . . . then the maple syrup, which is again of America” (40). Michael quickly becomes accustomed to the new dish, declaring: “[t]his is a breakfast fit for a king . . . America is a fine country,

and I seem to have fallen on my feet in it” (41). He also consciously develops his taste for coffee, recognising it as a staple of the American diet: “[i]n Ireland we take very little coffee, — I never cared for it. But I’m learning to drink it, and no doubt after a while I’ll like it” (40).

Michael is also determined to learn about American history and geography, requesting books from his employer, Mr. O’Donnell, on the subjects: “I don’t know as much of this country as I ought; I’ll study that. And a History of the United States; that I’ll need too” (51). Furthermore, he decides to learn Spanish because “it is a fine thing for a boy in this part of the world to know” (54), and later develops a fondness for watching baseball games (266). Michael also readily adapts American terminology into his vocabulary, and explains the meaning of such words as “trunk” (258), “store” (254), and “folks” (255) in his letters to a priest back in Ireland. In these ways, Michael repeatedly demonstrates a willingness and an enthusiasm to assimilate into his adopted home, defying the suggestion put forth by another character that “[the Irish are] the clannishest set . . . ‘cause they’ve been kept so ignorant that they don’t know there’s any other people in the world only themselves” (67), and eagerly embraces American customs and culture as his own.²⁹

As a young immigrant, Michael also takes pride in his willingness to work hard and contribute to society: “I never was a beggar, and, please God, I never shall be as long as I have two hands to work with” (106). He seeks to be helpful to Mrs. Olsen as soon as he moves in: “[i]n future we’ll arrange that I’m to do that work for you. I was loath to see you carrying that basket through the streets” (35), and works hard to earn his education: “no one but myself can know how hard and how perseveringly I have had to study to hold my own with the bright American boys” (263). Thus, while the

²⁹ This quotation is by Reggie Curtin, an Irish-American boy who renounces his Irish heritage. His assertion that Irish immigrants stick together stems from a stereotype perpetuated in many examples of the texts discussed in Chapters One and Two, both by American and Irish-American authors.

adults around him despair that “boys — and girls too — are different now” (99), Michael demonstrates that he is hardworking and dependable; in other words, the ideal young immigrant. In this way, Mannix aligns with child-centred Progressive Era reformers, who promoted assimilation, especially that of immigrant children, “into what they saw as the American way of life” (Kimball “Seeing the World” 677).

Another significant way Mannix depicts Michael as an ideal immigrant boy is by drawing on the conventions of the Romantic child in children’s literature. As discussed in Chapter One, the Romantic child began to emerge in the mid-nineteenth century and would flourish by the end of the century. As Murray argues, “[a] gradual transformation in society’s construction of childhood occurred in the late nineteenth century that complemented and extended the romantic notions of childhood innocence” (82).

Physical beauty, innocence, nobility of spirit, and the power to redeem were the cornerstones of the Romantic child, qualities embodied by the quintessential American Romantic child, Little Lord Fauntleroy. While Sadlier’s Willy Burke embodied traits of the Romantic child, stopping short at physical beauty, Mannix’s Michael is notably beautiful in a manner similar to Hodgson Burnett’s Cedric.

Describing Cedric, Hodgson Burnett notes that the little boy started in life with a quantity of soft fine gold-colored hair which curled up at the ends and went into loose rings . . . he had big brown eyes and long eyelashes and a darling little face He seemed to feel that every one was his friend and when any one spoke to him when he was in his carriage in the street he would give the stranger one sweet serious look with the brown eyes, and then follow it with a lovely friendly smile, and the consequence was that there was not a person in the neighborhood of the quiet street where he lived . . . who was not pleased to see him and speak to him. (5)

Michael is similarly depicted, with Mannix emphasising his “bronze curls” (7), “freckled face” (7), and “double row of white teeth, as perfect and as even as a set of pearls” (8) in Romantic terms, and linking this beauty to his Irishness: “he was young, with the fresh rose of Ireland on his cheeks, and her soft, sweet accent on his tongue” (161). Elsewhere in the text, Michael is described as “a boy with an honest face, and eyes like wells of truth— clear, sparkling, and innocent; a real boy, lively and alert, yet with the spirit of piety so engrained, both by inheritance and training, that it is second nature to him” (124), to which another character replies: “[t]his must be an Irish boy” (125). By thus associating her immigrant boy hero with beauty, innocence, and inherent goodness, Mannix situates Michael within the literary tradition of the Romantic child, simultaneously expanding that tradition to accommodate representation of the Irish immigrant boy. Consequently, her image of Irish immigrant youth is one defined by virtue, rather than delinquency.

Tooralladdy and the progressive ideal of assimilation

This chapter now turns its attention to *Tooralladdy* by Julia C. Walsh (1907). Like *The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant*, Walsh’s only known novel was published in the first decade of the twentieth century, and centres on a young Irish immigrant boy making his way in a large western city. It was favourably reviewed in numerous Catholic publications at the time, in a notably gendered way. For example, *The Catholic Telegraph* declared that “the little boy with the peculiar name wins admiration by his bravery, loyalty and manliness” (“Literary Gossip” 3), while in *The Catholic Columbian*, to which Walsh contributed regularly, the young protagonist, Edward “Tooralladdy” Tracy, is described as “a manly little fellow and a real boy” (“A Book For Boys” 4). Finally, *The Catholic Advance* described the text as being “interspersed with ‘boy’s talk’ that will appeal to the youthful sense of the

ridiculous” (“Book Notices”). Such remarks affirm the discussion in Chapter One that attitudes towards masculinity in American children’s literature had evolved by the turn of the twentieth century, when “*manhood* was replaced gradually by the term *masculinity*, which referred to a set of behavioral traits and attitudes that were contrasted now with a new opposite, *femininity*” (Kimmel 120).

However, despite the gendered focus of these reviews, it is Walsh’s depiction of a harmonious multiracial neighbourhood of children that is arguably the most defining aspect of the text, and thus the focus of this chapter. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, *Tooralladdy* offers an early portrayal of peaceful racial integration in American literature during the Progressive Era. Significantly, it emerged prior to the foundation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (1909), after which point “more White authors and artists entered the arena” to meet the “growing demand for realistic books by and about true-to-life Black children” (Bishop 74). In this light, Walsh’s work offers one of the earliest examples of racial harmony in children’s literature during the Progressive Era.

Also striking about *Tooralladdy* is that the theme of interracial harmony arguably overrides the narrative of the text’s protagonist, who is scarcely more prominent than the other children in Walsh’s “juvenile democracy” (47). The young protagonist’s Irish identity is implicitly, rather than explicitly implied, such as his Irish family names, Tracy and Grogan (29), his physical description as a “red-haired, freckle-faced” boy (20), and the fact that his nickname emerges from an Irish air his grandmother used to sing him (33). His Catholic faith is similarly indirectly indicated by the fact that Father Bacon teaches him the catechism (122), marking a significant contrast to earlier Irish-American children’s literature, in which the religious identity of a protagonist was central to the narrative.

Walsh further diverges from Irish-American writers regarding her explicit, often heavy-handed attempt at depicting racial harmony in the US. Where earlier texts such as *Bessy Conway* weaponised the whiteness of Irish characters against Black Americans to help them advance in the US, or *Annie Reilly*, which pits Irish immigrants against other immigrants to elevate the status of the former,³⁰ *Tooralladdy* seeks to promote collective belonging between all groups in the US. The text's casual depiction of Catholic success is also notable, with the local senator, whose family is greatly admired and respected, playing an active, yet understated role in the promotion of Catholicism. Arguably, this shift represents the gradual rise of Catholics to positions of power in the US from the mid-nineteenth century, and their continued acceptance and tolerance in society. As Meagher notes, Catholic Americanism "would triumph" in the first half of the twentieth century, "reaching its apogee in the 1950s" (*Becoming Irish American* 6). Where earlier authors felt compelled to defend and demystify Catholicism in their works, Walsh writes with greater confidence, and promotes a vision of Catholic success as an ordinary fact, rather than an exceptional feat.

Beyond Irish-American literature, Walsh's text is also significant for its contribution to the development of multicultural literature in the US. For example, as Donna L. Gilton argues, while, "several critics of 'the melting pot' or assimilation advocated cultural diversity in the early twentieth century . . . they focused mostly on people of European descent" (2). This is true of Izrael Zangwill's play, *The Melting Pot* (1908), about "the harmonious integration of races in America," which Gilton notes referred only to groups "from Europe—German, French, Irish, English, Jewish,

³⁰ On board the ship taking Annie to New York, the narrator observes: "Germans, black and greasy; lay in heaps together . . . and seemed to occupy their whole time eating. All the other passengers, especially the Irish, disliked them; their hands and faces were so dirty, and their old rags smelled so disgustingly, that we pity any company in a close room who would have a German; amongst them" (124).

and Russian. Unfortunately, people of color were not mentioned in this context at all. Other early writers on this topic also focused on the assimilation of people originally from Europe” (2). Gilton concludes that “people of color have not always been considered to be possible subjects of either assimilation or cultural pluralism. It would take the fight against Nazism in World War II and the civil rights movement . . . before this position was seriously reconsidered” (2).

This is also true of American children’s literature. As critic Michelle Martin observes, the picture book, *What Mary Jo Shared* by Janice May Udry (1966), was remarkable for its “peaceful picture of an integrated school system that had yet to become a reality in many parts of the United States” (52). While it was not until the 1940s that “white authors were finally beginning to write against the long-standing minstrel tradition so prevalent at the turn of the century” (43), Martin argues that “the chasm between stereotypical and honorable texts for and/or about black children . . . remained more or less intact until the 1960s” (43).³¹ Published in 1907, Walsh’s *Tooralladdy* thus represents an unusually early attempt to construct an inclusive vision of the US for young readers, in which children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds co-exist within a consciously integrated neighbourhood. Although this vision is articulated in ways that are neither consistent nor unproblematic, as I shall demonstrate, it nonetheless anticipates important developments in American children’s literature that would not fully emerge otherwise for several decades.

Describing the suburb of the unnamed western city in which the children of the text reside, presumed by a review in the *Boston Pilot* to be Chicago (“Books and Bookmakers 1907), the narrator states that it was

³¹ Bishop similarly argues that it was not until the 1930s that “some authors and children’s literature professionals had begun to recognize Black children as readers and to call for books that would be suitable and appealing to them” (72), and only by the 1950s that non-stereotyped “literature by and about African Americans . . . [became] a part of the American children’s literature landscape” (63).

small in numbers, its membership varying from twenty to thirty, perhaps; and small in stature, for those who belonged to it were all children; and though some of them lived in handsome homes, and a few in hovels, and the majority belonged to families that were comfortably well-off, yet there were no distinctions between them that related in any way to wealth or poverty, or, for the matter of that, to difference of complexion. (10)

From the outset, the text explicitly asserts its progressive perspective, claiming that all residents of the neighbourhood, whether Black, Jewish, or of European or Native American descent, “were all decent, respectable people, and their children played, quarreled, and made up among themselves as it is only possible for children to do in small communities where everybody knows everybody else, and all may rest assured that there is no black sheep in the little fold” (11). In this way, the text reflects the values of the period from which it emerged, and the fact that “many young people growing up in the Progressive Era enjoyed an extended period of schooling and leisure and found opportunities to form communities with their peers” (Saguisag 9).

Although multiple racial and ethnic groups are identified by Walsh, only some are portrayed in detail, most prominently a wealthy Catholic family, the Darbisons; a poor Black family, the Gifts; and a poor Irish family, the Doolans. In the following section, I outline Walsh’s portrayal of these fictional families in relation to each other to illustrate both the progressive and problematic elements of the text’s depiction of racial and ethnic differences. In doing so, I demonstrate that, while *Tooralladdy*, in some instances, successfully portrays a community in which children of all backgrounds interact as equals, it also perpetuates simplified characterisations and negative racial and ethnic stereotypes of its time.

As the first family described by Walsh in the text, I begin my analysis with the Gifts, “a family of very decent colored people; the children were the first generation

out of slavery, and the mother, once a slave, was now janitress of Zion Colored Baptist Church, in the basement of which they lived” (11). Although ultimately uneven, the portrayal of the Gifts is significant for its attempted equal treatment of Black characters with their white counterparts at numerous points throughout the text. For example, the older Gift children, Heavenly and Marget Ann, are depicted as the close playmates of the Darbison children, Dillie and Cillie, who represent the wealthiest of the neighbourhood’s residents. Of Cillie and Marget Ann’s friendship, Walsh writes that both girls, being “boy-girls” (49), preferred the boys’ games “and often forsook the ‘mothers’ to join in the boy’s sports; and let me tell you that the boys accorded that privilege as a great honor to the girls, not many of whom were considered worth while to bother with when it came to real hard play” (48).

The depiction of both girls as tomboys is significant, for as Michelle Anne Abate argues of the tomboy figure in American literature,

[t]omboyism is . . . powerfully raced and classed. Emerging in the mid-nineteenth century as a product of growing concerns over the deplorable state of health among middle- and upper-class white women, tomboyism was created as an alternative and even antidote. Concerned that weak and sickly young girls would become weak and sickly wives who would produce even more weak and sickly children, advice writers during the 1840s and 1850s began to recommend active and unfettered girlhoods. (“Tomboy”)

That Walsh depicts a poor, Black girl as a tomboy is an important detail because, as Abate demonstrates, such active, adventurous girlhoods were typically reserved for fictional white girls. Moreover, considering, that “by and large, reformers ignored or failed to prioritize the needs of African Americans” in children’s literature, and that non-white, non-middle class children were often “simply written out of narratives of citizenship” (Saguisag 18), Walsh’s depiction of an active, playful Black childhood

is even more significant,³² and signals an equal concern for the health and development of both Black and white children as future American citizens.³³

Significantly, both Cillie and Marget Ann are forbidden from playing leapfrog with the boys, despite both demonstrating equal capability of doing so: “I have seen them so agile in ‘skinning over’ a fence, so deft in rolling a barrel under their feet, so surefooted on stilts, so level-headed in walking a rail, that I am sure they would have been equally skilful at leapfrog” (48). Although the text does not explain why the girls are not permitted to play this particular game, it is likely that it was considered improper or “unladylike.”³⁴ The text thus imagines Black and white children subject to the same arbitrary social rules, and the unfair exclusion of both Cillie and Marget Ann from the game suggests that gendered restrictions override racial divisions in the neighbourhood.

Dillie Darbinson and Heavenly Gift are also depicted as equals in the text, as demonstrated by the narrator’s respect for both boys’ assertion that the girls would be experts at playing leapfrog, if permitted to play: “[i]ndeed, Dillie and Heavenly said they were; and surely brothers ought to know” (48). The children’s group games further exemplify their equal status to each other:

[b]oys and girls of every degree were in it, from little tots of six up to big ones of fifteen or sixteen; black, white, and brown; barefoot and shod; rich and poor; clean and — well, not dirty, but just as clean as children can be who have played hard since they were washed and dressed before supper.

³² For an overview of adolescence as experienced by Black, immigrant, and working-class people in the US at the turn of the twentieth century, see Town (7–8).

³³ For more on the history of the tomboy figure in American literature, see Proehl (2018).

³⁴ While, by the Progressive Era, girls had “gained opportunities that were not available to their mothers, especially in terms of education, leisure, and participation in consumer culture . . . many of these cultural spaces remained highly gendered: sports for girls, for example, emphasized the development of poise rather than strength” (Saguisag 9).

They were heart and soul in the game and everybody was playing fair, for they had crossed their hearts, before they began, not to cheat. (16)

Taken together, these scenes illustrate a sincere and effective effort by Walsh to portray Black and white children as equals within the neighbourhood, and the Gifts as full participants in play and friendship alongside their white peers.

However, despite these progressive instances, the text also perpetuates many negative stereotypes in its portrayal of the Gift family, and slips from being what Dorothy M. Broderick might identify as an “insightful” book “that lay[s] bare the essence of humanity,” to a “condescendingly racist” one (177).³⁵ For example, although the Gift children are depicted as equal playmates to the Darbisons, the games the children play subtly reinforce a racial hierarchy that undermines the text’s claims to equality. For example, Cillie and Marget Ann’s doll play clearly demonstrates a racial hierarchy: “Cillie’s was a beauty, with wax head and hands and real curly hair; and though Miss Marget Ann’s was only composition, with hair of lamb’s wool, it was as well cared for and as dearly loved as was Cillie’s, the doll aristocrat of the street” (49).

The material disparity between Cillie’s wax doll and Marget Ann’s composition doll is significant, and arguably positions whiteness as fragile and precious, while casting Blackness as expendable. As Bernstein argues of the historical Black doll, “the materiality of black rubber dolls configures blackness as an elastic form of subjectivity that can withstand blows without breaking. This elasticity enables the fun of roughhousing with rubber dolls to extend through practices that would shatter ceramic figures and thus terminate play” (71). Moreover, the Black doll’s “blackness in combination with its composition . . . enable them to

³⁵ In *Image of the Black in Children’s Fiction*, Broderick loosely categorises white-authored texts featuring Black characters as “(1) outright racist books; (2) condescendingly racist books; (3) traditionally liberal, do-gooder books, and (4) incisive, insightful books that lay bare the essence of humanity” (177).

survive rough play that would destroy a doll made of porcelain or wax” (71). The girls’ dolls are thus arguably loaded with symbolic meaning, “tuck[ing] racial politics beneath a cloak of innocence” (Bernstein 18).

The boys’ games demonstrate a similar racial hierarchy in Walsh’s so-called juvenile democracy. Among the many games they play together, including marbles, hopscotch, and flying kites, is a game called “[N-word]-baby” (47),³⁶ which has been described in a separate historical account thus:

‘[N-word] baby’ was an especially popular neighborhood game played between the houses. The players were each assigned to one of nine holes spaced about a foot apart on either side of a straight line. They took turns rolling a tennis ball and waiting to see if the ball fell into a hole, like a golf ball on a green. Each time the ball fell into someone’s hole, a stone was placed in that hole. If the ball missed all the holes, a stone was put into the thrower’s hole. When any hole reached nine stones, a ‘[N-word] baby’ was born. The player who possessed that hole had to put his face against the wall of a house, and the other players would throw the ball at his back. Each player had nine chances to hit the ‘parent.’ (Cole 112–13)³⁷

That Heavenly Gift is subjected to playing such a blatantly racist game with his non-Black playmates demonstrates how deeply anti-Black racism was embedded in the culture at the turn of the twentieth century. Even within the ostensibly egalitarian space of Walsh’s neighbourhood, the presence of such a game demonstrates how Black children were still degraded and humiliated, thus complicating Walsh’s portrayal of supposedly equal and harmonious neighbourhood.

³⁶ The original text uses a well-known racial slur, described here as “[N-word]” to acknowledge the term’s offensive nature, while preserving historical accuracy. Where the word appears in relevant secondary sources, it has been replaced with [N-word] for consistency.

³⁷ For a variation of how this game was played by American children in the mid-twentieth century, see Cope and Feinburg (2025).

The portrayal of Jane Gift, the children's mother, also warrants examination for its perpetuation of racist stereotypes of Black Americans. Jane is described as possessing the "superstition of her race" (69), thus evoking what Sterling Brown describes as the "Local Color Negro" stereotype in his foundational essay, "The Negro Character As Seen by White Authors" (1933): "[l]ocal color stresses the quaint, the odd, the picturesque, the different. It is an attempt to convey the peculiar quality of a locality." (174).³⁸ Portraying Black characters as being superstitious was a common way of suggesting ignorance or primitiveness, and, as Broderick argues, infantilising Black Americans: "one would be hard pressed to show white people acting superstitiously in children's books. When a white person was shown as superstitious . . . it was inevitably a child, not an adult" (126).

Jane Gift also uses excessive violence against her children to discipline them: "loud shrieks and wails and sobs proclaimed that . . . the broad maternal hand was meting out the just punishment . . . and that Jane was living up to her standard of raising her children 'decent an' perlite'" (54). Compared to Mrs. Darbison, whose daughter simply laughs when she raps her knuckles to discipline her (25), Jane is framed as harsher and more aggressive in her manner, reinforcing another prominent stereotype identified by Brown: the "Negro brute," which functioned to "[set] up black and beastly as exact synonyms" (167). Despite Jane's physical efforts to discipline her children, Mrs. Darbison nonetheless "wonder[s] that Jane permits one of her children to carry on so" (50). Whereas Mrs. Darbison is gentle, but firm when disciplining her children, Jane is depicted as both excessively violent and ultimately ineffectual. This contrast reveals a racialised double standard of maternal authority in

³⁸ In this essay, Brown argues that "the majority of books about Negroes merely stereotype Negro character Those considered important enough for separate classification, although overlappings do occur, are seven in number: (1) The Contented Slave, (2) The Wretched Freeman, (3) The Comic Negro, (4) The Brute Negro, (5) The Tragic Mulatto, (6) The Local Color Negro, and (7) The Exotic Primitive" (150).

the text, with Jane's harshness signalling her as inferior, and Mrs. Darbison's lighter hand affirming her position as the superior mother.

The depiction of the youngest Gift child, Lucindy, is also problematic in how it perpetuates the "pickaninny" stereotype, which Bernstein describes as "an imagined dehumanized black juvenile and a staple of U.S. popular culture from advertising images (such as the Gold Dust Twins) to children's literature, animation, and film (such as *Little Black Sambo*, Bosko, or the Little Rascals, respectively)" (16).³⁹ Separately, Bishop claims that the pickaninny stereotype represents most portrayals of Black children in American children's literature from this period, and suggests that Topsy in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the "literary model for the pickaninny in children's books" (69). Bishop references the following scene, in which Topsy is ordered to perform for her master, to demonstrate the typical portrayal of the pickaninny caricature:

[t]he black, glassy eyes glittered with a kind of wicked drollery, and the thing struck up, in a clear shrill voice, an old negro melody, to which she kept time with her hands and feet, spinning round, clapping her hands, knocking her knees together in a wild, fantastic sort of time, and producing in her throat all those odd guttural sounds which distinguish the native music of her race."
(Stowe 235)

Bishop concludes: "that such a description would appear in a book that was antislavery and presumably sympathetic to Black people is an indication of the pervasiveness of taken-for-granted racist assumptions that were woven into the social fabric of [the US]" (69). Walsh's text perpetuates similar racist stereotypes in its portrayal of Lucindy Gift, who, like Stowe's Topsy, has a "shrill voice" (49) when

³⁹ See Bernstein (30–68) for a full discussion of the "pickaninny" stereotype.

she sings, and “dances like an imp, or as if she were possessed” when cajoled by another character to do so (51).

Although the depiction of Lucindy is arguably less egregious than others of the period, including *Epaminondas and His Auntie* by Sara Cone Bryant (1907), Walsh nonetheless draws on long-established racial tropes and reinforces the stereotype of Black girlhood as unruly. According to Bishop, Bryant’s text

helped to popularize the pickaninny as a main character in American children’s books. . . . Not only was the main character a pickaninny, however, with exaggerated red lips, a grandiose name, and braids sticking out all over his head, but his mammy and his auntie were perfect plantation stereotypes, complete with exaggerated features and head rags. (70)

Stowe’s Topsy is similarly portrayed as having “round shining eyes,” a “mouth, half open with astonishment,” and “woolly hair . . . braided in sundry little tails” (235).

Whereas Stowe and Bryant rely on exaggerated physical characteristics to depict their Black child characters, as per the tradition of the pickaninny stereotype, Walsh relies more on behaviour and mannerisms. *Tooralladdy* is thus comparatively less offensive in its racial stereotyping than other texts, though Lucindy Gift is nonetheless reduced to a comic stereotype. Moreover, she perpetuates what Brown describes as the “Comic Negro” stereotype, whose primary function was to entertain white readers (165–66), and who “flourished in children’s books from the turn of the century until the 1950s” (Bishop 68).

Other problematic instances in the text include the revelation that Marget Ann “was named for Jane’s old mistress in the South” (18), reinforcing the “Contented Slave” stereotype (Brown 155),⁴⁰ and a passing remark that “after all . . . [Marget

⁴⁰ Of this stereotype, Brown argues that the “pattern of the joyous contentment of the slave in a paradisiacal bondage persisted and was strongly reinforced in Reconstruction days. If it was no longer needed for the defense of a tottering institution, it was needed for reasons nearly as exigent. Ancestor worshippers, the sons of a fighting generation, remembering

Ann] was only a little colored child and couldn't be expected to know how to behave" (48). Although this remark can be interpreted as being the opinion of another child in the neighbourhood, Walsh does not suggest that this child is mistaken or unfair, and thus allows the remark to stand uncontested.

The text also relies on virtually unintelligible dialect to portray its Black characters, particularly Jane Gift: "[f]otch that chile yah, till ah lam huh good ! Ain't I done tol' yo' oveh an' oveh, yo' low down traish, to min' yo' own bisnus an' let that white man alone ? Oh, yo' kin dance fo' me" (53–54). However, while the use of unintelligible dialect to convey the Gift family perpetuates the "minstrel tradition" (Martin 38), the "queer" (30) and "broken English" (60) of immigrant characters is also remarked upon throughout the text, demonstrating that this feature of the text is not unique to the Gift family. For example, Mrs. Doolan, the Irish mother of another child in the neighbourhood, is similarly depicted via exaggerated dialect: "[c]ome down out o' thaht, ye spalpeen, an' give me the kay, or Oi'll hahve the law on ye!" (74).

Significantly, the only family who speak standard English are the wealthy, white, American Catholic Darbisons, whom Walsh ultimately positions as the ideal model of behaviour and social status in the neighbourhood. Early in the text, Mrs. Darbison scolds her daughter, Cillie, for speaking like her Black and immigrant friends: "Now, Cillie . . . how often have I told you that you must not pick up what Tim says, or Lucindy, or Tomaso, or any other child who you know speaks incorrectly" (25). Mrs. Darbison then tells her husband, "if these children are determined to adopt all the slang and jargon they hear among their companions, something must be done. Either we must move away from this neighborhood, or I can not allow them to play outside of their own yard" (25). This positioning reveals

bitterly the deaths or sufferings of their fathers, became elegists of a lost cause and cast a golden glow over the plantation past" (155).

an unspoken hierarchy within Walsh's neighbourhood, and suggests that, despite the supposed inclusion of impoverished Black and immigrant children, the Darbisons are the true standard against whom everyone else in the neighbourhood is measured.

The Darbisons influence over the speech of other characters further reinforces their status and influence in the neighbourhood. For example, Tooralladdy is considerably improved under Mrs. Darbison's guidance: "[b]esides what he learned from books, there were scores of other lessons that the boy took to heart and by which he profited — lessons of both precept and example. His rough and ready manner of speech quickly softened under a few hints from Mrs. Darbison, who sometimes gave him a correct phrasing for his uncouth style" (119). Walsh's use of language and social modelling via the Darbison family thus suggests that, even within a diverse and seemingly harmonious neighbourhood, middle-class whiteness is the ideal. To this end, Walsh reflects the fact that, ultimately, "progressivism's mission of transforming the nation was, at heart, an effort to transform others," and that "the movement's project of reshaping peoples was primarily a project of universalizing middle-class (and white) conceptualizations of citizenship" (Saguisag 9).

Evidently, Walsh's portrayal of a harmoniously interracial neighbourhood is uneven and, on many occasions, problematic. However, despite the many negative stereotypes it perpetuates, the text remains radical in many ways. For example, it was highly unusual for texts by white authors to promote peaceful integration in children's literature in the early twentieth century, and more overtly racist portrayals of Black characters remained commonplace until the mid-century.

In her study on the evolution of Black representation in American children's literature, Martin traces a timeline dating back to the late-nineteenth century to chart the uneven progress towards more nuanced and affirming portrayals of Black

characters, pointing to such overtly racist texts as *Ten Little [N-Word]* (1875) and its sequel, *Nine [N-word] More* (187–) to demonstrate how children’s literature of the nineteenth century normalised blatantly derogatory caricatures, and laid the groundwork for stereotypes that would persist well into the twentieth century. Published by the McLoughlin Brothers,⁴¹ Martin argues that these particular texts taught the white children for whom they were intended “that black people are extraordinarily fecund, disposable, greedy, ignorant, unattractive, and dim-witted” (24). According to Martin, the popularity of the texts ensured that “[t]he turn of the century brought the publication of many more books of this ilk” (31).

Bishop traces a similar timeline in a similar study, but begins in 1850 to include Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a text whose influence inspired countless texts of what Broderick describes as the “do-gooder” and “condescendingly racist” variety (177). Although intended to portray Black characters favourably, these texts often reinforced the racist stereotypes Brown outlines, especially the ‘Comic Negro’ and the ‘Local Color Negro.’ One such text is *The Haldeman Children* by Mary E. Mannix (1904), of which a review in *The Sacred Heart* stated,

Mary E. Mannix tells us of ‘The Haldeman Children’ so brightly and pleasantly that we hesitate to find fault with the negro dialect which is over-abundantly lavished through the 154 pages. Still, if the good Nancy who uses this dialect shall serve to awaken in our children’s minds kind thoughts of the negro race, and the conviction that among them are to be found faithful Catholics, our brothers and sisters in the faith, we shall be heartily willing to withdraw our criticism. (“New Books”)⁴²

⁴¹ The McLoughlin Brothers was founded by Scottish immigrants in 1860, and later became known internationally as a publisher of children’s illustrated books. See Jenkins (2024).

⁴² The *Boston Pilot* also favourably reviewed this novel. See “Books and Bookmakers” (1904).

Although intended to be a positive portrayal, Mannix's Nancy reinforces racist stereotypes. As Broderick notes of such texts, the Black characters "exist only in relationship to the whites who are in authority in their world. For the whites within the books, the blacks exist to make them more comfortable" (69). Like the anti-slavery texts that came before them, these texts often perpetuated racial hierarchies under the guise of benevolence.⁴³

It wasn't until the emergence of *Hazel* by Mary White Ovington in 1913 that genuinely affirming, non-stereotyped portrayals of Black Americans began to appear in children's literature. This novel, which "details the activities of a middle-class African American child who is pretty, intelligent, cultured, and kind," was "among the few alternatives to the stereotyped images of African Americans" at the time (Harris 1990 545–46).⁴⁴ Emerging a few years after the foundation of the NAACP (1909), in which Ovington, a white woman, played a key role,⁴⁵ *Hazel* was instrumental in changing the landscape of American children's literature in the early-to-mid twentieth century, inspiring the professional library establishment, writers and

⁴³ For example, Bishop argues that while *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "was an important weapon in the fight against slavery, it also helped to perpetuate some of the longest-lasting stereotypes in the literary history of the United States. Abolitionist sentiment clearly could not be equated with antiracist attitudes" (69). Of the same text, MacCann argues that "Stowe's overall tone as she describes the Black community is mocking and supercilious" (20). See MacCann (3–24) for a full discussion of abolitionist children's literature, including *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

⁴⁴ Others have argued that the text "offered a more complex and positive representation of black children during this time" (Martin 39), and was "notable as a counter to the minstrel and plantation images of Blacks in most of the literature of the day, and possibly unique as a turn-of-the-century novel in which working class or middle class Black children could have seen something of themselves reflected" (Bishop 73). While *Hazel* was evidently a marker of significant progress, it also reinforced some of the stereotypes described by Brown and others above. For example, Harris argues that "colorism is an aspect of *Hazel*. While *Hazel* is depicted as light skinned with straight hair, her best friend Charity is portrayed as a 'pickaninny': dark skinned, plain, mischievous, and poor. Refinement, restraint, beauty, and moderation are embodied within the character most resembling Whites; and indolence, passion, lack of restraint, and physical plainness are embodied within the darker character" (1990 545). Bishop similarly argues that "[f]rom the vantage point of the late twentieth century, *Hazel* seems dated in the stances it assumes towards racial issues, probably reflecting the social realities of its day" (72).

⁴⁵ Ovington was a socialist, the descendant of an abolitionist, a social worker of independent means, and "among the key civil rights activists galvanised by the Springfield Race Riots of 1908 to found the NAACP" (Kellogg 109–10).

artists “to pay attention in print to Black children as readers and to realize that their needs were not being met” (Bishop 73).

That Walsh’s text appeared before the founding of the NAACP in 1909 is thus significant, as it predates the influential “persuasive propaganda fiction” inspired by Ovington (Brown *The Negro in American Literature* 106). As noted earlier, a review in the *Boston Pilot* suggests that the “western city” in which *Tooralladdy* is set is Chicago (“Books and Bookmakers” 1907). This is especially significant given Chicago’s proximity to Springfield, Illinois—the site of the 1908 race riots that spurred the NAACP’s foundation—and reflects the climate in which Walsh was writing. Indeed, the Midwest, including areas near Cincinnati, where Walsh lived, was repeatedly disrupted by race riots in the years prior to *Tooralladdy*’s publication: “between 1900 and 1908 they disrupted such cities as . . . Evansville, Indiana (1903), Springfield, Ohio (1904 and 1906), and Greensburg, Indiana (1906)” (Senechal de la Roche 2). Against this backdrop, Walsh’s effort to depict Black and white children as equal members of a shared community can be interpreted as an important counter-narrative to the racial unrest in the first decade of the twentieth century, before the collective efforts of the NAACP took effect.

Thus, *Tooralladdy* emerges as an early and complex attempt at imagining interracial harmony in children’s literature. Moreover, it represents the role of Irish-American children’s literature in shaping racial discourse in the US, and reveals the complex ways in which a previously forgotten Irish-American author participated in defining integration and belonging in the US in the early twentieth century.

Conclusion

Through a combination of extensive archival research and an interview with the great-granddaughter of Mannix, Deirdre Andrews, who was not previously aware

that her great-grandaunt was also a writer, this chapter has unearthed valuable and forgotten writings by Mary E. Mannix and Julia C. Walsh. It has also recovered an example of the sisters' mother, Margaret Mansfield Walsh's writing, demonstrating the multigenerational contributions of this family to Irish-American literature. While the chapter has focused on analysing the sisters' respective children's novels, both of which centre young Irish Catholic immigrant protagonists, future studies would undoubtedly benefit from examining other aspects of their output, and continuing the efforts of their recovery.

In its analysis of Mannix's *The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant*, this chapter has demonstrated the significance of a Western setting in Irish-American children's literature at the turn of the twentieth century. One of few known examples of Irish-American children's literature set in the American West (and evidently one of few in Irish-American fiction generally), this chapter has argued that Mannix's text offers a rare literary portrayal of the unique dangers Irish immigrant boys faced in California at the turn of the twentieth century, as influential theories on adolescence, which discriminated against the immigrant boy, gained traction.

The chapter has also demonstrated the influence of dime novel Westerns on young male readers, and argued that children's literature was an ideal medium to address the young immigrant boy effectively. By depicting Michael as an ideal immigrant boy who embodies the traits of the Romantic child, including innocence, nobility of spirit, beauty, and moral integrity, Mannix sought to counter the kind of masculinity promoted in dime novel Westerns, which put the immigrant boy at risk of incarceration in reform school. Far from a young delinquent, Michael O'Donnell functions as an aspirational model for the implied reader, demonstrating how he could successfully make his way in the American West.

By contrast, Walsh's *Tooralladdy* turns its attention to the juvenile democracy of a supposedly harmonious pluralistic neighbourhood. The text portrays strikingly progressive representations of Black and white children as equals, and demonstrates concern for the development of all its young citizens. However, it also reproduces common racist stereotypes of its time. Despite its flaws, this chapter has argued that Walsh's text is nonetheless significant for its early depiction of a harmoniously integrated neighbourhood in the US, and demonstrates the important contribution of an Irish-American author to the discourse surrounding it.

Both Mannix and Walsh expand the scope of Irish-American children's literature beyond the East Coast by situating their portrayals of Irish immigrant youth in California and the Midwest. Moreover, their children's novels imagine a version of the US during the Progressive Era where everyone, including Irish Catholics and other racial and ethnic minorities, were recognised as equal. By situating Mannix and Walsh within the broader history of children's literature and Progressive Era reform, this chapter has restored the lost voices of Irish-American writers to the category of American children's literature, and revealed how their writings contributed to discourses of identity, belonging, and integration in the US.

Chapter Four

From the Margins to the Mainstream: The “Golden Age” of Irish-American Children’s Literature¹

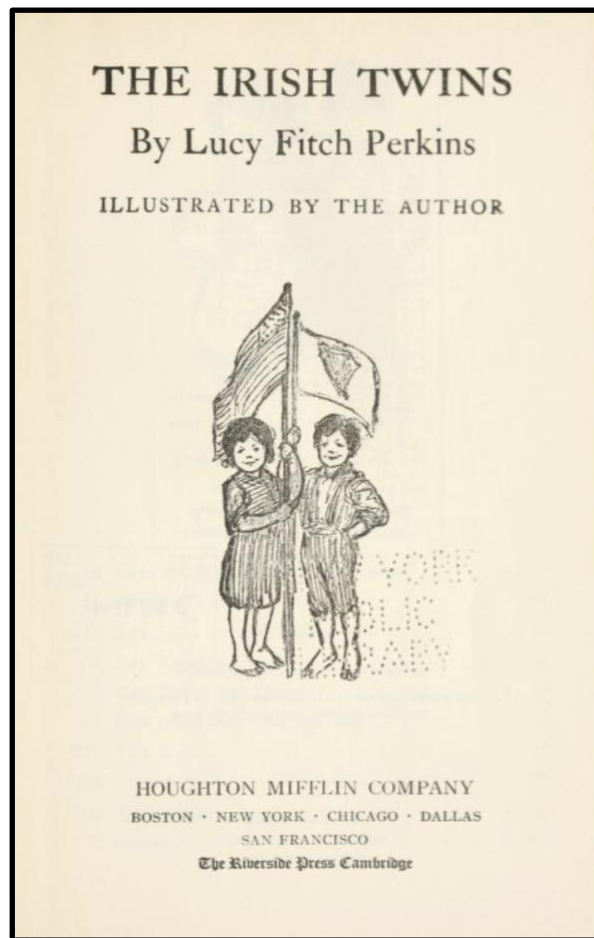


Figure 2. Frontispiece from *The Irish Twins* (1913).²

‘Is it American they are, or Irish, I want to know?’

‘It’s Irish-American!’ shouts little Larry.

‘And with the heft of both countries in your fists.’ (Perkins *The Irish Twins* 203–04)

¹ Some of the section on *Where the Winds Never Blew* by Colum in this chapter has been published already, but has been revised and extended here. See Ní Choileáin (2024).

² Illustration from *The Irish Twins* by Lucy Fitch Perkins, Houghton Mifflin, 1913. Public domain. Digitised by the New York Public Library and made available via the Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/irishtwins00perk/page/204>).

In the above image from Lucy Fitch Perkins' *The Irish Twins* (1913) (fig. 2), two barefoot children, a girl and a boy, stand side by side holding a flagpole each. The girl holds the US American flag in her hands, while the boy holds the Irish Nationalist flag. The flagpoles overlap, symbolising the dual identities of the children, young immigrant siblings from Ireland, as Irish-American. This message is reinforced in the above quotation from the text, in which one of the children, now grown, explains to his young, American-born nephew that their family holds the "heft of two countries" in their fists (204).

Having left Ireland at an unspecified point in time in search of equal opportunity denied to them at home, the children, Larry and Eileen McQueen, grow up and prosper in the US. As Perkins' note at the end of the text explains, "[t]his is a story about old days in Ireland, days when farmers could not own the land they lived on and cultivated, but were obliged to rent it, often on such hard terms that they were kept very poor" (209). Thus, as the American author explains, the promise of "free land in the United States caused a great wave of immigration which brought from Ireland and other countries many men and women whose children are now numbered among our most energetic and influential citizens" (209).

The text, which appears to reference the Land War in Ireland, and thus likely takes place at some point in the late nineteenth century, can be read as a simplistic tale of triumph over adversity, in which good Irish immigrants are rewarded for their hard work and contributions to American society. On its own, it perpetuates the reductive rags-to-riches narrative of Irish immigration to the US between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries (see Introduction). However, when considered in the context of the tradition of World Friends children's literature, from which it emerged, its true literary value becomes apparent. In this context, as this chapter demonstrates, the text reflects the ideals of the so-called "Cultural Gifts

Movement,” a by-product of the Progressive Era that promoted internationalism and world citizenship to young Americans, and played a crucial, yet previously overlooked role in the American embrace of Ireland and Irish culture in the early twentieth century.

Moreover, Perkins’ text (as well as others of its kind) represents the emergence of a new era in Irish-American children’s literature in which American authors were now defining Ireland and Irishness. Whereas such earlier attempts of this were typically limited to converting Irish Catholic children or utilising them to reinforce the superiority of the American-born child (see Chapters One and Two), World Friends literature sought to elevate the image of Ireland, its people, and its culture. This newfound interest in and appreciation for Ireland was the combined result of Progressive Era ideals and the emergence of the Irish Literary Revival, and paved the way for what can be considered the Golden Age of Irish-American children’s literature.

Emerging amidst this new wave of literature, which might be described as American-Irish children’s literature, was a new generation of Irish-American children’s writers, including two of the most influential writers of the category, Padraic Colum and Ella Young, who emigrated to the US in 1914 and 1925 respectively; Colum to New York, and Young to California. Both writers were deeply invested in shaping the image of a new and independent Ireland following the establishment of the Irish Free State, and channelled their creativity into sharing the Irish tradition of storytelling with a new generation of young readers, both Irish and American.³ Having both had at least two works each retroactively cited as Newbery

³ Other writers who emerged in this new wave were Seumas MacManus, who was also an immigrant in the US, and the American writer, Ruth Sawyer, both of whom represented Ireland as a country with “a rich culture of myth and folktale” (Clements “Padraic Colum” 156). Herminie Templeton Kavanagh was also instrumental to this new wave. See the doctoral research of McManus (2018) for more.

Honor Books, both Colum and Young were the dominant Irish-American children's writers of their generation, despite being relatively marginal figures today.

Notably, both Colum and Young are missing from Fanning's foundational study on Irish-American literature, an oversight which has been somewhat corrected in recent years. For example, a recent volume of essays, *The Writings of Padraic Colum* (2024), represents a substantial development in criticism on Padraic Colum by showcasing the richness of his work, which spanned various forms and genres, including poetry, drama, fiction, biography, and children's literature. Prior to this, the most substantial discussion of Colum's work was Zack Bowen's account (1970). Separately, essays by Clements (2011), Ní Choileáin (2024), Stevens (2017), and Whyte (2024; 2017; 2016) have recovered some of Colum's children's literature, and demonstrated the author's particular skill at writing for a young audience, as well as his use of children's literature as a site of serious cultural and political inquiry.

Ella Young has received comparatively less attention than Colum, which is not hugely surprising considering her output was smaller, and, as Heather Ingman and Cliona Ó Gallchoir note, the "comparatively slow acknowledgement of the value and importance of women's writing in the Irish context" (1). Moreover, as Aerialia Annat argues, "despite her integration into *fin-de-siècle* nationalist and Revivalist circles . . . only a faint impression of [Young's] life has remained in the written record, particularly for the years before 1900" (191).

Yet, like Colum, there has been renewed scholarly interest in Young in recent years. For example, she is briefly mentioned in Ingman and Ó Gallchoir's collection in an essay on children's literature by Valerie Coghlan. Coghlan positions Young alongside Lady Augusta Gregory, one of the foremost figures of the Irish Revival, whose legacy has not suffered the same neglect or obscurity by any means, thus affirming the cultural and literary value of Young's writing. A recent essay by Annat,

quoted above, is a particularly welcome development in its offering of rigorous examination of Young's poetry. Other recent accounts of Young include Doig (2022), Matthews and Sallee (2011), McDowell (2014), and Murphy (2008). *Great Irish Tales of the Unimaginable: Stories of Fantasy and Myth* (1994), edited by Peter Haining, is also worth noting for its recovery of one of Young's stories not previously published in book form, and recognition of Young's work to the development of Irish fantasy literature.

This chapter builds on recent efforts to recover and reevaluate the work of both Colum and Young, although to different effect. Beginning with an overview of World Friends literature, which first emerged as American children's travel literature in the late nineteenth century (see Chapter Two), this chapter then examines Colum's *A Boy in Eirinn*, which was published as part of Florence Converse's Little Schoolmates series, a quintessential World Friends series of children's books. The origins of the text in this context have either been overlooked or dismissed by critics, but this chapter demonstrates the significance of the series for understanding Colum's subsequent success and influence in the US. The chapter considers the differences between American-authored World Friends representations of Ireland, and those of Colum in *A Boy in Eirinn*, arguing that both strive to portray varying views of Irishness in an equally controlled manner.

The chapter then examines the portrayal of Ella Young in a special edition of the hugely influential *Horn Book* periodical dedicated to Young, as well as profiles written about her in American publications such as *The New York Times*. This section diverges from the rest of this thesis in that Young's work is not the focus of analysis, but rather her reception as an author. This is because most of Young's work falls outside the parameters of this thesis, with two of her three major American-published works for children being retellings of myths, legends, and folk tales, rather

than original fiction.⁴ However, Young's reception in the US was notably different to that of any other Irish-American author and warrants examination for its role in bringing Irish-American children's literature into the mainstream. This chapter demonstrates the often exoticised portrayal of Young by American journalists and writers, who clearly sought to evoke the *spéirbhean* figure in Irish literature and suggest that Young was a physical embodiment of the Irish Revival. It argues that overemphasis on Young's appearance and ethereal nature undermined her industriousness and intelligence as a writer, which are evident in her personal correspondence and writings. In doing so, the chapter seeks to demystify an overly mythologised writer who was integral to the development of Irish-American children's literature, and who, alongside Colum, played a crucial role in the emergence of its Golden Age.

The final section of this chapter returns to Colum and recovers *Where the Winds Never Blew* (1940), a seemingly simple and whimsical Irish-based animal tale, which, upon closer inspection, reveals themes of xenophobia and nativism in American society. This analysis demonstrates the continued contribution of Irish-American writers to American children's literature in the mid-twentieth century after the decline of Irish-American children's literature as a category around the same time. By 1940, American children's literature was moving away from texts created by or inspired by British and European (including Irish) writers, and focused on "Americanised" texts instead. An industry led by the socially progressive "minders" or "bookwomen (see Chapter Three), this new literature sought to promote patriotism in young American readers by reflecting the flaws of American society, including "concerns about the treatment of the immigrant, the place of the 'Other' in society,

⁴ The only book of Young's eligible for inclusion in this thesis is *The Unicorn With Silver Shoes* (1932), which received Newbery Honor Book recognition. While it is an original collection of stories with clear Irish influence, it does not engage with ethnic Irish or immigration themes in a substantive way, and has been excluded on this basis.

issues of racism, issues of pacifism and violence, issues of the just war, issues of progress and - modernization” (Schmidt xxvi). Colum’s picture book, which, on first glance, appears to depict the Irish countryside, fits squarely within this tradition of attempting to galvanise young American readers into action by holding a mirror to society’s shortcomings.

World Friends and the emergence of American-Irish literature

Far from emerging in isolation, Perkins’ *The Irish Twins* was not only part of a broader series of books by the same author known as *Twins of the World*, which depicted the lives of twin protagonists, usually a boy and a girl, from as many as twenty six countries around the world,⁵ but a broader trend in American children’s literature in which international settings were emphasised to teach American children about life beyond the US. As Marietta A. Frank explains, “there is no official term for this type of series, but [world friends] might be an appropriate way to refer to [them] since the primary mission was to bring children from different parts of the world together” (103).⁶

This chapter is the first to interrogate portrayals of Ireland and Irish people in American *World Friends* literature in the early twentieth century. In doing so, it pinpoints a crucial moment in the development of Irish-American children’s literature, in which writers began producing a new kind of literature with an implied American child reader in mind. To date, this development has been linked to the Irish Literary Revival, which “led to a surge of interest in Ireland throughout Europe and America. American writers and thinkers had been particularly inspired by Ireland’s self-determination, which recalled the parallel struggles for independence of the two

⁵ For more on Perkins’ biography and the *Twins of the World* series, see Barker (2014); Dillon (2011); Frank (2014); Kimball (2012); Mills (1993); Rouleau (2021).

⁶ Melanie A. Kimball describes the same kind of children’s literature series as “internationals” (“Seeing the World” 681).

nations (Stubbs 7). Among the general public, Fanning argues that “there was extensive American interest in and contribution to the Irish and Gaelic literary and cultural revivals in the last third of the nineteenth century” (*The Irish Voice* 168).⁷ However, while the Revival evidently inspired a newfound interest in stories about Ireland and Irish life in the US, sympathetic and romanticised portrayals of Ireland, its people, and its culture had actually been steadily emerging for a child readership for more than twenty years by the time Colum, Young, and others emerged.

World Friends series, of which there appear to have been dozens published in the US between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century,⁸ shared the common goal of “teach[ing] young Americans about the way of life in other countries; and (sometimes subtly, other times bluntly) [demonstrating] the superiority of American democracy and the American way of life” (Kimball “Seeing the World” 681). They were also hugely popular. For example, “more than two million” copies of the *Twins of the World* series were in print during Perkins’ lifetime, “and more than three million sold by 1949” (Dillon 85). Similarly, most titles of another popular series, *Our Little Cousins* by Mary Hazleton Wade, “went through numerous printings, and the series proved profitable for the publisher” (Rouleau 138). World Friends literature thus played an influential role in the advancement of the so-called Cultural Gifts Movement during the Progressive Era, its primary goal being the promotion

⁷ For more on the American response to the Revival, see Reynolds (2004); Mac Mathúna et al (2019).

⁸ Other series, which typically contained multiple texts each and were mostly published in the first two decades of the twentieth century, include *Boy Travellers* by Thomas Knox, *Family Flight* by Edward Everett Hale and Susan Hale, *Zigzag Journeys* by Hezekiah Butterworth, *The World’s Children* by Virginia Olcott, *Our Little Cousins* by Mary Hazleton Wade, *Little People Everywhere* by Etta Blaisdell McDonald and Julia Dalrymple, *Children of Other Lands*, published by Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, *Little Folks of Many Lands* by Lulu Maude Chance, *Little Schoolmates* by Florence Converse, *Child Life in All Nations* by Lindley Smith, *Boys and Girls of Other Lands*, published by Thomas Y. Crowell, and *Around the World With the Children* by Frank G. Carpenter. Another popular series in the US was *Peeps at Many Lands*, which was originally published in England. According to Frank, there were other popular series “like the Bobbsey Twins, Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, or any number of others by the Stratemeyer Syndicate, whose stories used countries around the world as settings for mystery, adventure, and intrigue” (95). For general overviews of most of the series listed here, see Jagusch (2021); Kimball (2012).

and celebration of cultural diversity among a younger generation of Americans to help collectively overcome societal racism and xenophobia (while simultaneously reaffirming and promoting distinctly American values, as I shall demonstrate).

In *Americans All: The Cultural Gifts Movement*, Diana Selig traces the history of the Progressive Era period in which “hundreds of thousands of Americans took part in a vibrant and complex crusade to overcome their own racial and religious prejudices” (1). According to Selig, this period, much like the various movements and causes discussed in Chapter Three, was spearheaded by

[l]iberal thinkers and educators [who] promoted tolerance through the concept of ‘cultural gifts,’ a term they used to describe the contributions of immigrant and minority groups to American life. In an explicit rejection of the melting-pot theory of assimilation, they welcomed heterogeneity as a source of strength for the nation and argued that the distinctive traits of each group were worth preserving and sharing. Advocates insisted that people could be both ethnic and American and that immigrant cultures were compatible with American institutions and traditions. (2)⁹

The movement, also known as Internationalism, developed as part of Progressive-Era efforts to reform international relations in the early twentieth century as “the United States expanded its role in world affairs, and Americans began to take an interest in life outside the borders of their own communities” (Kimball “Seeing the World” 680). Notably, activists included many librarians, educators, and parents, who “used new scientific authority to carry their pluralist aspirations into textbooks, lesson plans, parenting manuals, children’s literature, and Sunday school projects” (Selig 4).¹⁰

⁹ For further historical context on the evolution of this movement, including the significance of the First Hague Conference in 1898, see Threlkeld (2011).

¹⁰ Notable educators who advanced the Cultural Gifts Movement via “antiprejudice education” or “intercultural education” were Fannie Fern Andrews and Rachel Davis Dubois.

With the emergence of World Friends literature, the portrayal of non-Americans in American children's literature changed significantly. Compared to earlier literature of the nineteenth century discussed in Chapters One and Two, the portrayal of Irish characters was distinctly more positive now. For example, in World Friends literature Irish characters were no longer considered solely in relation to their "problematic" Catholic faith, and were more often depicted as speaking standard English or light Irish brogue, rather than exaggerated and unintelligible dialect. This immediately signals a newfound respect from American authors, whose intention was to favourably portray Irish people as valuable additions to American society, rather than burdensome strains on it. Indeed, this is evident in Perkins' *The Irish Twins*, when Larry, the boy protagonist, grows up to become "the biggest policeman on the Force" (203) in Chicago, signalling his integration into US life as an Irish immigrant, and furthermore his importance and influence.¹¹

The portrayal of Ireland and Irish characters in World Friends literature warrants sustained engagement for two reasons. Firstly, not only have such texts as *Our Little Irish Cousin* by Mary Hazleton Wade (1904), *Kathleen in Ireland* by Etta McDonald and Julia Dalrymple (1909), and Perkins' *The Irish Twins* never been analysed in the same context before, but their very existence has been overlooked in criticism of portrayals of Ireland in American children's literature. For example, Clements claims that "Irish characters are surprisingly scarce in American children's literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Where they appear they are usually limited to a narrow range of minor roles. The Irish characters found in this

Andrews founded the American School Peace League in 1908 to educate American children on what she called "world citizenship." For more on Andrews and her curriculum, *A Course in Citizenship*, see Threlkeld (2011). For more on Dubois, see Rosenberg (2019); Selig (70–84).

¹¹ The depiction of Larry McQueen as a policeman also reflects the fact that male Irish immigrants were becoming increasingly associated with law enforcement in the US by the early twentieth century. For example, Francis O'Neill was the first Irish-born Chief-of-Police in Chicago, having been appointed in 1901. For more on O'Neill's life and legacy, see O'Malley (2022).

‘Golden Age of Children’s Literature’ are mainly immigrants of Irish-Americans — there is little literature depicting Ireland and its inhabitants” (155).

However, while this is somewhat true of the American texts from the mid- to late nineteenth century (with the exception of Sunday School literature), the emergence of World Friends literature at the turn of the twentieth century complicates Clements’ assessment. Considering the profound effect this literature would have on the development of Irish-American children’s literature henceforth, its recovery here is pertinent. Accordingly, I provide an overview of the evolving portrayal of Ireland and Irish characters in World Friends literature below, which was more positive and more nuanced than earlier portrayals, and which arguably paved the way for the later success of Padraic Colum’s *A Boy in Eirinn*.

In the twenty years leading up to the publication of Perkins’ *The Irish Twins* in 1913, several American children’s texts featuring Ireland and Irish people had been published, although what would subsequently become the category of World Friends literature “read like travel guides or geography textbooks” at this point, and was not yet focused on “encourag[ing] the child reader vicariously to experience what it meant to be a child living in another country” (Frank 95).¹² Jacob Abbott’s Rollo’s Travels in Europe series, which comprised ten texts, marked the emergence of American children’s travel literature, and was “one of the most popular series for juveniles throughout the nineteenth century” (Nesmith 23). So successful was Abbott’s series that it “opened the way for other children’s travel series books to follow,” including William T. Adam’s (Oliver Optic) Young America Abroad series, and Daniel C. Eddy’s The Percy Family series (Nesmith 20).

“[T]apping into a well-established cultural phenomenon” of general travel writing in the US at the time, these series were, according to Nesmith, “primarily a

¹² Rouleau (270) and Kimball (“Seeing the World” 684) make similar observations.

fictional admixture blending facts about countries and their inhabitants and cultures with adventures and mishaps of their protagonists as they toured various foreign lands,” and “tended to emphasize differences among nationalities and races, and, frequently, to establish hierarchies among them as well” (21–2). Although “primarily an educational enterprise” (28), they nonetheless demonstrated early strains of World Friends literature. For example, in Abbott’s Rollo’s Travels in Europe series, Nesmith argues that “traveling abroad allows Mr. George and Rollo to imagine themselves as somehow related or akin to these immigrants – as members as it were, of the same community” (34).

However, these texts more frequently perpetuated negative stereotypes about other countries and nationalities, including the Irish. A representative example of Ireland in such texts can be found in *The Boy Travellers in Great Britain and Ireland* by Thomas W. Knox (1891).¹³ Described by Sybille A. Jagusch as “earnest travelogues” (62), Knox’s Boy Travellers series was well-established by the time *The Boy Travellers of Great Britain and Ireland* was published, having emerged over a decade earlier with *Adventures of Two Youths in a Journey to Japan and China* (1879). An extensive and detailed volume of almost 600-pages, *The Boy Travellers of Great Britain and Ireland* dedicates several chapters to the American boy protagonists, Frank and Fred’s adventures in Ireland. Although intended to be a “careful record” of their trip (iii), the text nonetheless demonstrates considerable bias and perpetuates multiple negative stereotypes about Ireland, ultimately presenting an uneven portrait of the country and its people to the implied American child reader. This most often occurs when both countries are compared to each other, possibly reflecting “the fact that travel and travel writing in the United States corresponded to

¹³ Other examples are *Zigzag Journeys in the British Isles* by Hezekiah Butterworth (1889), and William T. Adams’ *Shamrock and Thistle; or, Young America in Ireland and Scotland. A Story of Travel and Adventure* (1867). Abbott’s Rollo series does not feature Ireland.

the general cultural obsession with understanding national identity in a new but burgeoning country” at this time (Nesmith 21).

Upon arrival in County Cork, Frank and Fred observe as passengers embark on another vessel destined for the US, thus establishing the historic connection between both countries from the outset: “[t]hey are Irish emigrants for America . . . the Michaels and Patricks, the Bridgets and Norahs, and other Irish men and women, with whose names we are familiar all over the United States. From this port of Queenstown more than two million of the inhabitants of Ireland have sailed for homes in the New World in the past forty years” (7). While this observation is relatively neutral, both countries are then compared throughout the trip, with the US frequently portrayed superior to Ireland. For example, of the waterfalls in Glengarriff, which are identified as “an attraction for visitors,” Frank concludes that “the amount of water was only a fraction of that in the Yosemite stream” (22), while the Lakes of Killarney are a disappointment because “the mention of a lake suggested . . . something like the vast bodies of water upon the map of the United States” (24).

The custom of Irish wakes is also frowned upon in the text: “‘I’m glad we have nothing of the kind in our country,’ Mrs. Bassett remarked, when the description of this strange custom was finished” (38), while Irish people are portrayed as clannish: “[they] marry entirely among themselves and won’t allow strangers from anywhere to live among them” (18), foolhardy: “[t]he efforts in that direction [Irish independence] have been more patriotic than practical” (42), or conniving: “Americans who come abroad for the first time . . . give freely to the beggars, who pretend to be starving” (8). Emphasis is placed on Irish poverty, which is looked upon with Scrooge-like scorn, rather than sympathy: “[i]f the British Government were half as tyrannical to Ireland, as some people have claimed, it would suppress

this degrading business [of begging] by putting every suppliant for alms under arrest and sending him to the poor-house, which is his proper place, if his sufferings are as he represents them to be” (26).

What positions itself as an objective account of a trip to Ireland is thus deeply critical and teeming with negative stereotypes. Notably, the illustrations of Irish people are significantly cruder and more primitive than those of the other nationalities explored in the text, with characters typically depicted with simian features or roguish expressions. Moreover, references to Irish history tend to erase the trauma and suffering of Irish people under colonial rule, with repeated insistence that there are “two sides” to the story. For example, on the “Irish question” of the Land War, one of the protagonists explains:

The owners of the land insist that the rents are fair and just, while the tenants declare, with equal emphasis, that they are required to pay so much that they cannot make a living by tilling the soil. . . . No matter what opinion may be given by one man, there will be found another who will demonstrate to a mathematical certainty the utter falsity of the first one’s claim. . . . It’s a bewildering subject. (100)

While the text is notably different to earlier American children’s literature featuring Irish people, both in that it recognises Ireland as a country in its own right and portrays Irish people beyond the status of immigrant, it similarly perpetuates the idea that, although noble in some aspects as a country with a rich history of kings and poets (62), Ireland is less civilised, less respectable, and ultimately inferior to the US.

With the blossoming of World Friends literature over a decade later, a distinctly more sympathetic and emotionally-charged view of Ireland and its people would emerge in American children’s literature. This is particularly evident in such texts as *Our Little Irish Cousin* (1904), *Kathleen in Ireland* (1909), and the

previously discussed *The Irish Twins*—all of which treat Ireland on its own, rather than alongside Great Britain. Also notable about these texts is that they focus on the domestic interior setting in Ireland, rather than the physical landscape, thus diverging earlier travel texts, which demonstrated “a strong resistance to enter into any real engagement with local culture,” while objectifying Irish people “through a kind of touristic gaze. The interior domestic spaces of the country remain unseen” (Nesmith 30).

By contrast, fully-fledged World Friends literature sought to demonstrate the similarities between the daily lives of American children and other children to “bridge the divide between children in the US and foreign cultures” (Dillon 87). As the earliest example of its kind, Mary Hazleton Wade’s *Our Little Irish Cousin* marks an important turning point in the portrayal of Ireland and Irish children by an American author in its wholly sympathetic, if often patronising and problematic representation.¹⁴ The text’s protagonist, Norah, is the quintessential Romantic child described in Chapters One and Three of this thesis, with “beautiful blue eyes and dark auburn hair. Her teeth were like pearls and her cheeks were rosy as the brightest sunset” (2). Norah’s character is similarly portrayed in Romantic terms: “[t]he little Irish cousin, who has never left her native land, may be poor, and sometimes ragged, but her heart is warm and tender” (vi). The “shabby stone hut” Norah calls home is nonetheless a cosy and homey dwelling in which she is loved and cared for: “her mother lifted the kettle that hung by a hook over the smoky fire and made a pot of

¹⁴Rouleau compellingly argues of Wade’s *Our Little Cousin* series that “it would be easy, of course, to locate the many ways in which Wade’s books seem to celebrate US colonialism and reify racial hierarchy” (138). However, focusing on the “inconsistencies” of the text “represent low-hanging fruit that, when plucked out of context, distort the more forward-thinking dimensions of Wade’s work” (Rouleau 139–40). Similarly, Dillon argues of Perkins’ *Twins of the World* series that a “hypercritical” reading of the series “undervalues the fact that it explicitly countered the xenophobia found in other children’s books of the time” (102). Similarly, it is not the focus of this chapter to unpack the more problematic aspects of Wade’s and other World Friends authors’ work, but rather to demonstrate how her work intended to portray Ireland as part of a global community grounded in mutual respect.

tea. Then she placed a dish of steaming potatoes and a plate of dark, heavy bread on the table” (8). Norah clearly functions to endear the implied American child reader, and the text initiated a new, more sentimental imagining of Irish childhood in the process.

Like Knox, Wade also emphasises the historic relationship between Ireland and the US in the text, but in markedly more emotional terms intended to help position the US as a saviour. For example, of the Great Famine, she writes: “at this dreadful moment, help came from a kind friend in America, and they were saved from further suffering” (26). Rather than highlighting the perceived shortcomings or faults of Ireland, or comparing it unfavourably to the US, as Knox does, Wade minimises what might be considered by the implied American reader as less “desirable” aspects of Irish culture. For example, the traditional Irish belief in fairies is reduced to a notion of childish innocence: “Norah and Mollie believed in fairies. They had as much faith in them as many little boys and girls in America have in Santa Claus” (62), while the arrival of Christianity is celebrated as the solution to Ireland’s pagan past: “[i]n a short time the whole of the people became Christians, and the strange worship of the Druids came to an end” (38).

The suffering of the Irish under colonial rule is also emphasised by Wade to gain the implied reader’s sympathy, with some inaccurate claims made about Irish history: “[a]s though this were not enough, forty thousand of the Irish people . . . were put on board ships and sent to Spain,” while “poor helpless boys and girls were to become slaves on the tobacco plantations of the West Indies” (47).¹⁵ Setting the tone for World Friends literature to come, the text strives to convince the implied

¹⁵ There is no historic basis to this claim, and Wade is possibly referring to the so-called Wild Geese Irish soldiers who fled Ireland between the 16th and 18th centuries and enlisted in other European armies, including Spain. Wade’s second claim about the West Indies is not baseless, but is oversimplified. In recent years, historians have debunked the so-called “Irish slave meme,” which distorts the history of Irish indentured servitude in the Caribbean during Cromwell’s reign. See Hogan et al (2016); Johnson (2018).

American child reader of the inherent goodness of Irish people by presenting them as innocent and resilient victims, emphasising their Christianity, and downplaying their pagan roots and folk beliefs and traditions.

A similar, if less emotional portrayal of Ireland and its people can also be found in *Kathleen in Ireland* by Etta McDonald and Julia Dalrymple (1909), as part of the Little People Everywhere series. Where Wade arguably exaggerates Irish suffering to exploit the sympathy of the implied reader, McDonald and Dalrymple minimise it. For example, there is no mention of the Great Famine in the text, and only passing reference to colonialism is made as “the time when the English lords came over to live in Ireland and set the fashion of building grand churches and monasteries all over the country” (94). The text is also inexplicably critical of young Irish emigrants for leaving home, overlooking the historical reasons for doing so: “[g]reen meadows never offered sweeter resting-places than those of the Emerald Isle; yet its young people turn their backs to it, and their blue eyes toward the more barren worlds beyond the seas” (iii). While McDonald and Dalrymple encourage respect for the Irish, they simultaneously discourage Irish immigration. As one Irish character tells another, “[t]here’s as good a place for you here as you will find in America . . . and we can’t afford to let all our lads leave their own country” (81).

Like *Our Little Irish Cousin*, *Kathleen in Ireland* also associates belief in fairies with children, with Kathleen’s father, a keen historian, stating that it was time “to put an end to these foolish notions about the good people, and tell [her] the true words about Ireland’s brave men and women” (7). Moreover, the fairy stories Kathleen is enchanted by are perpetuated by her Irish-speaking grandmother, “who talked often in Gaelic about the fairies with Great-grandmother Connell” (6), thus relegating the tradition to an older generation and a separate language. On the whole, as in *Our Little Irish Cousin*, Ireland is palatably presented by its American authors,

with admirable qualities, such as the quality of Irish schools, emphasised: “[t]he fame of these Irish schools spread outside of this country, and in the different countries of Europe it became the fashion to go to school in Ireland” (88), while non-Christian or politically-charged aspects of Irish culture are erased, minimised, or reframed to better align with American values.

In many ways, the publication of Perkins’ *The Irish Twins* four years later reinforced a similar representation of Ireland and its people as respectable and compatible with American values—or, at the very least, unthreatening. As Claudia Mills observes of the series overall, “in almost every *Twins*, the family lives in a little house, whose adorable size is stressed repeatedly,” which “may seem to patronize rather than to engender genuine respect for other peoples and cultures” (6). However, the text diverges from its predecessors in the World Friends tradition in significant ways. Firstly, it pays closer attention to Irish daily life, rather than history. In this way, as José Laners argues, it bears striking resemblance to Patricia Lynch’s *The Turf Cutter’s Donkey* (1934). Not only does the text centre on a young brother and sister whose father is a turf-cutter and whose mother is the ideal homemaker, as Lynch’s foundational Irish children’s text also would, but it is episodic in order to fit in several aspects of traditional rural Irish life, from Fair Day to the Feis.

Notably, as Lynch would also do, Perkins does not relegate Irish folk beliefs and traditions to the distant past, but rather pushes them to the fore. In this way, *The Irish Twins* reflects both a development in the portrayal of Irishness in American children’s literature, and the steady embrace of fantasy in American children’s literature in the early twentieth century. As Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn argue in *Children’s Fantasy Literature*, American children’s literature historically demonstrated “a very real antipathy to the fantastic,” a tone set, in part, by the Anglo-Irish writer, Maria Edgeworth, who was “enormously popular in the United

States,” and “had no truck with fairy lore” (49). Although the European immigrant population had brought a rich folklore tradition to the US from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, by and large, “there was a general tendency for colonial and American storytellers to play down the fantastic, either rationalizing the tales, that is, finding non-fantastic explanations for what in the original story was a clearly supernatural event, or including the supernatural but retaining a European setting” (Levy and Mendlesohn 50).

Moreover, stories were told “in such a way as to keep them from being taken seriously” (Levy and Mendlesohn 51). This is evident in both *Our Little Irish Cousin* and *Kathleen in Ireland*, which acknowledge the Irish tradition of fairy and folk tales, yet minimise their influence or confine it to children’s interest or that of the older, Irish-speaking generation, as discussed. By contrast, Perkins’ text does more to celebrate this aspect of Irish culture, as demonstrated at the Feis the twins attend, where prizes are awarded to the best storytellers of Irish myths and legends (154). While the Irish Literary Revival likely played a part in this newfound appreciation for Irish culture, it also reflects a new and growing appetite for fantasy in American children’s literature, which accelerated considerably following the publication of L. Frank Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz* (1900)—the first “truly important” American children’s fantasy text (Levy and Mendlesohn 59).

Thus, by the time Padraic Colum emerged in the US, the children’s literature landscape was primed and hospitable to the kind of stories he was writing, and thus fertile for his success. While American enthusiasm for the Irish Literary Revival undoubtedly influenced his later success, developments in American children’s literature, particularly World Friends literature and the emergence of fantasy children’s literature, also played a significant role in this. In the following section, I provide an overview of Colum’s career and reception as a children’s writer in the

US, then proceed to contextualise his first children's book, *A Boy in Eirinn*, as World Friends literature, demonstrating the significance of this previously overlooked or dismissed element of the text.

Padraic Colum and the Golden Age of Irish-American Children's Literature

As other critics later would, Clements points to Padraic Colum as the major Irish influence on American children's literature: "Colum certainly influenced the readers of children's literature, particularly in their appreciation of Ireland's storytelling culture. He also shaped American expectations in Irish children's literature" (154). Indeed, by the 1920s, Padraic Colum's status as one of Ireland's great storytellers and twentieth-century American children's literature's most influential voices was solidified. This is evident in reviews of his children's books, which frequently equated Colum's Irish identity with the quality of his work. For example, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* stated in 1922 that Colum created "such a combination of classic and Gothic myths as only a Celtic imagination could encompass" ("Colum's Splendid Juvenile"). In 1940, *The New York Times* wrote of Colum: "Padraic Colum's books for children, at their best, have a quality akin to the ancient magic which in Ireland is always breaking through the surface" ("An Enchanted World").

Colum's status as a respected Irish author of children's literature is also evidenced by the fact that he "had three books recognized as Newbery Honor books, making him the first Irish writer so honoured, and one of very few, up to this day" (Clements "Padraic Colum" 163). As Whyte notes, Colum was "championed by critics such as Anne Carroll Moore; Mary Lamberton Becker described him as a 'leader' among those producing literature for children in the early 1920s" (Whyte "'Firing for the Hearth'" 145). Considering the significant influence of children's

librarians and book critics in the US during the Progressive Era, such endorsements of Colum undoubtedly helped to consolidate his status.

Evidently, Colum was greatly respected in American children's literature circles, and Clements attributes his success to the fact that his influence "was occurring at a time when Americans' views of Ireland were evolving . . . to a more positive, if still romantic, view" (154). However, as I have argued, existing enthusiasm for the tradition of World Friends literature, as well as evolving interest in fantasy stories, also helped to launch his career in mainstream American children's literature. The fact that *A Boy in Eirinn* is an example of World Friends literature is not an insignificant detail; in fact, I argue that the text's publication as part of Florence Converse's Little Schoolmates series launched Colum's successful career in the US, providing both a receptive readership and a familiar framework through which his distinctly Irish stories could be embraced by a wide audience.

To date, the context in which Colum's first children's book emerged has either been overlooked or dismissed in criticism. For example, in *Ireland in Fiction*, the influential bibliographer, Stephen J. Brown, advises that "the reader would do well to take the book before the Preface, which latter is by the general editor of the series" (65). Similarly, Bowen states that the text "is hardly strengthened by its preface," which he then describes as a "horrendous document" (142).

If not dismissed in this manner, the text's World Friends context has been overlooked. For example, while recent essays by Pádraic Whyte (2024) and Julie Ann Stevens (2017) demonstrate the literary value of the text, thus undermining Colum's primary biographer, Sanford Sternlicht's assertion that it is "crass, heavy-handed propaganda" (130), they do not consider the text as part of the Little Schoolmates series. Rather, the text is positioned as a quintessential product of the Irish Literary Revival, with Stevens arguing that "it was written in the midst of an

upsurge in propaganda for Young Ireland, and alongside the book's backward look at Irish country life . . . are Irish myths and legends to inspire young readers, while the exclusive concentration on boys is in line with much revival material for children" (185). Whyte similarly argues that the text formed "part of the wider cultural project of the period to use myth to create a sense of shared history and heritage and to inspire young readers and audiences to look to a heroic past to forge a revolutionary future" ("Rewriting *Buile Suibhne*" 144).

Considering the immense popularity of World Friends literature in the early twentieth century, this chapter argues that the success of *A Boy in Eirinn*, which had apparently gone through an impressive seven editions by 1935 (Bowen 142), can more effectively be understood and explained when the full context of its production is considered. The text's Revivalist context is undoubtedly very relevant, but its success in the US is arguably better explained by its World Friends origins. This chapter argues that the text can be seen as occupying a unique position at the intersection of Irish Revivalist cultural production and American children's publishing, which made influential Revivalist ideals accessible to a mainstream American child readership for the first time.¹⁶

Although earlier Irish-American works, such as Mary E. Mannix's *Tales Tim Told Us* (see Chapter Three) and Herminie Templeton Kavanagh's *Darby O'Gill and the Good People* were similarly invested in portraying Ireland and Irishness to a young American readership, neither would have had the same reach or circulation as

¹⁶ Notably, Colum was not the only, nor even the first Irish writer to contribute to the category of World Friends literature. Katharine Tynan wrote the entry, *Ireland* (1909) as part of the Peeps At Many Lands series published in England. In 1936, *When I Was a Boy in Ireland* by Alan M. Buck was published as part of the Children of Other Lands, a series which "stood out for having been written by immigrants who reflected upon their childhoods" (Rouleau 145). Like Julia C. Walsh, Buck has fallen into complete obscurity as an Irish-American author, despite having written several children's texts based on Irish mythology. See Conclusion. A more contemporary example of an Irish writer contributing to a similar kind of World Friends literature is Siobhán Parkinson, who wrote *Kathleen: The Celtic Knot* (2003) as part of the Girls of Many Lands series by the American Girl doll company.

a *A Boy in Eirinn*. This is because the latter's publisher, E.P. & Dutton, was considerably more established and influential. Mannix's text was published by Ave Maria Press, whose mission, like other niche Catholic publishing firms, was to advance Catholicism, a minority faith, in the US. As Sullivan asserts, most Irish-American literature, including the texts examined in this thesis, were published by niche, often Irish immigrant-owned firms which "created in their readers a sense of belonging to a group that was defined by values and institutions that differed from those of the larger American society but that also claimed a legitimate, even if separate, place within it" ("Community in Print" 44). By contrast, Kavanagh was published by Reilly & Britton (later known as Reilly & Lee), who, although an up-and-coming firm that would experience enormous success in publishing L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* a few years later, had only recently become established "on a modest basis, with extremely limited capital" (Tebbell 452).

By comparison, E.P. & Dutton had been established since the mid-nineteenth century and had "a list of 700 titles by 1874, including most of the instruction books used in the nation's Episcopal Sunday schools and in church libraries" (Tebbell 242). In 1910, it

inaugurated one of the largest general periodical advertising campaigns ever devised for retail books for its 'Everyman's Library,' which at that moment had nearly five hundred titles. In the fall of that year, the house placed advertising . . . in such popular magazines as *Everybody's*, the *Literary Digest*, *American*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Current Literature*, *Review of Reviews*, *Outlook*, *Scribner's*, and *World's Work*. These advertisements were full pages, with two in the *Post* initially and a follow-up campaign of half-pages. The insertions were to run two or three times, depending on the medium and the results. (Tebbell 166)

The publisher was thus exceptionally well-positioned to ensure wide national circulation and visibility for *A Boy in Eirinn*, far beyond the niche audiences reached by most earlier Irish-American children's authors. As a result, *A Boy in Eirinn* had a significantly greater capacity to shape American understandings of Ireland and Irishness for young readers, thus taking Irish-American children's literature from the margins to the mainstream for the first time.

In an advertisement by E.P. Dutton & Company in *The New York Times* in 1913, the Little Schoolmates series in which *A Boy in Eirinn* was published is described as “[s]tories for children who wonder how their schoolmates might have lived and learned and played if their fathers had not come to this country; and which aim to show what characteristics the children of each land bring to the making of America” (“E.P. Dutton and Company’s”). Thus, it fits squarely within the category of World Friends literature, aligning neatly with the literature’s goal of “encourag[ing] the child reader vicariously to experience what it meant to be a child living in another country” (Frank 95).¹⁷

Each text includes a long and detailed preface, written in the style of a letter, by the series editor, Florence Converse, introducing the implied American reader to the country in question. Like other World Friends authors of the Progressive Era, Converse was evidently committed to the cause of “urg[ing] young Americans to approach the world’s people not as antagonists but rather as playmates” (Rouleau 143). Born in New Orleans, Converse was a social activist, novelist, and assistant editor at the *Atlantic Monthly*. She graduated from the women’s liberal arts college, Wellesley, in New England in 1893, where she met her partner, the writer and reformer, Vida Scudder. Together, they were active in settlement houses modelled

¹⁷ As very little has been written about this series, it is difficult to ascertain how many texts were published as part of it, or how they were received. In addition to stories about Greece and Spain, which feature in the above advertisement, there were also texts about Russia, Belgium, Mexico, France, Armenia, Scotland, and Japan. See *Journal of Education* (526).

after Hull House (see Chapter Three) and socialist politics (McCullough 63). Given this background, the Little Schoolmates series can be understood as a quintessential Progressive-Era pursuit by a relatively prominent social activist to promote cultural understanding and empathy among young American readers.

In Converse's letter at the beginning of *A Boy in Eirinn*, which is ten pages in total, the implied child reader is promptly launched into an overview of Irish history, beginning with the Great Famine. Unusually for this kind of literature, the text unambiguously blames greedy landlords for the failure of the potato crop outright:

if you keep on planting the same crop on the same land, year after year, the land gets tired of the crop, and the crop gets tired of the land, and presently the crop fails. This is what happened in Ireland in 1846. The potatoes fell sick and rotted, and there was little else to eat. That meant famine, you know,—a dreadful word; a dreadful thing. And all because of the greedy landlords who knew so much, and so little. (x)

Whereas earlier World Friends texts either neglect to mention the Famine, or described it as a tragedy in a vaguer sense, Converse presents a frank, socially conscious portrayal of the event, thus encouraging young readers to confront issues of injustice and inequality in Ireland directly.

After explaining to the reader, “[s]o now you know why the Irish began to go across the sea to America in such great numbers, in the middle of the last century. They were hungry; and in America there was bread to spare, as well as potatoes” (x), Converse swiftly moves on to the subject of fairies: “[t]he little people,’ the Irish call them. There are old men and women in Ireland, yes, and in America too,—today, who can tell you breathless tales of how their grandfathers or grandmothers saw the little people dancing on a lonely heath at midnight” (xi). As in Perkins’ text, fairy stories are depicted as a central aspect of Irish culture, and Converse encourages the

reader to seek out the works of Revivalist Irish poets and writers, including William Allingham, Lady Gregory, Douglas Hyde, and the Australian folklorist, Joseph Jacobs to learn more.

However, while Converse offers an affirming portrayal of Ireland and its culture, she is no less insistent than other World Friends authors in positioning St. Patrick, and thus Christianity, as the country's defining saviour. She writes that a young Patrick "saw in his dreams the pagan children of Green Erin, holding out their little arms to him and calling 'Dear Christian child, return among us; return to save us.' So after he had been made a bishop he went again to Ireland to preach Christianity to the kings and chiefs and poets of the country; and they all listened to him and loved him" (xiv). The pagan roots of Ireland are scrubbed from Converse's account, as they are in virtually all World Friends texts about Ireland. In this way, Converse's portrayal accepts Irish history and culture only up to a point: it celebrates its folklore and literary traditions, while rejecting its pagan past, thus reinforcing a limited, Christianised version of Irish identity.

Significantly, the story beyond the pages of Converse's letter in *A Boy in Eirinn* challenges this representation of Irish history. Colum's tale of Irish life, which is structured around the frame-narrative device first popularised in American children's literature in 1852 by Nathaniel Hawthorne's *A Wonder-Book For Boys and Girls* (Levy and Mendlesohn 52), reinforces many conventions of World Friends texts, but also deviates from them in significant ways. For example, Colum's version of the story of St. Patrick in Ireland varies from Converse's in that, while the King of Ireland listened to Patrick as he preached, he did not convert: "although he did not become a Christian himself he gave Patrick permission to preach Christianity through Ireland" (147). Colum's retelling thus subtly resists Converse's Christianised

Ireland, and presents a more pluralistic vision of Irish identity in which pagan and Christian traditions co-exist.

Reflective of other Irish Revivalist children's writers, who had, by now, begun retelling myths and legends for a young audience in Ireland,¹⁸ Colum is considerably more detailed than Perkins and other World Friends writers in his retellings of Irish myths and legends. Moreover, he establishes Ireland's legendary past as the central theme of the text, alongside a portrait of "everyday Irish life," establishing this theme at the very beginning. The text opens on the story of the protagonist, Finn O'Donnell's name, with the narrator explaining that, "on the day he was born and the day following that there was great debate in the house concerning the name to be given him" (1). Finn's grandfather, Manus, suggests the "extraordinary name" (1), Finn, after Finn MacCoul, "the best of Ireland's heroes," to the despair of his parents: "Finn was not the name of any saint nor of any pious person, said his mother's mother; Finn was not a name in either family, said his father's mother." His mother further laments that "[i]t wasn't right . . . that her child should be given a name out of old stories" (2).

In the end, the name Finn is agreed upon, and the emergence of this young protagonist heralded a new era of Irish-American children's literature in which storytelling and those who preserve the tradition were central. As well as signifying the importance of the old stories of Ireland by naming his protagonist Finn, Colum also signifies the importance of Finn's grandfather, who gave Finn his name. Indeed, Manus O'Donnell is revered in the text both by his family and the wider community for his knowledge of old Irish traditions:

[h]e remembered the histories, the stories and poems that had been handed down, and he read Irish manuscripts which he had collected. He had the

¹⁸ For example, Ella Young's *Celtic Wonder Tales* and Lady Augusta Gregory's *The Kiltartan Wonder Book* were both published in Ireland in 1910.

secret of making medicine from herbs and was reputed to have a cure for cancer. People from far places would come to consult him about this disease, and they would often stay a night in the house sleeping in the settle bed. He spoke Irish and English, but his wife, Finn's grandmother, spoke Irish only, and Finn's father and mother spoke English mainly. Finn, like his grandfather, spoke both languages. (7)

Where in such American-authored World Friends texts as *Kathleen in Ireland* the older, Irish-speaking generation is relegated to the margins, their knowledge and experience deemed old-fashioned and irrelevant (6), Colum centres the influential character of Manus as much as his boy protagonist in *A Boy in Eirinn*, reflecting Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's assertion that Colum's ideal Ireland is one where ordinary folks were viewed "as preservers and custodians of cultural treasures threatened with destruction by colonial hegemony" (39).

Under Colum's creative control, Ireland is an ancient country whose stories, traditions, and language, as retained by the older generation, remain vital sources of wisdom and identity. As Ní Chuilleanáin argues, Colum's accounts of this "chosen Ireland," which is distinctly rural, Gaelic, and Catholic, is "rich in folklore detail. He includes tales and legends, superstitions, observations for St Brigid's Day, and a couple of striking examples of beliefs" (37).¹⁹ This is demonstrated throughout *A Boy in Eirinn* through the various figures Finn meets on his travels, and the stories they tell him, which function to paint a vivid picture of a particular vision of Irish life. It is reinforced by such characters as the priest who tells Finn that "[l]ong ago he was teaching in Ireland and he was misguided enough to give the boys in his charge

¹⁹ Colum's Catholic identity is emphasised throughout his writings, and was, as Whyte and O'Sullivan argue, "a means of setting himself apart from Lady Augusta Gregory, J.M. Synge, W.B. Yeats, and others" (3), all of whom represented the Protestant Ascendancy. For more on the major figures of the Revival, see Howes (2020); Kiberd and Mathews (2015); Mac Mathúna (2019); Stubbs (2013).

a contempt for the language and the history of his country. Nothing good could come of such teaching, he said. Now that he was back in Ireland he would strive to make boys understand the worth of their country's past" (148).

As well as a country of ancient knowledge and tradition, Colum's Ireland is also one of resilience. For example, where earlier World Friends accounts of Ireland gloss over the significance of Daniel O'Connell as a historical figure, or, as in *Our Little Irish Cousin*, provides a simplified and sentimental account in keeping with the tone of the series,²⁰ Colum dedicates considerable attention to describing the legacy of O'Connell and, crucially, his transformative impact on Irish people: "Daniel O'Connell got the Catholics representation in Parliament, but he did more than that for them—he put a spirit into them, and after his time no one would make them feel that they were inferior to anyone else, or that they could not make their own way in the world" (121). O'Connell thus emerges in Colum's account as a symbol of Irish Catholic resilience and perseverance, inspiring a collective strength and agency that would survive long after his demise. Whereas in American-authored texts Irish survival hinged on American benevolence, Colum, crucially, locates Ireland's strength within its own people.

Compared to earlier World Friends accounts of Ireland, *A Boy in Eirinn* thus presents a richer, more complex, and more politically-charged image of Ireland and Irish people. In Colum's Ireland, important stories that occurred "[b]efore Saint Patrick came" (32) are told, descriptions of religious festivals appear alongside descriptions of pagan ones (56–8), and warriors are romantically depicted: "[n]o one who was ignorant of the art of poetry was permitted to enter the Fianna" (16–7). While its vision of Ireland is still limited (as Ní Chuilleanáin observes, Colum's

²⁰ Both *Kathleen in Ireland* (7) and *The Boy Travellers in Great Britain and Ireland* (470) briefly refer to O'Connell as a great orator, while Wade dedicates a chapter to "the story of the brave man who had worked so hard to help his people" (44–53).

Ireland is “not about cities” [37]), the text nonetheless extends conventions of other World Friends literature of the period, and provides a bolder, more nuanced, and more richly detailed portrait of Ireland in American children’s literature.

A Boy in Eirinn has been dismissed by Bowen as “pure propaganda” (142) and Sternlicht as “crass, heavy-handed, propaganda piece designed to invoke American sympathy for the cause of Irish independence” (130), yet both also acknowledge that the text exhibits excellence. Considering the wide audience the text was exposed to due to its publication as part of a World Friends children’s series published by an established mainstream publisher, this chapter argues that *A Boy in Eirinn* did more to launch Colum’s career in the US than has been previously acknowledged. Ní Chuilleanáin has argued that *The King of Ireland’s Son* “started [Colum] off as a successful children’s writer” in 1916 (34),²¹ but this chapter contends that the foundation for Colum’s success had already been established by then. What is more, the text’s publication pinpoints an important moment in the development of Irish-American children’s literature, bringing it from the margins to the mainstream, and instigating its Golden Age, a development that would span the next twenty years, as I demonstrate in the following section via a discussion on the reception of Ella Young in the US.

Ella Young and the Female Embodiment of the Celtic Revival

This chapter now turns its attention to Colum’s contemporary and fellow Newbery Honor recipient, Ella Young. Specifically, it examines a selection of features written about Young in the American media, including a rare edition of the *Horn Book* that

²¹ Notably, this text, like much of Colum’s subsequent children’s literature titles, was published by The Macmillan Company, “the largest publisher in the United States” at the time (Schmidt x). At Macmillan, Colum was edited by Louise Seamen Bechter, the first children’s book editor in the US to head her own department. For more on Bechter’s legacy, see Jagusch (191–218); Marcus (76–83).

was published in 1939, twenty-six years after Colum emerged on the American children's literature scene and Irish-American children's literature entered its Golden Age. This primary source, which was advertised in *The New York Times* as "a special edition honoring Ella Young" (Eaton 10), is particularly valuable for its insight into how Young's highly gendered authorial persona was constructed by American children's literature "minders" (including Colum), and also in how it captures the feverish manner in which Irish-American children's writers and their work were received in the US in the first decades of the twentieth century.

In the twenty years prior to this special edition emerging, both Colum and Young had built impressive careers in the US as children's writers (Young more recently), and had both gained Newbery Honor Book recognition multiple times: Colum for *The Golden Fleece and the Heroes Who Lived Before Achilles* (1921), *The Voyagers, Being Legends and Romances of Atlantic Discovery* (1925), and *The Big Tree of Bunlahy* (1933); Young for *The Wonder Smith and His Son* (1928) and *The Unicorn With Silver Shoes* (1932). Both authors also appeared in publications about American children's literature compiled by influential figures such as Anne Carroll Moore, "librarian, literary critic, director of the New York Public Library's Office of Work with Children, and a powerful determiner of the fate of any children's book published in America" (Schmidt xiii), whose previously discussed series, *The Three Owls*, pays considerable attention to both authors. Both authors also contributed autobiographical sketches to Stanley J. Knitz and Howard Haycraft's *The Junior Book of Authors* (1934), in which they emphasised the role of storytelling in their idyllic Irish upbringings.

As both Kelleher (77) and Delaney (2024 93) have observed, a notable aspect of Colum's writing life was the support he gave fellow writers. This is true for Young, whose book, *The Wonder-Smith and His Son*, Colum reviewed in the second

volume of Moore's *The Three Owls*. Colum writes: "[s]he is one of the few English-speaking people who really possesses the art of the Shanachie or traditional storyteller and who can hold an audience with a story told" (1928 234). Colum also wrote an essay about Young, which was first published as a pamphlet in 1931 and reprinted in the special edition of the *Horn Book* dedicated to her, in which he stated: "[f]rom the first time I knew her I have thought of her as one whom some seeker in ancient Celtia would find beside a well on which the sacred hazels dropped and from whom he would learn some of the mysteries" (183). The essay demonstrates Colum's high regard for Young, and also his active role in elevating the status of the highly popular Irish storyteller figure in American society at this time.

By 1939, Colum and Young had thus long been established as the leading authorities on storytelling in the American children's literature world, a status repeatedly affirmed by the *Horn Book*, in which they were both regularly featured. As Clements points out, another of Colum's essays, "Story Telling, New and Old," originally published in *The Fountain of Youth* (1927), was "twice reproduced" in this publication (163). The special edition of the *Horn Book* is revealing in how it constructs Young as an almost quasi-mythic being, with three features on the author, including Colum's essay, working together to construct her ethereal persona for a young readership. Young is repeatedly evoked as a *spéirbhean* or "sky-woman" figure, a feminine representation of Ireland and popular nationalist trope at the time.²² This is typical of references to Young in *The Horn Book* generally, whose reviewers, as Clements observes, tended to concentrate less on the content or craft of Young's work, and more on "the art she brings to her books" (162). Although intended to be read in positive terms, the features in the special edition of the *Horn*

²² The *spéirbhean* figure has its origins in the Irish *aisling* poem, a vision poem in which a woman, representing Ireland, inspires men to go into battle. See Kiberd (1995) for more. For more on the trope of Ireland-as-woman in the Revivalist era, see Meaney (2010); Valente (1991).

Book arguably overemphasise Young's physical appearance and supposedly ethereal nature, and reduce her to a romanticised symbol of the Irish Revival, rather than an important literary figure of the movement.

The first feature is written by Sylvia Flanagan, Secretary of the Department of Public Speaking at the University of California, which opens with a description of the writer's first visit to the Young's home: "I was looking for Ella Young, the dramatic figure, who, gathering her long black satin cloak around her, had left the crowded lecture hall with her arms full of flowers." Flanagan proceeds to describe her observations of her meeting with Young in her home in romanticised terms: "[i]n the glow of the fire I watched her fine features express each changing emotion, as she spoke of her friends in Ireland, of Yeats, of Synge, of 'AE,' of James Stephens" (146). As Young chants a song, Flanagan further observes: "the firelight turned to fiercer red the large opal pendant on her throat and intensified the crimson flowers on her white satin coat. Under the rhythmic spell of her voice, the statue of Kwan-Yin, Chinese Goddess of Mercy seemed to rise foam-white from her lotus sanctuary in the far corner" (146). Although the feature pays some attention to Young's writing, it ultimately follows the same pattern as many others on Young, which portrayed her primarily as an embodiment of Ireland's mystical past.

The second feature in the edition, by Anne Hadden, librarian of the Palo Alto Public Library, once again elevates the Irish tradition of storytelling and the stature of the storyteller to idealised, almost mythic heights via the figure of Young. Hadden states that "there is something indescribable about Miss Young": "[s]he has listened to the magic music . . . and on the great tide of Mananon which beats upon the western shore she has travelled off to Tir-na-nog, the Land of the Ever Young.— Indeed, her name might well be Ever Young" (180). Considerable attention is paid to Young's home throughout the feature, which is portrayed as an extension of Young's

supposedly enchanted identity: “[t]he garden was full of roses. The rooms had bronze bowls with blossoming branches. Fire-flame dances on a bronze Buddha, serene upon a thousand-petaled lotus” (179). Although respectful in tone, the feature nonetheless portrays Young as a figure of wonder or curiosity.

The third feature in the edition is a reprinted essay by Colum about Young, in which Young’s appearance is emphasised to reinforce a now-familiar image of her as otherworldly: “[h]er appearance seemed to me to be that of some initiate—the grey shining eyes, the thin face that always looks as if there was a light behind it, the sensitized hands. Yes, ever since I have known her, I have thought of Ella Young as a reincarnated Druidess” (183). This particular description of Young is consistent in other profiles of the author which similarly focus on her appearance, with an image of fragility, in particular, being evoked repeatedly. For example, a full-page feature in *The New York Times* describes Young’s “high, serene brow, gray hair that waves softly, features that are at once delicate and strong” (Jewell 12). Her obituary in *The New York Times* just over thirty years later would similarly describe her as “fragile, delicately featured” (“Ella Young Dead” 56), and the *East St. Louis Daily Journal*, in another full-page profile, describes Young as “fragile and clear-featured” (Phillips 4).

The features share in their enthusiasm for depicting Young as belonging to another realm. Mary Phillips writes that Young is “chief friend and confidante” of the “Wee People” of Ireland, and that she arrived in the US “as their envoy to us human beings and their brother fairies who people our rivers and mountains and trees and fields of flowers” (4). Edward Alden Jewell similarly claims that Young is the “closest present-day link with the fairies.” While Jewell acknowledges Young’s “valuable work” in translating and preserving old Irish-language folk tales, considerably more focus is paid in the feature to Young’s facial features: “she has the

face of a poet and seer,” and manner: “she has a repose about her, a sort of gentle drooping” (12).

Such emphasis on Young’s physical characteristics, as well as her ethereal persona, is notably at odds with the reception of Colum and other Irish-American authors at this time, whose bodies of work, rather than physical bodies, were more frequently the focus in discussions of their writing. Yet, despite the repeated suggestion that Young somehow inhabits a liminal realm, her writing, although more imaginative at turns, is clearly rooted in the same tradition as her Irish and Irish American contemporaries. For example, the special edition of the *Horn Book* opens with an original story by Young entitled “The Poet’s Fee,” which portrays Ireland as an ancient country with a special regard for storytelling, poetry, and pagan traditions. When a young boy named Patsey Pat asks for his nightly story, his father tells him that tonight is the Festival of Saint Brigit, and as Brigit is “the Patron Saint of poets, so it is a poet’s story that I will tell you tonight” (139). The story that follows is about the King of Munster’s poet, and his encounter with an ordinary Irish man on the road. The poet bestows on the man “the gift and privilege” of hearing the first recital of his new poem, an honour typically reserved for the King. In return, the man pays the poet his fee, for “some precious thing must be given in honour of the poem” (142).

Being poor, the man offers his only possessions, his cloak and his cow, insisting that “had I the weight of [the cow] in jewels it would not be too much!” (142). Although outraged not to be the first to hear the new poem, the King concedes that the poor man, in offering all that he had, “upheld the honour and tradition of his race and the dignity of his country. If he is poor, he has a king’s heart” (143). The story thus centres on the reverence for poetry and storytelling as defining features of Irish identity, reinforcing contemporary American expectations of Ireland as a land

where the tradition is considered noble and culturally inherent. This is reinforced again when the story returns to Patsey Pat and his father, who tells the boy, “[h]ere is my story for you and may the next teller better it!” (143).

Young’s story is similar in tone and theme to Colum’s *A Boy in Eirinn* and his later work, *The Big Tree of Bunlahy*, which Whyte argues is “a sophisticated narrative . . . wherein landscape provides a mechanism for the anchoring of story, for highlighting the transformative potential of story, for revealing themes of loss, recovery and preservation within story, and for elevating the status of the storyteller” (“Firing the Hearth” 146).²³ But while both writers were, in their time, celebrated and upheld as guardians of the Irish storytelling tradition, Young was consistently framed through a gendered lens that often underestimated her literary authority.

Although clearly intended to be read in positive terms, the relentless tendency to portray Young as a mythical incarnation of Irish storytelling undermines the quality of her work and her commitment to it, which is evident in many examples of her writing. For example, in her foreword in *The Wonder Smith and his Son*, Young positions herself as a collector of ancient Irish stories whose understanding of the Irish language gave her deeper access to this tradition:

the stories were told to me in Gaelic at times, at times in English. I heard them in cottages by turf fires, I heard them in brown-sailed fishing boats and on rocky hillsides. They are mixed in my mind with sunshine and sweet air and wide empty spaces: with lakes in Donegal, where faery horses are said to hide, with pools in Connemora where crested serpents, called Piasts, lift their heads, and with glittering inlets of the sea and mountains in Kerry. (*The Wonder-Smith* 12–3)

²³ For further analysis on *The Big Tree of Bunlahy*, see Ní Choileáin (2024); Whyte (2016; 2017).

In her autobiography, *Flowering Dusk*, she claims to have spent twenty-five years collecting these stories (216). Although framed in romanticised terms, Young nonetheless demonstrates her commitment to her craft here, which required significant labour, time, and linguistic competence to carry out effectively.

Of Young's persona as a druidess figure in close connection with the Other world, Annat argues that it positions the author "within a context of established cultural nationalist discourses" and should thus be taken into account in analyses of her work (195). However, overemphasis on these aspects have arguably obscured the value of her work. In a more detailed review of Young's only collection of original stories, *The Unicorn With Silver Shoes*, children's librarian, Elva Smith, remarks on the "rhythm of the prose" and "melody of the verses," which "have the same beauty and poetry, the humor and charm found in *The Wonder Smith and His Son* and *The Tangle-Coated Horse*" (263). The review is refreshing for its rare focus on the technical craft of Young's work, rather than her appearance and persona, and demonstrates the possibility for re-evaluating Young's children's literature in a more balanced and critical way.

The Forgotten Legacy of Irish-American Children's Authors

In the final portion of analysis in this thesis, I return my focus to Padraic Colum to recover a previously unexamined picture book of his, *Where the Winds Never* (1940), which emerged a year after the *Horn Book* edition dedicated to Young. Illustrated by Irish-born illustrator Richard Bennett, the story is a seemingly simple animal tale set in an idyllic landscape reminiscent of rural Ireland, yet also a subtle confrontation by Colum of American nativism and xenophobia. In recovering this text, I demonstrate the brief, but significant role Colum played in the development of a new wave of American children's literature that would override and eventually eclipse the

previous wave, which had embraced the Golden Age of Irish-American children's literature. Moreover, I demonstrate that, although Irish-American children's literature, as a category, would largely collapse in the 1940s, the contribution of Irish immigrant authors to American children's literature would persist.

The gradual decline of Irish-American children's literature as a category from the late 1930s can be linked to further developments in Irish-American history, including the continued assimilation of Irish immigrants in US society over several generations, and the drastic decline of Irish immigration to the US following the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, which cut Irish immigration from 220,591 people in the 1920s, to 13,167 in the 1930s, and 26,967 in the 1940s (Kenny *The American Irish* 182). The waves of immigrants Sadlier and Roddan sought to guide in the mid-nineteenth century were thus no longer arriving on American shores in droves, and those who were were entering a country in which Irish Catholic immigrants had since successfully staked a claim. There simply wasn't the same need for a literature in the mid-twentieth that initially emerged to guide the vulnerable immigrant.

Despite no longer having a vast and easily identifiable implied Irish child readership to write for, Irish-American writers continued to influence the development of American children's literature in the mid-twentieth century, with *Where the Winds Never Blew* being a perfect, yet overlooked example of this. Emerging in the aftermath of the Immigration Act of 1924, the Great Depression, and the Jewish refugee crisis of the late 1930s, I argue that Colum utilised the medium of children's literature and a romanticised and highly palatable image of the Irish landscape to interrogate—and subtly challenge—exclusionary anxieties shaping social and political discourse in the US in the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, I argue that the timing of *Where the Winds Never Blew* is not a coincidence, but rather

reflects new concerns of American children's literature which began to surface in the 1930s.

In *Making Americans: Children's Literature from 1930–1960*, Gary D.

Schmidt observes that “in the 1920s, American children's literature had yet to leave its European moorings and identify a distinctively American subject matter” (ix–x). Indeed, as this thesis has demonstrated, it was a category defined by British and European (including Irish) writers. Several important factors, from the continually rising status of children's book editors and continued expansion of children's publishing in the Progressive Era, to a growing desire in the aftermath of World War One for “new texts that spoke to the experience, needs, and interests of the modern American child” (Schmidt xiii), would change this in the coming decades. What emerged by the 1940s was a new kind of American children's literature that reflected “intense patriotism” and an “image of American power and dominance enacted as a promise for the protection of the American child” (Schmidt xv). Consequently, the World Friends literature that had paved the way for the Golden Age of Irish-American children's literature was now firmly a thing of the past.

But while this new “Americanised” children's literature sought to inspire patriotism and citizenship in the American child reader,²⁴ much of it was produced and promoted by socially progressive writers, illustrators, and previously discussed children's book “minders” in the US, who

did not want to reflect a culture only; they wanted to inculcate a complex vision of culture. Thus they would show an America that was to be extolled and an America that was deeply flawed, and in doing so . . . [create] a literature that showed a concern about society's problems, that accepted the old

²⁴ For examples of American children's literature published on the eve of World War Two and intended to promote patriotism, see Jagusch, who observes that “[a]nother look at different countries, published in 1939 as World War II began in Europe, mixed a small dose of fantasy with a large dose of reality and patriotism” (185–190).

American assumption that the child did have a responsibility to the republic, that argued that artists and those who supported and disseminated their work to children had a responsibility to young citizens to depict America as it was and to challenge their young readers to engage in their country's progress. (Schmidt xxiv)

Thus, what emerged in the 1940s was a mainstream-published children's literature that both implicitly and explicitly reflected "concerns about the treatment of the immigrant, the place of the 'Other' in society, issues of racism, issues of pacifism and violence, issues of the just war, issues of progress and - modernization" (Schmidt xxvi). It is in this context that Colum's confrontational and socially radical text emerges.

At first glance, *Where the Winds Never Blew*, which primarily comprises blue pencil sketches, appears to be a simple Irish-themed story. Like other texts by Colum, including *A Boy in Eirinn* and *The Big Tree of Bunlahy*, the illustrations depict a rural Irish landscape complete with stone walls, a thatched-roof cottage, a hearth, and an Irish settle chair. However, while *A Boy in Eirinn* and *The Big Tree of Bunlahy* are set in real geographical settings in Ireland, *Where the Winds Never Blew*, as the *Index-Journal* of Greenwood, South Carolina put it, portrays "the strange adventures of an amusing group of animals in a land of make believe" ("Children's Books"). This fantastical setting, known as Where the Winds Never Blew and the Cocks Never Crew, is a domain without boundary, in which no one is ever born or dies. In this way, it mirrors Tír na nÓg, the land of eternal youth from Irish mythology, and was celebrated in the *New York Times* for being "completely in accord with the old folk world of enchantment" ("An Enchanted World"). However, closer inspection reveals that this Irish-like world is more similar to the US, with Colum's portrayal quite boldly depicting a society steeped in social problems.

My argument that Colum's animal story engages with themes of nativism and xenophobia in the US hinges on the fact that it is not entirely an original story, but rather a revision of another of Colum's texts, *The Six Who Were Left in a Shoe*. Originally published seventeen years earlier, in 1923, *The Six Who Were Left in a Shoe* was a shorter, more conventionally structured European-style fairy tale. The story likely takes inspiration from either the well-known Mother Goose nursery rhyme "There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe," or "The Old Woman in the Shoe" by L. Frank Baum (1910), with Colum stating in the text's opening line: "[y]ou have all heard of The Old Woman Who Lived In A Shoe, but maybe none of you know what happened to her in the end" (1).

Colum's earlier version of this story presents a straightforward narrative of a quest for home with a happy ending. The shoe-house is occupied by anthropomorphised animals, rather than children, who are left behind when their owner, an old woman, is taken by fairies to "brush the cobwebs off o' the sky" on her flying broom (3). After being abandoned, the animals must find a new home, and set off across a quintessential fairy tale landscape replete with stepping stones dotted along winding streams, luscious fields, golden meadows, and brightly coloured houses. After being turned away from the first few dwellings they encounter, the group eventually discovers a shoe-shaped house identical to their original home, where they choose to settle. While *Where the Winds Never Blew* retains the basic premise and many of the same characters of this text, a crucial revision is that the animals are no longer turned away from potential dwellings; instead, they are fiercely protective of the land they claim as their own. To this end, Colum's reworking of *The Six Who Were Left In a Shoe* into *Where the Winds Never Blew* reflects a substantive

ideological shift, and an initially innocuous fairy tale is transformed into a pointed story about displacement and exclusion.²⁵

After setting out in search of a new home, Colum's updated cast of animal characters arrive at Where the Winds Never Blew and the Cocks Never Crew and happily settle down. There is room for everyone in this special land, and the animals live together in harmony: "[n]ot one of the creatures had said a cross word to the other since they had come to the place. They were having a quiet life" (20). It is only when Hoodie, the crow, arrives one day that the animals' peace is disturbed. Hoodie is immediately met with suspicion by Croodie the pigeon: "[h]e was very big and very black, and his beak was so large that Croodie wondered what a creature wanted with a beak of such a size" (21).

Hoodie, who is repeatedly described as having been "through the wars" (21; 23; 24; 26; 32; 42; 52) seeks shelter, and attempts to communicate to Croodie that he poses no threat. However, Croodie does not speak Hoodie's language and misinterprets his words: "[w]hen Hoodie, the crow said 'Caw, caw caw!', he didn't mean by it what the lone pigeon thought he meant. He didn't mean 'I'm Hoodie, the crow, and I'm big and black and bad-tempered.' He meant 'I'm lonesome', and lonesome he surely was" (23).

The other animals are equally alarmed by Hoodie's arrival, and only agree to let him stay on the condition that nobody interacts with him. Tibbie, the cat, warns the others: "[b]ut let there be no making up to him, no speaking to him, no being friendly with the fellow. Let him stay! He's a trespasser, that's what he is. I will keep

²⁵ It is worth noting that both versions of Colum's story are early examples of animal stories in American children's literature. Levy and Mendlesohn argue that "[t]he great late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British tradition of literary animal fantasies – from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) to Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) and A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) – has no equivalent in American children's literature" (62). It wasn't until the emergence of *Stuart Little* by E.B. White, "the most successful American animal fantasist of all," (63), in 1945 that animal fantasy became a staple of American children's literature.

my distance, and I hope you will all keep your distance from this tatterdemalion old vagrant of a crow. Him and his temper!” (32). Grateful to the animals, Hoodie promises to provide for himself and keep his distance.

The character of Hoodie arguably reflects the increasing xenophobia in the US in the 1930s. In the seventeen years since Colum’s original version of the story was published, major events, including the enactment of the Immigration Act in 1924 and the substantial emigration of the Jewish population from Nazi Germany, rendered the social and political landscape of 1940 drastically changed. Moreover, the US was only recently emerging from the Great Depression, an event Roger Daniels argues “changed almost every aspect of American life, and immigration was no exception” (59).

In his foundational account, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882*, Daniels argues that, despite the effects of the Immigration Act, “new ‘problems’ arose that focused on Mexicans, Filipinos, and then refugees from totalitarian regimes in Europe. And, in keeping with the growing concern about numbers of immigrants, the apprehension and deportation of illegal immigrants became increasingly important” (59). Thus, while immigration had diminished drastically by 1940—including from Ireland, as discussed—hostility towards immigrants in the US was heightened, with “a sizable majority of ordinary Americans” even opposed to proposals to accommodate immigrant children (Daniels 78–9).²⁶

²⁶ Opposition to such bills as the Wagner-Rogers Bill of 1939, which proposed bringing 20,000 German children to the US outside of the quota system, was possibly rooted in antisemitism, which had taken firm root in the US during the 1920. As Ronald H. Baylor argues, “Jews were considered to be one of the inferior races within the new immigration which would cause the mongrelization of America and its decline. Coupled with these ideas was the renewed interest in anti-radicalism after World War I, with the Jews seen as the main threatening element.” (182). For more on antisemitism in the US at this time, see Higham (92–97).

Considering his marked physical otherness and description as a “rapacious rascal” (31), which both strongly evoke stereotypical Jewish imagery popular in American culture at the time,²⁷ as well as his association with recent conflict and displacement, Hoodie the Crow can reasonably be interpreted as representing a Jewish refugee. Moreover, the name “Hoodie” sounds like the Irish plural of Jew, “giúdaigh.” Given Colum’s tendency to subtly weave the Irish language into his stories, this is possibly more than a coincidence; indeed, the wren character in this text is named Droileen, with *dreoilín* being the Irish for “wren.” Emerging in a children’s publishing landscape that now openly “debated the strategies of ‘tolerance’ versus ‘acceptance’” (Schmidt xxvi) makes this reading of the text all the more plausible.

The timing of Colum’s revision of his animal story in this light is telling, and his personal feelings on the war might have inspired him to take action. For example, in a letter he wrote to Josephine Crane, his friend and benefactor, on the 27th of September, 1939, he stated “[w]e’re devastated about the war. But we must all try to keep our hearts from sinking” (“Letter to Josephine B. Crane”).²⁸ Several high-profile events in the late 1930s demonstrate the inadequate and often apathetic American response to Jewish refugees, possibly motivating him to rewrite his animal story. For example, the Évian Conference of 1938, organised under President Franklin Roosevelt, failed to produce meaningful action to aid refugees, and in 1939 the German liner *St. Louis*, carrying 937 Jewish refugees, was turned away from American shores, “demonstrat[ing] the degree to which American officials’ hearts

²⁷ Appel lists the stereotyped facial features typically ascribed to Jewish people in American media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including “huge convex Jewish beaks” (114). The assumption that Hoodie is inherently greedy evokes the “Shylock” stereotype, which Higham argues casts Jewish people as “an immoral, unmannerly people, given to greed and vulgarity” (160).

²⁸ This letter was sourced in the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University.

had hardened against admitting any refugees outside of the quota system” (Daniels 79).

As mentioned, public opinion at this time was similarly discouraging, with polls in the media demonstrating the reluctance of the American public to relax the country’s immigration policy to accommodate Jewish refugees. For example, “polls conducted throughout 1938 and 1939 discovered that 12 percent of the Americans surveyed consistently favored a campaign against Jews in America, while another poll . . . found that 42 percent of Americans who were asked wanted either to take measures to prevent Jews from gaining too much economic power in America, or (less often) to deport them as fast as humanely possible” (Jantzen 216).²⁹ Through Hoodie, Colum arguably engages with the climate of xenophobia and exclusion in the US at this time. The character’s repeated description as “having been through the wars” and his physical appearance signal his outsider status, while his arrival disrupts the animals’ previously secure community. By illustrating the animals’ initial fear and exclusion of Hoodie, Colum mirrors American anxieties and prejudices.

Colum’s revision of the text also captures heightened American hysteria regarding immigration at this time. Soon after Hoodie’s arrival, the animals take a notion that the world is ending. In a scene reminiscent of the folktale popularly known as “Chicken Licken,” in which the animal characters become convinced that the sky is falling, Colum’s animals convince themselves that “the world is coming to an end!” (36). The animals’ panic reflects their state of unease in their home that had been perfect until “trespassers” began encroaching on it. Although they are originally settlers themselves and were also once displaced, they have now claimed *Where the Winds Never Blew* and *the Cocks Never Crew* as their own, and are both protective of it and fearful of what “others,” like Hoodie, might do to it.

²⁹ For more on the US response to the Jewish refugee crisis in the 1930s, see Daniels (71–80).

The nativist hysteria of the animals reflects the attitudes towards immigrants that had developed towards the end of the nineteenth century in the US and peaked in the early twentieth century, when “many viewed them as being too different to assimilate into the majority culture. As a result, politicians and the press frequently portrayed immigration as a threat to the nation. By the early 1920s, these long-held nativist fears generated new restrictive legislation that would cause the number and percent of foreign-born in the United States to decline sharply for decades afterwards” (Young “Making America 1920” 218). Such fears began to brew towards the end of the nineteenth century, when an “eruption of nativism” resulted in “a fear-ridden and sometimes hysterical hatred of foreigners” (Jones 253).

In this context, Colum’s animal tale takes on new meaning. The animals believe that *Where the Winds Never Blew and the Cocks Never Crew* is theirs and claim ownership of it, despite having happened upon it by chance, just as Hoodie did. They do not see the hypocrisy of their actions towards other refugees, having themselves only recently staked a claim in what can effectively be interpreted as stolen land, and are thus reflective of the many native-born Americans who objected to the accommodation of immigrants, despite their own ancestors being refugees in the US once upon a time, and perhaps only recently.

After Hoodie’s arrival, many of the animals experience existential crises. The goat leaves in favour of a better life: “[h]ow grand it was to be on the side of a mountain on a day when the wind was bending the ferns and blowing hard against one’s side. What dull lives they had down in that flat place!” (47), while Droileen, the wren, decides to take up with a flock of starlings (54). When a mysterious swan arrives and sings a song before flying away, a symbol in Greek mythology that death is imminent, most of the animals follow her, leaving their adopted home behind for good. The animals go “across the edge of the world, where the forefathers of all the

pigeons, and all the guinea hens, and all the wrens; of all the geese, and the crows, the cats and goats and dogs are; and where they never see their shadows” (94). This new domain is one in which all species of animal co-exist peacefully without fear of looking over their shoulders, and where they are free from the prejudice they knew on earth: “[a]ll crows have bad tempers” (26); “[starlings are] a thievish lot” (50).

Ultimately, the ending of Colum’s revision is ambiguous, resisting a neat conclusion or clear moral. By ending with death, it is possible that Colum is suggesting there is relief in the afterlife for those who have struggled to find a home on earth, or that, in the end, earth belongs to nobody. It is possible, too, that he is offering a vision for an alternative, pluralistic society in which everybody belongs. Indeed, animal fables have historically been used as a device to convey such morals and messages, with animals standing “for something else, usually some aspect of human behaviour, and their fables are the vehicle for moral warnings or political satire” (Spencer 3). With this in mind, as Erica Fudge argues, “[t]o look beneath the surface of the fable, to read the moral and not the animal, is where the human can be found. . . . To misread a fable is to be an animal” (65).

Clearly, *Where the Winds Never Blew* transcends a simple tale of animal adventures in an Irish landscape, and can instead be interpreted as reflecting 1930s American society and critiquing the escalating nativism and xenophobia that had grown since Colum first emigrated. In this way, it epitomises the kind of American children’s literature being produced by the 1940s, which encouraged the next generation of Americans citizens to “perceive the limitations of the ‘melting pot’ metaphor, to explore the boundaries of freedom, and to . . . ask harder questions about America’s global influences than had ever been imagined” (Schmidt xxvii). Recovering the text here demonstrates the role of Irish-American authors in developing this new literature.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the Golden Age of Irish-American children's literature in the early twentieth century was not solely the result of the Irish Literary Revival; rather, the emergence of World Friends literature at the turn of the century provided an unexpectedly fertile foundation upon which American perceptions of Ireland and Irishness were reconstructed by American and Irish American authors alike. Gradually shifting away from the derogatory caricatures that defined the Sunday School literature described in earlier chapters of this thesis, Ireland was now depicted as a nation of cosy cottages, hardworking peasants, and lovable children intended to endear the implied American child reader.

With the emergence of Padraic Colum, the structures and expectations of World Friends literature would be further expanded. *A Boy in Eirinn*, published as part of Florence Converse's Little Schoolmates series, drew upon the literature's characteristic progressive ideals, yet diverged from them in crucial respects. While American-authored texts carefully tempered political complexity and cultural identity, striving to align their portrayal of Ireland with American values, Colum put pagan rituals, Irish mythology and legends, and fairy stories to the fore, thus asserting a fuller, more nuanced Irish history, culture, and identity in his account of everyday Irish life.

Equally important to the Golden Age of Irish-American children's literature is the contribution of Ella Young, whose work has received comparatively less attention than Colum's. This chapter has argued that emphasis on Young's ethereal appearance and persona have overshadowed the merit of her work. While much of her writings fall beyond the scope of this thesis, this chapter has nonetheless demonstrated the significance of Young to the development of Irish-American

children's literature in the twentieth century, and argued for continued recovery and reassessment of her work that puts her skill and craft as a writer to the fore, rather than her appearance.

As the analysis of Colum's *Where the Winds Never Blew* has demonstrated, Irish-American children's writers continued to contribute to the development of American children's literature after the category of Irish-American children's literature began to collapse in the 1940s. Evidently, Colum's critically neglected picture book, which initially appears to evoke the Irish countryside, can be situated within a broader, socially progressive tradition in American children's publishing that increasingly addressed questions of community, exclusion, and belonging within American society. In recovering *Where the Winds Never Blew*, this chapter repositions Colum within the broader canon of mid-twentieth century American children's literature, and also demonstrates the need for a broader reassessment of the influence of Irish-American writers on the development of this category.

Conclusion

“I’ll be diggin’ lumps of gold”: Towards the Continued Recovery and Recognition of Irish-American Children’s Literature



Figure 3. Boston: Boston Irish Famine Memorial (Gobet 2007)

In downtown Boston, in 1998, statues dedicated to the memory of the Irish Famine and history of Irish immigration to the US were unveiled. Sculpted by Robert Shure, the two statues depict a simplified version of a complex history, suggesting a smooth narrative of triumph over adversity, or rags to riches. In the first statue, an emaciated Irish man, woman, and child are depicted in ragged clothing, an empty basket between them. The woman holds a skeletal arm to the sky, while the man hunches over, his head resting wearily against his naked leg. The child, slumped on her knees beside them, holds an empty hand open before her. The second statue similarly depicts an Irish man, woman, and child, although this time well-dressed and confidently striding forward, an energetic vitality about them that is at odds with the first statue.

These statues, which have been criticised and mocked for their gross and offensive oversimplification of Irish American history,¹ are intended to reflect the backdrop of this thesis. While they are a crude example of the trivialisation to which Irish-American history has long been subjected, they nevertheless represent a persistent trend in discussions of the subject, whereby simplified narratives gloss over a far more complex history. In its recovery and reclassification of several titles of Irish-American children's literature, this thesis has resisted the perpetuation of such narratives, and demonstrated the significant role of literature for young people, written by Irish immigrants in North America, in both reflecting and actively shaping the history of Irish America. Among other things, the thesis has illustrated how Irish immigrant writers used children's literature to construct a positive image of the Irish Catholic immigrant child at the expense of other racial or ethnic groups (especially Black Americans), and exposed the strongly anti-Protestant nature of some texts. To this end, the thesis has confronted the murkier aspects of Irish-American history and demonstrated the unique role of children's literature in their construction.

This thesis has also demonstrated the various ways Irish American authors utilised established conventions of American children's literature to their own ends to create a special literature for an implied Irish Catholic immigrant child reader. Consequently, it has demonstrated the many ways Irish-American writers contributed to the development of American children's literature by centring the experiences of the "other" (i.e. the non-American WASP child), thereby expanding the category and challenging its narrow representation of American childhood. Irish immigrant writers contributed for over a century to American children's literature, although these contributions have largely gone unrecognised until now. By incorporating Irish-American children's literature into the study of American children's literature, this

¹ See O'Toole (1998); O'Shea (2013).

thesis broadens and deepens critical understandings of American children's literature as a category.

This thesis breaks new ground by representing the first comprehensive study of Irish-American children's literature, as a category, to date. At the beginning of the thesis, strict parameters for what constitutes "Irish-American children's literature" were set in recognition of the term's potentially vast and unwieldy scope. While a substantial body of material has been examined, a great deal more was necessarily excluded. These exclusions should not be read as limitations of the category of Irish-American children's literature, but as an indication of its richness and breadth, and thus of the many avenues that remain open for future research. One avenue for future study, for example, is Irish Catholic publications such as the *Boston Pilot*, which had a weekly column entitled "Our Boys and Girls" that published "a constant supply of games, riddles, puzzles, charades, enigmas, and all sorts of amusement and exercise for young brains" ("Our Boys and Girls").

Other future studies might include analyses of fiction by Irish American authors that is not "Irish" in theme, such as Mary E. Mannix's many other children's novels besides *The Fortunes of a Little Emigrant*, none of which has received any critical attention to date, or the poetry and short fiction of Irish American children's authors, which would recover many more of Mannix and her sister, Julia C. Walsh's neglected works. Consideration of non-original stories, such as the many retellings of myths and legends that appeared in the early twentieth century, would further expand the category of Irish-American children's literature considerably, and include such writers as Seumas MacManus, Elizabeth Hely Walshe, and Alan M. Buck, none of whom has been written about in depth to date. This is particularly true of Buck, who

wrote several books for children, but who, like Mannix and Walsh, does not appear in any studies on Irish-American literature or children's literature.²

The starting point for this thesis was obvious: Orestes Brownson's call for a special literature directed at young Irish immigrant boys resulted in the publication of Fr. John T. Roddan's *John O'Brien* and Mary Anne Sadlier's *Willy Burke* in 1850, and with that, the emergence of a new category of children's literature. A greater challenge this project presented was where to conclude the research. As discussed in Chapter Four, the 1940s was the selected end point, as represented by Colum's *Where the Winds Never Blew*. But while the category as it is defined in this thesis naturally began to decline in this decade, the influence of Irish American authors evidently persisted to the end of the twentieth century. In addition to Padraic Colum, such authors as Monica Shannon, Maureen Daly, and Eve Bunting made valuable contributions to the development of American children's literature, although they have not been recognised in this context before.

Chapter Three briefly referenced Monica Shannon, a Canadian-born, Irish-descended author who, like Mary E. Mannix, set much of her children's literature in California, and often drew on her Irish ancestry in her writing: "[b]etween the pages of the books she has written are fairies, sprites and elves, cousins of all the little folk her Irish ancestors knew and loved" (Hazeltine 700). In 1935, Shannon was awarded the prestigious Newbery Medal for *Dobry*, a novel which, according to the librarians of the judging panel, "[gave] boys and girls a memorable companion and a lasting literary gift" (Hazeltine 701). While works by Colum and Young were Honor Books of this award on multiple occasions, as discussed in Chapter Four, Shannon's win remains the first and only by an Irish-American author.

² Born in England, Buck spent his early years in Ireland, and emigrated to the US as a young man, where he served in the US Army during World War Two ("Alan M. Buck").

Reviewing Maureen Daly's enduringly influential *Seventeenth Summer*

(1942) in the Catholic publication *Blackfriars*, one critic remarked, “[t]his young Irish-American journalist has made in her first novel a new contribution to Catholic fiction” (G.D.S. “Reviews”). Indeed, the significance of this text extends beyond its contribution to Catholic fiction, with one of the most influential critics on Young Adult (YA) literature, Michael Cart, claiming that it is “often hailed as the first young adult novel” (8). Considering the category of YA literature first emerged in the US, along with the concept of young adulthood (Cart 3), the pioneering role of an Irish immigrant woman in its establishment is all the more significant and worthy of further examination.

Finally, the recently deceased Eve Bunting was a Northern Irish author of over 250 children's books, the first of which, *The Two Giants* (1972), a retelling of Finn McCool, was published in the US. Bunting, who immigrated with her young family to the US in 1958 to escape sectarian violence in the North, won several awards over the course of her long career, including the prestigious Caldecott Medal (Roberts “Eve Bunting, 94, Dies”). While her works included novels and folktales, she was best known for her picture books, which deal with a wide variety of social issues, including “the Holocaust, immigration, religious intolerance, migrant workers, urban gangs, Japanese internment, American Indian boarding schools, orphan trains, Middle East conflict,” as well as personal issues such as divorce and parental death (Hade and Brush 118). Along with Shannon's Newbery-winning contribution and Daly's foundational role in the development of YA fiction, Bunting's sustained engagement with questions of social justice in an American context clearly demonstrates Irish-born and Irish-descended writers' continual, yet overlooked influence on American children's literature in the twentieth century.

While the primary objective of this thesis has been to demonstrate both the existence and value of Irish-American children's literature, both as a category in its own right and as a component of American children's literature, its findings are also relevant to contemporary discussions around children's literature, including, for example, boyhood and masculinity studies. In 2024, the publishing company, Faber, launched a special prize "in direct response to research from the National Literacy Trust that revealed children's reading enjoyment was at its lowest level in almost two decades, and that the problem was most acute for boys" ("Faber Renews Action! Prize"). The aim of the "Action! Prize," which draws direct parallels with Orestes Brownson's call for a special literature for Irish Catholic boys in the US in 1850 and the competition by the *Boston Pilot* in support of it, was to address the issue that fewer boys than ever are reading for pleasure by publishing more literature written for boys specifically. This thesis illustrates that a desire to address social anxieties around boys via a special literature are evidently not new, but historically recurrent across generations. The thesis thus offers relevant context to contemporary concerns regarding the role of literature in the lives of young boys.

The thesis also contributes to ongoing efforts to challenge prevailing global stereotypes of Irish people, many of which were established in the US during the long nineteenth century. In 2022, the EPIC Irish Emigration Museum launched a campaign entitled "This Is Not Us" in response to images of Irish people generated by Artificial Intelligence, with the aim of offering a more accurate, balanced, and nuanced understanding of the global Irish. The chapters of this thesis demonstrate the various ways Irish immigrant authors similarly challenged negative stereotypes perpetuated in American society—including drunkenness, laziness, ignorance, and superstitiousness—and how their work thus functioned both to guide an implied Irish

child reader and construct a more favourable image of Irish people and Irish identity in the US.

The thesis also demonstrates that contemporary discourse regarding immigration in the US is by no means a recent phenomenon, but is rather a symptom of a long-standing cultural pattern. For example, the racism, xenophobia, and hysteria that fuelled events in the city of Minneapolis in January 2026, which prompted global outcry over the killing of innocent civilians by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, echo many of the same narratives discussed throughout this thesis. By tracing these narratives over time, this thesis reveals how patterns of moral panic, misinformation, and scapegoating have long been used to define who is considered “American” and who is positioned as an outsider. Though the communities involved have changed, these same strategies continue to shape the public response to immigration in the US today. Irish-American children’s literature thus provides a useful critical lens through which to read and understand this heightened moment of anti-immigrant rhetoric in closer detail. The thesis shows that, evidently, immigration discourse in the US has repeatedly re-emerged in new forms since the mid-nineteenth century, while remaining rooted in the same ideological frameworks.

This thesis has demonstrated that analysing the selected texts by Irish American authors as children’s literature generates fascinating and important new lines of inquiry. This is due to the historical function of children’s literature as a transmitter and constructor of the social and cultural values of an era; a medium that is “inevitably permeated by our most fundamental emotional attitudes toward ourselves, toward our society, and, of course, toward childhood” (MacLeod *American Childhood* ix). Books for children have scarcely been included in discussions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish-American literature to date,

but to overlook the category as a serious form of cultural production “would not only render the research incomplete, but would be missing out on some crucial and immensely revealing data.” (Grenby 202–03). If not overlooked entirely, Irish-American children’s literature has been dismissed as sentimental, didactic, or propagandic. Yet, as this thesis demonstrates, the selected texts and more offer a rich, complex, and valuable archive through which questions of religion, class, race, and national and cultural identity have been navigated and negotiated by Irish immigrant writers in the US since the mid-nineteenth century. By centring a category that has historically been neglected, this thesis asserts that Irish-American children’s literature is more than just reflective of its historic moment, and was often an active and powerful participant in its shaping.

The quotation referenced in the title of this chapter are lyrics from the nineteenth-century emigrant song popularly known as *Muirsheen Durkin*, one of many ballads that celebrate emigration as “a blessed release from poverty or oppression . . . in ‘The Glorious and Free United States of America’” (Miller *Emigrants and Exiles* 561). The song references the allure of the Gold Rush in California for Irish immigrants, who believed that great riches awaited them there. It is hoped that this thesis will inspire scholars of children’s literature and Irish-American literature alike to pursue the study of Irish-American children’s literature with similar curiosity and enthusiasm going forward, and the many riches of the category yet to be (re)discovered.

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Figure 4. Photograph of Mary E. Mannix (undated), courtesy of Deirdre Andrews

This interview was conducted via Zoom on 18 April 2024. The interview was recorded in full and archived by the student, Méabh Ní Choileáin. The excerpts presented here have been selected based on their relevance to the thesis. According to Ms Andrews, the following information about her great-grandmother, Mary E.

Mannix, derives from a combination of family correspondence, including letters exchanged among Mannix's relatives such as her sister, Julia C. Walsh, and the brother of her husband, Daniel Pratt Mannix, as well as family stories that have survived orally across generations.

What biographical information do you have about your great-grandmother, Mary E. Mannix?

Mary E. Mannix was born on 17 May 1846, in New York and died in 1938. Her maiden name was Mary Ellen Walsh. Her parents were Michael and Margaret Walsh. Margaret's maiden name was Mansfield. Both Michael and Margaret were born in Ireland. Mary mainly grew up in Ohio, in the areas of Reading and Cincinnati. We think she had one sister, Julia. Because my great-grandfather was an attorney, he had all of these wills [in his possession]. I found a financial exchange from a Julia Walsh. Mary married John Baptist Mannix in Cincinnati, at St. Xavier's Church on 15 May 1873. He was born on 17 February 1843 in Kerry to Timothy Mannix and Joanna Scanlon. His mother died in Ireland; he emigrated with his brother, Daniel Pratt Mannix, and father in 1853. He died in 1913. Once they had been married, they moved to San Diego and had seven children: 6 girls and one boy.

Do you know why the family relocated to California?

There are a couple of family stories. My great grandfather, John Baptist Mannix was an attorney, and he worked for the Bishop of Cincinnati and was very involved in supporting the Irish there, especially the Irish widows. There were many Irish widows at that time. I think there was a trial, and that he was not accused of malpractice, but wanted a fresh start. He was on a quest to see where in California they might want to relocate, and he fell in love with San Diego. He was also very

good friends with the Archbishop of Los Angeles before he came from Cincinnati, and I think the Archbishop suggested that he come out. He and Mary, whom he called Marella as a pet name (I learned that through his correspondence with his brother, who was an officer in the United States Marine Corps), arrived on one of the first trains that ever came to San Diego.

Aside from the texts examined in this thesis, do you know any other works of Mannix?

She wrote the hymn, “Bring Flowers of the Rarest,” when she was fifteen, and “Black Hawk Waltz” later. She published pieces for *Catholic World* and *Young Catholic Messenger*. She wrote under a lot of pseudonyms. Sylvia Hunting is possibly one, Sarah Ashburton might be another.¹ She also translated some works.

There is significant representation of Native American tribes throughout Mannix’s work. Do you know what might have inspired this interest?

This is one of our strong family stories, actually. Everyone loves it and we all knew about it, so that means it was very important to the family. Apparently, my grandfather discovered that there was this tribe of Indigenous Natives who were out near Warner Hot Springs: a reservation of the Cupa Indians. He would take his family to visit, and they would all go out there many, many weekends. I think that’s what the family story is: that we would try to help them with all of their legal needs. I have pictures that were taken at the time, of the children and themselves. I actually sent those pictures to the Chief of the Cupa tribe years ago, so that was really a treasure. I think it was a really important part of their life here.

¹ A poem by a Sylvia Hunting was published by the *Boston Pilot* in 1896. See Hunting.

Was it missionary work, do you know?

It wasn't missionary work. I think that he [John B. Mannix] really wanted to help them out with legal problems, you know, because he was an attorney, and he could do that. And then—and maybe this is an intuitive thought—but because he had seven children, I think he wanted his children to be aware and be inclusive. So that they could see, you know, oh, there's an Indian Catholic. Oh, there's a Mexican Catholic. Oh, here's, you know, an Anglo Catholic. You know, inclusive.

Were the Mannixes involved with the Irish Catholic immigrant community in California, do you know?

Yes, both were actively involved. They were very involved in creating Mary, Star of the Sea Catholic Church in La Jolla. They also financially helped to restore the San Diego Mission. My great-grandfather had also been part of a group called Knights of Columbus. He was the first Catholic to be head of the Bar Association, which is the attorneys in San Diego. And he had been part of a group called the Fenians and was very passionate about what had happened in Ireland, and what had transpired for the people there. At one point, the Catholic Church told anyone that was a Fenian that they couldn't go to confession or they'd get excommunicated. I do have a record that he was a Fenian and couldn't go to confession for a couple of months.

