

“Ireland first”: The Great War in the Irish Juvenile Press

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ABSTRACT

Inspired by Ben Novick’s studies on the response of the Irish advanced nationalist press to the First World War, this paper focuses on a less-explored topic, i.e. the representation of the conflict in the separatist press for Ireland’s youth. Combining literary and historical interests, I devote my attention to the editorials and literary contributions published in the pages of the juvenile periodicals during and after the war, to highlight how these papers came to popularise, among the youngsters, a specific reception of the first ‘total’ conflict. Spy- and war- stories, ballads and *aislings* took hold of the boys’ and girls’ imagination: a powerful propagandist instrument, popular literature buttressed a nationalist agenda. At the same time, given the readers’ young age, these periodicals aimed to shape what was to become Ireland’s public memory of the Great War. In the public sphere of post-war Ireland, many soldiers were treated with disdain or indifference. The First World War and its protagonists were condemned to a period of oblivion, which has lasted until quite recently. Textual attention to the rhetoric and literary strategies adopted by the contributors helps to expose the nuances and shifts in the Irish nationalists’ view on war.

Keywords: Irish juvenile periodicals; Great War; Easter Rising; popular response, rhetoric.

Lord Dunsany, the Anglo-Irish noble who wrote fantasy stories that influenced H.P. Lovecraft, was numbered among the wounded of the First World War in the official military records of 1916. In the second year of the conflict, he was serving as captain with the Fifth Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers: yet his wound was not sustained in military action at the front, but from a squad of rebels in Dublin on April the 24th. Dunsany was then on leave in the Irish capital city, waiting to be mobilized to France. That morning he went to Dublin Castle to offer his services to the British forces, because there were rumours of a rebellion: indeed, the Easter Rising had just broken out and, while he was reaching the place to which he had been appointed, he was shot in the head, wounded and taken prisoner by a group of insurgents (Dunsany, 1938). He survived the

attack and, after the recovery, went on to fight in Flanders: the Baron lived through the war and lived enough to see that the Irish people's hostility towards their fellow countrymen who had served in the Great War was not confined to the emotionally heightened moments of the rebellion, when an officer in a British Army uniform was logically perceived as an enemy by the rebels. In the Ireland of the late 1910s and early 1920s, it was not uncommon that the Irishmen who had fought and perhaps perished in the First World War were 'welcomed' or remembered with hostility. Or, in a luckier scenario, with indifference.

In 1929, Dunsany felt obliged to raise the issue of the commemorations denied to the 49,400 Irish soldiers who had perished fighting on the Continent, whose deaths often provoked hostility and indifference in post-war Ireland (Dawe, 2015: *passim*). He did so in the poem "To the Fallen Irish Soldiers", in which the lyrical I explicitly addresses the dead, urging them to wait for their due honours in a passage that is worth quoting in its full length: "Sleep on, forgot a few more years, and then / The Ages, that I prophesy, shall see / Due honours paid to you by juster men".

Here Dunsany bitterly observes that the sacrifice of thousands of Irish soldiers had not been officially acknowledged by the Irish State. In the specific instance, the poem originated from the author's frustration in seeing that the project of building a war memorial in the central area of St Stephen's Green, Dublin, was met with resistance. In 1919, a Trust Fund had been founded to consider designs for a permanent memorial to commemorate all the Irish who died in the Great War, but a decade later works had yet to begin. Eventually, the Cumann na nGaedheal government gave its permission to build a war memorial, but it imposed an out of the way district for its location. The First World War Irish dead were to be commemorated in the far-off Islandbridge, in the expressly designed Irish National War Memorial Gardens: a granite monument was erected in 1939, but never civically inaugurated and dedicated (Myers, 2012: xv-xvii; Dolan, 2003: 40).

Moreover, just as Dunsany believed that the First World War dead were not adequately honoured, so too most ex-servicemen who had managed to return from the trenches did not think that their sacrifices were adequately acknowledged at home either by word or deed. The oblivion surrounding the war dead reflected the silence surrounding the experience of those Irishmen. Upon their arrival in Ireland, many veterans soon realized that they were far from being seen as heroes and that their experiences of war, including tokens of their army lives such as uniforms and medals, had to be locked away (Dawe, 2013: 4). The veterans themselves sometimes deliberately chose to hide their army experiences so as to avoid several institutional and social hurdles. These men were frequently discriminated against: in the 1920s, for instance, job priority in government was given to ex-Free State soldiers, while the service in the British Army could even be held against the job applicants (Bourke, 2002: 166). At worst, the Irish ex-servicemen could be murdered: in the early 1920s, having been soldiers in the British Army could be a sufficient reason to be perceived as enemies of the Republic.¹

The present article is concerned with exploring the origins of the Irish ex-servicemen's miserable lot by detecting the shifts in the popular response to Ireland's participation in the Great War through four juvenile periodicals—*Our Boys*, *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* (in Irish: *Éire Óg*) and *St. Enda's*. These magazines deserve critical attention because they aimed to construct the public discourse on the global conflict and

to shape their young readers’—the citizens of post-war Ireland—attitudes towards ex-servicemen. Combining literary and historical interests, the focus will be on the editorials and literary contributions published in the pages of the juvenile periodicals during and immediately after the war, to highlight how these papers came to popularise, among the youngsters, a specific reception of the first ‘total’ conflict. Textual attention to the rhetoric and literary strategies adopted by the periodicals’ contributors will also help to expose the nuances and shifts in the Irish nationalists’ view on the Great War. In the wake of the studies by Randall Stevenson and Ben Novick, the article thus attempts to trace periodical literature’s reciprocal relations with broader developments in the society of its time, and with the expectations of a changing readership during and after the conflict, when the Home Rule crisis was not yet resolved and the Easter Rising of 1916 was fresh in the public’s memory.

The soldiers’ plight was, in part, the result of the chronological proximity (or coincidence) of the First World War with the Easter Rising and the ensuing fight for national independence. The veterans returned to a country fraught with political tensions, radically changed from the place they had left. At the very end of the conflict, the Irish nationalist parties led their battle against the British Empire to a higher level by initiating the Anglo-Irish War, which was followed by the Civil War of the early 1920s and the creation of the Free State in 1922. The victors of the internal struggle managed the government that emerged from it—the Cumann na nGaedheal government—and devoted much energy to writing the official nation-building narrative.

In the eyes of the victorious nationalists, Irish participation in the so-called “Empire’s war against Germany” was a problematical addendum to the glorious narrative of Irish national development, i.e. an event that could challenge the legitimacy of the recently accomplished separation from London (Myers, 2012: 2; see also Johnson, 1999: 36). They were not eager to legitimise the rightness of the cause for which the First World War Irish soldiers had fought: the only right cause was the nationalist one that led to Irish independence; on the other hand, the slaughter of the Great War pertained to British politics and motives, and therefore the Irishmen who had fought on the Continent had only furthered the political agenda of Ireland’s oppressor. Accordingly, the new construct of Ireland’s history claimed that the only true Irish hero was one who fought for such ‘Irish causes’ as independence: since honours had to be paid to those who had died in the effort of throwing off the British yoke, the heroes of the Easter Rising were officially and enthusiastically commemorated in the Free State every year. This was not the case for approximately 50,000 Irish men who had died in the Great War (*ibid.*). The very decision to locate the war memorial dedicated to the fallen soldiers in Islandbridge contained the implicit, albeit clear, message that the soldiers’ service on the side of England and the Allies was not to be connected to the emergence of an independent Ireland. Moreover, until the mid-1980s, this site was in an emblematical state of ruin, because the Government’s refusal to provide for its care allowed the site to fall into dilapidation and vandalism over the following decades. Its bad state epitomized the oblivion to which Ireland’s participation in the First World War had succumbed (Dolan, 2003: 2, 143; Dawe, 2015: 36).

The immensity of the Great War and Ireland’s participation has been downsized in the history of the country for decades. To the victors go the spoils, including writing the

nation's history (Novick, 2001: 17). The victors were the advanced nationalists, those Irish men and women who, when Ireland was still subjugated to the British Empire, wanted an absolute separation from London, deeming the option of Home Rule insufficient. Their official national narrative, albeit written after achieving independence, lays its foundations in all their previous political and cultural activity. Even the hostile or neglectful responses to the Great War, bound to be widely spread in post-war Ireland, were first shaped during the conflict itself by means of the counter-narrative about the war constructed by the advanced nationalists.

In the war years, countering the recruitment campaign promoted by pro-war unionists and nationalists and the representatives of the British forces was the campaign of the advanced nationalists. The separatists waged a battle of images and words against the British government to portray enlistment as an unpatriotic act through the medium of the so-called "Sinn Féin press": the battle was performed in the newspapers of radical organisations such as the Irish Republican Brothers (*Irish Freedom*), Sinn Féin (*Eire and Sinn Féin*), the Irish Volunteers (*The Irish Volunteer*), and the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (*Irish Worker*) (Johnson, 2003: 34). This seditious propaganda against the war and recruitment was deemed a threat by the British if we judge from the fact that, as early as October 1914, a debate in the House of Commons—reported in the *Times* editorial "Recruiting in Ireland" on the 31st—cited it as the cause of the low number of voluntary recruits from Ireland (Fitzgerald, 2007).

Britain's reaction was not long in coming: already in December 1914, the Defence of Real Act—the Act promulgated in August to keep morale high—was used against the press in Ireland for the first time. The *Sinn Féin*, *Irish Freedom* and *Irish Worker* newspapers were suppressed, while their Irish-American counterparts *Gaelic American* and *Irish World* were prohibited distribution in Ireland. Yet, designing schemes to circumvent censorship, the separatists wittily sniped in print and their message was spread quite far among the population (Novick, 1997: 53). Recent scholarship has thoroughly investigated the modes of distribution as well as the rhetorical devices employed in nationalist and anti-war journalistic propaganda (cf. Novick 2001; Hay 2012), not neglecting surveys of newspapers issued in the years of the First World War: suffice to mention Catriona Pennell's *A Kingdom United* (2014), which charts the evolution of British and Irish public opinion with regard to the conflict until Christmas 1914. These studies also attest to people's growing interest in the Irish war effort, first aroused at the turn of the century, when a deluge of academic or non-academic books flooded the market casting light on the Irish experience of the war, including civilian responses to it.² Previous historiography had constructed the experience of the Easter Rising rebels as an event of greater significance than the world conflict for Ireland's national history. As Ben Novick convincingly summed up, "the Easter Rising, not the Great War, had traditionally been acknowledged by historians of Ireland as the central political events of these years" (2001: 17). On the contrary, recent historiography on the conflict has contributed to restoring, to Irish collective imagination, the immensity of the Great War and of its impact on Ireland.

Yet, when addressing the aspect of the popular response to the conflict through the press, the focus has usually been on the representation of the First World War in papers aimed at an adult readership. Therefore, the present article explores an aspect that has not

attracted considerable attention, because it aims to pinpoint the main tenets of the response to the Great War and Ireland’s involvement in the conflict in the nationalist press for the Irish youth.

Our Boys, *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda’s* were four periodicals competing for the cultural allegiance of Irish adolescents, aged 12-19. They waged a battle against *Gem*, *Magnet* and all the other British magazines modelled on the *Boys’ Own Paper* that enjoyed enormous success in Ireland between the XIX and XX centuries; a success that, in the same years, spurred the nationalists’ appeal for juvenile periodicals made in Ireland and truly Irish, resisting the deluge of foreign trashy literature then invading the country. Irish nationalists took an active interest in promoting home-grown substitutes for the examples of British popular culture, deemed a main factor in distracting the youngsters from fighting for national independence. At last, in the rapidly evolving paper landscape of the 1910s, four periodicals for Irish youth were established, all of them championing nationalist values and the de-Anglicisation of the country.

The monthly *Our Boys* magazine was the first to be published, in September 1914, by virtue of the commitment of the Christian Brothers, who were determined to shape the future of Ireland in a Catholic and anti-British direction. Conceived as an educational auxiliary to the Christian Brothers’ work in schools, *Our Boys* was the medium through which the Brothers cultivated a holy patriotism in their readers, whom they envisioned as the torchbearers of a renewed Catholic nation after the attainment of independence (Keogh, 2015: 700). Born under the aegis of Pope Pius X, this periodical largely outlived *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda’s*, being the most popular of them: not only did the first issue sell 30,000 copies, but the monthly circulation rose rapidly to 40,000, with an estimated readership of 100,000 throughout the country and the Irish diaspora abroad (*OB*, Oct. 1914; Coldrey, 1998: 27). However, the main difference between *Our Boys* and the other magazines lay not so much in the degree of popularity as in the editorial line adopted: whereas the Christian Brothers’ paper was marked by a moderate Redmondite tone in its earliest numbers and later underwent a shift towards a more radical stance on politics, *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda’s* were the mouthpiece of the advanced nationalists from their inception.

The short-lived *Fianna*—it was published in the 1915-1916 two-year period and then resumed only in de Valera’s years—was the unofficial organ of the Irish Boy Scouts, whose object was “to train the youth of Ireland to work mentally and physically for the independence of their country” (*Fianna*, Mar. 1915: 3). The magazine was an additional weapon to the armoury of the boys who pledged to work for Ireland, because the opinion articles, editorials and fictional stories were all geared to provide the youngsters with a ‘rebellious’ mentorship. For instance, “The Siege of Zaragoza”, an adventurous account set in the Napoleonic era, and the other stories with foreign settings were meant to “give boys ideas of how other countries run revolutions” (*F*, Apr. 1915: 3).

Unlike the contributors of *Our Boys*, the *Fianna’s* did not buttress a Catholic agenda, because the paper mirrored the non-sectarian policy of the organization the Irish Boy Scouts, which addressed both Protestants and Catholics in its appeal to fighting for Ireland. The lack of sectarianism was a major difference distinguishing *Fianna* not only from the monthly edited by the Christian Brothers, but also from *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda’s*. The former was founded in 1917 as the instrument to spread Sinn Féin ideology

among the youth by the publicist Aodh de Blacam, who, in the first leader article declared that “the Irish-Irelander magazine” *Young Ireland* had to “always be stoutly Irish and devotedly Catholic from cover to cover”, and added, “It’s Catholic, because it’s truly Irish” (*YI*, 21 Apr. 1917: 1). Nationalism and the equation between Irishness and Catholicism, with the second element of the equation conceived as a quintessential characteristic of Irish identity, were upheld also by the contributors of *St. Enda’s*. This periodical was largely an amateur operation, with many of its reporters and compositors being university or high school students; nonetheless, it had a clear editorial line, which was centred on the promotion of highly particularised notions of national activism inspired by the teaching of Patrick Pearse, the leader of the Easter Rising and founder of a Gaelic School called St. Enda. Nurturing the memory of the dead hero, the monthly *St. Enda’s* was engaged in carrying out his designs of nation-building, by striving to forge the character of the young Irish citizens, who would commit themselves to the freedom of their country.

Since *St. Enda’s* was first published in March 1918, just a few months before the end of the Great War, it might seem superfluous to take it into account in the present analysis: however, this omission would be a mistake, because the numbers of *St. Enda’s* issued in the early 1920s feature some war tales that best exemplify the abovementioned process of ‘downsizing’ the First World War. Moreover, a survey of these writings, placed against the background of fictional and non-fictional contributions published in the other three periodicals in the earlier years of the conflict, enables today’s readers to detect those mutations that occurred in the attitudes held by nationalists towards the war and Irish soldiers in the British Army. A chronological criterion is adopted in the following analysis in order to pinpoint the shifts in attitude and their dependence upon concurrent historical events, such as the destruction of Louvain and the brutal repression of the Easter Rising. The juvenile periodicals are read as texts resulting from a dynamic exchange between the cultural-ideological movements that originated them and the historical context. This approach is applied to texts of multifarious nature: the poetry and fiction published in the magazine are analysed for their rhetorical complexity but, at the same time, attention is devoted to other forms of expression such as advertisements, editorials and cartoons.

Proceeding in chronological order, the examination cannot but begin with the earliest issues of *Our Boys*. Since its first number, which came out in September 1914, *Our Boys* featured the column *The World’s News*, reporting the main events that had taken place in the previous months. The war was then paramount and, in a terse style, the reporter described the technological innovations in the military field, the generals’ tactics, the official messages of the Kaiser and the King: all the paraphernalia of warfare are condensed in brief sentences like “Kluck’s right wing was faced back with loss of men and guns” or “the Western fighting line extends 520 miles” (*OB* Aug. 1915: 337) that, thanks to their unimaginative laconicism, jettison any celebration of the war. This sharp style contrasts with the rhetorical complexity and convolutions of the fictional pieces,—mainly tales describing trench-life—which nonetheless play a function analogous to *The World’s News*’s conciseness insofar as the repetitions, pleonasm and refrains employed in poetry and fiction come to convey the ordinariness of the horrors experienced by the Irish soldiers.

Unlike much British popular fiction intended for juveniles (cf. Fussell, 1975; Boyd, 2003: 15-16), *Our Boys* offered no space for the potent *mythos* that depicted war in a romantic fashion, as a time for youthful heroism when to display widely acclaimed characteristics such as patriotism, camaraderie and athletic prowess. In *Our Boys*, to die fighting at a young age is not the noblest death of all, but just the death of a boy: rather than celebrating the glory of warfare, these stories expose its horrors. In June 1915, the periodical featured a realistic tale by Richard Grant, significantly titled *A Message from the Front. Lifting the Veil of the Valley of Death*, which relates how the young Irish soldier Bernard Tracy spent his last St Patrick’s Day on the battlefield; “the everlasting torrents of the rain [...] had rendered field and trench and torn roadway all alike a marsh of unutterable muddiness” and rain is again pouring together with shrapnel. Under rifle fire and German shells, the Irish Fusiliers fight bravely and the enemy is flying before the last onslaught led by Bernard. But the Irish battalion’s victory is marred by the death of half of its soldiers, including the story protagonist: eschewing any happy ending or a laudatory tone in its conclusion, the tale follows a plot pattern that is usual in *Our Boys*’s war stories whereby there is no reward for the bravery of the soldiers (*OB*, Jun. 1915: 264-265). Running over “muddy main roads and muddier by-roads, past dismantled farmhouses and demolished villages”, the Fusiliers may die in action, shot or killed by the “abominable gas” in a place of which they do not know the name as the narrator of *A Touching War Incident* points out, while bitterly commenting “None of the glory and pageantry of war here. Nothing but its naked horrors” (*OB*, Aug. 1915: 321-322). Not even the author of *Selfish: or a Strange Revenge*, a short-story published in the 1915 September issue, attempts at concealing the destructive consequences of war: here a character gazes aghast at “the scattered limbs and mutilated forms, which but a few short-hours before had moved about in all the grace and pride of manhood” (*OB*, Sept. 1915: 13).

To probe the veracity of these fictional accounts, in September 1916, *Our Boys* gave space to the letters sent from the front by Father Francis Gleeson who, as the Chaplain attached to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, witnessed the war at first hand. These letters, collected under the title *A Soggarth Tells His War Experiences*, provide further images of pervasive muddiness, of villages evacuated (“the whole village is black, bleak, sad, deserted”) and the ferocity of the enemy’s attacks (“the activity of aeroplanes is tremendous” and “bullets flying over and hither in reckless fury”), which the Irish regiments suffered heavily (*OB*, Sept. 1916: 5-6). For Gleeson, who made frequent visits to the front lines and often conducted mass under fire, the only solace derived from seeing, in the soldiers’ deeds and words, the evidence of their religious devotion: he noticed that they heard the offices “with prayer books and Rosaries in hand” showing “the greatest reverence” (*ibid.*).

The devotion of the Irish soldiers is an element emphasised both in Gleeson’s accounts and in the fictional pieces detailing life at the front. Within the limits of a short tale, the authors often depicted either the spiritual awakening of the servicemen—stories of last-minute conversions are frequent—or their unshakable faith in the Catholic God. A couple of considerations may be drawn with regard to the function of the emphasis on religious devotion. First, it reveals to what extent the contributors of *Our Boys* were determined to present their readers some positive stereotypes to be emulated, i.e. exemplary models who display Catholic virtues in the face of adversity. Second, it

contributes to delineating the reasons why, according to those writing for *Our Boys*, the war had to be carried on, despite the sorrow and destructions brought about by the conflict. All the stories published between 1914 and the spring of 1918 represent the Irish soldiers in the British Army under a positive light: they are shown respect, though this is signalled through stories that extol not their bravery, but their commitment to Catholicism and—as I am about to explain—to Ireland. Even if there is no glory in dying in active combat, the Irish servicemen's sacrifice was necessary: the Irish who died on the Continent had to be mourned and commemorated because they fulfilled the duty of any good Catholic and patriotic Irishman by fighting the Germans.

Regarding Irish nationalism, *Our Boys* held moderate positions, endorsing the policy of John Redmond, whose central objective was legislative independence from Ireland through Home Rule. As Redmond enthusiastically supported the British war effort and his own country's participation in it, linking the sacrifice of Irish people with the implementation of Home Rule, the Christian Brothers looked favourably on those youngsters who enrolled to fight in Europe, among whom there were some of their readers and former students. In the eyes of the Brothers and their collaborators, however, the political reasons underlying the endorsement to the war effort were as crucial as reasons of another nature: the Great War came to be legitimised on moral grounds as a defensive war.

In *A Message from the Front*, the dying Bernard Tracy takes pride in having served “God and Ireland”, claiming that he “came out here [at the Western front] to fight the men who are profaning the churches” (*OB*, Jun. 1915: 265). The soldier of another tale likewise “enlisted to defend Christianity” against the Germans (*OB*, Dec. 1914: 87). The words uttered by these characters evoke the burning of churches and cathedrals, the destruction of the library of the University of Louvain that preserved ancient Irish manuscripts and the summary executions in France and Belgium after the German invasion. These episodes enraged the Catholic Irish public and the Church so that many clergymen pledged support for Redmond's positions on Ireland's participation in the Great War (aan de Wiel, 2003: 1-41; Pennell, 2014: 179). Since the Christian Brothers and *Our Boys* embraced the positions on war held by most clergymen of the Irish Catholic Church, many opinion articles and editorials published in the magazine were used as a political platform from which the journalists denounced Germany as a ruthless barbaric destroyer of liberty and the Christian civilization. “Inhuman outrages are reported,” the author of a 1914 editorial writes, identifying “the damage or destruction of the historic churches of Louvain, Malines and Rheims” as the nadir in the descent into “old barbarism” (*OB*, Nov. 1914: 86). In June 1915, a journalist states to “be disgusted” by “German war morality”: the depravity of the Huns was confirmed by another barbaric act—“the destruction of unarmed merchantmen” with the sinking, on May the 7th, of *Lusitania* (*OB*, Jun. 1915: 270).

Our Boys's focus on German immorality brought to its contributors the criticism of the radical nationalists, such as the senior members of the Irish Boy Scouts writing for *Fianna*. The journalists of *Fianna* were vocal in faulting *Our Boys* for not questioning the accuracy of the alleged German atrocities. As the ultimate affront, they compared the Christian Brothers' periodical to the British *Marvel* insofar as both papers sanctioned the so-called atrocity propaganda (*F*, Jul. 1915: 2). The contributors of *Fianna* were

outspoken but not unfair in their accusations, because, since the very beginning of the First World War, the British press and propaganda had constructed the German as a barbaric people driven by bloodthirsty militarism: the stories about the atrocities committed by the Huns, which were prominent in early pro-war propaganda, only corroborated this negative perception (Pennell, 2014: 93). In the case of Ireland, pro-war propagandists played with the Irish people’s moral duty to defend Belgium, a small Catholic nation like their own, and its churches. With analogous purposes, in May 1915, the press aroused widespread indignation by publishing gruesome tales on the sinking of *Lusitania*: civilians had to be defended against unprovoked German aggression.

Stories detailing German brutality were given to the consumption of the Irish people in the hope that they would boost the recruitment rate in the island, but atrocity propaganda did not turn out to be such a powerful tool as the pro-war militants expected. On the contrary, it became a weapon in the hands of their opponents: in the earlier years of the conflict, the semantics and images of atrocity propaganda were so prominent in the collective imagination that the contributors to the advanced nationalist periodicals, including *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda’s*, appropriated it, though reversing its original ends.

The appropriation of the “Others” language was one of the first strategies enacted by the advanced nationalist to undermine the legitimacy of the Irish war effort as a nationalist cause. The authors of *Fianna* started employing this strategy as early as 1915, when, in the landscape of juvenile periodicals, their monthly was the only one counterbalancing *Our Boys’s* views on war issues. At first glance, *Our Boys* and *Fianna* seem to mark the opposite polarities of the nationalist spectrum, especially if we consider how they handled the topic of German atrocities: if the former was horrified by the Huns’ misdeeds to the point of calling Irish boys to arms, the latter either blamed or laughed at the gullibility of those who believed in the stories of atrocities. This sharp contrast in opinions originated from the commitment of the Scouts’ magazine to construct the British rather than the Germans as Ireland’s enemy: an ambitious plan that was carried out, in most cases, by resorting to the literary medium.

The tale *Eirig! Eirig!* (“Arise! Arise!” in Irish), published in *Fianna* in two instalments between August and September 1915, epitomises the periodical’s act of ridiculing their political opponents by exploiting the semantics of atrocity propaganda. Respecting all the stylistic features of an *aisling*, the tale presents a first-person narrator who, inadvertently, falls asleep and starts dreaming: his dreams are coloured by the fears of a German invasion, a possibility then discussed in the press. He finds himself staring at the green meadows and fields where the cattle are grazing, but, as soon as he opens *The Independent* and reads “the latest German ‘atrocities’, yes! atrocities”, the landscape changes under his eyes. The once prosperous nation is now plagued by “a villainous and hell-emitted soldiery” who is responsible for the worst atrocities: the indigenous population is “hunted, stabbed, shot, murdered”. The narrator is certain that the soldiers are Huns, “the vilest of them”, and that he is staring helplessly at the devastation of Belgium. At this point, a beautiful lady turns up, reprimanding the narrator for not realising that the oppressed country under his eyes is Ireland, not Belgium: the destruction of altars and executions of priests and civilians—alleged crimes of the Germans in Louvain and France—were, in fact, the wrong-doings of the British. Thus, the tale depicts

the growing nationalist awareness of an Irishman, who, as the dream suddenly ends, resolves to fight for Ireland's freedom (*F*, Aug. 1915: 2 and Sept. 1915: 11; cf. also Novick, 2001: 85-86).

The construction of Britain as Ireland's first and foremost enemy was a crucial process for the contributors of *Fianna*, eager to legitimise the independents' cause as the only one Irish people had to fight for. As previously noted, Germany was constructed as the enemy threatening Ireland and England in equal measure, thus creating an irreconcilable opposition between these nations. Gross dichotomising is an imaginative habit that pertains to wartimes. It consists in a binary vision which relies on the stark antithesis between the "We", individual with specific names and personalities, and the alien "he"—the enemy—which is a mere collective identity. The latter threatens "Us" and therefore it must be destroyed, or, at least, contained and disarmed (Fussell, 1975: 75). During the Great War, the advanced nationalist press for the Irish youth spared no pains to dismantle the binary system concocted by pro-war propagandists that opposed the Germans to the Irish, and to apply the label "he" to the British. One of their techniques was to reverse atrocities propaganda, but there was a whole gamut of strategies.

One of *Fianna*'s techniques consisted in depicting the Germans under a positive light: not only did its writers remind readers that "till the war was actually declared, Irish people were actually neutral towards Germany", but they also described the Kaiser's subjects as "quite decent chaps", so decent that the British Army servicemen fighting on the Western Front "have been asking themselves why they are fighting at all". To endorse these remarks, the editors of *Fianna* quoted on the same page a mysterious letter they claimed to have received from an anonymous soldier after the Christmas Truce, in which it is confirmed that "the German soldiers are "jolly, cheery fellows for the most part, and it seems so silly under the circumstances to be fighting them" (*F*, Feb. 1915: 9). Obviously, in keeping with this strategy of rehabilitation, no account of Huns' misdeeds ever found space in this periodical and their absence was justified on the basis that the gruesome stories of atrocities were, to use an expression common today, fake news: indeed, "it is as easy to manufacture a German atrocity as it is to sharpen your pencil" (*ibid.*).

If Huns' atrocities are a fabrication, Redmondites' promise that Ireland would be paid off by Home Rule for its loyalty after the end of the war is a myth. These myths had to be debunked and the naïve Irishmen awakened. From its establishment, the objective of *Fianna* was to open the eyes of the Irish about the right cause as expressed in their declaration of intent of the periodical, which juxtaposes the Great War with a war for independence yet to come:

Peace has passed away—war instead rules the countries of Europe. The time has come when every country must fight for her liberties. Are you prepared then, to stand by your country and help her fight for her liberties—liberties that she has been deprived of for the last 700 years? Prepare yourself. [...] You have a cause to fight for, be prepared to die for your cause, and keep before you always "Ireland First". (*F*, Feb. 1915: 1)

Unfortunately, according to the contributors of *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda's*, the Irish had been brainwashed into the Great War. The brainwashing affecting the Irish was put into effect through the Anglicisation of the country, which imposed British

culture in Ireland, and the artful construction of the German as the only enemy to fight. The English curriculum taught in Irish national schools, together with the invasion of juvenile literature from Britain, was considered a decisive factor in uprooting Irish cultural heritage: they were the instruments which made Irish people to believe that British culture was superior to their own and the one to defend, even by embracing weapons if necessary (*F*, Nov. 1915: 8).

The Irish mind had been so perverted by the phenomenon of Anglicisation that people were no longer able to discern what was Irish from what was foreign. This is the issue at the core of Dalcassian’s *From a Long Way to Bodenstown!*, a tale the title of which stands out as a mockery of the famous wartime song *It’s a Long Way from Tipperary!*. During a visit to the grave of the revolutionary Theobald Wolfe Tone in Bodenstown, the tale’s protagonist finds himself watching “a marching regiment” and later realises that “they were Irish and they wore the English khaki [and] they sang ‘Tis a Long Way to Tipperary”. The soldiers did not know that the wartime melody they were singing, despite referring to the Irish town of Tipperary, was a British music hall song written in 1912; in Dalcassian’s view, the soldier’s lack of knowledge derived from a general confusion about Ireland’s history and current situation, especially with regard to the role played by British rule in shaping them: they “did not know that their country and their minds were not their own!” (*F*, Jul. 1915: 1-2).

The inability to recognise the alien element in Irish culture mirrored the impaired historical vision of the youngsters at the moment of their enrolment. These boys did not understand that “the number of Irish quoted daily as dying for England in the Dardanelles is a great tribute to English rule and English influence” (*F*, Oct. 1915: 4); the very same rule that evicted Irish tenant farmers and committed atrocities “no illustrated ha’penny Press can record” (*F*, Jul. 1915: 1-2). On the pages of *Fianna*, even if the recruiting sergeants and atrocity propagandists are blamed for deceiving Irish boys into enrolment, it is the Irish boys themselves who are condemned with the utmost contempt. There is no respect either for the Irish serving in the Continent or for the people in Ireland creating a “home-front” against Germany. There is no respect, but harsh criticism, mockery and derision. The soldiers are often portrayed as fools, taking pride in their brave feats on the battlefield when they should not: *Fianna* recurrently features the stock character of a vain arrogant Lieutenant of the Irish Fusiliers, who spends his time in Dublin pubs boasting the glories of his brigade, like having slaughtered the enemy of “gallant little Belgium”.

Civilians who supported Ireland’s participation in the war were likewise treated with disdain, while those believing in pro-war propaganda were sneered at in fictional and non-fictional pieces. The tale titled *The Spy Peril* mocked the phenomenon of spy-fever in Irish society, which was connected to the emerging fear of the “enemy within”, i.e. the enemy that does not come from abroad but lurks in the country waiting to strike it. Since the enemy took the form of the spy, some people started to be obsessed with pro-German spies and espionage. The obsession degenerated into the appearance of amateur spy-catchers, ordinary people who took it upon themselves to deal with spies: they accused other ordinary people of being enemy spies and reported them to the authorities (aan de Wiel, 2012: 25-27; Pennell, 2014: 98-107). It was such a common phenomenon that *Fianna* decided to fictionalise it. In *The Spy Peril*, a husband and his wife report each other to the police: neither the one nor the other is a spy, but the news on spies in the

papers made such an impression on them that they saw pro-German spies everywhere. Yet, like the soldiers wearing the English khaki, they did not realise that there was a more dangerous enemy within: the British oppressor.

In these works, beneath a veneer of irony, there is ill-concealed contempt, a constant element when referring to Irish servicemen or those who believed in the necessity of joining Britain in the Great War. To the contributors of *Fianna*, these people paid “a great tribute to English rule” over Ireland, because they employed energies and resources which should have devoted to the attainment of national independence. The appropriation of the language of atrocities propaganda, the rehabilitation of the “Huns” as well as the denigration of the Irish serving in the British Army were all strategies geared to open the eyes of the Irish on the contemporary political situation: Ireland’s colonial oppression made the war against Britain the only one worth fighting. The soldier’s sacrifice at the front was delegitimised or even condemned, because, by continuing their fight on the European battlefields, they deprived Ireland of much needed human resources: ultimately, those who served for the “cause of small nations” were tainted with the stain of collaboration.

When *Fianna* ceased to be published in February 1916 due to financial problems and the obstacle of censorship, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda’s* emerged as the mouthpieces of the radical fringe of nationalism among the youth. The delegitimation of Ireland’s support in the Great War was perpetuated in the last two periodicals, but the attitude towards the soldiers took other forms. All these papers provided their young readership with an arena where to publicly discuss national matters, striving to control “the direction” of the debates and to mould the views of Irish boys and girls. However, it should be considered that the readers’ opinion may, in turn, influence the editorial line of a newspaper: since newspapers are business depending on sales and advertising, they ultimately rely on the opinions of their readership, which are variable (Boyd, 2003: 67; Pennell, 2014: 6). In the case of the juvenile magazines here analysed, the beliefs of their purchasers—the youngsters or their parents—at a certain point contributed to modifying the editors’ attitude towards the ex-servicemen. A survey of the articles on war issues published in *Young Ireland* over the span of two years, from 1917 to 1918, sheds light on this process of reciprocal influence between press and readership.

Conceived to mould the nationalist ideals of Irish boys and girls, *Young Ireland* was closely affiliated with Sinn Féin: many of its contributors were activists of the party and, when *Young Ireland*, had to convert into an adult paper, it was Arthur Griffith—the founder and leader of Sinn Féin—who took over its reins. Sinn Féin’s ideas informed the articles and the fictional pieces of *Young Ireland* and changes in the party’s policy were to be reflected in the notions promoted by the periodical. Changes to Sinn Féin’s philosophy were brought about by the Easter Rising: though it was a military failure, the uprising came to represent a turning point in the campaign for independence, thus affecting the policies of the parties upholding the advanced nationalist cause. After the brutal repression of the Easter Rising, many Irish men and women, who had previously sided with the moderate factions, were drawn to more radical views. Sinn Féin saw its electoral base expanding to include ex-servicemen and the families of serving (or fallen) soldiers; thus, in 1917 and 1918, with the December 1918 General Election coming up, Griffith’s party veered towards a more conciliatory tone in its vocabulary when

discussing the war and the lot of the Irish soldiers to fuel its supporters' sympathies and win more votes (Johnson, 2003: 56).

In an attempt to mitigate their tone, Sinn Féiners endeavoured to despoil their messages about the Irish soldiers of either any element of denigration or any accusation of collaborationism, even if the soldiers' sacrifice was still denied any legitimisation. Moreover, frustration increasingly grew among Irish people as the costs of war mounted: the memories of tragedies like the destruction at Gallipoli of the volunteer Tenth Irish Division were still vivid and painful for many (Novick, 2001: 56-62). People's weariness was exploited by Sinn Féin and the magazines, which, besides evoking the halting of Ireland's participation in the war, harnessed the growing frustration against their political enemy.

In *Young Ireland*, this complex attitude towards the war found verbal expression in two forms: it resulted either in grievances about Ireland's death toll or in the occlusion of the First World War, which was often displaced from the magazine's narrative. In compliance with the first modality, the editor's speech featured in the first issue focused on the destructive consequences of the war: "the wars of history were mere street-fights, school-yard squabbles, compared with this one," he thundered (*YI*, 21 Apr. 1917: 2). A notion reasserted few months later when a reporter observed that "a week of this war is probably more destructive of life and capital than a year of the great Napoleonic wars" (*YI*, 28 Jul. 1917: 6).

These critiques of war occurred frequently in other papers as well, including *Our Boys*, which, in 1918, abandoned its pro-Redmondite positions in favour of a more radical stance on Irish politics. In July 1918, indeed, the journalists sent out a message of resistance against England's designs to introduce conscription in Ireland, by extolling the ninety Sinn Féiners who in "Ireland, too long exasperated by British empirics and their broken pledges, rose against the unconstitutional and immoral imposition of a blood tax against the national will" (*OB*, Jul. 1918: 125). As clear from these extracts, with Sinn Féin attracting increasing consensus, *Our Boys* was forced to adjust its views on Irish politics, in order to fit public opinion and its readership's desire. Interestingly, eager to mirror the new attitudes the becoming prevalent in the political landscape when referring to the Great War, *Our Boys* opted for the composition strategy of occlusion, which was the predominant characteristic of *Young Ireland's* pieces on the same subject.

Since 1917, the topic of the First World War underwent a gradual silencing in these two magazines insofar as their writers made only passing references to the conflict, which usually recurred in articles and stories about the future of Ireland and the campaign for independence. It was the case in the summer of 1917, when the contributors of *Young Ireland* started speculating about post-war opportunities for their country and, among other things, coveted the idea of a Peace Conference where Irish representatives could demand the recognition of Ireland's ancient sovereignty (*YI*, 18 Aug. 1917; see also: 28 Jul. 1917 and 25 Aug. 1917). But no direct reference to trench-life or to Irish participation was ever made in *Young Ireland*, apart from the few attacks to the possibility of conscription in Ireland, which were similar to those published in *Our Boys*. However, the contributors could not fail to mention and attack the plans for establishing conscription, because they were functional to their jingoistic campaign against England: notions of

exploitations, unfairness and oppression characterised the deeper structures of these pieces in order to give a full picture of the consequences of foreign rule over Ireland.

The silence surrounding Ireland's participation in the war and the tragic historical event itself contrasts sharply with the prominence and wealth of articles on the other two wars promoted by both *Our Boys* and *Young Ireland*—the war on Anglicisation that was conducive to the war for independence. *Our Boys* was conceived as a response to the corrupting influence of foreign papers such as *Gem* and *British Bulldog*, which threatened the survival of Irish culture: thus, from its establishment, the Christian Brothers' magazine offered great publicity to all the preserves of Gaelicism—above all, Irish folk music and sports. And the articles on Gaelic culture grew in number after the execution of the Easter Risers, because the rediscovery of Irish Gaelic heritage and the cultural emancipation of Ireland were perceived by separatists as the prerequisites for political independence. Yet, while the analysis of the rhetorical strategies employed in *Our Boys* is not relevant to a survey of the journalistic response to the Great War, an investigation of *Young Ireland's* war on Anglicisation is needed. In *Young Ireland*, besides the occlusion of the First World War which clashes with the recurring appeals to rediscover Gaelic heritage and to fight for Ireland, there is also the use of the language of British and pro-war propaganda to promote the separatists' objectives: the Great War is never explicitly mentioned, but it provides the imagery employed to enhance the notion that the wars for de-Anglicisation and independence were the only just wars.

The appropriation of the semantics of pro-war propaganda is exemplified by the article "Recruiting" published in October 1917. The anonymous writer starts the piece by spurring any of its readers "[to] do his or her bit" to "roll back the tide of invasion": indeed, "a great peril" is threatening Ireland. "Invasion", "peril" and the call to arms were recurring words in the numerous books, published after the success of Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) in pre-war years, which brandished the spectre of a German invasion of Britain or Ireland (cf. van de Wiel, 2012: 29-30; Stevenson, 2013: 28). Yet the semantics of this fear-mongering literature is here at the service of the campaign to recruit soldiers, not for the British Army, but for the Gaelic one: the youngest among the periodical's readers, too young to fight for Ireland with the use of violence, were expected to learn Irish, thus countering the noxious effects of British culture. In keeping with the strategy of appropriating the opponents' rhetoric, the article's power of persuasion is enhanced by a vignette—reprinted in later issues as well—which provides an effective visual correlative to it and satirises pro-war recruiting posters. It depicts a man wearing a Tara brooch and pointing his finger at the viewer: under him, the caption "Are you learning Irish?" (*YI*, 13 Oct. 1917: 4). The visual reference to the posters portraying Uncle Sam or Lord Kitchener is clear as well as the attempt to confine the experience of the Great War to the background and to reduce it to a touchstone to assert the centrality of nationalist battles.

The First World War had been displaced from these wartime nationalist narratives, but the descent into oblivion reached its baleful climax when the conflict was over and the Anglo-Irish War began in 1919. *Our Boys*, *Young Ireland* and *St. Enda's* still featured stories with war settings, but the battlefields of Europe described in the tales such as *A Message from the Front* were replaced by the Irish landscapes where the guerrilla war between the IRA and the Black Tans was being fought. In *Our Boys*, the good Catholic

soldiers gave space to boys and girls working for independence as assistants to local IRA commanders, messengers or lookouts (Flanagan, 2001).

It is in juxtaposition with the Easter Rising that the Great War is (rarely) referred to in the juvenile periodicals after the outbreak of the Anglo-Irish War. The juxtaposition is at the core of two tales featured on *St. Enda's* in the early 1920s—*The Choice* and *Two Soldiers* (*SE*, Jan. 1921: 13-14 and 12 Feb. 1922: 2 respectively)—, which constructed the experience of the 1916 uprising as the true expression of essential Ireland. The tales have a similar schematic plot insofar as the protagonists are either two brothers or cousins who make opposite choices: while one enlists in the British Army, the other joins the Irish Volunteers and dies fighting for Ireland in the uprising. If the latter is honoured for his sacrifice, the other is blamed for his choice: some of the harsh criticism characterising *Fianna's* attitudes towards the British Army servicemen steals into the pages of *St. Enda's* when describing the lot of the boy who left for Flanders. In *The Choice*, while the tombstone of the gallant hero is covered with “wreath and beautiful flowers, [...] eloquent testimony of Nation's love and reverence”, his brother is buried in “a foreign land, under a foreign flag”, but he deserves no pity because “in the hour of his country's great need he did not see or understand” and enrolling he “left [his] own Motherland an easy prey to her foe”.

These two tales well exemplify the nationalists' negative opinion on the Great War in the early 1920s. Then, all the magazines for Ireland's youth reflected the polarisation characterising the period. In war years, through articles either mocking or neglecting the soldiers and Ireland's war effort, the periodicals even anticipated and promoted the climate of growing radicalisation which would lead to the glorification of the minority of the Easter Rising, “Ireland's little hero-band”, to the detriment of the far larger numbers who had served for the cause of small nations. In *Fianna's* defamatory remarks and in the occlusion enacted by *Our Boys* and *Young Ireland* one can read the hostility or indifference that shaped public attitude towards the conflict and the ex-servicemen in post-war Ireland for many years.

Dunsany was too optimistic in his 1929 poem, when he prophesied “a few more years” of wait for the soldiers before seeing their merits acknowledged. The Irish ex-servicemen were honoured much later. *Fianna Fáil*, the party that dominated Irish political life for most of the twentieth century, was determined that Irish First World War veterans would not receive national honour, condemning them to oblivion. Thus, a collective public amnesia around Ireland's participation in the Great War was artfully perpetuated. In 1966, the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising was celebrated across independent and nationalist Ireland, while the Somme was commemorated almost exclusively in Northern Ireland (Myers, 2012: 2). It was not until 30 years later, that Dunsany's prediction came true: on the 80th anniversary of the Armistice on 18th November 1998—few months after the signature of the Good Friday Agreement, which determined a major political development in the Northern Ireland peace process and a détente in the political relationships between Ireland and Britain—the President of Ireland Mary McAleese and Queen Elizabeth II jointly dedicated a memorial on the site of the battle of Messines Ridge to all those Irishmen who gave their lives during the First World War.

Notes

1. According to Peter Hart, since its acquiring the status of Ireland's army in 1919, the IRA created a taxonomy of its enemies, subdivided into "types" including "ex-servicemen, Orangemen, freemasons, tramps, fast women": those people were "the most likely to be denounced as informers or enemies of the republic and shot, burned out, or intimidated" (1998: 291). Unfortunately, while the majority of those who really informed were never suspected, those actually intimidated or shot mostly never informed. Since many of the punished were Protestants, ex-soldiers and 'tinkers', Hart has argued that they were murdered not for what they did, but for who they were (*ibid.*: 300-315). For further details see also: P. Taylor (2015) and N.C. Johnson (1999: 51).

2. D. Fitzpatrick's *Ireland and the First World War* (1986) paved the way for a series of detailed studies on Ireland's participation in the First World War. This includes T.P. Dooley, *Irishmen Or English Soldiers?* (1995), and T. Denman, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers* (1992), which are regimental histories comparing Irishmen's and English soldiers' experiences of the war. Moreover, of great value are the works by K. Jeffrey (1993 and 2001), A. Gregory and S. Pašeta (2002), and J. Horne (2008). In line with a renewed interest in the cultural representations and commemoration practices of the conflict around the world at the turn of the century—see, for instance, the works by J. Winter (1998 and 2006)—in Ireland there has been a growth of interest in these aspects related to the Irish experience of the Great War. For instance, the studies by A. Dolan (2003), N.C. Johnson (1999 and 2003), Haughey (2002), J. Horne and E. Madigan (2013) deal with the symbolic role of public commemoration in politics of everyday life in Ireland and with war writing. For full bibliographic entries, see Bibliography.

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