

ANALYSING THE BOOK REVIEWS IN THE IRISH RADICAL PRESS:
JUXTAPOSITIONS, DYNAMIC CONJUNCTIONS AND A POLITICAL AGENDA

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The present paper aims to evaluate the importance of book reviews in the radical press, by discussing the productivity of an approach that combines historically-informed close reading with an interest in the specificities of the periodical as a cultural object. I thus examine four case studies from Irish print culture: *Our Boys*, *Fianna*, *Young Ireland* and *Saint Enda's* – the most popular nationalist story papers for juveniles in early-twentieth-century Ireland (1900-1920s). With their country still under British rule, these papers were concerned about the role of the youths in the context of nation-building and, despite representing different nuances of the nationalist spectrum, they all shared an interest in forming a counter public sphere opposing the dominant Anglophile one.

Book reviews, a regular fixture of the periodicals, partook in this political and cultural project. The review was a space used by contributors to further their political agendas, support the formation of a truly-Irish literary canon, produce alternative historiographies, and instil patriotism in Ireland's youth. A great variety of books were reviewed, which included fiction and non-fiction and ranged in topic from poetry to religious matters. Reviewers identified with the core (nationalist) ethos of the journal as is evident not only in the titles being reviewed – e.g. autobiographies of Fenians abounded –, but also in their language, which sometimes deployed the rhetorical devices commonly found in the political speeches of Sinn Féin members. We can assume that the reviewers' personal investment in their task was a central factor in the success achieved by the periodicals. But not only that. A close analysis of the reviews reveals the managerial competences of the reviewers (or the shrewdness of their editors), who were often careful to review and promote the books released by the publishing houses that financially supported the periodicals.

As will be shown in the core section of the presentation, these peculiarities of the book review in the radical press can be best appreciated, first, if we consider the reviews against the background of the other 'texts' featured in the periodicals. By 'text' it is here intended also the visual text – such as those complementing advertisements – whose relationships with the blocks of written text in the reviews are here taken into account. Indeed, an analysis of reviews in politically positioned periodicals should focus on the juxtapositions of the different 'texts' that occur within and across the periodicals' pages. The juxtapositions were far from apolitical, being rather "dynamic conjunctions" meant to heighten the desired effect of prompting rebellion in the young readers. Basically, reviews interacted with the other components of the periodical to form a coherent cultural and political object.

Finally, the appreciation of the reviews' importance demands a detailed investigation of the historical and cultural context in which these texts – and by extension, the periodicals – were produced. Here, the examined texts are thus seen as inseparable from the conditions of their production in history, and the historical, political and cultural particularities of the period around 1900 in Ireland.

Biographical note

Elena Ogliari holds a PhD in British literature and culture from the State University of Milan. Her thesis examined some facets of the Irish sporting culture as it emerged during the “Long Gestation” of Ireland’s independence. She is the recipient of the 2020 post-doc grant awarded by Fondazione Fratelli Confalonieri and her current research project focuses on popular response to the Great War through Irish periodical literature. Among her publications: “‘Ireland first’: The Great War in the Irish Juvenile Press” (*Alicante Journal of English Studies*) and the forthcoming “Against British influences: Home rule and the autonomy of Irish culture in Ireland’s juvenile periodicals” (*Review of Irish Studies in Europe*).