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IVRLA[1] RESEARCH REPORT: IRISH WOMEN WRITERS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE 1870-1940

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1. CONTEXT

This project focuses on Irish women writers of children's fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries utilising two collections, the John Manning Collection of Children's Books (UCD Special Collections) and the Máirín Cregan Papers (National Library of Ireland). These two collections are particularly relevant to an understanding of two key periods of production of children's literature, firstly the late nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century, and secondly, the 1930s and 1940s. The focus on these two periods also offers a comparison between children's literature directly pre- and post-Independence. In relation to the earlier period, the project offers digitised extracts from children's fiction by four Irish women writers, providing access to currently out-of-print material and also provides a catalogue of books in the John Manning Collection. The second section of the project focuses on Máirín Cregan, a once popular but now forgotten children's writer, who published predominantly in the 1930s and 1940s. The project provides a catalogue of her papers which reside in the National Library of Ireland.

One of the major aims of this project is to begin to delineate a literary history of women's writing for children in Ireland between 1870 and 1940 due to their neglect in critical material in which male writers such as Padraig Pearse, Patrick Colum, and Oscar Wilde are dominant. Critics such as Declan Kiberd and John Wilson Foster have noted the connections made by writers of the Irish Literary Revival between ideas of childhood and constructions of

[1] The UCD Irish Virtual Research Library and Archive (IVRLA) is a major digitisation project which was undertaken by University College Dublin from 2005 to 2009. Material selected from UCD's extensive resources of archival and rare material was digitised and catalogued before being made available from a single virtual location (http://ivrla.ucd.ie). This digitised material covers a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines and is arranged in curated collections which can be browsed, searched, bookmarked, or downloaded. In addition to the digitisation of existing UCD collections, the IVRLA conducted a series of demonstrator projects. The remit of these projects was to develop additional digital research resources and to present these in the form of an exhibition collection. Some of these projects incorporated existing IVRLA material but many generated new content which was inspired by the potential of digital resources. Consequently, the IVRLA and its demonstrator projects show how digital repositories can provide access to diverse archival research materials as well as challenging the ways in which we consider digital content and generate research in a digital environment. The IVRLA is a component of the UCD Humanities Institute of Ireland and is funded under the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI) Cycle 3, administered by the Higher Education Authority.

the nation as well as the importance of children's writing to the Revival project, particularly in terms of the inculcation of heroic ideals through the promotion of Gaelic myths and legends and figures like Cúchulainn. Máire West, particularly, discusses how Irish children's literature of the time takes up such mythologies in order to inspire a sense of national heritage and identity. Scholars such as Marnie Hay and Michael Flanagan have identified the profusion of nationalist and propagandist literature aimed at children in this period and Elaine Sisson's study of Padraig Pearse's nationalist school for boys, St Enda's, delineates Pearse's attempts to construct an ideal Irish masculinity.

However, much of this scholarship focuses on the reading practices and literary culture of young boys although West does include Lady Gregory and Ella Young in her discussion. Frank Flanagan in his brief survey of Irish children's literature mentions only Maria Edgeworth among several male writers when discussing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The role of women writers in Ireland and of literature aimed specifically at girls of this period has been neglected despite Siobhán Kilfeather's identification of a considerable increase in fiction for girls and young women in the latter half of the nineteenth century (1142). This project then, identifies women writers of children's literature publishing in this period, provides digitised extracts and detailed catalogues of children's literature collections, and aims to stimulate further debate in this area. It is a pilot project and thus demonstrates, with a small selection of material, the potential of making such texts available together to draw attention to the presence of Irish women's writing for children in this time period.

Despite a critical absence surrounding girls' literary culture in Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there are a significant number of Irish women writing children's books aimed at girls, particularly between 1870 and 1920, including the writers whose work was digitised as part of this project (L.T. Meade, Rosa Mulholland, May Crommelin, and Katharine Tynan). A large number of their texts were published by Blackie and Sons, a firm that published a significant amount of children's books and who had opened a Dublin office by 1909. Irish writers feature strongly on their lists of children's books – in the endpapers of Rosa Mulholland's *Giannetta: A Girl's Story of Herself* published in 1889,[2] books by J.M. Callwell, Katharine Tynan, Elizabeth J. Lysaght, and Violet G. Finny are all advertised under the heading "Books for Girls," and are still being advertised six years later in the endpapers of a book by popular English boys' writer G.A Henty; indeed *Giannetta* was reprinted into the 1920s. The books seem to have a market in Britain as well as Ireland and

[2] This text is available in UCD James Joyce Library in its general collection.

are often purchased as school book prizes. Contemporary reviews, their presence on publishers' lists, and extant copies of novels by these writers attest to their popularity.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

This research project, which was carried out from July to December 2009, has three aims: firstly, to digitise relevant existing material in UCD and disseminate that through the IVRLA; secondly, to identify additional partners and additional relevant material in their collections that could be digitised in the future; and, finally, to stimulate debate about children's literature, specifically that by Irish women writers in the 1870-1940 period.

The material in UCD comes from the John Manning Collection of Children's Books, a collection of almost 400 children's books, mainly by English authors, published between 1870 and 1920. The collection also includes several *Boy's Own* and *Girl's Own* annuals. It was donated to UCD between 1977 and 1984 by John Manning, a Dubliner who appears to have collected the books himself rather than inheriting them. The collection also includes material by Irish writers L.T. Meade, Katharine Tynan, Rosa Mulholland, and Sophia Rosamond Praeger, and contains a *Girl's Own* annual to which May Crommelin contributed.

The project provides both a detailed index to the Manning collection and digitised extracts from novels by Meade, Tynan, and Mulholland and a short story by Crommelin. The availability of these extracts provides a significant resource for researchers of Irish children's literature both in Ireland and internationally. Although some texts by these writers are already available in digitised form, this project brings these writers together in the same virtual space for the first time, demonstrating the presence of children's fiction by Irish women writers in this time period. Due to timeframe restrictions, it is a small sample collection; nonetheless, by co-locating the extracts in a coherent archive the project can present connections between the writers and their texts as well as the texts themselves. This is a first vital step towards mapping a literary history of children's literature by Irish women writers in this time period.

The second aspect of the project involves the Máirín Cregan papers in the National Library, which contain correspondence, typescripts, manuscripts, print copies of short stories, and other ephemera connected to this, now little known, children's author. The papers were donated by her family in 2004 and an additional batch of material will be donated in early 2010. Files cataloguing the current Cregan collection were compiled during this project and have been made available as part of the IVRLA research collection. A potential expansion of the IVRLA children's culture archive could include short stories and extracts from the

correspondence with Cregan's publishers which give an insight into children's publishing during the Second World War. The availability of these catalogue files in conjunction with the catalogue of the Manning collection adds to the resources previously available in Ireland to scholars of Irish children's literature. Other such archives and collections include the Patricia Lynch Papers (MS Collection List 79) and Eilís Dillon Papers (MS Collection List 41) in the National Library, Dublin City Library's Children's Book Collection,[3] and Trinity College Dublin's Pollard Collection of Children's Literature.[4] The National Library also holds letters from May Crommelin, Rosa Mulholland, and Katharine Tynan.

While the IVRLA research collection itself comprises a new virtual space devoted to the study of children's literature by Irish women writers, the project also aimed to stimulate debate in the more traditional space. It did so by arranging two events: a workshop for children which showcased work from some of the digitised IVRLA material, relating it to contemporary children's literature, and a symposium on Irish children's literature. These events were very well received and clearly demonstrated that digital and traditional scholarship can have a mutually beneficial relationship.

3. DETAILED OUTPUT

Digitised Output: The IVRLA Irish Women Writers of Children Literature Collection

The first stage of the project required identification of suitable extracts for digitisation. As only a small number of items could be digitised in the timeframe available, it was important to ensure that there was an appropriate sample of writers and a reasonable range of publication dates. Furthermore, the material chosen needed to be in good condition, suitable for digitisation, and either out of copyright[5] or cleared by the copyright holder. As digitisation, cataloguing, and copyright issues were dealt with by the IVRLA team, detailed consultations took place to identify the list of four extracts which now form part of the IVRLA research collection for this project.

[3] A pdf file listing the Dublin City Library Collection of children's books from the eighteenth century to the present day can be accessed from Dublin City Library's Books and Manuscript Collections webpage. See <http://www.dublincity.ie/RecreationandCulture/libraries/Heritage%20and%20History/Collections/Pages/book_and_manuscript_collections.aspx>.

[4] This collection, which comprises over 10,000 books, is currently uncatalogued. Further information is available at <http://www.tcd.ie/longroomhub/projects/ireland/#Pollard>.

[5] The Manning Collection includes work by Sophia Rosamund Praeger. Although this would otherwise have been included in the sample extracts, her work is still within copyright and hence was excluded.

While the Manning Collection material is already on the UCD Library catalogue, it is not identified as a specific collection so catalogue users are not aware of the other related items in the collection. Courtesy of the staff in UCD Library Special Collections, an excel file detailing the items in the collection has now been made available as part of the IVRLA research collection. Using this list will allow researchers to see the collection in its entirety, and identify connections and points of interest.

The Máirín Cregan collection of material in the National Library (NLI) represents a significant resource for studying this once-popular writer. Although it was not appropriate to digitise the material (as this project's remit was for the digitisation of UCD-owned material), both the Cregan papers and her published books could be digitised in any expansion of this project.[6] While reviewing the Cregan papers in the NLI, a catalogue was compiled of the overall collection and two detailed lists were compiled of the letters and newspaper cuttings. These files are all now available as part of the IVRLA research collection.

The writers chosen for the project were popular during their writing career but have been subsequently forgotten, critically neglected, and their books are now long out-of-print. It is likely, particularly for the nineteenth-century writers, that their popularity and young female audience account in some way for their critical neglect. Sally Mitchell notes, in her book on girls' culture in England between 1880 and 1915, that fiction which "becomes very popular and then fades into obscurity draws on the values, interests, and concerns of a specific group of readers at a particular time" (5). Thus, the work of such writers may demonstrate assumptions about femininity, Irishness, and childhood particular to the period as well as the role children's literature is seen to have in the inculcation of such discourses. This is research that I expect to develop further outside the remit of this project. The material digitised as part of this project represents the work of five women writers whose work was published between 1870 and 1940, starting the important process of providing research resources for the study of children's literature in this period. Brief details for each writer are given below.

L.T. Meade

Of the writers included in this project, L.T. Meade was the best known and most popular during her writing career. Indeed, Helen Bittel notes that Meade's novels for girls "enjoyed a wider circulation than the works of most Victorian writers for either 'general' or

[6] This would of course be subject to copyright clearance. Copyright is held by the family of Máirín Cregan, who have already been most helpful during the course of this project.

juvenile audiences." Largely credited with popularizing the school story, she was an extraordinarily prolific writer during her lifetime, writing somewhere near 300 books in a range of genres including romances, sensation novels, crime fiction, career novels, and supernatural novels. She is best known for her children's books many of which feature an Irish setting. She was born in 1844 in Bandon, Co. Cork and grew up in Nohaval, near Kinsale, where her father was a rector. She moved to London in 1874 following the death of her mother and her father's remarriage, where she studied in the Reading Room of the British Library. Between 1887 and 1898 she edited *Atalanta*, a magazine aimed at girls and young women and contributed stories and articles to a wide variety of periodicals, both aimed at adults and children. She was a member of the feminist Pioneer Club, whose members included New Woman novelist Sarah Grand. In 1898 *Girl's Realm* readers nominated her as their favourite author. Her books were reprinted into the 1920s but by 1929 she had made a list of books "Not to be Circulated" – a list of children's books that public librarians were recommended to remove from their shelves due to a lack of sufficient literary value (Mitchell, 14). Critics have tended to dismiss the literary quality of her work but recent scholarship has argued for a re-evaluation of her work in terms of cultural histories of adolescence and Meade's engagement with the New Woman novel. The IVRLA has digitised an extract from a popular novel, *The Children's Kingdom, The Story of a Great Endeavour*, which was published in 1878 and set in the south of Ireland and London. The novel's plot concerns the family's loss of fortune and subsequent move from Ireland to London. This relocation from the rural idyll of the Irish "kingdom" to a London represented as gloomy, crowded, dirty, and dark is, for the children, a move into adulthood.

Rosa Mulholland

Rosa Mulholland was born in 1841 in Belfast and wrote over 40 novels, both for adults and children. Her writing was encouraged by Charles Dickens who published her stories in his *Household Works* and *All the Year Round*. John Millais also expressed interest in her work and illustrated some of her poetry. W.B. Yeats included her story "The Hungry Death," a story about the Irish famine, in his collection *Representative Irish Tales* (1891) and described her as "the novelist of contemporary Catholic Ireland." Mulholland also influenced Katharine Tynan, who dedicated *Ballads and Lyrics* (1891) to her. She married John Gilbert (1829-98), an historian and secretary of the Public Record Office of Ireland. He was knighted in 1897, and after his death she wrote his biography, *Life of Sir John T. Gilbert* (1907). Her sister, Clara Mulholland, also wrote children's books and her sister Ellen married Lord

Charles Russell, who was Lord Chief Justice of England and brother of the editor of *The Irish Monthly*, Matthew Russell SJ. The UCD James Joyce library holds several of her novels for girls in its general collection. As part of this project, an extract from Mulholland's 1873 novel *The Little Flower Seekers* has been digitised.

May Crommelin

May Crommelin (Maria Henrietta de la Cherois) was born in Carrowdore Castle, Donaghadee, Co. Down in 1850. She was educated at home, moving to Devon with her family during the Land War, which began in 1879. When her father died in 1885 she moved to London to pursue a writing career. She is best known for her travel writing but also wrote numerous novels for young girls as well as writing poetry. One of her short stories "A Sad Day's Eye," which was published in 1904, has been digitised as part of this project. She was one of the first female members of the Royal Geographical Society and her travel books include *Over the Andes from the Argentine to Chili and Peru* (1896). She published fiction as well as travel writing in periodicals such as *Leisure Hour*, *Ludgate Illustrated Magazine*, *Argosy*, and *The Pall Mall Magazine*, *English Illustrated Magazine*, and *Quiver*. She applied for assistance from the Royal Literary Society on two separate occasions citing eye problems and a drunken brother-in-law.

Katharine Tynan

Katharine Tynan was a poet and novelist, known for her association with the Irish Literary Revival and friendship with W.B. Yeats. Better known for her poetry and novels, she also wrote a number of books for children and young girls including *The Adventures of Carlo* (1900) (an extract of which is included in this project), *Heart O' Gold; or, The Little Princess* (1912), and *Bitha's Wonderful Year* (1921). She was influenced by Rosa Mulholland's work and dedicated *Ballads and Lyrics* (1891) to her.

Máirín Cregan

Máirín Cregan was born in Killorglin, Co. Kerry. Her two children's books, *Old John* (1936) and *Rathina* (1942), enjoyed national and international success in the 1930s and 1940s. *Old John* was first published in America by Macmillan and was translated into several languages. Jack B. Yeats illustrated an Irish-language version in 1938. In 1943 Cregan won the Downey Award in the USA for *Rathina*, rewarding it as "the finest children's book" in the Catholic tradition. She also wrote two plays and a number of short stories. Cregan was also a

member of Cumann na mBan, was awarded a medal for her involvement in the War of Independence and married Dr James Ryan, who was a founder member of Fianna Fáil and held ministerial roles in the government until 1965.

Discursive Output: The Workshop and Symposium

In addition to the digitised materials and resource lists, the project organised two events: a workshop with a group of sixth-class girls from St Brigid's GNS, Glasnevin, jointly organised by the IVRLA and Children's Books Ireland, and a symposium on Irish Children's Literature. The workshop took place on 2nd December 2009 in the National Library of Ireland. As the IVRLA also has an educational component which aims to use the digitised content as a teaching and research resource and also enables wide-reaching access to its digitised archival collections, the workshop's aim was to encourage a group of primary school children to engage with the children's literature focused on in the project, asking them to think about writers' lives and archives. Children's writer, Oisin McGann, led the workshop, which was divided into two sections. In the first session, McGann introduced the girls to L.T. Meade and read one of the digitised extracts from *The Children's Kingdom* as well as an extract from one of his own novels set in the nineteenth century. McGann asked the group to think about voice and dialogue and the differences in language use between the nineteenth century and the present before asking them to re-write the Meade extract, setting it in contemporary Dublin. In the second session, McGann compared letters from his own editor with Máirín Cregan's correspondence noting the effects that the Second World War had on Cregan's efforts to publish her books. The girls then had the opportunity to write an editor's letter that contained both praise and criticism of a book, film, or television programme of their choosing.

The symposium was held on the 5th December 2009 in the UCD Humanities Institute of Ireland at which I presented a paper outlining this research project, with particular focus on texts by L.T. Meade and Rosa Mulholland. McGann discussed the children's workshop and read out some of the girls' writing produced during that workshop. These extracts provided a very useful interjection of writing by children into the symposium.

Session 2 of the symposium consisted of papers by Valerie Coghlan and Ciara Ni Bhroin. Coghlan's paper, entitled "The Liminality of the Bog in Irish Children's Literature" which surveyed the cultural resonances of depictions of bogs in Irish children's literature from Patricia Lynch's *The Turf-Cutter's Donkey* (1934) to Siobhan Dowd's *Bog Child* (2008). Coghlan argued that the bog represents, especially in more recent literature, a liminal space that facilitates imaginative engagements with other spaces, times and identities,

particularly those most troubling. Ciara Ní Bhroin's paper, "Mythologizing the Present – Modern Retellings of Irish Myths for Children" asked why certain myths, such as the Children of Lir, persist in modern retellings. Reasons suggested included the choices made by writers after independence in terms of constructing the new nation, whether certain myths lent themselves to Christianisation, and the fact that the most popular myths are also, relatively, the most recent. Ní Bhroin also pointed to recent changes in retellings including a renewed focus on the god Lugh.

The symposium concluded with a paper by Dr Mary Shine Thompson entitled, "A Bend of the Road: Children's Literature Studies in Ireland" which surveyed the trajectory of children's literature studies in Ireland pointing at important achievements made in the field including the establishment of Irish Society for the Study of Children's Literature (ISSCL) and the associated graduate network, outlining gaps in scholarship such as a focus on drama and poetry, and projecting future developments including engagements with the virtual world. Thompson also raised the question of which methodologies are best suited to children's literature studies, an issue which was taken up by the roundtable discussion, led by Valerie Coghlan. The participants included Celia Keenan (Director of the MA in Children's Literature at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra), Dr Patricia Kennon (Froebel College of education, President of IBBY[7] Ireland, and editor of *Inís*) and Dr Éilís Ní Dhuibhne (children's writer as Elizabeth O'Hara and Fellow in Creative Writing, UCD). Issues discussed included the problems of children's book reviewing given the very small community involved, and the place of new media. In response to this last issue Keenan stated that she was torn between the view expressed by Kimberley Reynolds in *Radical Children's Literature* on the one hand, who embraces the radical potential of new media, and on the other hand, Jack Zipes's warning against the commercialisation and financial exploitation of children's literature. Lastly, both Thompson and Keenan acknowledged that Irish children's literature studies would have to answer Jacqueline Rose's contention that children's literature suffers from the difference between writer and addressee. The roundtable also discussed whether Young Adult fiction was essentially patronising and debated the issue of hopeful endings in books for children and teenagers.

[7] IBBY is the International Board of Books for Young People, a worldwide organisation which promotes access to quality children's books. For more information, see <http://www.ibby.org>.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

That Thompson identified a focus on new media and the possibilities of digitisation as future directions of research in children's literature is significant for this project. It is hoped that with increased funding the project could be expanded in the future to include scans of material contained in the Cregan papers from the National Library of Ireland, which could not be digitised during this project. The digitisation of Cregan's short stories and extracts of her novels, which are not available elsewhere, would offer fruitful comparisons between Irish children's literature directly pre- and post-Independence. Furthermore, the potential digitisation of selected correspondence between Cregan and her American and British publishers would offer an interesting insight into children's book publishing for Irish writers during the Second World War. In addition, a future development of this sample selection of extracts would be the inclusion of a detailed list of Irish women writers of children's fiction between 1870 and 1940 combined with extracts from their work. Such a development would establish a critical presence for such writers and their location in the same virtual space would provide a literary history of Irish women writers of children's literature in this period as well as a platform for critical engagement with the material itself, making potential connections, influences and trends discernable.

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