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**This treasured island:
Irish nationalist propaganda aimed at children and youth, 1910-16¹**

Marnie Hay

Bulmer Hobson (1883-1969), a prolific writer and editor of Irish nationalist propaganda and co-founder of the nationalist youth organisation Na Fianna Éireann, knew from personal experience the profound effect that certain reading material could have on a youth. The son of a Gladstonian home ruler, he grew up in a North Belfast Quaker family who 'argued everything', 'discussed everything with good temper', and barred no opinion.² It was, however, the reading material recommended by his neighbours, the poets Alice Milligan (1866-1953) and Ethna Carbery (pseudonym of Anna Johnston) (1866-1902), that started the schoolboy's conversion to advanced nationalism. These publications included Standish O'Grady's books based on Irish mythology, Milligan and Carbery's nationalist newspaper *Shan Van Vocht*, and the writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-98).³ They convinced Hobson that Ireland was not just an island apart, but a nation apart – and that his treasured island nation should become fully independent of the United Kingdom.

Mindful of his own youthful conversion to advanced nationalism, Hobson fostered the production of propaganda targeting young people throughout his nationalist career. In 1900, at the age of seventeen, he started the Ulster Debating Club for boys, the first of a string of propagandist organisations aimed at youth. In 1902 he founded the first incarnation of Na Fianna Éireann in Belfast and then in 1909, with the impetus of Countess Constance Markievicz (1868-1927), revived it in Dublin as a nationalist counter-blast to Robert Baden-Powell's Boy Scout movement, which had been founded in the previous year.⁴

This paper will examine nationalist propaganda aimed at children and youth that appeared in publications associated with Hobson in the period 1910-16. The publications under consideration are the columns for children and youth in the republican newspaper *Irish Freedom* (1910-14), the Fianna articles in the *Irish Volunteer* newspaper (1914-16), the *Fianna handbook* (1914), and the nationalist [p. 33] boys' paper *Fianna* (1915-16). The youth content in these publications served four main purposes, namely, to provide young people with an Irish nationalist education; to promote an idealised image of Irish nationalist youth

¹ I would like to thank the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the U.C.D. School of History Small Grants Research Fund for their financial support, which enabled me to undertake research for this paper, and Dr Michael Laffan for commenting on an earlier draft.

² Bulmer Hobson, R.T.É. TV interview (5 Dec. 1963) (R.T.É. Media Library, TY0004108).

³ Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland yesterday and tomorrow* (Tralee: Anvil, 1968), pp 1-2.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp 3, 15-16.

that young people could emulate; to offer an Irish nationalist alternative to popular reading material produced in Britain; and to foster the potential for young people to become nationalist propagandists and activists. These publications encouraged Irish boys and girls to treasure their island nation by furthering its struggle for independence.

Launched in November 1910, *Irish Freedom* was a monthly newspaper published by the Dublin Central Wolfe Tone Clubs Committee, which was a front for the Irish Republican Brotherhood (or I.R.B.). Hobson was one of the paper's editors.⁵ This unabashedly separatist republican paper survived until December 1914 when it was suppressed under the Defence of the Realm Act, due to its seditious content. The *Irish Volunteer* newspaper, which appeared between February 1914 and April 1916, was the weekly organ of the Irish Volunteer movement. Hobson served as business manager and unofficial editor from December 1914 onwards.⁶

Although it was geared towards an adult audience, *Irish Freedom* included two regular features aimed at children and youth. 'Grianán na nÓg' (or the 'Sunroom of Youth'), which was [apparently] written by a young woman identified only as 'Neasa', was a column for boys and girls under twenty. It suggested ways in which young people could further the struggle for Irish independence and featured monthly competitions that gave readers a chance to compete for prizes. In addition, *Irish Freedom* provided a forum for Na Fianna Éireann to report its news and views. Fianna officers Liam Mellows (1892-1922) and Pádraig Ó Riain also wrote similar columns for the *Irish Volunteer*.

It is impossible to say for certain how many young people read these papers. Although I have yet to find figures for *Irish Freedom*'s circulation, Hobson's estimate that there were over 1,500 members of the I.R.B. in 1912 suggests the existence of a potential adult audience of at least that number.⁷ Contemporary police reports surmised that the *Irish Volunteer* had at the very least a total circulation of 3,937 in November 1915 and 4,615 in February 1916.⁸

One can gain some insight into the readership of 'Grianán na nÓg' by looking at the competition entrants over the course of a sample year. Between December 1910 and December 1911 Neasa published the names of 82 readers who submitted winning and commendable entries. 52 of these entrants were boys, 27 were girls, and three used

⁵ Louis N. Le Roux, *Tom Clarke and the Irish freedom movement* (Dublin: Talbot, 1936), pp 89-90; Hobson, *Ireland*, pp 38-9; P.S. O'Hegarty, Bureau of Military History (B.M.H.) witness statement (19 Sept. 1947) (N.A.I., B.M.H., W.S. 26). Hobson resigned as editor of *Irish Freedom* in June 1914 after he had a falling-out with Tom Clarke (1857-1916) and Sean MacDermott (1884-1916), the most powerful members of the I.R.B. Executive, over his support – for tactical reasons – of the co-option of John Redmond's nominees onto the Provisional Committee of the Irish Volunteers.

⁶ Hobson, *Ireland*, p. 68.

⁷ Ibid. p. 36.

⁸ Breandán Mac Giolla Choille (ed.), *Intelligence notes 1913-16* (Dublin: Republic of Ireland State Papers Office, 1966), p. 163.

pseudonyms that did not indicate their gender. Over half [p. 34] (43) used the Irish language version of their names. Two female winners gave their ages as 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ and 16. Occasionally the place of residence was listed, indicating that entrants came from Dublin, Cork, Belfast, Limerick, Waterford, Cavan, Leitrim, and Mayo as well as Liverpool and London. The only identified contest winner of note was Herbert (or Barney) Mellows, the brother of Liam Mellows and one of the Fianna members who participated in the Easter Rising.⁹

In 1914 members of the Fianna, following the example of their founder Hobson, began to produce their own publications to disseminate propaganda aimed at boys in particular. In 1914 the Central Council of Na Fianna Éireann issued the *Fianna handbook* in order to instruct and guide its members. Although a girls' *sluagh* (or troop) existed in Belfast, the text, with the exception of Countess Markievicz's introduction, referred only to boys. The *Fianna handbook* was compiled by Pádraig Ó Riain, the Honorary General Secretary of the Fianna. Hobson helped him to negotiate with the publication agent.¹⁰ Priced at one shilling, the handbook provided information about the Fianna organisation and included practical instruction on topics related to military training and camping and chapters by prominent nationalists such as Douglas Hyde (1860-1949) (later to become the first president of Ireland), Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), and Roger Casement (1864-1916).¹¹

The year 1914 also witnessed the publication of a [one-off] Fianna Christmas annual, entitled *Nodlaig na bhFiann*. Edited by Fianna members Percy Reynolds and Patsy O'Connor, the annual was not issued by Fianna Headquarters but did have official sanction.¹² The financial success of this venture encouraged Reynolds and O'Connor to launch *Fianna*, a monthly paper for boys, in February 1915. Hobson probably served as advisor to these young entrepreneurs and may have helped to edit the paper, possibly after O'Connor abandoned the project to concentrate on his local *sluagh*.¹³

The paper initially published fiction and poetry, articles on Irish history and folklore, and Fianna news and views, though it was not an official organ of Na Fianna Éireann. After a

⁹ See Neasa, 'Grianán na nÓg', *Irish Freedom* (Dec. 1910-Dec. 1911), p. 3.

¹⁰ According to Hobson, the government publication agent E. Ponsonby Ltd. made an unsuccessful attempt to break its verbal contract with the Fianna after the company's director realised that the handbook was not issued by an Irish branch of the British boy scout movement. See Bulmer Hobson, B.M.H. witness statement (15 Oct. 1947) [N.A.I., B.M.H., W.S. 31].

¹¹ See Pádraig Ó Riain (ed.), *Fianna handbook* (Dublin: Central Council of Na Fianna Éireann, 1914).

¹² Liam Mellows, 'Boy Scouts Organising Notes', *Irish Volunteer* (21 Nov. 1914), p. 15.

¹³ Contemporary newspaper articles identified Reynolds and O'Connor as the initial editors of the paper; O'Connor resigned from the editorship sometime prior to his death in June 1915 (Willie Nelson [Pádraig Ó Riain], 'Na Fianna Éireann', *Irish Volunteer* [9 Jan. 1915], [26 June 1915], p. 8; 'In memoriam', *Fianna* [July 1915], p. 3). Reynolds probably secured another editorial partner after O'Connor's departure. Although Virginia E. Glandon and Ben Novick have cited Hobson as the editor of *Fianna*, Hobson does not verify this in his memoirs (Virginia E. Glandon, *Arthur Griffith and the advanced nationalist press: Ireland, 1900-1922* [New York: Lang, 1985], p. 269; Ben Novick, *Conceiving revolution: Irish nationalist propaganda during the first world war* [Dublin: Four Courts, 2001], p. 30; Bulmer Hobson, B.M.H. witness statement [15 Oct. 1947] [N.A.I., B.M.H., W.S. 31]).

short struggle to survive as a boys' paper, *Fianna* widened its target [p. 35] audience to both men and boys from July 1915 onwards.¹⁴ Its content now included articles on weightier topics such as Irish industry. Neasa, having been forced out of *Grianán na nÓg* after the demise of *Irish Freedom*, re-emerged in 'Neasa's nook' with a column and monthly competition for readers between the ages of six and seventeen.¹⁵ In November 1915 the British authorities estimated that the paper had a circulation of at least 859, which grew to 1,094 by February 1916.¹⁶

Members of the Fianna were the main audience for the *Fianna handbook* and the paper *Fianna*. The majority of young people who read the youth columns in *Irish Freedom* presumably came from families with republican sympathies. Young readers of the *Irish Volunteer* were probably members of the Fianna and/or children or siblings of Volunteers. They may have read copies bought by older relatives or were introduced to these papers by friends. Thus, the goal of these propagandist publications was the reinforcement of an existing nationalist sentiment rather than conversion to advanced nationalism.

Hobson, like other prominent Irish nationalists of the early twentieth century, such as Maud Gonne (1866-1953), Patrick Pearse, and Countess Markievicz, recognised that children and youth were the future of the Irish nationalist movement and that in order to prepare them for their forthcoming role within that movement, they must be educated along nationalist lines. Like the Irish history and language classes for children offered by Inghinidhe na h-Éireann (the women's nationalist organisation founded by Gonne, literally 'daughters of Ireland'), Pearse's schools, St Enda's and St Ita's, and the training provided by Na Fianna Éireann, the publications under consideration, made a contribution to the nationalist education of a small minority of Irish youth.

These publications sought to educate young people about Irish history and folklore in order to teach them about their own unique heritage, to familiarise them with Ireland's long struggle against British occupation, and to introduce them to Irish heroes and heroines worthy of emulation. *Fianna* included a monthly calendar of significant dates in Irish history and ran articles on aspects of Irish history and folklore. Pearse contributed a chapter to the *Fianna handbook* in which he traced the three traditions of the Fianna in Ireland – Fionn Mac Cumhaill's Fianna, the Fenians of the nineteenth century, and the Fianna boy scout movement – before focusing on the tradition surrounding Fionn's Fianna. Many of Neasa's monthly competitions encouraged boys and girls to display their knowledge of Irish history. For instance, she offered book prizes for the best essay on 'the noblest female figure in Irish

¹⁴ 'From the Editors', *Fianna* (9 June 1915), p. 3.

¹⁵ See A.P. Reynolds, 'Our industries', *Fianna* (July 1915), pp 4-6; Neasa, 'Neasa's nook', *Fianna* (July 1915), p. 12.

¹⁶ Mac Giolla Choille (ed.), *Intelligence notes*, p. 163. As reports tended to be a month behind, the figure for Feb. 1916 probably refers to the Jan. 1916 issue.

history'¹⁷ or for the best answers to questions like 'When and where was Wolfe Tone arrested by the English?'¹⁸ [p. 36]

Neasa also urged her audience to educate themselves by reading and writing Irish literature. Among the book prizes that she awarded were William Carleton's *The black prophet*, Sheridan Le Fanu's *The house by the churchyard*, and Alice Stopford Green's *The making of Ireland and its undoing*.¹⁹ In June 1911 she challenged readers to select the four best quotations from Thomas Davis' *Essays* and William Rooney's *Prose writings*²⁰ and later expressed surprise when a 19-year-old correspondent admitted he had never read Davis' work.²¹ She encouraged budding writers to send their poetry, short stories, and articles to her for 'fair, candid, kindly criticism' and, in rare cases, publication.²² For instance, Neasa informed Mary Kerrigan that though there was 'a fine ring of sincerity and honest uncompromising Nationalism' in her verses, they had 'many faults'; she then recommended ways to fix these faults.²³

Although these publications did not provide any Irish language instruction, they did urge young people to learn Irish. The *Fianna handbook* included a chapter in Irish by Douglas Hyde, founder of the Gaelic League, while *Fianna* ran a monthly column on Irish folklore written in Irish. Neasa challenged readers to write a short essay in Irish on 'an obair tá romhainn i nÉirinn' (the work before us in Ireland) and published the winning entry the following month.²⁴

In 1910 a Fianna member, writing in *Irish Freedom*, predicted that the final settlement of the 'Irish question' would fall to 'those of us who are growing up boys and girls'.²⁵ In order to prepare boys for their future role in the settlement of the Irish question, the *Fianna handbook* asserted that 'their first work must be to train themselves to be fit citizens of a free nation'. To render service to Ireland, they needed to be trained in mind and body. The study of Irish language and history helped to train the mind while military training and physical fitness drilled the body. The book provided instruction on topics ranging from military drill to swimming. Such practical instruction was also the subject of Fianna articles included in the *Irish Volunteer*.²⁶ As the boys themselves, rather than adults, were responsible for the running of the organisation, the *Fianna handbook* also outlined the policy,

¹⁷ Neasa, 'Grianán na nÓg', *Irish Freedom* (Dec. 1910), p. 3. All reference to Neasa's writings hereafter may be found on p. 3 of 'Grianán na nÓg', *Irish Freedom*.

¹⁸ Neasa (Sept. 1911).

¹⁹ Neasa (Apr. 1911).

²⁰ Neasa (June 1911).

²¹ Neasa (Sept. 1911).

²² Neasa (Nov. 1910).

²³ Neasa (Sept. 1911).

²⁴ Neasa (Mar. 1911) (Apr. 1911).

²⁵ Art, 'The Fianna', *Irish Freedom* (Nov. 1910), p. 7.

organisational structure, and constitution of the Fianna.²⁷ This taught members how to govern themselves, preparing them for citizenship, perhaps even leadership, in an independent Ireland of the future.

Advanced nationalists promoted an idealised image of Irish nationalist youth in these publications. Patriotism and morality were among the most important traits embodied in the ideal young nationalist. He or she was loyal to God and Ireland, not to the newly-crowned King George V or to the British Empire. As Neasa pointed out, ‘the allegiance of the boys and girls of Ireland is due to God and their Motherland alone’.²⁸ Such loyalty had wider benefits because, according to Neasa, ‘the boy or girl who is true to the Motherland will be true to home and [p. 37] friends, true to everything noble and holy and good’.²⁹ The implication that there was a moral dichotomy between Britain and Ireland is typical of nationalist propaganda from the period.³⁰ Ben Novick has suggested that such propaganda ‘sought to both create an idealised (and fictive) revolutionary and highlight as a sharp contrast the degenerate and debased nature of British and pro-British people’.³¹

These publications communicated the messages of the Sinn Féin and Irish Ireland schools of thought, whose orientation was culturally isolationist, by showing how the patriotism of the ideal young nationalists could be expressed through their knowledge of certain subjects and choice of pastimes and consumer goods. They knew their Irish history (from a nationalist viewpoint, of course), tried to master the Irish language, bought and read Irish publications, and resisted the ‘Anglicising force’ of foreign dances,³² songs, and games, instead choosing to dance traditional Irish dances, sing Irish songs, and play Irish games like hurling.³³ Neasa further emphasised the ‘choose Irish’ message by insisting that contest entries had to be written on Irish-made paper.

The ideal nationalist boy joined Na Fianna Éireann in order to prepare himself mentally and physically to play an active role in the fight for Irish independence. The *Fianna handbook* emphasised the importance of such traits as self-reliance, obedience, discipline, loyalty, trust, and manliness. Members were never to ‘do anything that would bring discredit upon Ireland or upon the Fianna’.³⁴

²⁶ For instance, Pádraig Ó Riain contributed a series of articles on map reading. See Ó Riain, ‘Na Fianna Éireann’, *Irish Volunteer* (22 Jan. 1916), (29 Jan. 1916), (5 Feb. 1916), (12 Feb. 1916), p. 8.

²⁷ Ó Riain (ed.), *Handbook*, p. 14.

²⁸ Neasa (July 1911).

²⁹ Neasa (Nov. 1910).

³⁰ Novick, *Conceiving revolution*, p. 132.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

³² A young reader named Máire Ní Cheallaigh wrote to Neasa about the necessity of rejecting foreign dances because they were ‘an Anglicising force’. (Quoted in Neasa [Sept. 1911]).

³³ Séumas Ó Connghalaigh urged his fellow readers to ‘dance no English dances; play no English games; and sing no West British ditties’. (Quoted in Neasa [June 1912]).

³⁴ Ó Riain (ed.), *Handbook*, pp 23-4, p. 14.

In order to attain Irish independence, the ideal Irish nationalist had to be prepared to make sacrifices. In her introduction to the *Fianna handbook*, Countess Markievicz asked readers to ‘remember and respect those who throughout the world work and fight, live or die for their country’s freedom’, because ‘it is their self-sacrifice and suffering that keeps the spirit of a nation free’. She predicted that although ‘[t]he path of freedom may lead us [on] the same road that Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone trod’, ‘if we must die as they died we will not flinch’.³⁵ The Fianna members who participated in the 1916 Easter Rising heeded this message. Those who died as a result, such as Sean Heuston (1891-1916) and Con Colbert (1888-1916), were praised in post-1916 Fianna propaganda.³⁶

Ironically, in light of the so-called moral dichotomy between Britain and Ireland, the Baden-Powell Boy Scouts also advocated discipline, trust, obedience, loyalty, manliness, service, and self-sacrifice.³⁷ The editors of *Fianna*, however, [p. 38] freely admitted that ‘you can learn something from the enemy’.³⁸ The Fianna and Baden-Powell’s Boy Scouts were both examples of the contemporary proliferation of ‘pseudo-military youth groups’, which were not only a manifestation of the cult of discipline, training, and manliness that grew out of the menace of the coming war in Europe,³⁹ but also, perhaps, a reaction to the widely-perceived *fin-de-siècle* ‘decadence’.

The *Fianna handbook*, the Christmas annual *Nodlaig na bhFiann*, and the boys’ paper *Fianna* were designed to provide Irish nationalist alternatives to British popular literature for boys. The Irish versions remained true to the genres of their British counterparts, but adapted their content to suit an Irish nationalist audience. For instance, *Fianna* published an example of the classic school story genre in a serial entitled ‘The wandering hawk’ by Patrick Pearse. Set in St Fintan’s, a Catholic boys’ boarding school, it tells the tale of a group of boys whose popular new schoolmaster turns out to be a Fenian on the run from the authorities.⁴⁰

The *Fianna handbook* was designed to replace the 1908 book *Scouting for boys* written by Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941), founder of the World Scout Movement, and the British War Office manuals, which were the few written sources for instruction previously available to the Fianna. Both the *Fianna handbook* and *Scouting for boys* covered such topics as camping, first aid, chivalry, and patriotism. In certain cases, however, the interpretation of

³⁵ Countess Markievicz, ‘Introduction’, in Ó Riain (ed.), *Handbook*, p. 8.

³⁶ See *Easter Week 1916-1922 Commemoration Aeridheacht souvenir programme* (23 April 1922) (Dublin: Fianna Éireann Dublin Brigade, 1922); Cathal O’Shannon (ed.), *Souvenir of the golden jubilee of Fianna Éireann, Aug. 16, 1909-Aug. 16, 1959* (Dublin: Na Fianna Éireann, 1959).

³⁷ Lieut.-General R.S.S. Baden-Powell, *Scouting for boys: A handbook for instruction in good citizenship*, fifth impression (London: Pearson, 1908), p. 266.

³⁸ ‘From the editors’, *Fianna* (Mar. 1915), p. 3.

³⁹ David Fitzpatrick, ‘Militarism in Ireland, 1900-1922’, in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffrey (eds.), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1996), pp 382-3.

⁴⁰ For the first instalment of this serial, see *Fianna* (Feb. 1915), pp 4-7.

these topics differed. For instance, Baden-Powell wrote of the chivalry of the knights, while Roger Casement hearkened back to the chivalry of Fionn MacCumhaill's Fianna. Baden-Powell's book promoted patriotism in the context of the British Empire. He exhorted boys not to 'be disgraced like the young Romans, who lost the Empire of their forefathers by being wishy-washy slackers without any go or patriotism in them'.⁴¹ The Fianna book rejected such imperialistic patriotism, instead encouraging Irish boys to direct their patriotic impulses toward the foundation of an independent Irish state. In contrast to *Scouting for boys*, the *Fianna handbook* included a section on rifle exercises, revealing the more militant nature of the Irish organisation.⁴² Illustrations in the two books further emphasise this difference between these two groups. While Baden-Powell's scouts are portrayed holding walking sticks, the Fianna are shown handling rifles.

The potential for young people to become nationalist propagandists and activists was fostered by these publications. In taking the initiative to produce *Nodlaig na bhFiann* and *Fianna*, Reynolds and O'Connor showed what young people could do to communicate the message of Irish nationalism and separatism to their own age cohort. Neasa awarded prizes for written propaganda such as the 'best original anti- [p. 39] enlisting appeal to the young men of Éire'.⁴³ When space was available, the best entries were published. For instance, Séumas Ó Connghalaigh of Armagh recommended that Irish boys and girls should 'teach the younger children Ireland's history; inspire them with love for their native land; teach them to scorn the slavish "leaders"', as well as 'post up anti-enlistment bills', 'organise branches of Na Fianna', 'form hurling clubs and join the Gaelic League'.⁴⁴ Neasa urged her readers to take action, particularly in response to the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary and their July 1911 visit to Ireland. In order to combat a plan to solicit donations from all Irish women and girls named Mary to buy an all-Ireland coronation gift for the queen, she suggested that readers 'go to every Mary in their native district, and to ask her to boycott this slavish and mean device to represent the women of Ireland as being loyal West Britons'.⁴⁵ She also told her readers that it was their duty to warn neighbouring children and parents 'that every cheer given, and every flag waved, and every mile travelled in connection with [the royal visit was] a crime against Ireland'.⁴⁶

Although Irish young people were encouraged to express their nationalism by buying and reading only Irish publications, the lure of popular British literature was hard to counteract. In February 1915 Pádraig Ó Riain, writing in the *Irish Volunteer*, estimated that

⁴¹ Baden-Powell, *Scouting*, p. 240.

⁴² See Ó Riain (ed.), *Handbook*, pp 53-74.

⁴³ Neasa (Jan. 1911).

⁴⁴ Neasa (June 1912).

⁴⁵ Neasa (Feb. 1911).

⁴⁶ Neasa (June 1911).

‘nearly every boy from twelve to sixteen years of age’ read at least one boys’ story-paper per week. Despite the launch of two Irish monthly papers for boys, the Christian Brothers’ *Our Boys* in 1914 and *Fianna* in 1915, Irish boys were still subscribing to weekly magazines imported from Britain. Ó Riain found that ‘preaching against them only acts as an incentive to a wider reading of these papers’.⁴⁷ When the editors of *Fianna* declared that ‘English boys’ periodicals’ were ‘killing Irish Nationalism’, there is a sense that what they really meant was that British boys’ magazines were killing their paper. They attempted to boost circulation by offering incentives, such as free copies of the *Fianna handbook* to readers who attracted four new subscribers,⁴⁸ before being forced to widen their target audience to include men.

The stereotypical image of the Irish and the imperialist message in these British publications incensed advanced nationalists. A particularly striking example can be found in ‘The legions of the Kaiser’, a timely war serial by John Tregellis that appeared in the *Boys’ Friend* between 13 June and 19 September 1914. It tells the story of Roy Kildare, the young squire of an estate on the border of Co. Donegal, who ‘was generally either laughing or fighting’. Although he was ‘an Ulsterman and a Protestant’, Roy

came of the old native Irish race, and thought that, while Ireland should remain a partner of England, she was a nation in herself, with a right to her [p. 40] own flag and Government. But politics bored him stiff, though he liked elections, for there were always some merry ructions.⁴⁹

Roy’s dichotomous identity as a home ruler from Ulster and a protestant of native Irish stock broke down some Irish stereotypes, yet he was still portrayed as a stereotypical Irishman – jocular and pugnacious. His boredom with politics may have been British wishful thinking at a time when the Ulster question dominated the Westminster parliament.

The story opens with the Ulster Volunteers and the home rulers poised for conflict. The Ulster Volunteers in Roy’s district are depicted as well organised while the home rulers appear to be a rag-bag of country boys. No mention is made of the Irish Volunteers. In the middle of the night the soldiers of the Kaiser invade Ireland, hoping to team up with Irish nationalists in order to use Ireland as a base to attack Great Britain.⁵⁰ Initially the nationalists and the ‘Ulsterites’ assume that a force has been sent over from England to subdue them. Once Roy discovers the real state of affairs, however, ‘the rival forces of Ireland forget their grievances against each other, and combine against the common foe’.⁵¹ When the Germans

⁴⁷ Willie Nelson (Pádraig Ó Riain), ‘Na Fianna Éireann’, *Irish Volunteer* (13 Feb. 1915), p. 8.

⁴⁸ ‘Killing Irish nationalism’, *Fianna* (Mar. 1915), p. 4.

⁴⁹ John Tregellis, ‘The legions of the Kaiser’, *Boys’ Friend* (13 June 1914), p. 34.

⁵⁰ Tregellis, ‘Kaiser’, (20 June 1914), p. 50.

⁵¹ Tregellis, ‘Kaiser’, (27 June 1914), p. 66.

have been ousted from Ireland, Roy's Irish American friend Harvey Dunster predicts that 'within a few days you Britishers will carry the flag into Germany'. The serial ends with Roy's rousing response to this prediction: 'God save the King!'⁵² Despite its positive depiction of Irish nationalists and unionists working together, the story's pro-British, anti-German message would have been unacceptable to advanced nationalists. By July 1915 even the Christian Brothers' magazine *Our Boys* came under fire in the pages of *Fianna* for publishing 'such war articles' and being no better than a British story-paper.⁵³

In addition to objecting to the imperialist message of British youth papers, Irish nationalists also accused them of being immoral. Neasa published 'The poisoned bowl', a poem by a young correspondent, which encouraged boys and girls to reject 'degrading and denationalising publications sent over from England to corrupt the minds and morals of Ireland's youth'.⁵⁴ Advanced nationalists were particularly scathing in their condemnation of the (ironically) Irish press baron Alfred Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe), who published the *Boys' Friend* (among other popular children's papers) and controlled *The Times* and *Daily Mail*.⁵⁵

The nature of propaganda is such that it is difficult to provide an empirical assessment of its effectiveness. There are, however, indications that this advanced nationalist propaganda aimed at youth was effective to some degree. That the editors of *Irish Freedom*, the *Irish Volunteer*, and *Fianna* chose to publish, and continued to publish, propaganda aimed at youth suggests that they believed there was a [p. 41] potentially receptive audience for their message. The responses to Neasa's competitions show that entrants had absorbed and could reiterate in their own words her advanced nationalist message. Although *Fianna* clearly failed in its attempt to provide a successful Irish nationalist alternative to popular British boys' papers, it made gains in circulation after it widened its focus to become a paper geared towards boys and men. After the outbreak of the first world war, the authorities at Dublin Castle were so concerned about the effect of such 'seditious' newspapers that they suppressed *Irish Freedom*, issued a warning to the printer of the *Irish Volunteer* – though the youth columns in these papers were probably the least of their worries – and began tracking the rising circulation of *Fianna*.⁵⁶ That members of the *Fianna* served as leaders, combatants, scouts, and messengers during the Easter Rising also attests to the effectiveness of the *Fianna* propaganda. Such propaganda probably contributed to the role of youth and the pre-

⁵² Tregellis, 'Kaiser', (19 Sept. 1914), p. 266.

⁵³ Dalcassian, 'From a long way to Bodenstown', *Fianna* (July 1915), p. 2.

⁵⁴ Neasa (Mar. 1911).

⁵⁵ Novick, *Conceiving revolution*, p. 167.

⁵⁶ Mac Giolla Choille (ed.), *Intelligence notes*, pp 116, 163.

dominance of young men within the Irish Volunteers (later known as the Irish Republican Army), which has been noted in recent studies of the Irish revolution.⁵⁷

In conclusion, the advanced nationalist propaganda aimed at youth in the *Fianna handbook* and the papers *Irish Freedom*, *Irish Volunteer*, and *Fianna* served four main purposes: to provide young people with an Irish nationalist education; to promote an idealised image of Irish nationalist youth that young people could emulate; to offer an Irish nationalist alternative to popular reading material produced in Britain; and to foster the potential for young people to become nationalist propagandists and activists. These publications, all of which were associated with Bulmer Hobson, encouraged Irish boys and girls to treasure their island nation and showed them ways in which they too could further Ireland's fight for freedom. [p. 42]

⁵⁷ See Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. and its enemies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); Joost Augusteijn, *From public defiance to guerrilla warfare* (Dublin: Irish Academic, 1996); Marie Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish revolution* (Dublin: Irish Academic, 2003); and David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life, 1913-1921* (Cork: C.U.P., 1998).