



Transitions in Irish Miscellanies between 1923 and 1940: *The Irish Statesman* and *The Bell*

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ABSTRACT

Between 1923 and 1940 a variety of political and cultural events took place in Ireland, including the formation of the Free State, the establishment of the 1937 constitution by Eamon de Valera, and the adoption of a policy of neutrality in the Second World War. The effects of these changes are traced in the processes of production of two related periodicals, *The Irish Statesman* (1923-30) and *The Bell* (1940-54). The differences and similarities between the editors of these journals, George Russell (Æ) and Sean O'Faolain, are discussed in the context of the intellectual history of the period, as are the processes of influence and reaction between them. The historical evolution of the miscellany as a specific periodical genre is considered, together with its influence upon the form and content of these publications. It is argued that particular audiences were created for these periodicals in post revolutionary Ireland and that they were both able, in different ways, to exert a benign influence on the development of the new nation.

KEYWORDS: periodical; Ireland; miscellany; journal; genre; Russell (Æ); O'Faolain; *The Bell*; *Irish Statesman*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Between 1923, the date of the first issue of *The Irish Statesman*, and the initial publication of *The Bell* in 1940 there lies a space of difference, generated by historical circumstance. Among the defining events, which alter the contexts within which these two periodicals are produced, are

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such major interventions as the creation of the new Free State in Ireland, its early struggles for an independent self-definition, and the eventual electoral and cultural dominance of the government of Eamon de Valera. This in turn led to the enshrinement of the state's formal values in its 1937 constitution, the operation of a literary censorship and the adoption of a policy of neutrality in the Second World War. I would like to trace some of the effects of these changes on the process of writing, editing, and producing these periodicals and to suggest how a specific periodical genre, the Irish miscellany, is first developed, derived from English models, and then adapted to social and historical circumstances. I will place these events in the context of the intellectual history of this particular period. We will see how a process of influence operated between the two periodicals and how they impacted on different audiences.

II. THE EDITORS: SIMILARITIES

Both the sympathy and the tensions between two overlapping generations in Ireland are well illustrated in the writings of the editors of these journals. George Russell (1867-1935) and Sean O'Faolain (1900-1990) had many similar preoccupations about the cultural condition of the mass of the people of Ireland in their respective times. Some significant differences between them will be discussed later, but at this stage I wish to concentrate attention on the positions they held in common. Both editors were deeply concerned with the condition of contemporary Irish culture. Russell, writing with characteristic grandiloquence and deploying what John Eglinton described as his "maieutic" style (Gibbon, 1937: 1), seeks to bring forth new concepts and to set out a cultural manifesto for the new Ireland.

A nation is cultivated only in so far as the average man, not the exceptional person, is cultivated and has knowledge of the thought, imagination and intellectual history of his nation [...] The civic sense must awaken rapidly and our concern be about the quality of life in our country. There is really nothing else that matters but that. Governments exist for this; literature and the arts exist for this, economic enterprise exists for this and the quality of life evolved is their justification. (Gibbon, 1937: 381)

A similar insistence on the need for an inclusive Irish culture marks O'Faolain's stance, enunciated in an early editorial in *The Bell*, towards the need for an "active periodical open to everybody". This desire for inclusiveness leads to his declaration that "country people are fine: they tell us the whole story from morning to dark" and underlines his assertion that they are better contributors to his magazine than more academic writers, offering "vague woolly articles, all personal opinion and no study" (1941a: 5-6).

Clifford Geertz describes culture as "not a power, something to which social events, behaviours or processes can be casually attributed: it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is thickly—described" (1973: 14). The official cultural context within which Russell and O'Faolain both operated was one influenced by the desire to differentiate the new Irish state from its predecessors and especially from England. Ireland was envisaged as

Catholic and puritanical, and as deriving its culture from the Gaelic past, from an ancient land of saints and heroes. Russell, in a phrase anticipating Benedict Anderson, aimed to define the nation as "an imagination common to millions of people" (Davies, 1977: 138; Anderson, 1990: 6). But both editors were concerned with the insularity that this accepted but reactionary vision of Ireland could be seen to encourage, entailing the risk of "a prevailing national narcissism" (Brown, 1985: 121).

Russell frequently insisted, therefore, on the definition of the culture being broadened to include external contexts. In July 1929 his editorial comments on the new Labour administration in London, on the issues arising from British and French withdrawal from the Rhineland and on the restructuring of relations between the Free State and Russia (1929: 363-65). Similarly O'Faolain, in a series of editorials under the heading, "One World", adopted a confident cosmopolitan agenda, quoting world statesmen such as Mackenzie King or European philosophers like Benedetto Croce, dealing with such questions as relations within the British Commonwealth or the need for a broader consensus in postwar Europe (1944a; 1-9; 1945a: 277-289; 1945b: 461-471; 1945c: 97-105). One example of his vigorous rhetoric on this theme will suffice:

Is the reader the sort of Republican who wishes his country to take her part in this terrible evolution of European civilisation which is and always may be a recurring series of periods of achievement and defeat, of full living and hard enduring, of rebuilding and new starts, of Peace in which men create splendidly and interruptions of every kind which they struggle to control, avert or, once again, endure until they can once more take up the golden thread? If he is that kind of Irishman he has the right to speak. (1945a: 281)

Both editors, then, shared highly compatible views on the state of Irish culture at these different historical junctures, especially in respect of two crucial issues: their advocacy of the need for developing a more inclusive culture within the new state and their concerns about avoiding isolationism.

III. INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

The intellectual borders of Ireland were, in any case, always porous and open to influence from Europe and Britain. Contemporary political questions such as the decline of Liberalism, linked to the rise of nationalism and broader cultural issues such as modernism and its relationship to modernisation, entailing the alienation of many intellectuals from their own societies, were also reflected in twentieth-century Irish debates. However, the Irish tradition of 'thinking otherwise' ensured a different emphasis upon them (Kearney, 1985: 37). At this stage I would like to relate the work of Russell and O'Faolain to a powerful tradition of 'organic' literary and cultural criticism that was developing in England in the mid-twentieth century, especially associated with the names of T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis and Raymond Williams. Many of Sean O'Faolain's preoccupations in Ireland in the 1940s, such as his devotion to realism, his insistence on 'Life'

as against 'abstractions' as the criterion for critical judgement, and his interests in the interplay between tradition and the role of culture in society were shared with Leavis and Williams (O'Faolain, 1940: 9). As the editor of *Scrutiny*, Leavis had sought to develop Matthew Arnold's critical practice by placing primacy on the moral meanings of literary works and insisting upon the role of culture in civilisation and the need for intellectual stringency in the study of literature (Leavis, 1932: 24). His deepest insights were based on a strongly felt if somewhat nostalgic organicism, derived from critical close readings of literary texts and the consequential development of a cultured and trained sensibility which, echoing Arnold in *The Function of Criticism*, could freely play on all subjects it touched (Collini, 1993: 37). This stance brought him into frequent bruising conflicts, especially with the critical Brahminism of Bloomsbury (perhaps unfairly associated by him with T. S. Eliot and his journal *Criterion*) as well as with Marxist literary critics (Mulhern, 1985: 118) and, again, with the scientific establishment during the "Two Cultures" controversy with C.P. Snow in 1959 (Trilling, 1966: 145-77).

However, Raymond Williams developed Leavis's thinking further, initially along Marxist lines, especially working towards a new discipline of cultural studies, identifying "structures of feeling" that he saw being derived from a state of "deep community that makes communication possible" (1984: 63). This concept of a society based on a realist grasp of the continuity of affective and kinship ties brought him into conflict both with right-wing critics and also with many traditional Marxists. As the editor himself of a left-wing critical review, *Politics and Letters*, Williams argued that "there are two primary tasks for this journal: the creation of an intelligent reading public; and secondly, the creation of a group which could and would intervene politically" (1947: 25). These tasks —reinforcing community, audience creation and creating political impact— bear a close resemblance to the key missions espoused by George Russell in *The Irish Statesman* and by Sean O'Faolain in *The Bell*.

Williams conceded the validity of the work of Marxist critics such as Lukacs and Goldmann in opposing literature as a major affirmative response to the socially repressive forms of industrial capitalism. He also debated the role of realism as "a positive contribution to the process of understanding 'social reality'" (1977: 2, 50). Although his sophisticated discussion of the term in *Keywords* demonstrated his awareness of the structuralist critique of realism, Williams's thinking at this stage stopped short of incorporating the work of Althusser, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes or the linguistic theorists (1990b: 257-62). In this respect Williams represents a crucial shift in the history of literary criticism in his era. It should be remembered that O'Faolain was also a professional literary critic, the author of books about the short story and the novel, espousing a controversial "realist aesthetic", and that his colleague and eventual successor, Peadar O'Donnell, was that rare bird in Ireland of the time, a committed Marxist theorist and practitioner (Smyth, 1998: 85).

The intellectual positions taken by both Russell and O'Faolain deal with contemporary issues that were currently being debated in the first half of the twentieth century. To some degree, indeed, they appear to me to anticipate Raymond Williams's notion of a common

culture, demanding wide participation throughout any given society and placing its ultimate emphasis on the idea of natural growth (Williams, 1990a: 325). As Terry Eagleton has pointed out, this concept retrieves from the organic metaphor a sense of "its radical potential" (2000: 120). Both Russell and O'Faolain are thoughtful liberals with a well-developed sense of the kind of "organic society" they would like to see in post-revolutionary Ireland. Marie Arndt describes O'Faolain as an "undisputed liberal" whose "highly complex and fluid intellectual position" emerged from the extent to which his established principles were under siege (Arndt, 2001: 239). And both Russell and O'Faolain chose to express ideas that (however innocuous they may appear today) ranked as subversive in post-revolutionary Ireland, using for this purpose the medium of the miscellany periodical. Within this long-established but essentially elastic form they were able to encompass a wide variety of different literary modes: editorials, essays, documentaries, poetry, reviews, political opinion and letters.

IV. THE EDITORS: DIFFERENCES

It is difficult to decide whether the similarities or the differences between these editorials, separated in time by seventeen eventful years, are more significant. Let us for now, however, examine some differences. Russell's appeal is to tradition as a binding source of unity between classes and regions. Simultaneously he looks to the past and evokes the future. He has some specific targets and policies in mind: the co-operative movement and agriculture and the need for wider cultural development. In 1911, writing to St. John Ervine he declares that "I am trying hard to socialise Ireland, but I call it co-operation" (Eglinton, 1937: 83). He wanted, maybe unrealistically, "to create a popular culture which would give the people the taste, learning and culture that would replace the rifle of revolutionary days with books and the arts" (Davis, 1977: 139). The lofty and inspirational tone reminds us of Yeats's Anglo-Irish rhetoric: the people of Swift and Burke are being rallied. By way of contrast, O'Faolain's writing is dominated by the present —any future he evokes is not more than three issues away, uncertain and in the hands of yet-to-be discovered writers. The past is dead. Thus any appeal to tradition is effectively forestalled. Life in today's Ireland is experimentally fresh and new and the editor's modernising mission already peeps through his *faux-naïf* assertion, in his opening editorial, that "*The Bell* has, in the usual sense of the word, no policy" (1940: 5).

Indeed, a comparison of the opening editorials of each journal is highly suggestive. Russell (1923, 3-6) desires to avoid personal bitterness and to "look upon all living in Ireland, North or South, as one people". He knows that "the dream of hope which precedes action is often nobler than the realisation" but still "hopes that this journal may help to create alluring images of the future society". He stresses the national importance of agriculture but also points out that there are very few bookshops in Ireland outside the main centres of population. He advocates co-operative associations as centres "not only of economic but of intellectual and cultural life". He will "endeavour to interpret the new self governing Ireland to Irishmen". In his peroration,

freely mixing Enlightenment and Romantic rhetoric, he invokes the names of Swift, Sheridan, Berkeley, Goldsmith and Burke, while declaring that he "wants to make the Irish harp to sound in the orchestra of the nations". The traditional values implicit in the conclusion of this opening editorial may be bound up with the long-standing interest in mysticism that governed Russell's beliefs throughout his life. His novel *The Avatars*, published in 1933, powerfully invokes ancient gods and heroes and their abilities to weave spells and incantations (1933: 11). This mystical bent of Russell's suggests a residual conservatism which sometimes appears at odds with the rationalist, liberal tone of the policies he usually espouses in *The Irish Statesman*.

Sean O'Faolain's opening editorial (1940: 5-9) is very different in tone. Entitled "This is Your Magazine", it begins, as we have noted above, by asserting that "*The Bell* has, in the usual sense of the word, no policy" but, later in the same paragraph, he claims that "by the time you have read three issues you will take its character for granted". The name, *The Bell*, is chosen because it has "a minimum of associations"; he has discarded "all the old symbolic words" which are "as dead as Brian Boru". These old names, he says, "belonged to the world where we growled in defeat and dreamed of the future. That future has arrived and, with its arrival killed them. All of our symbols have to be invented afresh." He goes on to say that "this Ireland is young and earnest" and that "we are living experimentally". An invitation is issued to "unpublished men of talent". He expresses his preference for "the positive to the negative, the creative to the destructive" and ends with the renewed claim that "we are absolutely inclusive".

Russell's instinctive support for the new Ireland and his attempt to exert a benign influence on the future of the Free State (still in 1923 scarcely established in the aftermath of colonisation, revolution and civil war) contrasts sharply with Sean O'Faolain's perception of the "thin society" which that State has, in practice, established (1949: 373). *Æ*'s valedictory editorial in April 1930 regrets the weakness of the Irish audience, leading to the periodical's closure, and attributes this to defects in the Irish education system. He believes, however, that his periodical has helped to reassure Southern Unionists about their place in the new nation and expresses his optimistic belief that *The Irish Statesman* has improved the political education of its readers: "we have passed away from our passionate selves and we are coming slowly to our intellectual selves" (1930: 104). The tone is elegiac, regretful but ultimately hopeful. Contrast this lenitive writing with the more pessimistic note struck in Sean O'Faolain's editorial, "Signing Off", in April 1946, which records his growing weariness with:

abusing our bourgeoisie, Little Irelanders, chauvinists, stuffed-shirts, pietists, Tartuffes, Angbphobes, Celtophiles... What I am mainly left with is a certain amount of regret that we were born into this thorny time when our task has been less that of cultivating our garden than of clearing away the brambles. (April 1946: 1)

O'Faolain goes on to celebrate the factual and realist nature of the writing in *The Bell* and to warn about the dangers of "a parochial Ireland". These contrasts in the self-evaluation of the two journals illustrate the miscellany form's ability to develop new terms of debate about current

issues in changing historical situations. What we are glimpsing here is a historical process where a post-revolutionary rhetoric based on tradition, hope and expectation is being supplanted by an alternative approach, asserting modernisation, opposition and challenge.

V. THE MISCELLANY GENRE

A brief exploration of the historical evolution of the miscellany will help us to set the transitions between *The Irish Statesman* and *The Bell* against the background of their influential predecessors in the genre. The miscellany periodical originated in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was quickly imported, subject to some subtle adaptations, into Ireland. Early English examples include the *Gentleman S Magazine*, which in 1731 first mischievously circumvented the rules of Parliamentary Privilege by disguising its reports of proceedings as "Debates in the Senate of Lilliput". Nineteenth-century examples in England include the *Athenaeum* and the *Cornhill*, aimed at the increasingly influential middle classes. Early Irish miscellanies include *The Hibernian Magazine: or Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge*, which provided Dublin in 1771 with a characteristic mix of gossip, documentary and creative writing. Between 1807 and 1815, the *Irish Magazine and Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography*, also known as *Watty Cox S Magazine*, specialised, according to Kevin Whelan, in "raking over the embers of 1798 in abusive, even scurrilous detail" and was distinguished by its adversarial writing, robust sense of humour and demotic style (1996: 164). Some of the characteristics and adaptations of the miscellany become evident even in this briefest of accounts: what starts as gossip and entertainment, distinguishing the miscellany from the solemn review genre, yields to the inclusion of more serious (and sometimes illicit) elements, which, in the context of a colonised country, include the covert distribution of information, instruction and subversion to a wider, less elite audience.

The miscellany disappeared from Ireland during the later nineteenth century, possibly as a result of the pervasive censorship and the absence of non-sectarian debate, but the form re-emerged powerfully in the early part of the twentieth century, with Standish James O'Grady's *The All Ireland Review* (1900-6) followed in 1904-5 by *Dana: A Magazine of Zndependent Thought*, edited anonymously (but probably by John Eglinton and Frederick Ryan). The *Irish Statesman* appears, as we have seen, in 1923 and *Ireland Today* follows in its wake in 1936. In the two years before its suppression in 1938, *Ireland Today* assembled together critics of the cultural poverty of the new nation's post-revolutionary society and advocated an international perspective, including support for the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War (Furze, 1974: 21). This summary of the history of the Irish miscellany genre demonstrates a number of common characteristics which were undoubtedly reflected in the production of *The Irish Statesman* and *The Bell*. It also supplies a common generic context within which we can be more sure of our judgements about the processes of change which took place between 1923 and 1940.

I believe that in the Irish miscellany genre a model was established which influenced both

Russell and O'Faolain. Common characteristics of the *genre*, which appear in all the examples I have cited, include, as we have already seen, the mixing of factual and creative writing, together with a sharp focus on internal Irish affairs, matched against a lively interest in the world outside Ireland. In the miscellany periodical texts can be strategically arranged by editors, providing explicit or (more usually) implicit comments on one another. For example, in the issue of *The Bell* in January 1942 O'Faolain produces an effect of this kind. An editorial complaining about the weak public response to the memorial fund for the poet, F. R. Higgins, is immediately followed by two newly commissioned poems by Irish poets, implying the strength of the poetic tradition despite the poverty of the nation's response to it. An account of a neglected Irish poet, Thomas Irwin, is immediately preceded by an article on the damage done by the literary censorship. The effect of these strategic juxtapositions is to bring together suggestions of official neglect with assertions of the vitality of the literary tradition that the magazine perceives to be under siege (O'Faolain, 1942: *passim*).

Other characteristics of the miscellany include the recruitment of industrial and commercial support and the strong dominance of editorial presence (even where the editorship is ostensibly collective or anonymous). Questions about the practicalities of editing process are frequently overlooked but I believe that the similarities in editorial practice between the two magazines are quite striking. I have expanded further on the marginalisation of the study of editorial practice in a separate essay on the topic (Ballin, 2001). We know, for instance, that O'Faolain was notoriously interventionist and that he personally contributed more articles to the magazine than anyone else (Holzapfel, 1970). Russell had at least four pen-names under which he wrote for *The Irish Statesman*, in addition to the well-known "Æ" (Davis, 1977: 124). Both editors had personal reputations for versatility entirely appropriate to exponents of the miscellany form: Yeats said that Russell displayed "an impassioned versatility" (Gibbon, 1937: 62) and Julia Moynihan perceived in O'Faolain "the curse of versatility" (1976: 20). *The Irish Statesman* was financed by Horace Plunkett, aided by a group of Irish Americans, leading to the relatively large-scale advertising revenue and a highly competitive price which created envy among its Republican rivals (Allen, 2000: 8). *The Bell* had support from some prominent industrialists who welcomed O'Faolain's ideas about the desirability of a modernised Ireland and regularly gave help by placing advertisements. Cahill's the printers were also active supporters: J. J. O'Leary, their Managing Director, paid O'Faolain a thousand a year to edit his journals and supplied him with office space (Harmon, 1994: 128-129).

The magazines were also connected in other, more personal ways. Sean O'Faolain wrote his first published story, "Lilliput", for *The Irish Statesman* in 1926 and described *The Irish Statesman*, in his autobiography *Vive Moi*, as being "of an excellence never before or since equalled in Irish journalism" (1965: 186). In his "One World" editorials in May 1945, writing about the future of international relations and the role of the new United Nations, O'Faolain paid tribute to the prescience of his predecessor's journalism:

It is evident that should these vast schemes ultimately take shape Ireland will have to do some very hard and quick thinking during the coming year. It is only a few years since that prophetic Irishman A.E. used to keep on hammering away at us week after week that the island spirit was giving way to the cosmic spirit, and his words are becoming more and more imminently true. (1945c: 105)

The process of modelling between periodical genres usually appears to work, at a subliminal level, as an almost instinctive election of an appropriate literary form for a particular purpose. In the case of *The Irish Statesman* and *The Bell*, however, a more direct process of influence seems to be discernible. It is appropriate, at this point, to spend a little time considering how a periodical genre like the miscellany is formed and how it operates.

VI. THEORETICAL APPROACH TO THE MISCELLANY GENRE

Tony Bennett has argued that "reading practices are, in part, organised by the system of genre expectations brought to bear on specific texts" and that such texts can be made to "hum and reverberate to the full range of meanings and effects they have furnished a site for" (1987: 72). I would now like to consider how "the system of genre expectations" is generated in the miscellany form and how it can illuminate the behaviour of the texts concerned. The miscellany belongs to the group of writings characterised by Mikhail Bakhtin as "secondary mixed genres, composed of variously transformed primary genres" (1986: 78). The concept of dialogism, as developed by Bakhtin, emphasises the interdependence of literary forms and the importance of intertextual relationships. Arguing that writing always distinguishes itself from other writing within the same universe of discourse, Bakhtin, in a key passage, relates this to polemical productions:

Internally polemical discourse —the word with a sideways glance at someone else's hostile word— is extremely widespread in practical everyday speech as well as in literary speech, and has enormous style making significance [...]. In literary speech the significance of the hidden polemic is enormous. In every style, strictly speaking, there is an element of hidden polemic. (1984: 196)

Applying this to periodical production, much of which has polemical content, one can sense, in the self-conscious choice of a particular genre, the articulation of this process of differentiation. The thinking of Bakhtin about various serio-comic genres, such as "carnivalised literature" and Menippean satire, described as "deliberately multi-styled and hetero-voiced" and as having a "pointed interest in the topics of the day", fits with some precision a twentieth-century periodical in the miscellany form, such as *The Bell*.

Bakhtin remarks of these mixed forms that:

The first characteristic of all genres of the serio-comical is their new relationship to reality; their subject, or what is more important —their starting point for understanding, evaluating and shaping reality is the living present — often the everyday. (1984: 196)

It is illuminating to set against this abstract conceptualisation the following words of Sean O'Faolain in his May 1941 editorial, where he articulates in a direct and concrete way his own positive attitude towards time and modernity:

This merit of acute contemporaneity is the attraction of every live periodical. That is why people buy periodicals. As the saying goes, 'it keeps one in touch.' It comes from where the crowds jostle at the crossroads. (1941b: 8)

Here we see O'Faolain setting out the generic appeal of the miscellany. "The merit of acute contemporaneity" is what he brings to the Irish miscellany form, in a periodical dedicated to new writing, to precise documentation of existing conditions in present-day Ireland and to preparing the way for a long-delayed process of modernisation.

Indeed, here he not only fulfils Bakhtin's prescription for a particular relation to reality in "the living present" but also anticipates Raymond Williams's argument for the importance of accessing the "structure of feeling" of a culture, entailing a "felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combine together into a way of thinking and living" (1984: 63). In *The Long Revolution* Williams, like O'Faolain, "inverts the image of a crass modernity, and challenges the easy nostalgia for the apparent order of pre-democratic society" (Higgins, 1998: 147). O'Faolain's striking image of the crowds jostling at the crossroads invokes exactly the kind of creative carnivalesque which Bakhtin ascribes to the serio-comic genres. O'Faolain is making a social comment about the nature of periodicals and Bakhtin is speaking of a style of discourse. But the style of *The Bell* relates intimately to its emphasis on the everyday. It discards the Romantic mysticism which characterised the Irish literary revival, a mode of writing that preoccupied George Russell throughout his life and which also provides the prevailing tone of other contemporary Irish periodicals such as Seumas O'Sullivan's *The Dublin Magazine*. *The Bell* enshrines in its "sideways glance" at the opposition's rhetoric an element of "hidden polemic" in favour of a wholly different view of the world. This seems to me to indicate the direction in which the Irish miscellany has developed between the historical moment of *The Irish Statesman* and that of *The Bell*.

VII. AUDIENCES

The sense of immediacy which is provoked in O'Faolain's editorial practice in *The Bell* is linked to the final consideration I would like to deal with — that of a distinctive search for an alternative audience for the miscellany. John Eglinton tells how *The Irish Statesman* hails an audience described by Russell himself as being large but very reactionary, something which was difficult for Russell (whose self-image is said to be that of being "on the side of the outcast") to accept with ease (Eglinton, 1937: 83; 151). Monk Gibbon reports Æ's reservations about "vast numbers of semi-illiterates [...] whose triumph would be to place genius in service to

rmediocrity" (1937: 190). In an editorial of November 1923 Russell speaks of the poor reception of Yeats's Nobel Prize in Ireland and attributes the relative indifference of the Irish people to their general lack of education (1923: 326). In the same issue, writing of the Irish language, a proponent of Irish refers to "E's great family of readers and writers" as being an elite especially able to apply intelligence to the issue under discussion (O'Neill, 1923: 329). But, in his farewell editorial in 1930, Russell reckons that the audience for Irish writing is greater abroad than at home and, in the same final issue, he publishes a letter from "Amicus" suggesting that *The Irish Statesman* was "too literary" to survive (1930: 103; 112). Nicholas Allen suggests that *The Irish Statesman* enjoyed a circulation of some ten thousand copies for the first six issues and that it appealed to a clientele which included the wealthiest and most influential Irish citizens. He points out how the journal inherited the readership of Russell's former publication, the *Irish Homestead*, which had been incorporated into it at its inception (2000: 8-9). Essentially then the audience can be seen as traditional, middle-class and well-established. Russell's primary role in this context is that of an educator with superior insight.

This differs considerably from the audience actively sought by *The Bell*, seventeen years later. We have already noted the ambition to be inclusive reflected in O'Faolain's early editorials. The circulation was far smaller than that for *The Irish Statesman*, probably not exceeding three and a half thousand copies of most issues although O'Faolain, in a self-conscious act of intertextual affiliation, echoed the belief of Thomas Davis, in relation to *The Nation*, that each copy had a multiple readership of about ten people (1944: 95). The net was, however, set far wider in social terms and the successful interpellation of this wider audience of "small town intellectuals" was seen by Vivian Mercier as the journal's greatest feat (1945: 159). This particular constituency is more closely identified by Conor Cruise O'Brien (writing in *The Bell* as Donat O'Donnell) as "the teachers, the civil servants, the librarians, the lettered section of the Irish petty bourgeoisie" (1946: 1030). This is a social grouping which may be relatively powerless in conventional political terms but which, nevertheless, is identified by Pierre Bourdieu as especially open to the processes of social and cultural change (1986: 319-370). This audience was to come to play in Ireland a role not unlike that ascribed by Antonio Gramsci to the rural intellectuals of Italy: the priests, the notaries and doctors whose activities were seen by him as crucial to any development of opinion among the mass of the population (Gramsci, 1971: 14).

A contemporary witness recalls the dissident, teasing tone of the magazine, bought by him clandestinely in Ennis in 1940 and privately circulated to his friends:

A pervasive and enviable daring was acknowledged, as was the common touch evident in what one unrecognised genius described as "the editor's orchestration of a score no other conductor would touch". (Foley, 1976: 57)

This sense of provocation is an integral part of *The Bell's* appeal to an audience that, by and large, it actually created. Audience relations with this special group are strongly reinforced

by such **unusual** measures as interrogating the readership by **questionnaire**, soliciting readers' letters and canvassing readers in search of original contributions by new writers. And the sense of daring gains added piquancy from the awareness of both formal and informal censorships. Indeed, Terence Brown **sees** the position of *The Bell* in respect of censorship as defining the ideological struggle in Ireland in the 1940s and describes it in this context as "a vital organ of empirical, humanistic self-consciousness at a moment when the new state was entering on a period of profound challenge" (1981: 203). Seamus Deane says of the group of writers associated with *The Bell* that "the exit from the labyrinth of Irishness, **the old essentialism, lay** in modernisation. the creation of a possible future rather than the recreation of an impossible past" (1986: 208). Both critics recognise that this miscellany has made a decisive intervention in Irish cultural history. Although, in his final, and rather despairing editorial, O'Faolain describes his **role** as merely a clearer of nettles from the ground of history, a more positive, less depressed and more generous reading **would credit** *The Bell* with a significant share in preparing the way for the public acceptance during the 1960s of the modernising policies of Sean Lemass.

We **have** now traced **some** transitions in the Irish miscellany from its original predecessors in the **genre**, flowing from the English models of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries up to the Irish adaptations **available** to, and developed creatively in turn by, George Russell and Sean O'Faolain. The fluidity of this **genre** is illustrated further by the **sensitivity** it displays to the changing political and **literary** situations presented to it by the impact of historical events and social change. A remarkable success of both *The Irish Statesman* and *The Bell* lies in their ability, in Bakhtin's terms, to disguise polemic, to wear ideologies **lightly** and to signify a challenge to contemporary conventional wisdom through the **skilful** way they weave between the multiplicity of miscellaneous discourses they encompass. The dissidence inherent in the **genre** stems not **only** from **overt** propaganda or obvious educational intent but **also** from a provocative use of the interplay between editorial comment, audience interaction, **creative** writing and factual reporting. The nature of a miscellany is to be various: concealed within that carnivalesque variety of interwined texts lies a dangerous and delightful potential for **creative mischief**.

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