

Ireland's Exiled Children: America and the Easter Rising

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Pages 268-270

Although the “exiled children in America” are given a special mention in the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, the transatlantic connections that facilitated the 1916 Rising have often been glossed over. Robert Schmuhl’s engaging study *Ireland’s Exiled Children: America and the Easter Rising* is built around the rather bold claim that “to a large extent, the roots of the Rising grew in US soil and the American reaction proved critical to determining its consequences” (2). Drawing on a range of journalistic and contemporary sources, Schmuhl comprehensively substantiates this claim, and in doing so sheds much needed light on another important aspect of the Easter Rising.

The title of the book, however, is arguably misleading. Rather than consider the roles and responses of the collective American diaspora, Schmuhl seeks to illustrate the complexities of American involvement in the Rising through the lens of the lives of four significant male figures, namely John Devoy, Joyce Kilmer, Woodrow Wilson and Éamon De Valera.

In discussing the Fenian leader, John Devoy, Schmuhl outlines the significant influence wielded by Irish America in the practical steps of planning the Rising. While American contributions to the Irish cause are often largely considered in terms of financial supports – a fact that is indeed supported by Devoy’s successful funnelling of over \$100,000 to Ireland in the lead up to the Rising (29) –, Schmuhl also considers the significance of the United States as an ideological breeding ground. Remarkably, five of the signatories of the proclamation, namely Joseph Clarke, James Connolly, Seán Mac Diarmada, P.H. Pearse and Joseph Mary Plunkett, all spent time in the United States. As is particularly pertinent in the case of Pearse, the radicalism and zeal of the Irish America may have paved the rebels’ road to revolution. Schmuhl also speculates on the significance of American neutrality in the initial period of the First World War in facilitating Devoy and Roger Casement’s collaboration with German Ambassador to the United States, Count von Bernstorff.

As a professor of media studies, Schmuhl’s detailed understanding of the war of words in the press is particularly noteworthy. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Rising, Devoy extended the fight for Irish freedom by ensuring that the rebels were presented favourably in his paper, *The Gaelic American*, while simultaneously railing against other journalists for their perceived inaccuracies and bias against the Irish cause. Although facts were often erroneous due to British censorship and difficulties in reporting, the extensive coverage of the Easter Rising in the United States was unmatched in any other country, with news of the Rising being featured on the cover of the *New York Times* on seventeen occasions over the course of nineteen days (46). While Schmuhl postulates that the various Pro- and Anti-Rising viewpoints in the media enabled the population to draw their own conclusions regarding the Rising, it would have been helpful to further unpack exactly to what extent newspaper coverage corresponded with public opinion.

Indeed, the most arresting chapter in this study focuses on the fascinating story of the journalist and poet Joyce Kilmer. As a contributor to *The New York Times*, Kilmer opposed the largely anti-Rising editorial policy of the newspaper by publishing a number of articles drawing attention to the poetic endeavours of leading figures involved in the Rising, and thus established their reputation as “men of

letters". Included in the appendix is an interview by Kilmer's with Cumann na mBan member Moira Ryan. This article was republished in Ireland, despite the best efforts of the Press Censor's office to suppress material from the American press. The treatment of Kilmer in this study is intriguing. Although Kilmer alleged that he was half-Irish, genealogical research has established that this claim was unfounded. Rather, Kilmer's sympathy with the Irish cause was a result of his emotional attachment to Irish literary culture and his conversion to Roman Catholicism. Despite the many obvious complexities that accompany Kilmer's pseudo-Irish identity, Schmuhl notes that, "In his mind, as well as in his heart, he, too, was one of the exiled children" (46).

While Kilmer is admired for his "fictionalized ethnicity" (75), Schmuhl is highly critical of President Woodrow Wilson for his failure to support the Irish cause despite his Ulster heritage. Schmuhl probes the ways in which Wilson courted Irish America during the 1912 presidential election campaign, yet subsequently failed to deliver on his rhetorical sympathies. Despite Wilson's endorsement of the right of nations to "self-determination", his domestic objectives of increased patriotism through minimisation of ethnic heritage seemingly superseded his commitment to help the Irish cause, culminating in his refusal to advance the Irish Question at the Paris Peace Conference. While Wilson's personal secretary Joseph Patrick Tumulty purportedly sent supportive replies in the President's name to members of the Irish American community, Wilson's own private writings reveal a far more scathing view of Irish American demands. However, Schmuhl's criticism of Wilson for his failure to endorse Irish independence seems to be based on the belief that, as an Irishman, Wilson was in "denial" of his own identity as an Irish exile, as evident in the chapter subtitle, "The Denial of Exile". This criticism does not seem to give due consideration to the political expectations that the President should not interfere with what may be deemed as the domestic affairs of other states, nor consideration to Wilson's genuine support for Home Rule. Moreover, accusing Wilson, who came from Scots-Irish Presbyterian stock, of "denying" his Irish identity by failing to share the aspirations of Irish America, which was overwhelmingly Catholic and nationalist, also proves problematic in its narrow conception of Irish identity.

Schmuhl's final chapter comprehensively debunks the widely perceived myth that Éamon De Valera escaped execution during the Easter Rising due to his American citizenship. Schmuhl provides an extensive historiography of emergence of this myth – which largely was born in the United States – and charts how the enigmatic De Valera himself, aware of the advantages of strong transatlantic ties, allowed this fiction to grow. In a statement written in 1969, De Valera clarified that his escape from court-martial resided in the timing of executions and Primer Minister Asquith's decision to end the executions. This chapter is of great importance to scholars of Irish Studies given the continued prevalence of this misconception in both popular and academic studies.

Although limited to four case studies, Schmuhl's book paints an absorbing and provocative picture of the transatlantic dimensions of the Easter Rising and should encourage other scholars to follow his lead in further scrutinising the Irish American experience of the revolutionary period at large.

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