

Literature Censorship in Ireland

This resource uses items from the National Library collection to explore the history of censorship in Ireland from 1929 in various forms of literature such as magazines, newspapers and books.

The history of censorship in Ireland is closely aligned with the formation of the new Irish Free State. Religious campaigners were insistent that obscene influences from foreign, and particularly British, publications be restricted. Moral reform did quickly enter the legislation of the Free State. While the Censorship of Publications Act did not go into effect until 1929, film was censored in 1923.

The Censorship of Publications Act is an interesting piece of legislation in the way it operates. The public and various authorities could send complaints to a board of censors for review. Scholars have called this a “license for busybodies.” Some Catholic societies of the day, such as the Catholic Truth Society, would organise their members to send submissions in. The Irish censors banned 1,193 books. Censorship later increased dramatically around the 1950s.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Censorship of Publications Act, 1929

An act to make provision for the prohibition of the sale and distribution of unwholesome literature and for that purpose to provide for the establishment of a censorship of books and periodical publication, and to restrict the publication of reports of certain classes of judicial proceedings and for other purposes incidental to the matters aforesaid. [16th July, 1929.]

PAUSE: What do you think the writers meant by “unwholesome literature?” Can you think of any examples of early 20th century literature that Ireland banned?

Though the act did not go into effect until 1929, discussions of censorship in Ireland and government involvement had been building for a few years. On the next page see an example of a handbill from 1927!

THE BLACK LIST

CLASS I.

The large Majority of this list (Class 1) are habitually rankly immoral; the small remainder are very frequently so.

News of the World
The Sunday News
Reynold's Newspaper
Illustrated Police News
Thompson's Weekly News
Lansbury's Labour Weekly
World's Pictorial News
The Empire News
The Sunday Chronicle
Health and Strength
Health and Efficiency

The Cinema Star and
Photo Bits
John Bull
London Life
The Winning Post Annual
(Summer and Winter
editions)
The Sporting Times
(known as the Pink 'Un)
London Mail

CLASS II.

The following are extremely undesirable:

London Opinion
The Smart Set
Mascot Novels
Peg's Companion
Betty's Paper
Girl's Companion
Answers' Library
Smart Novels
Royal Magazine
Pears' Annual
Home Companion
Pam's Paper
Girls' Cinema

Woman's Weekly
The Picture Show
Woman's World
Eve's Own Stories
My Pocket Novels
Peg's Paper
Dainty Novels
Nash's Magazine
London Magazine
Ideas
Girls' Mirror
Girls' Favourite

CLASS III.

This class is of the milk-sop character. We are examining a few dozen specimens to be exhibited in the Dail when the subject comes on for discussion.

CONTEXT CLUES: Based on the descriptions and types of publications under Class I and II what do you think was presented to the Dail for consideration under Class III?

TERMINOLOGY: Consider what the term “milk-sop” means.



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This broadside advertisement could be placed on a sandwich board and represented *The Standard* which was a weekly Catholic newspaper in Dublin. The date issued is October 26th and though no year is given we can assume it was between 1926-1928, before the Censorship act went into place.



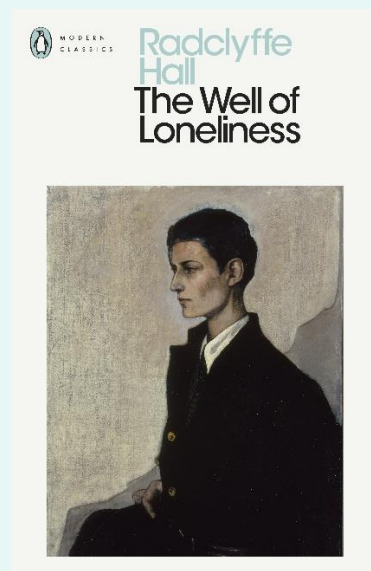
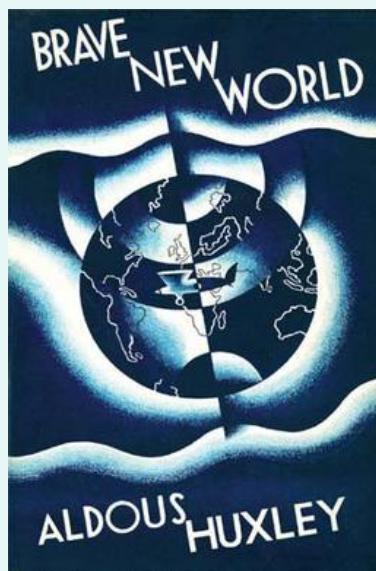
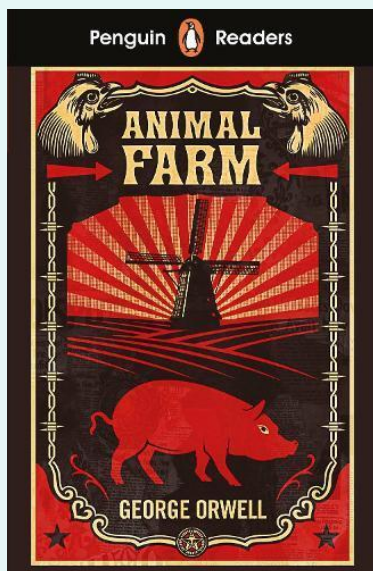
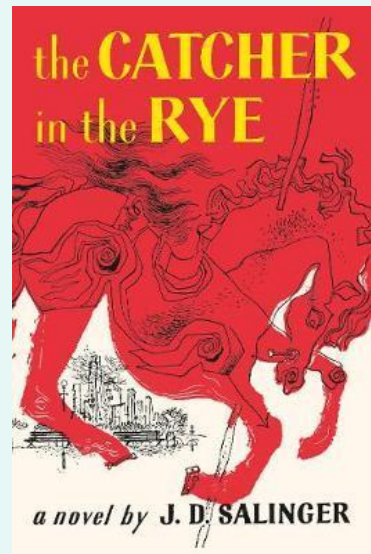
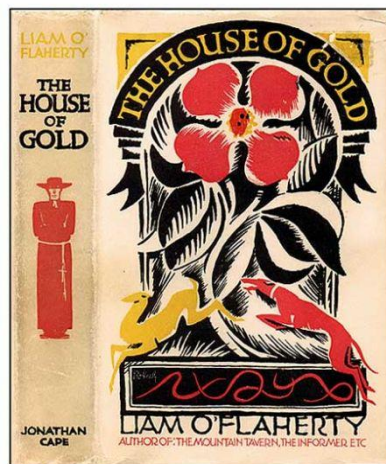
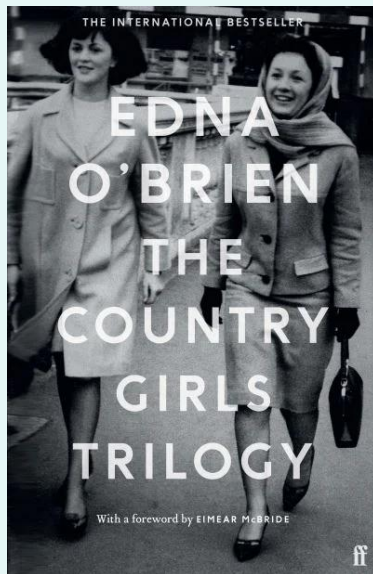
*Reance to
100
Sunday
Independent*

Gordon Brewster was an editorial cartoonist for the Irish Independent group of newspapers.

This cartoon was published in the Sunday Independent sometime between 1922 and 1927.

© National Library of Ireland PD 2199 TX 439

ANALYSE: What position is Brewster taking? What is he saying about modern novelists and their motivations?



BANNED: Above are books that were banned in Ireland over the years. Can you match each title with the reason associated with its censorship? Write the title next to the description.

1. Themes of drug use, sexuality, dehumanization of society, challenged societal norms and critiqued totalitarianism
2. Profanity and adolescent rebellion as corrupting for young readers
3. A focus on lesbian relationships and the struggles of LGBTQ+ individuals
4. Government satire and critique of communism was viewed as destabilizing
5. Depiction of female sexuality and challenging gender roles was viewed as immoral and obscene
6. First novel to be banned in Ireland, for “minor affronts to decency”



© National Library of Ireland PD 3045

This cartoon was created by David Low, an Australian cartoonist who worked in London for the United Kingdom. This particular cartoon was published in Evening Standard on December 6th, 1930. It references the banning of books by Doctor Marie Stopes by the Irish Censorship Board.

ANALYSE: What is happening in this image? Describe the interactions taking place and look for any context clues that can help you understand more about the scene.

Cumann Chun Saoirse Inntleachtula
IRISH SOCIETY FOR INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM.

President—Madame Gonne-MacBride.

Vice-Presidents—Mrs. H. Sheehy-Skeffington, Mr. Lennox Robinson.

Executive Officers—Gerard Grimley, Victor Meally, Rosamund Jacob, Lorna Reynolds, Sean Dorman,
Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, Robert Dawson.

OBJECTS OF THE SOCIETY

1. To secure the Repeal of the Censorship of Publications Act, 1929.
2. To secure the Repeal of certain British Customs and Postal Laws, relating to Books, still in force in Ireland.
3. To resist attempts on the part of booksellers, librarians, and others, to exercise an unofficial censorship of books.

(NOTE:—The Censorship of Publications Act is the Law under which books and other publications are suppressed for alleged indecency. It is not to be confused with the wartime censorship, under the Emergency Powers Act, upon military and political matters. The Society is not concerned with the latter).

Persons willing to work for the above objects are asked to join the Society. The minimum Subscription for Members is 2/6 yearly; non-members who are sympathetic to the objects of the Society can help by subscribing—as generously as possible—to the Society's Funds.

Correspondence should be addressed to:—

Mr. Gerard Grimley, 10 Charlemont Street, Dublin.

BUY THE
ANTI-CENSORSHIP MONTHLY.

6d. per copy at Meetings; by post, 2/- per quarter, to any address in Ireland.

ORDER FORM.

Please send me copies of the ANTI-CENSORSHIP MONTHLY to

M.....

for which I now send

(Please write in Block Capitals).

Above is an order form to subscribe to the publication 'Anti-Censorship Monthly.'

READ: Look at the objects of the society and the key players involved in heading it.

BRAINSTORM: Think about what actions the society would have to undertake to meet their aims.

Key Players for Anti-Censorship



Maud Gonne

Gonne was a nationalist, political activist and actress. She is frequently associated with W.B. Yeats and is the subject of many of his poems. Gonne can be explored more through the NLIs Yeats exhibition.



Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington

H. Sheehy-Skeffington was an activist and politician. In 1926 she was appointed to the Fianna Fail party executive. She was a strong proponent of women's suffrage and gender equality. More about Hanna can be found out through the NLIs "Revealing History" series.



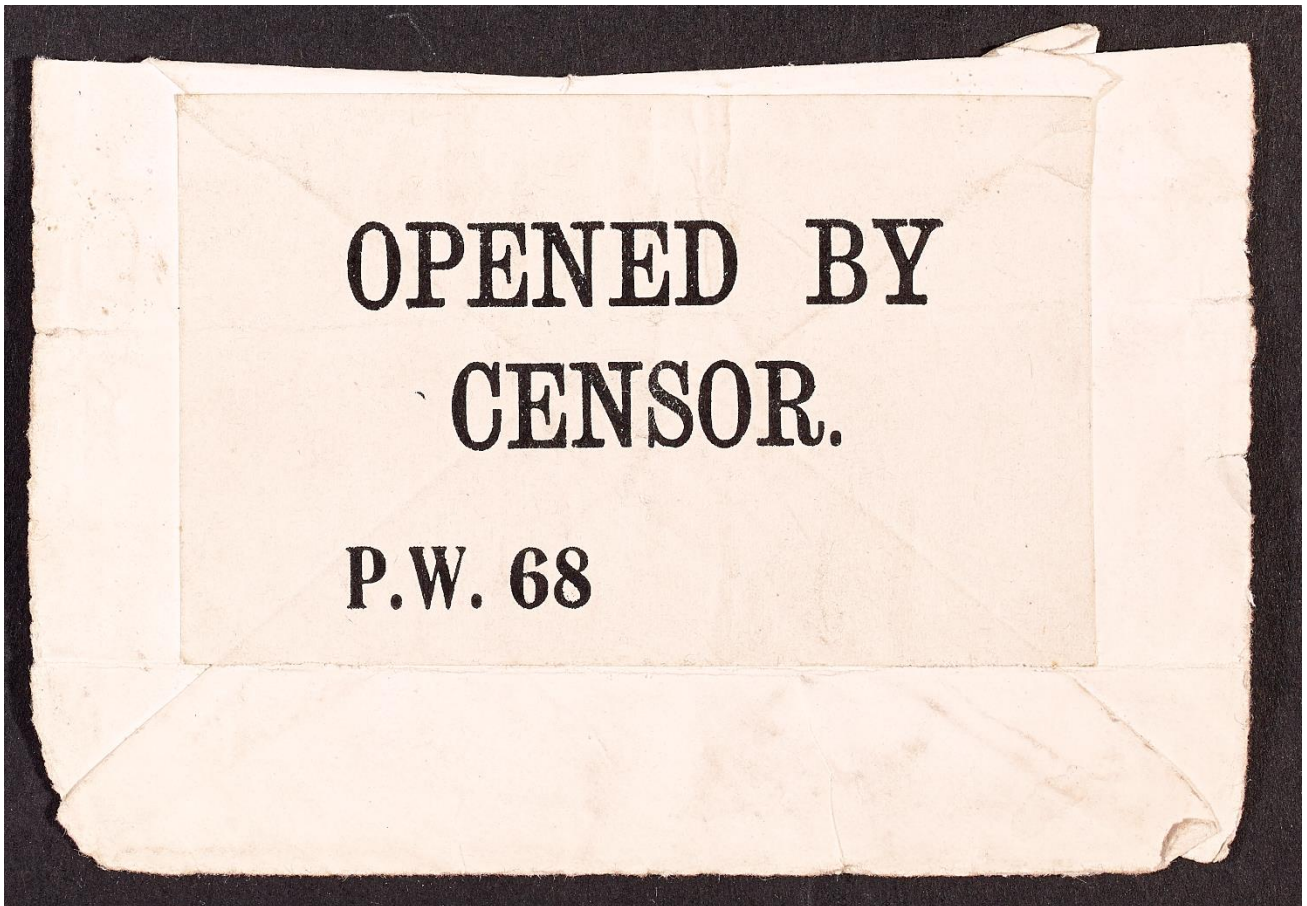
Lennox Robinson

Robinson was a playwright, director and served as manager of the Abbey Theatre for a few years from 1909. He also worked as a librarian for the Carnegie Trust until he was dismissed in 1924 due to controversy over the subject matter of one of his short stories.

Censorship in Other Contexts

The previous pages have discussed book banning and literature censorship in the Irish Free State; however, censorship was predominant in other forms prior to this.

Censorship has been used as a military tactic and to limit correspondence in times of conflict as well. The following letters between Mary Josephine Plunkett, Countess Plunkett and George Noble Plunkett, Count Plunkett while the Count was being held in Mountjoy prison demonstrate this.



© National Library of Ireland MS 20,766/7

Example of a sticker attached to an envelope signifying that it had been read by a censor.

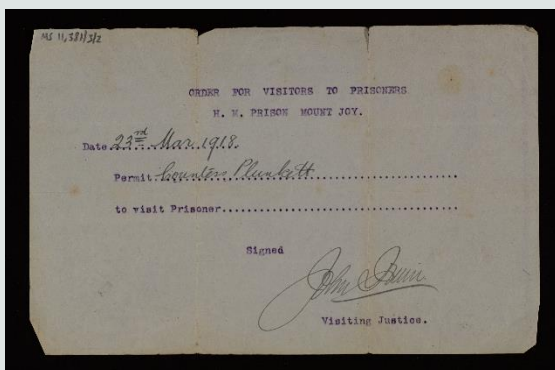
Meet the Correspondents



Count George Noble Plunkett

Plunkett was a Catholic revolutionary born in Dublin in 1851. He became the Director of the National Museum in 1907. While in this role he increased annual visits from 100 to 3,000. In April 1916, he was sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood by his son, Joseph Plunkett.

He was interred in 1918. Plunkett was anti-treaty and headed the Cumann na Poblachta. This position led to him being interred again in 1923.



Countess Mary Josephine Plunkett

Mary Josephine was the wife of George Noble Plunkett. Here in the collection we have her permit to visit her husband in Mountjoy Prison. In between visit, they wrote letters to each other which were censored and redacted.

BIRMINGHAM PRISON.

15A

23rd August 1918

My dear wife, — No letter today. I wrote you a business letter yesterday; I hope it won't be stopped or delayed, for it contains an instruction for my solicitor. What between delays and suppressions I am uncertain what messages from me are reaching you. For all the generous promises of "letters in 24 hours" and "3 letters a week," letters are stopped constantly, and it seems deliberate that I seldom get one letter in a week, and I'm often 10 days and more without the letters awaiting me! And many from you and me seem never to reach their destinations. I wonder is this kind of nuisance to go on as long as I am "detained" in this fly-trap? —

MS 11, 375/6/8

© National Library of Ireland MS 11,375/6/8

READ: What does Plunkett say about how correspondence is being affected?

M

Mountjoy, 18th May, '23

a *cara* Dilly, I wrote to you on Tuesday, as usual, one green letter, and another on business. I had a long talk with John O'Mahony - he and the other deported men can (and will) give a good account of themselves. - Bob Barton is in Newbridge, I hear. (I think I wrote you that.) Ernie is better, but the [redacted] are still [redacted]. So glad to hear you are all well. I answered you, as well as I can remember, all your points. I am waiting for the settlement of "The Roman Question!" I am very comfortable, and the fine supply of food you send saves me from the [redacted] supplies. [redacted] the bread and milk (and Friday rice) are [redacted] to eat. The meat and 'cabbage' look like a [redacted]. - How goes business? There's a man just come who was arrested (a second time) because he worked [redacted]!! Ah, well, we are nearing the end, I feel sure; the money-bags are running dry! God bless you all, Your loving Husband

MS 11,375/12/6

INTERPRET: The black marks on this letter show areas that were redacted. Read closely and consider why these areas might have been censored.

Activity: Blackout Poetry

Blackout poetry is an opportunity to create your own poem from within a piece of text.

You will be given pages of text from an encyclopaedia, novel or other piece of literature.
Your poem is hidden inside these words somewhere.

Analyse the structure and words, think about poetic devices and what story you can tell within it. Black out or redact all the words you no longer need. Remember that the words you keep in order will form your poem. Feel free to decorate the page as well.



Leabharlann
Náisiúnta
na hÉireann
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