



*Leabharlann
Náisiúnta
na hÉireann*

National Library
of Ireland

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. Censorship advocates saw it as an integral part of the Irish nationalist movement. As the government was formed, many wanted a new state that was Catholic, Gaelic and independent. They wanted to protect Irish culture—and as such, censorship became part of the Irish nationalist movement. Religious campaigners also pressured the new government for censorship laws. They insisted that what they saw as obscene influences, from foreign and often British publications, mainly newspapers and magazines initially, be restricted.

Moral reform did quickly enter the legislation of the Free State. Film was censored in 1923, with the Censorship of Publications Act following in 1929, based on recommendations that the Committee on Evil Literature presented to the Oireachtas.

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. In 1930, they banned around 100 items. Through the 50s, this dramatically increased with around 600 a year between the years 1950-1955.

ANALYSE | Take a look at this political cartoon by Gordon Brewster. Gordon Brewster was an editorial cartoonist for the Irish Independent group of newspapers. This cartoon was published in the Evening Herald.

Look at both the imagery and text. Using the introduction you just read, what observations can you make from this?



EPH B828

PICTURE STORIES OF THE DAY



NEW AIR ENTRY OF BATTLESHIP.—The biplane, equipped in accordance with the air war, is shown in the air, showing the wings of the plane and the engine in the foreground.



ROYAL WIFE TO ACHIEVE.—The King and Queen, accompanied by a detachment of the Royal Irish Dragoon Guards, are shown in the foreground, with the King on horseback.



THE SEVENTH DIVISION.—The dragon, as the Government, is shown in the foreground, with the King and Queen in the background.



THE LADY'S GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP.—The lady is shown in the foreground, with the King and Queen in the background.



CHARITY CONCERT.—A group of children, who took part in the recent charity concert, are shown in the foreground.



A scene from "The Irish Revolution."—The scene is shown in the foreground, with the King and Queen in the background.



A beautiful picture of a woman.—The woman is shown in the foreground, with the King and Queen in the background.



A scene from "The Irish Revolution."—The scene is shown in the foreground, with the King and Queen in the background.

LATEST NEWS. CITY SPECIAL EDITION.

HOUSE PRICES FOR REMOVAL.
The house prices for removal, as shown in the City Special Edition, are as follows: The house at No. 1, 1/2, 1/4, 1/8, 1/16, 1/32, 1/64, 1/128, 1/256, 1/512, 1/1024, 1/2048, 1/4096, 1/8192, 1/16384, 1/32768, 1/65536, 1/131072, 1/262144, 1/524288, 1/1048576, 1/2097152, 1/4194304, 1/8388608, 1/16777216, 1/33554432, 1/67108864, 1/134217728, 1/268435456, 1/536870912, 1/1073741824, 1/2147483648, 1/4294967296, 1/8589934592, 1/17179869184, 1/34359738368, 1/68719476736, 1/137438953472, 1/274877906944, 1/549755813888, 1/1099511627776, 1/2199023255552, 1/4398046511104, 1/8796093022208, 1/17592186044416, 1/35184372088832, 1/70368744177664, 1/140737488355328, 1/281474976710656, 1/562949953421312, 1/1125899906842624, 1/2251799813685248, 1/4503599627370496, 1/9007199254740992, 1/18014398509481984, 1/36028797018963968, 1/72057594037927936, 1/144115188075855872, 1/288230376151711744, 1/576460752303423488, 1/1152921504606846976, 1/2305843009213693952, 1/4611686018427387904, 1/9223372036854775808, 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There were already existing obscenity laws in Ireland, but some thought more restriction was necessary. The government set up the Committee on Evil Literature which was to “consider and report whether it is necessary or advisable in the interest of the public morality to extend the existing powers of the State to prohibit or restrict the sale and circulation of printed matter.” The committee was composed of 2 university professors, 2 clergy members, one representative from the National Teaching Organisation and one TD.

They found that the current situation was inadequate and recommended establishing a censorship board. Publications listed on the handbill on the following page were ones submitted as evidence of obscene literature—including News of the World, which was a big target. You can see that “Class III” says more discussion is necessary in the Dail. Once the report was submitted in December of 1928, the Committee was dissolved. The Censorship of Publications Act went into place the following year in 1929.

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 Cinema Star and
The Sunday News	Photo Bits
Reynold's Newspaper	John Bull
Illustrated Police News	London Life
Thompson's Weekly News	The Winning Post Annual
Lansbury's Labour Weekly	(Summer and Winter
World's Pictorial News	editions)
The Empire News	The Sporting Times
The Sunday Chronicle	(known as the Pink 'Un)
Health and Strength	London Mail
Health and Efficiency	

CLASS II.

The following are extremely undesirable:

London Opinion	Woman's Weekly
The Smart Set	The Picture Show
Mascot Novels	Woman's World
Peg's Companion	Eve's Own Stories
Betty's Paper	My Pocket Novels
Girl's Companion	Peg's Paper
Answers' Library	Dainty Novels
Smart Novels	Nash's Magazine
Royal Magazine	London Magazine
Pears' Annual	Ideas
Home Companion	Girls' Mirror
Pam's Paper	Girls' Favourite
Girls' Cinema	

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.



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?

THE Standard

AN IRISH ORGAN OF CATHOLIC OPINION

26th OCT.

TWOPENCE

**DANGERS
IN PRINT:
NEED FOR
CENSORSHIP**

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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.

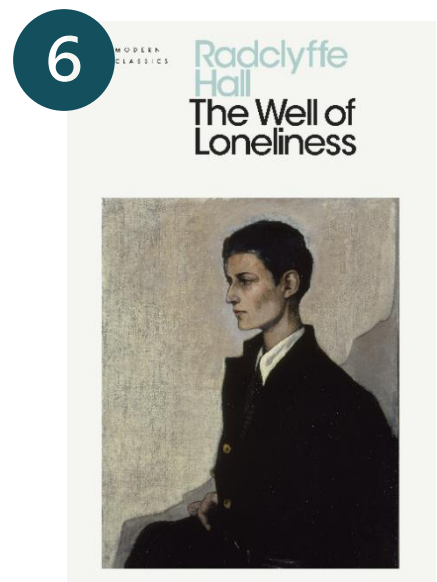
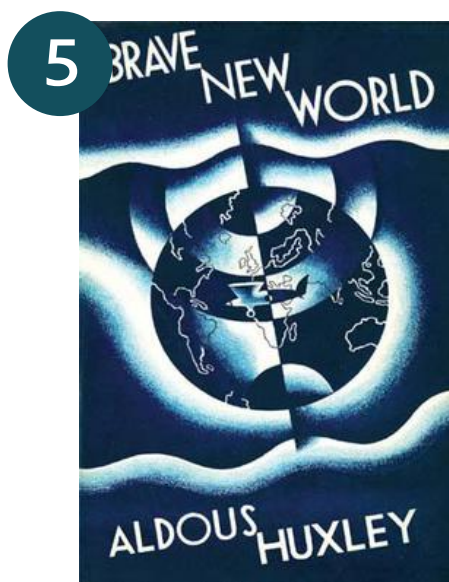
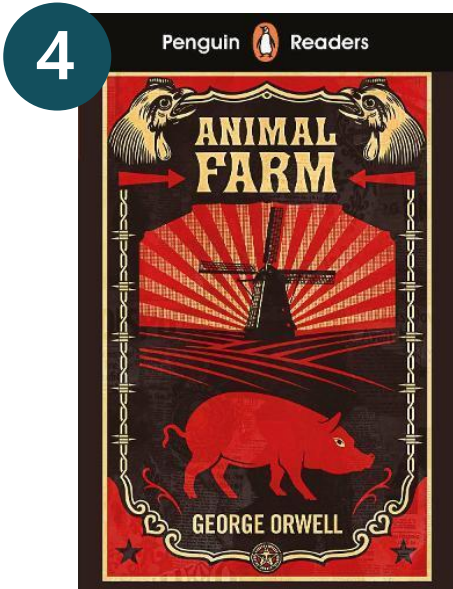
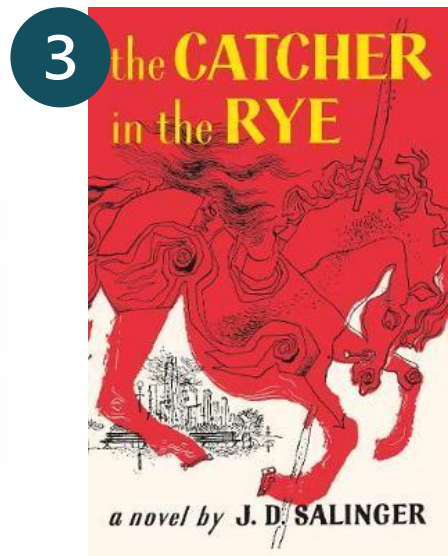
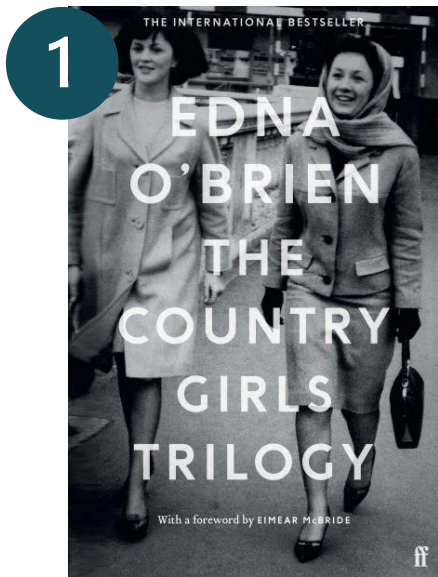


*Revue to
1001
Sunday
Independent*

© National Library of Ireland PD 2199 TX 439

This another cartoon by Gordon Brewster that was published in the Sunday Independent sometime between 1922 and 1927.

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



Above are books that were banned in Ireland over the years. Can you match each title with the reason associated with its censorship?

Fill out the chart on the next page.

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



“day by day many tons of filth are deposited on the shores of Ireland brought into the most out of the way rural districts”

- *The Derry People*, 7 March 1925

Is this speaker for or against censorship?

What is their reasoning?

What do you notice about how this language is reflected in the visuals you’ve seen so far?

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.



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.

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.

This activity mimics censorship in other contexts. Censorship has been used a military tactic and to limit correspondence in times of conflict as well.

Look at the letter between Mary Josephine Plunkett, Countess Plunkett and George Noble Plunkett, Count Plunkett while the Count was being held in Mountjoy prison on the next page too see what this would look like! Your blackout poetry page will have similar marks across it.

M
Mountjoy, 18th May, '23
a c/pa 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 de-
ported 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
are still ~~in the hospital~~. 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
~~the~~ supplies. ~~the~~ the bread and
milk (and Friday rice) are ~~to eat~~. The meat and
cabbage' look like a ~~step~~. - How goes business?
There's a man just come who was arrested (a second
time) because he worked ~~the~~! Ah, well,
we are nearing the end, I feel sure; the money-bags
are running dry! God bless you all, Your loving
Husband

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OPENED BY
CENSOR.

P.W. 68

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

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 *maiserie* to go on as long as I am "detained" in this fly-trap? —

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

Activity | Debate

Divide into two teams—one team will be pro-censorship and the other will be anti-censorship. Research opinions and views from the time to make arguments for your side.

Remember you can use primary sources such as newspapers and government documents to support your case. You can make arguments for your side and also contend the points the other side presents.

You'll present before the class with your teacher as the debate moderator.



*Leabharlann
Náisiúnta
na hÉireann*

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