

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST AND THE NEW YORKER: IRISH WRITERS AND AMERICA'S BIG WEEKLIES IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

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IN AN APRIL 1962 rejection letter for Brian Friel's 'Ginger Hero', *The New Yorker's* fiction editor Roger Angell complained that Friel's ironic treatment of a man's impotence and his interest in cockfighting was 'so obvious that it is fundamentally uninteresting' (Angell 1962). The bad news came at a time when Friel's submissions were repeatedly turned down by *The New Yorker*, with whom he had held a 'first-reading agreement' since 1960 (Angell 1960). The rejection rate was so high in the early 1960s for Friel that he feared that he might lose this lucrative contract. Fortunately, by the end of the year, he found a home for 'Ginger Hero'. His literary agent at Curtis Brown, Edith Haggard, wrote to Angell in December 1962: 'I can't recall if I told you that the Post, of all magazines, bought GINGER HERO which pleased me no less than it did Brian' (Haggard 1962). The 'Post' that Haggard referred to here is *The Saturday Evening Post*, where 'Ginger Hero' appeared in the 18 May 1963 issue. What is interesting here is Haggard's quick interjection, 'of all magazines', when mentioning the *Post*. The interjection reveals her insider knowledge in the publishing industry of the rivalry between *The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, two of the biggest general-interest weeklies in the United States in the early and mid-twentieth century.

The Saturday Evening Post, under George Horace Lorimer's editorship (1899–1937), boasted an enviable circulation number rivalled by few, surpassing three million copies in the late 1930s.¹ In comparison, *The New Yorker's* circulation never came close to the *Post's* astronomical numbers, but in terms of advertising sales, it was one of the top three most profitable titles in the US magazine market.² As Trysh Travis points out, 'In 1958, [*The New Yorker's*] 10 percent profit margin was double that of Time, Inc., its nearest competitor' (Travis 2000, 256). Because of their financial success, the *Post* and *The New Yorker*, along with other lucrative commercial magazines during the mid-century, were able to attract contributors from overseas. Irish writers, joining the cohort of international contributors, appeared frequently in these US periodicals. This remarkable Irish presence in the US magazine market during the mid-century has started to attract critical attention. Sinéad Moynihan, for instance, has played a leading role in mapping the extent of Irish publications in US magazines. Her research, including her chapter in this volume, has shown us that Irish writers

appeared in a wide range of US periodicals, such as women's magazines, sports and religious magazines (Moynihan 2022; Chapter 28). Yet, as Moynihan points out, more scholarly work remains to be done for us to fully appreciate the significant impact of the US magazine market on Irish literary production in the mid-century. This chapter will contribute to this scholarship on the transatlantic dimension of Irish periodical culture by examining Irish writing in two commercial US magazines.³

In periodical studies, literary magazines have traditionally dominated scholarly interest. The recent critical turn to 'big magazines', however, alerts us to the important role that commercial publications play in the popularisation of literary taste.⁴ This critical shift offers a useful framework from which to examine the function of mass-circulation magazines as tastemakers. As Faye Hammill reminds us, circulation number is only one measurement of a publication's bigness. Magazines like *The New Yorker*, the early *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* had modest circulations. But by catering to selected and educated readerships, they established themselves as important 'tastemakers' whose cultural impact 'extended far beyond the group of readers who subscribe or purchase copies' (Hammill 2020). In this respect, the *Post* was 'big' in terms of circulation and outreach, while *The New Yorker* was 'big' in terms of cultural impact. Moreover, as Donal Harris indicates, a common thread of 'big magazines' – beyond being 'unapologetically commercial' – is 'a conscious effort to expand their readerships by way of their textual and visual styles' (Harris 2016, 6). The *Post* and *The New Yorker*, with their distinct styles, are cases in point: the former employed rich visual design and bold typesetting to appeal to popular taste, while the latter's association with New York City and its sardonic humour curated a sense of urban sophistication.

Partly because of their different editorial styles, *The New Yorker* has enjoyed better prestige and more critical attention than the *Post*. Irish writers' connections with *The New Yorker* have received ample critical study, while their appearances in the *Post* have not.⁵ Despite the uneven treatment of the two publications, the *Post* and *The New Yorker* shared many contributors on their mastheads. The case of Brian Friel, as mentioned above, also shows that Irish writers (or their agents) submitted the same material to both magazines for consideration. If both commercial publications drew from a similar pool of contributors, how did their publishing contexts frame the stories differently? Informed by periodical studies scholarship, this chapter explores Irish writers' fiction in *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The New Yorker* in the mid-twentieth century, considering the importance of these commercial magazines' editorial styles in framing their fiction contributions. It first offers a survey of the Irish writers publishing in these two magazines in the mid-twentieth century. The following section analyses the 'periodical codes' – in particular, the compositional codes – of the two weeklies (Philpotts 2013). Based on this survey and a contextualisation of the magazines, the chapter investigates the extent to which the two magazines' editorial house styles framed the stories in different ways for their readerships. I will focus on two Irish writers: Walter Macken and Julia O'Faolain.⁶ By comparing their contributions in the *Post* and *The New Yorker*, the chapter demonstrates that the publishing venues and the visual presentations of the stories in the magazines played a crucial part in shaping the stories.

A General Survey of Irish Contributions in the *Post* and *The New Yorker*

In the 1930s and 1940s, the *Post*'s most notable Irish contributor was the bestselling author Maurice Walsh. 'The Quiet Man' appeared in the magazine's 11 February 1933 issue. The story features Shawn Kelvin, who has a quiet demeanour and a shadowy past in the United States before he returns to Ireland. He marries Ellen of the O'Gradys, big local farmers who despise Shawn for his reserved nature and sense of high morality. The conflict between Shawn and Ellen's brother, Big Liam O'Grady, leads to a fist fight as a final showdown when it is revealed that Shawn was a champion boxer in America under the name 'Tiger Kelvin' (Walsh 1933, 83). The characterisation, tropes and structure of the story are reminiscent of American westerns. It is perhaps not surprising that John Ford – Hollywood director well known for his westerns – secured the film rights in 1936 for \$1,250 (Brandt & Brandt 1936). Propelled by the story's popularity, the *Post* and Walsh established a lasting relationship. His vagabond character, Thomasheen James O'Doran, recurred in his adventure stories in the *Post* through the 1930s and 1940s.

Contemporaneous with Walsh, Joyce Cary appeared in the *Post* under the name 'Thomas Joyce'. Drawing on his experience at the Northern Nigerian political service, Cary wrote stories set on the African continent (Murphy 2009). Walsh continued publishing in the *Post* in the 1950s, during which time more Irish writers appeared in the magazine. Frank O'Connor made his debut with 'That Ryan Woman' (19 January 1957), which was introduced on the issue cover as 'A Notable Story by Frank O'Connor'. Seán O'Faoláin's novella, 'Love's Your Dream' (3 October 1959) was also promoted on the cover. Walter Macken contributed three adventure stories during this period, to which I will return later. Some Irish writers, whose works are lesser-known today, made frequent appearances in the *Post*. Dublin-born writer Leonard Wibberley had his fantasy/satire story 'The Day New York Was Invaded' serialised in six parts from December 1954 to January 1955. Cork-born Vivian Connell published six stories and a serial in two parts in the 1950s. His contributions were mostly romance stories set on the European continent. Mediterranean French towns provided the setting for 'The Riviera Affair' (14 December 1957), 'The Riviera Prelude' (21 and 28 February 1959) and 'Casanova Car' (5 September 1959); 'The Eagle of the Snows' (7 February 1959) takes place in the Alps. Equally productive in the 1950s was Brian Cleeve, a prolific short story writer, journalist and broadcaster. Cleeve's *Post* stories were more diverse than Connell's and included romance, crime and horror. Like Connell, Cleeve often had his stories set outside Ireland. For instance, 'Passport for Darkness' (15 September 1956) is a suspense story that takes place on a boat heading from Boston to Israel, with a mysterious Polish woman revealing her past to the narrator. 'Forbidden Love' (31 May 1958) is a romantic comedy set in an Italian town, where the narrator is courting the daughter of a man who was an assassin back in the United States. 'High Terror' (15 November 1958) takes place in a small town near Neuberg, Germany.

Wibberley, Connell and Cleeve continued their steady contributions at the *Post* in the 1960s, but the magazine started a new fiction scheme during this decade. An editorial titled 'The *Post* and Fiction' in 1963 announced: 'In the past the purpose of *Post* fiction was simple: to provide easy escape and entertainment. Today the editors of *The Post* believe that if people want easy escape they can get it from TV. Fiction should

serve a more noble purpose' ('The *Post* and Fiction' 1963, 70). This change came at a time when the *Post* was struggling financially. There were personnel changeovers and infighting between the *Post* and its parent company Curtis Publishing in the early 1960s, which eventually led to the magazine's demise in 1969.⁷ The shift to serving a 'more noble purpose' also reflects the changing media landscape in the 1960s when television began competing with popular magazines for audience attention and advertising revenues. The same issue, in which the editorials pledged 'to bring the best fiction to [its] readers', included stories by John O'Hara and John Updike; both were frequent contributors to *The New Yorker*. During the 1960s, Frank O'Connor and Seán O'Faoláin published more stories in the *Post*, and a younger generation of writers such as Brian Friel and Julia O'Faolain joined the list of Irish contributors in the *Post*.

Compared to the *Post*, *The New Yorker* had more Irish contributors. In the 1940s, Elizabeth Bowen and Norah Hoult wrote a wartime story and a report respectively for the magazine. Irish-born actress Patricia Collinge contributed short pieces of city observations and cultural commentary. Frank O'Connor garnered a first-reading agreement with *The New Yorker* in 1946, and would become one of the most prolific Irish writers in the magazine (O'Connor 1946). In the 1950s, a notable addition to the magazine was Maeve Brennan, who worked as a staff writer. She contributed stories based on her childhood in Dublin, the 'Herbert's Retreat' series that satirises New York's upper middle classes, and column pieces under her alias, the Long-Winded Lady. Brennan's careful attention to fashion and her sardonic humour was particularly attuned to the magazine's tenor of urban sophistication.⁸ Walter Macken and Joyce Cary, both well-known writers at the time, also appeared in the pages of *The New Yorker*. Younger writers, such as Julia O'Faolain and Brian Friel, joined the lineup of Irish contributors at the magazine. Other notable Irish writers during this time included John Godley, the third Baron of Kilbracken, who wrote about his inheritance of Kilegar House in County Leitrim, providing an important first-hand account of the experiences of the Anglo-Irish gentry in post-independence Ireland.

At the turn of the 1960s, two important Irish contributors were Benedict Kiely and Mary Lavin, both of whom held *The New Yorker's* first-reading agreement. Kiely's stories focused on the Northern counties and Irish traditions, while Lavin's contributions touched upon topics such as mother-daughter relationships, women's sexuality and widows' social status in the mid-century. Some of her most celebrated stories, 'In a Café' (13 February 1960) and 'In the Middle of the Fields' (3 June 1961), made their first appearance in *The New Yorker* (see Chapters 13, 23). During this decade, we also see Padraic Colum and journalist Peter Lennon appear in the magazine. Irish-American writers Elizabeth Cullinan and J. P. Donleavy also published in the magazine – the former, in particular, wrote about Ireland from an Irish-American perspective, investigating the conflicts between these two worlds. Edna O'Brien and John McGahern, famously banned in Ireland at the time, became fellow contributors in *The New Yorker*. Both brought complexity to their depictions of Ireland, paying equal attention to the island's rural areas, the bohemian side of Dublin and the Irish communities outside the Republic. O'Brien was offered a first-reading agreement in 1962 (MacKenzie 1962). Over her long writing career, she contributed more than thirty stories to *The New Yorker*, only slightly behind the top contributors Frank O'Connor and Maeve Brennan, who each had over forty stories in the magazine. O'Brien and McGahern continued their publications in the 1970s and 1980s. During this period,

the magazine industry declined due to fierce competition from television. As a result, *The New Yorker*, along with other commercial magazines, reduced its fiction publications. Nonetheless, an important Irish writer joined the group in the late 1970s: William Trevor, who published in the magazine from the latter half of the twentieth century to the 2000s.⁹

As this survey shows, several Irish writers appeared in both magazines: Joyce Cary, Frank O'Connor, Walter Macken, Brian Friel and Julia O'Faolain published across the *Post* and *The New Yorker*. Did these writers change their styles and subject matter to suit the magazines' different readerships? How did the two magazines' different visual presentations shape the stories? To explore these questions, I will first examine the periodical codes of the *Post* and *The New Yorker*: their publishing practices, textual and visual styles, before offering close readings of selected Irish stories in the two magazines.

The Periodical Codes of the *Post* and *The New Yorker*

In the mid-twentieth century, the *Post* aimed for a nationwide readership, while *The New Yorker* focused on city dwellers. This difference in target readership was well reflected in their advertisements, editorial practices and visual layouts. The *Post* attracted big-name national advertisers, its editorial voice was down to earth, and it employed colourful illustrations and bold typeset to increase visual appeal. *The New Yorker*, by contrast, sold advertising pages mostly to New York-based stores and enterprises; its editorials were culture-savvy and sophisticated; its visual contents were largely in grey scale; and its typeface simple and inconspicuous. The two magazines' periodical codes, in turn, shaped their fictions differently.

The *Post* was an unremarkable magazine until the publishing tycoon Cyrus Curtis purchased it in 1897 for \$1,000. Under George Horace Lorimer's editorship the magazine grew exponentially in circulation and popularity. David Reed thus describes the magazine's mass influence in the early twentieth century as 'supreme in the United States' (Reed 1997, 153). Its success owed much to Lorimer's ambition 'to create a national magazine by appealing to the average American' (Cohn 1989, 28). In contrast to the *Post*'s national appeal, *The New Yorker* had a local focus. Harold Ross, in his 1924 'Prospectus' for *The New Yorker*, stated that the magazine was 'avowedly published for a metropolitan audience and thereby will escape an influence which hampers most national publications' (Ross 1924). This declaration may have risked alienating a substantial demographic outside urban areas, but as Dale Kramer points out, it proved to be a smart business decision to attract 'local New York City advertising revenue' for whom *The New Yorker* offered better value for them to reach their prospective customers (Kramer 1951, 47).

The *Post*'s mass circulation and nationwide outreach helped attract major advertisers. At the front of the magazine issues are full-page advertisements by Leistering mouthwash, Campbell's soup cans, the General Tire, Metropolitan Life Insurance, Maxwell House Coffee, Kellogg's cereal, General Electric's appliances and Shell Oil. These products had good brand recognition, but they were also mostly household goods that the 'average American' reader of the *Post* could afford. *The New Yorker*, on the other hand, attracted local New York businesses. The front pages of the magazine's mid-century issues were adorned with luxury goods and establishments: high-end

department stores Bergdorf Goodman and Saks Fifth Avenue, jewellers Tiffany & Co. and Cartier; Elizabeth Arden's perfume, women's clothing Peck and Peck and menswear Brooks Brothers. These companies were either headquartered in New York City or had flagship stores on Fifth Avenue. Their high-end products conveyed a sense of sophistication that gave *The New Yorker* a metropolitan glamour. They appealed to the upper echelons of society with substantial purchasing power and those who aspired to be among them. The advertisements in the *Post*, while being household names, were perhaps restricted in class terms; they were affordable products that were associated with middle and lower classes.

Aside from the advertisements, the two magazines' editorials and visual qualities contributed to their different styles. The *Post* had a 'down-to-earth' quality that Harold Ross admired (Gill 1975, 196). Its news coverage, for instance, included everyday topics with which average American readers were familiar. *The New Yorker*, on the contrary, had heavy cultural references in its editorials and reports. The magazine's ideal reader was expected to possess prerequisite knowledge of the referenced cultural scenes to fully appreciate the textual contents. In terms of layout, the *Post* had a table of contents to guide its readers. The title of every contribution was displayed in prominent font, followed by a subheading, the author's name, and illustrations or photographs. The contributors – especially the first-timers – were often given a short introduction in the 'Keeping Posted' column. In a letter to Maurice Walsh in 1945, Ralph Knight, editorial promotional director of the *Post*, asked him to supply the magazine with some 'inside information' of his story, and he requested 'a picture of yourself [Walsh] of the informal type' (Knight 1945). Knight's request for an 'informal' picture of the author is indicative of the *Post*'s approach to the 'Keeping Posted' column: instead of painting the writers as esoteric intellectuals, the editorial treated them as common folk. For instance, Brian Cleeve was introduced in the 'Keeping Posted' column as a family man. A segment titled 'Irish Author Joins Our Columns' showed a casual photo of the Cleeve family with the text: 'Here we have author Brian Cleeve and Company in their Dublin home. Both parents are broadcasters and champion fencers, and the father has flaming red hair and a story on page 36' ('Keeping Posted' 1957a, 160). The short introduction portrayed Cleeve as an ordinary man, with a day job and a hobby. It gave information about Cleeve's hair colour, but it did not mention his literary credentials.

In contrast, *The New Yorker* did not offer much guidance to its readers, nor did it attempt to bring readers closer to the contributors. It is perhaps more telling to see what *The New Yorker* did *not* do to distinguish itself from other commercial magazines. The metropolitan weekly did not have a table of contents until 1969 (Yagoda 2000, 43); it did not use subheadings to introduce the contents. While most magazines had cover lines and blurbs, *The New Yorker* never did. A standard *New Yorker* cover included an image, the title of the magazine in its distinct *New Yorker* font, the price and the publication date. It was a clean design. The magazine trusted that its readers would pick up a copy without knowing its contents; the brand of *The New Yorker* sold itself. Moreover, in the mid-century, the magazine did not put authors' names on the title page of their contributions. Instead, it put the names at the end of the pieces. It thus downplayed the writer's individual identity, subsuming them in the loose category of 'New Yorker contributors'. The magazine did not have an editorial column to introduce the writers, as the *Post* did in 'Keeping Posted'. Without biographical

information and ‘informal’ photos of the authors, *The New Yorker* kept a gentle distance between the readers and the contributors.

By not doing what the *Post* did, *The New Yorker* elevated itself from the former’s ‘down-to-earth’ quality, acquiring a sophisticated style. Another crucial element of the two magazines’ different styles was their visuals. The *Post* had a visual richness that was eye-catching. Its colourful illustrations aimed for realism; it also incorporated photographs. *The New Yorker*, on the other hand, maintained a hand-drawn aesthetic. It did not introduce photography until Tina Brown’s tenure in the 1990s.¹⁰ *The New Yorker*’s visual style thus carried an unassuming quality, in contrast to the *Post*’s vibrant design. More importantly, the *Post* used customised illustrations for their stories, while *The New Yorker* did not (Stout 1932, 8). This feature was such a special part of the *Post*’s editorial practice that critics have argued that ‘the textual and visual materials that framed the publication’ deserve special attention (Nolan 2017, 367). Building on this observation, the following section examines how the images, subheadings and introductory blurbs in the *Post* framed the fiction contributions and how the absence of these elements in *The New Yorker* allowed the stories to speak for themselves. I will focus on two Irish writers whose stories appeared in both the *Post* and *The New Yorker*: Walter Macken and Julia O’Faolain.

Case Studies: Walter Macken and Julia O’Faolain

Walter Macken published three stories in the *Post* and five in *The New Yorker*. His contributions in these magazines were similar: they were light-hearted stories about boyhood, adventure or mischief. He is a good example to show that both magazines published entertaining stories, but the publishing contexts framed the pieces differently. In the *Post*, the subheadings and illustrations brought out the drama of his stories, while in *The New Yorker*, his contributions were simply humorous.

Macken’s stories in the *Post* were constantly framed as genre fiction. His first contribution in the *Post*, ‘Rage on the Mountain’ (22 June 1957), tells the story of village policeman Tom Clancy who is given the task to arrest Mike Stranger over a brawl in a local pub. The story appeared with the introductory blurb: ‘Clancy had a near-impossible order: Bring back a maniac.’ The customised illustration shows a man in a red shirt, holding a baton, charging towards another man who raises his hands in defence. The caption under the illustration makes it clear: ‘Mike had the baton and came toward him swinging it.’ Both the blurb and the illustration highlight a sense of action and adventure, dramatising the situation where the fugitive Mike gets hold of the baton from the policeman. The end of the story, however, is about how the two men come to understand each other. Mike has become a ‘maniac’ because he lost his mother to suicide when he was a boy. The fight between Tom and Mike turns out to be a therapeutic moment for the latter to let go of his repressed anger over his mother’s death. This psychological aspect of the story is completely lost in the subheadings and illustrations that the *Post* used to dramatise the piece.

Likewise, ‘Challenge the River’ (31 August 1957) tells how Father Solo – a recurrent character in Macken’s short stories – attempts to cross a turbulent river to save a girl who is seriously ill. The illustration shows a man holding on to a stone wall, his lower body submerged in violent waters. Under the image, the caption describes

the scene: 'He gripped with his fingers, knees and toes as the water flowed over him, tearing at him.' The blurb is even more dramatic: 'A child's life hung in the balance. He had no choice but to' – which links to the title in a prominent font – 'Challenge the River'. The central conflict in the story, however, is set around the sinister figure Thady, who is about to perform the 'nine irons', a traditional but dangerous ritual, on the dying girl. In this aspect, the characterisation of Father Solo and Thady carries symbolic values, underlining the tension between a modernised version of Catholicism and the traditional folk way of life. Such an understanding of the story's symbolic currency is completely lost in the *Post's* visual presentations.

Macken's last story in the *Post* was 'The Cruel Cage' (1 February 1958), which tells of little Tim's attempts to rescue the elderly lion Samson from the circus. The story has a sad ending, where the badly tortured lion is put down. Yet the title page of the story paints it as a heroic adventure story. A stunning illustration of a boy walking with a lion on the street spans two pages; the townspeople scurry away in the background. The caption explains: 'Tim walked solemnly on, talking to Samson, almost unconscious of the confusion and upset he was leaving behind him.' Samson in the story, however, is sickly and near his death. The illustration nonetheless gives the lion a grand posture and a glorious mane. In this way, the *Post's* textual blurbs and visual images dramatise and sensationalise the stories as more action-packed than they actually were.

Macken's stories in *The New Yorker*, in comparison, were presented in less dramatic ways. They were shown as simply humorous pieces. His first two stories in *The New Yorker*, 'Gaeglers and the Wild Geese' (13 February 1954) and 'The Proud Man' (24 April 1954), both feature the trickster figure Gaeglers.¹¹ They are fun stories about how Gaeglers tries and fails to trick people, and how he gets tricked in return. In 'The Gauger' (4 February 1956), Tim Winters, who works as an inspector for old-age pensions, almost gets himself killed by a pair of old bachelor brothers trying to conceal their properties from him. 'No Medal for Matt' (28 June 1958) is an adventure story about Matt, who climbs down a cliff to catch a rabbit, a feat that shocks and amazes his father who is watching from a boat. Macken's last contribution to the magazine, 'The Kiss' (7 September 1963), is a comic story about Jimmy (age nine) and Cecily (age six), who share an innocent kiss. A priest witnesses it and jokes that they would have to get married, a joke that the boy takes too seriously.

These are humorous pieces. In terms of literary quality, they are similar to Macken's stories in the *Post*. While the *Post's* visual presentation highlighted the drama and actions of the stories, *The New Yorker* did not offer introductory blurbs or customised illustrations to suggest a particular approach to reading the stories. There were cartoons on the pages where Macken's contributions appeared, but these visual contents were not associated with the stories. On the pages of 'Gaeglers and the Wild Geese', a cartoon shows two couples on a beach. Both the men are holding cigars, sporting pot bellies and receding hairlines, while their partners are two ladies in two-piece swimwear and heels. The caption shows that one of the men is saying: 'And this is *my* secretary – Miss Foster', which pokes fun at the clichéd office romance between business executives and their secretaries-turned-mistresses ('Cartoon' 1954, 35). On the pages of 'The Gauger', a seven-panel cartoon shows an artist carving a block of rock into a statue of a woman. When he goes to a sculpture show, however, he finds out that the first prize has gone to a work called 'Mass' looking exactly like the block of

rock he was working with ('Cartoon' 1956, 24–5). These cartoons centred around arts and business, topics that *The New Yorker's* metropolitan audience would appreciate. Because the visual contents were unrelated to the textual contents, *The New Yorker* allowed the stories to speak for themselves.

Similar to Macken's case, Julia O'Faolain's stories in the *Post* were sensationalised. Her first story in the *Post* was 'Pray for Grace, Poor Little Sinner' (25 February 1967). The customised illustration by Robert J. Lee uses a movie-poster style of composition. A seaside town with a church provides the backdrop; a looming figure floating in mid-air is the upper body of a nun whose face has a stern expression; three smaller figures are placed in front of the nun's folded arms: a little boy's ashen-white face, a ghostly silhouette of a girl trailing behind, and an almost unrecognisable child figure fading in the background. The illustration carries an ominous feeling, hinting that the dominating figure of the nun has the three small children under her thumb. The introductory blurb of the story tells us: 'He had vowed to have his revenge, but now he trembled as he heard the steady approach of her footsteps ...' This clearly sets up the piece as a revenge story, but the story defies this expectation by engaging with the issue of memory and internalised trauma in a profound manner.

Set in the Italian town 'U—', 'Pray for Grace, Poor Little Sinner' is about Mario's return to the convent orphanage where he grew up. He remembers this place with resentment. The head nun, Sister Serafina, was a ferocious woman who physically and verbally abused the children, treating them as 'bastards of the poor' (O'Faolain 1967, 79). He remembers Berto and Linda, who both suffered from the nun's mistreatment. Mario wants to confront the Sister, but during their talk, he learns that Berto has become rich and donated a huge sum of money to the convent. Linda got away but returned a few years ago with her daughter Gloria, who is now living in the convent. Hearing their stories from the nun, Mario feels betrayed by his fellow victims. At first, the story does set out to be a revenge story, but it turns out to be a gloomy tale of the orphanage system's psychological impact on the kids. It asks questions about how victims remember and reconcile with trauma in different and sometimes inexplicable ways. The *Post's* presentation of the story, however, glossed over O'Faolain's psychological and social inquiries. By framing the story as a thrilling revenge story, the *Post* highlighted the entertaining rather than the literary quality of the story.

O'Faolain's second contribution in the *Post* is 'A Political Animal' (7 September 1968), also set in the town of 'U—'. Despite the shared setting, this story is thematically very different from her previous story in the *Post*. The customised image of 'The Political Animal' frames the story as a thriller, but the piece could also be read as a psychological study of a man who would do anything to achieve his career ambition. The illustration shows a suited man holding a sharpened pencil in his hand. Behind him are three silhouettes of the same figure; each silhouetted frame contains other images, foreshadowing the events in the story. The farthest image is a moustached man moving a stack of books, the second is a man kissing a sleeping woman in bed, and the nearest one is a media crowd in a public square. The composition suggests that these images are crucial moments that make the man who he is. The seemingly disconnected images leave a sense of intrigue and suspense. The story follows Franco, an archivist in U—. When he hears the news that a flood has hit Florence, where his family used to live, he leaves his pregnant wife on the pretext of helping to save the archival materials there. But he is secretly hoping to meet his mistress, Joan, a young American girl.

When he arrives, the local Florence archivist refuses Franco's help, because the ancient documents need to be carefully stored; they cannot be transported without careful planning. Franco, however, insists on bringing the documents to U—, and when he sees a media crowd outside, he steps into the spotlight and portrays himself as a noble man who leaves his pregnant wife to save the endangered cultural treasures. In this way, Franco becomes the title's 'political animal', not through intrigue or plotting, but through his opportunism. Similar to 'Pray for Grace, Poor Little Sinner', 'A Political Animal' can be read as meditations on the psychological working of a political opportunist. In the publishing context of the *Post*, however, both stories were reduced to entertaining pieces. The *Post*'s textual blurbs and visual images encourage surface readings of O'Faolain's stories.

In comparison, her story in *The New Yorker*, without the customised framing, was open to different interpretations. O'Faolain's 'Love in the Marble Foot' (27 April 1957) appeared in *The New Yorker* under 'Julie' O'Faolain. In her memoir, O'Faolain describes this early story of hers as a 'crude caricature'; she thinks that it was only accepted as 'reports from the youth front' (O'Faolain 2013, 178). Indeed, the story has a biographical dimension, drawing from O'Faolain's experience in Italy. The protagonist Giulia – a thinly disguised name of the author – is an Irish Catholic girl who lives in a 'pensione' (an Italian boarding house) in Rome. There she bonds with two local Italian girls: the romantic Flavia and the pragmatic Maria-Pia. They talk about women's magazines and their dreams of their future. Incidentally, one of the magazines mentioned is the *Post*'s sister magazine, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, which Flavia uses to learn English. Focusing on young women's aspirations and romantic lives, the story touches on the limited prospects for young women at the time. The story may be read as a simple biographical account of O'Faolain's youthful experience in Italy, but it could also be read as a coming-of-age story where the characters come to realise the restricted options – other than marriage – available to young girls in the mid-century. The visual materials in *The New Yorker* did not sensationalise or romanticise the story. 'Love in the Marble Foot' ran over nine pages. The advertisements over these pages included travel advertisements from the Greek National Tourist Organisation and Air France, and advertisements for fashion and alcohol. These visual contents work in concert to appeal to the magazine's metropolitan audience, highlighting the exotic setting, but they do not interfere with the reader's perception of the story.

As the Macken and O'Faolain case studies show, their contributions in the *Post* and *The New Yorker* did not differ much in terms of literary quality, but the magazines' publishing contexts – advertisements, typesetting and visuals – framed their stories differently. The *Post*, aiming at the average reader, sought to smooth the reading experience by employing customised blurbs and illustrations to guide its audience. In doing so, it exaggerated the drama and action of the story. A plot-driven reading was thus preconditioned – or strongly suggested – by the *Post*'s visual presentation before the reader set eyes on the main texts. *The New Yorker*, in comparison, targeted a metropolitan readership. It presumed its readers' pre-existing cultural and literary knowledge. The magazine did not offer accompanying materials to offer guidance on how to read the stories. The advertisements and cartoons – catered to metropolitan readers – further cultivated a sense of sophistication on *The New Yorker*'s pages where the fictions appeared.

Conclusion

Publishing in *The New Yorker* in the mid-twentieth century was a literary achievement. The magazine, however, was (in)famous for its meticulous editing and fact-checking. Therefore, the mid-century *New Yorker* was criticised for creating a mode of fiction that was ‘bland’ and ‘dull’, appealing to a genteel middle-class sensibility.¹² Because of this perceived ‘blandness’, Heather Ingman argues that it is understandable why Frank O’Connor was a frequent contributor at *The New Yorker*, while Seán O’Faoláin never appeared in the magazine. She writes: ‘It is clear that O’Connor’s stories would fit easily into the mould of the ideal *New Yorker* short story but that O’Faoláin’s more diffuse, detached and intellectual stories would not’ (Ingman 2009, 159). Ingman perhaps overstates the ‘mould’ of the *New Yorker* story as unfitting for ‘intellectual’ writings. More importantly, the fact that both O’Connor and O’Faoláin appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* further complicates such critical assumptions about individual writers’ literary reputation and their positioning in the magazine market.¹³ Despite growing critical attention for commercial ‘big’ magazines in literary studies, certain preconceived notions regarding the supposed literary quality of a ‘*New Yorker* story’ or a ‘*Post* story’ still persist – even though the two magazines shared many contributors. One solution to correcting this bias, as this chapter indicates, is to read the Irish contributions in their original publishing contexts. In doing so, instead of asking how individual Irish writers fit in a magazine’s established mode, we examine how the publications’ editorial styles frame their fictions differently. We therefore draw attention to the ways in which the various contents in the magazine worked together to shape the supposed mode of a ‘*New Yorker* story’ or a ‘*Post* story’. This chapter has shown Irish writers’ remarkable presence in the transatlantic magazine market. By comparing the Irish contributions in two American big weeklies, it has demonstrated how the two magazines’ editorial styles were performed by a chorus of contents – the advertisements, illustrations and typefaces. By unpacking the visual presentation and editorial policies of *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The New Yorker*, this chapter foregrounds the importance of the periodical contexts in which these Irish stories originally appeared.

Notes

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1. The *Post*’s only competitor was its sister magazine, the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, both published by Curtis Publishing Company. Their circulation numbers were neck and neck, and in the 1960s both sold over six million copies. For the magazines’ circulation numbers, see Brooks E. Hefner and Edward Timke’s ‘Circulating American Magazines.’
2. The *Post*, in its heyday, sold over six million copies. In comparison, *The New Yorker* never surpassed half a million in the mid-twentieth century. See Hefner and Timke.
3. For the back issues of *The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, I consulted the two magazines’ digital archives, which are fully accessible for subscribers.

4. The *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*'s special issue, 'Investigating Big Magazines', signals a critical turn to big magazines. See the editors' introduction (Reynès-Delobel et al. 2020) and Mark Morrisson's comprehensive account of the shift from little magazines to big magazines in this special issue (2020).
5. See, for instance, Gráinne Hurley's study of the editing process of Mary Lavin's *New Yorker* stories (2013; 2020); Angela Bourke's outstanding biography of Maeve Brennan (2004); Scott Boltwood's research on Brian Friel's early works in the *Irish Times* and *The New Yorker* (2014); and James Alexander on Frank O'Connor and *The New Yorker* (1995).
6. There are other Irish writers who published both in the *Post* and *The New Yorker*, such as Brian Friel and Frank O'Connor, and Irish-American writers J. P. Donleavy and John O'Hara. Due to the chapter's limited space, they are excluded from the discussion. It is also worth pointing out that a bibliography of Edna O'Brien's in *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* (1996) lists two stories ('Orphan on the Run' and 'Summer Encounter') in *The Saturday Evening Post*. But this appears to be a case of confused identity. The *Post*'s 21 December 1957 issue provided short bios of the contributors in the issue. Edna O'Brien, according to the bio, resided in Ontario, California, with her husband, and the photo of the author clearly showed that she was not the Edna O'Brien of *The Country Girls* trilogy. See 'Keeping Posted' (1955, 1957b).
7. For an insider account of the *Post*'s publishing history and demise, see Michael M. Mooney 1969.
8. See Ellen McWilliams 2016 and Yen-Chi Wu 2023a.
9. For a comprehensive list of Irish writers at *The New Yorker*, see Yen-Chi Wu 2023b.
10. Before she became *The New Yorker*'s editor-in-chief, Tina Brown, then editor of *Vanity Fair*, had thought of the introduction of photography as an important measure to modernise *The New Yorker*. See Brown (2017, 229).
11. Elke D'hoker describes the series of Gaeglers stories as 'the trickster stories' (2022, 146). For an informative discussion of Macken's short fiction, see D'hoker 2022.
12. See Yagoda 2000, especially 'Chapter Five: the Bland Leading the Bland 1952–62', and Tom Wolfe 2000, especially the 'Foreword'.
13. Frank O'Connor had five contributions in the *Post* (four stories and one article) between 1957 and 1967, and Seán O'Faoláin had six (one novelette and five stories) between 1959 and 1968.

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