



GIRLS OF THE POLLARD COLLECTION AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY COUNTERPARTS

BACKGROUND

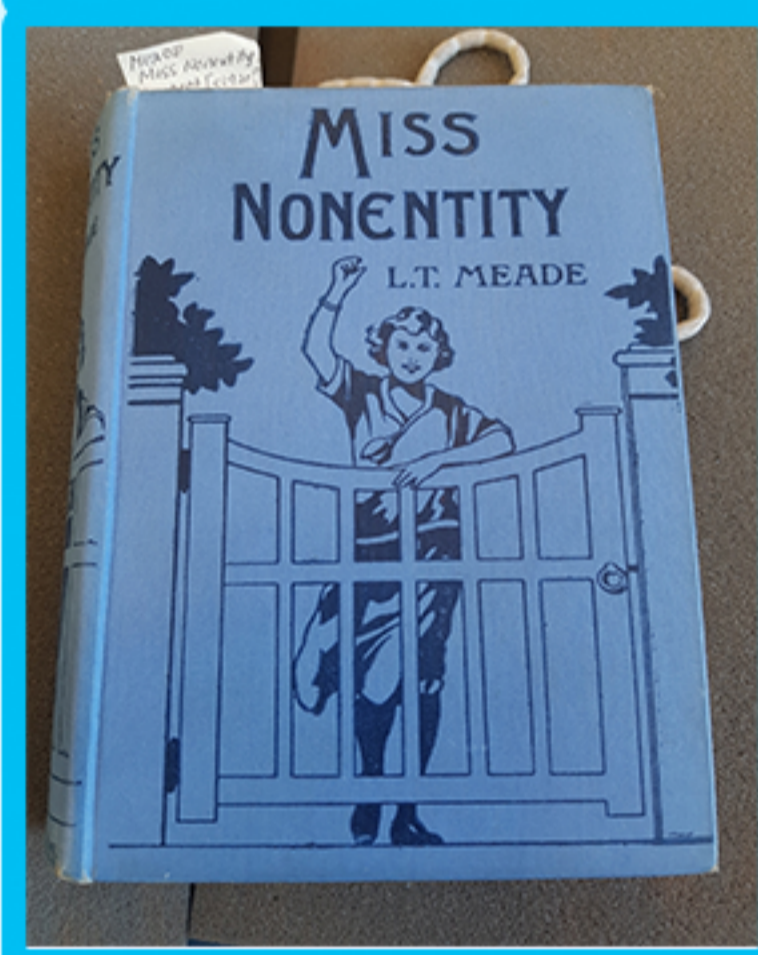
The Pollard Collection of Childrens books is the largest collection of children's books in Ireland, which focuses on Irish writers and stories for girls.

Bold Girls is an initiative from Children's Books Ireland on the centenary of women's suffrage in Ireland, with the aim of "celebrating strong, confident, intelligent, brave women and girls in children's books". This served as inspiration for the project to study girls' literature in the years leading up to the vote for women in Ireland in 1918.

AIMS & METHODS

My aim was to investigate what kind of values and role models were presented to Irish girls leading up to womens suffrage, what was considered a successful outcome for a protagonist, and what topics were seen as suitable for young girls.

My goal was to uncover female protagonists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were portrayed with agency and autonomy. Close reading was carried out on a selection of twenty books from the Pollard Collection dating from the years 1895-1918 and a selection of contemporary novels to compare conceptions of Irish girlhood in children's fiction.

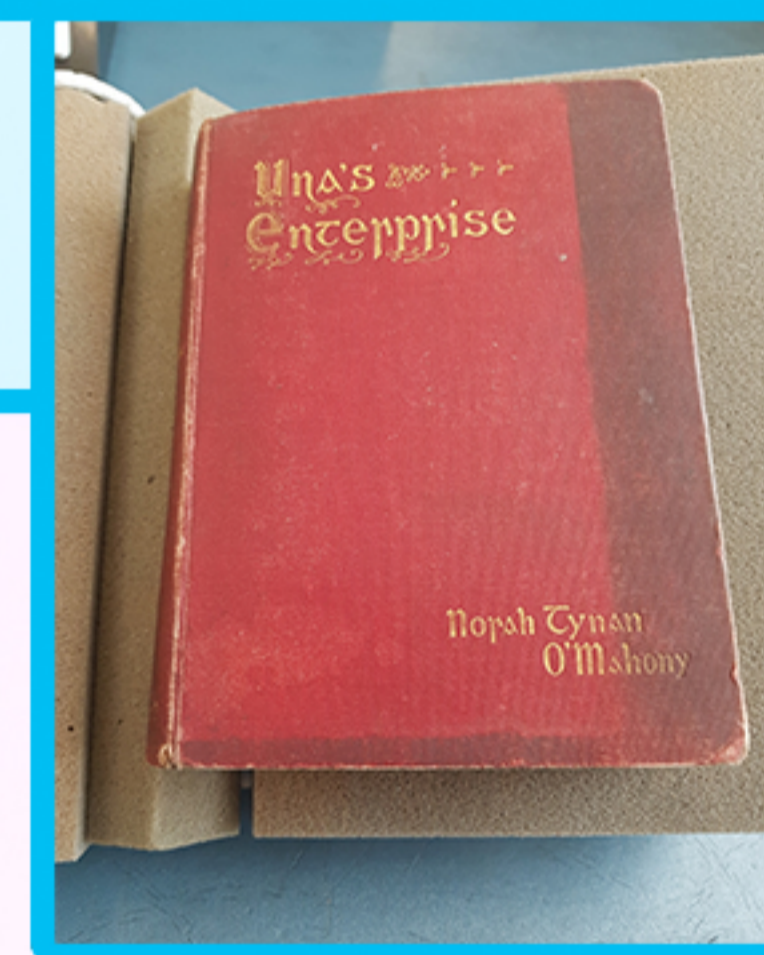


FINDINGS

THE POLLARD COLLECTION

While girls from older stories are commonly assumed to be passive, female characters are placed in the centre of their story. The most common description of a young girl, especially in L.T. Meade's works, are "lively" and "bright". Education of young girls is always prioritised, as is financial understanding and independence. The Tynan sisters both place their young female protagonists at the head of the family, ensuring they have provisions and making financial decisions. The qualities most championed in these texts were bravery, goodness of heart, intelligence, resilience, dedication and tenacity.

Authors provide the reader with a range of incredibly diverse young girls to learn from, which allowed me to conceive of Irish girlhood as multi-faceted and not a single mode of being. Young women are almost exclusively portrayed as pro-active in their own stories.



CONTEMPORARY COUNTERPARTS

Contemporary publications that do not incorporate supernatural or paranormal elements are commonly set in the years leading up to the Easter Rising and women's suffrage.

This is a fascinating insight into our modern conceptions of Irish girlhood, which makes clear a connection in our collective consciousness between Irish girlhood and this time period and between Irish girlhood and patriotism itself.

These books are more directed by historical events compared to the books of the Pollard Collection, yet the same qualities are celebrated in the characters - proactivity, engagement, agency, intelligence and autonomy.