

Book Review: Thomas Fitzpatrick and the Lepracaun Monthly 1905-1915

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In *Thomas Fitzpatrick and the Lepracaun Monthly 1905-1915* the authors introduce us to a turn of the century Irish cartoonist, Thomas Fitzpatrick ('Fitz') and his magazine *The Lepracaun Cartoon Monthly*. **Carole O'Reilly** writes that this is a beautifully produced book that situates both Fitz and his magazine in the context of their time, describing the important role of cartoons to portray societal issues, including city politics, national politics, gender and labour.

Thomas Fitzpatrick and the Lepracaun Monthly 1905-1915. James Curry and Ciaran Wallace. Dublin City Council. June 2015.

The impact of cartoons on a community of readers has been much in the news recently, after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and the associated debates about freedom of expression. Their potentially controversial nature alerts us to the power of the printed image to move and provoke. This also explains a surge in interest in cartoons and cartooning by scholars working in media and cultural studies. Writers have examined subjects such as cartoons in the Anglo-Irish relationship (Roy Douglas and Liam Harte's *Drawing Conclusions: Cartoon History of Anglo-Irish Relations* (1998)), cartoons from the Great War (Huenig's *British and German Cartoon as Weapons in World War One* (2002)) and cartooning during the American Civil War (Lewin and Huff's *Lines of Contention* (2007)). The satirical press itself has received scant critical attention which makes this book all the more welcome.

Curry and Wallace's text takes advantage of the opportunity to focus on the career of one particular Irish cartoonist, Thomas Fitzpatrick ('Fitz') and his work for the *Lepracaun Monthly*, of which he was founder and editor. This satirical magazine was published for ten years, outlasting many such publications and relying on its relationship with Fitz for much of its visual humour. He realised a personal ambition when he founded the *Lepracaun Cartoon Monthly* in 1905, with its strangely phonetic spelling of Leprachán and emphasis on the importance of cartoons appearing firmly in its title.

The book is beautifully produced and is accompanied by two introductory essays by the authors which help to situate both Fitz and his magazine in the context of their time. This provides an interesting basis for the detailed exploration of individual cartoons from the *Lepracaun* which comes afterwards. Each image gets an entire page with an associated commentary on the context, written by Wallace. The images are grouped by theme – society, city politics, national politics, women and labour – each reflecting important motifs in the magazine itself. Fitz was, of course, not the sole artist for the publication, as it also employed people such as John Fergus O'Hea and Frank Reynolds, with others as occasional contributors. These collaborations helped to keep the contributions fresh and current – each monthly issue needed two full-page cartoons, with other smaller images scattered around in the text. The *Lepracaun* was unusually successful in attracting advertising which explains both its comparatively long life and its achievement in retaining a loyal readership during this period.

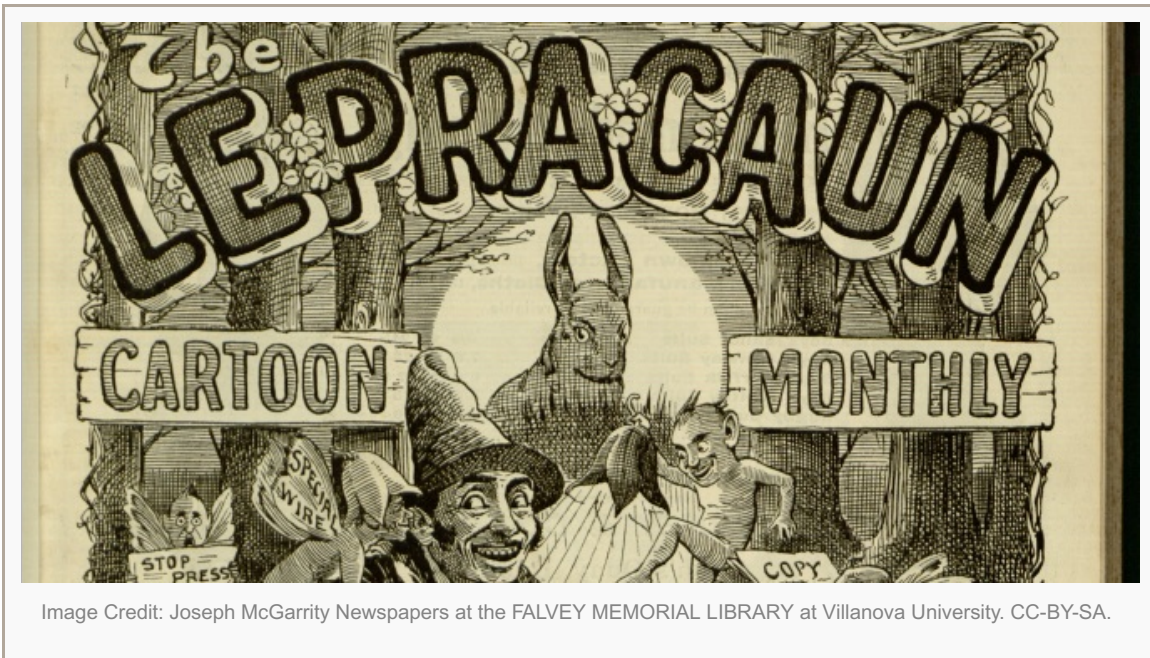


Image Credit: Joseph McGarrity Newspapers at the FALVEY MEMORIAL LIBRARY at Villanova University. CC-BY-SA.

Unlike many satirical periodicals, the *Leprecaun* was no niche publication, struggling to survive from issue to issue. It attracted many famous and high-profile readers such as the novelist James Joyce and Sean T O’Kelly, a future deputy Prime Minister and President of Ireland. Although much of the *Leprecaun*’s humour was directed at Dublin-centric targets, the magazine sold well all around Ireland and even overseas. While it was predominantly nationalist in tone, the broader appeal of its political humour and often sharp attacks on political figures ensured a more general readership.

Criticism of the calibre of local councillors was a common theme in the satirical press since the nineteenth century and most was predicated on the reader’s knowledge of the target. In this regard, the humour of the *Leprecaun* fits into a long tradition of political satire, with the focus usually firmly on a particular individual. The magazine frequently used the device of personification to satirise City Hall departments – the department of Public Health was depicted as a sleeping ‘fat cat’ ignoring the living condition of the poor in a cartoon from 1908. Similarly, the city of Dublin was often represented as a young woman (‘Miss Dublin’) who bore witness to the city’s social problems or swept away the municipal detritus (councillors’ salaries and expenses) from City Hall in a post-election image from 1905.

Cartoons dealing specifically with women are an especially welcome category and will interest many scholars of feminism and gender. In keeping with the spirit of the time, the cartoons of women were not especially progressive but the depiction of suffragettes was not as offensive as those in the British press. The representations of women in the *Leprecaun* were fairly stereotypical – the comical spinster, the uncouth working-class woman and the young fashion victim. A cartoon of a suffragette from May 1913 showed the magazine’s ambivalent attitude to the increasingly militant movement. Drawn by one of Fitz’s collaborators, John Fergus O’Hea, it depicted a woman with wild hair, carrying a hammer leaning on a ballot box while clouds from a fire rage in the background. A jar of paraffin and a bomb lie at her feet, symbols of the violence which was now characterising the campaign in Britain and of which Irish readers would have been well aware. The caption: ‘When she gets it, what will she do with it?’ betrays the typical mixture of anxiety and resignation with which many regarded the suffragette movement.

This is a text that will appeal to an audience well beyond the academic. The quality of the reproduction of the illustrations and the attention to detail combined with the informative and engaging essays make it ideal reading for anyone with an interest in early twentieth century art, media or politics.

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