

An Gúm's Censorship of *Makers of Europe*

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The book publisher, An Gúm, was established in 1926 as part of the Department of Education of the Irish Free State to provide reading matter for Irish language learners and the Irish-speaking public. It was clear at the time of its establishment that there had been very little original writing made available in the Irish language in the previous years; therefore, An Gúm undertook an ambitious scheme of translation. During the 1930s alone, more than 250 translations from European languages were published; including both textbooks and general literature. Gradually, as more creative writers came forward writing original literature, the need for translations became less acute and, from 1940 on, less and less translations of literary titles were undertaken ('An Gúm: Nóta Eolais', 2018).

The An Gúm archive (c. 1922–c. 1999) is held in the National Archives of Ireland; my research focuses on the files that discuss translations in the period between 1926 and 1966. During this period, the Irish government were still making decisions about the place the Irish language should hold in the newly formed state. I investigate these decisions in the context of the work of An Gúm. The Irish Free State was established in 1922, four years before An Gúm. In the early years of political independence, the Irish government, which included An Gúm, tried to emphasise the differences between the Irish Free State and the United Kingdom. Among the key differences were the Irish language and Catholicism; as Ronan Fanning noted: 'The Irish language, like the Catholic religion, was a badge of identity which set apart what Ireland had been in the United Kingdom from what it should be after independence' (1983, 81). In this paper, I discuss the decisions that were made with regard to censorship in the context of the history textbook, *Makers of Europe* (1923). I analyse these decisions in the context of censorship in 1930s Ireland and assess An Gúm's censorship in the translation process.

The Irish Free State Executive Council felt that the rejection of foreign values and the implementation of censorship was necessary to strengthen the nation, which

they hoped would one day become a republic (Nic an Bhaird, 2012, 39). The Irish translation of *Makers of Europe*, *Taoisigh Eorpa*, was published in 1933. In this version, passages in which critics of the Catholic Church were praised, and passages in which Catholics were portrayed in a negative light, were omitted from the published translation. As we shall soon see, sentences that commended the work of Martin Luther and passages that described the more gruesome details of massacres carried out by Catholics, were not translated (Wilmot-Buxton, 1923, 148–9 and 163). The translation process was initiated by then Publications Officer of An Gúm, Seán Mac Lellan, who asked Micheál Ó Siochfhradha, a school inspector, if he would translate a history book into Irish for use in secondary schools (1929). Mac Lellan asked him to suggest a book that would be suitable. Ó Siochfhradha disliked a number of history books because of their bias in favour of certain religions and countries (1929), but found little fault with *Makers of Europe*, which was written by the English author, Ethel Mary Wilmot-Buxton. However, he did recommend that An Gúm seek a second opinion from at least one other reader with regard to the book's suitability for translation before he began the work (1929). There is nothing in the *Makers of Europe* file in the National Archives (A0053) to suggest that An Gúm consulted any other reader at this point. It was unfortunate that An Gúm did not heed the translator's advice, because questions were raised about the suitability of the text after the translation was finished.¹

The translator stated that he had finished his translation in September 1930, and it was Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, the editor of the book, who brought attention to the suitability of the original text for translation in January 1931. He questioned whether secondary schools in Ireland would be satisfied with the text's account of the Reformation, as it appeared more sympathetic to Protestants than Catholics (1931). Ó Siochfhradha drew attention to specific pages of the book (Wilmot-Buxton, 1923). On page 144, for example, 'Papal Despotism' is mentioned and is to be seen in the original *Taoisigh Eorpa* translation manuscript in the National Archives, but is not included in the published translation (Wilmot-Buxton, 1933). It is stated on the same page of the

¹ Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, the editor of the book, brought attention to the suitability of the original text for translation in a memorandum to Seán Mac Lellan on the 22nd of January 1931 (ref NA).

original book and in the manuscript that the Church had ‘fallen away from its first paths’ and ‘accumulated the dust and cobwebs of time’ (1933). However, these statements are not included in the published translation either.

For his part, the Editor did not find the account of the reformation offensive; in fact, he felt that there was very little wrong with it (1931). Mac Lellan noted that the English version of the text was ‘in use in a number of Catholic Secondary Schools’, pointing out that the controversial pieces were ‘pro-protestant, but hardly in any opinion, anti-Catholic’ (1931). Proinnsias Ó Dubhthaigh, the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Education, told the Secretary of the Department, Seosamh Ó Néill, that he did not believe the text was anti-Catholic either: ‘This book certainly seems to be written from a Protestant view-point – that is, by a Protestant and for Protestants – though not in a bigoted way, as far as I have been able to see’ (1931a). The Editor felt that people were becoming sensitive about matters such as these at the time, and Mac Lellan suggested they ensure that the translator had not ‘accentuated (but rather the reverse) any bias which the author may have shown’ in dealing with matters which had been subjects of religious controversy (1931). Ó Dubhthaigh agreed with him: ‘As the Irish version is a translation, and published professionally as such, I don’t think we can make any material alteration in the sense of oppressing of the original, except to the limited extent which Mr. McLellan suggests’ (1931a). It is clear that external pressures had a substantial effect on the actions of An Gúm, as although the Editor, the Publications Officer, and the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Education did not agree that the controversial pieces of the original text were anti-Catholic, the Editor feared that the public would not be happy about them (1931), and as a consequence, the Deputy Secretary felt compelled to consult the clergy (1931b).

The book was given to Father Lambert McKenna, an experienced teacher and Irish language lexicographer, and he was the first to recommend that An Gúm should make substantial changes to the meaning of the original text. In his opinion, the book should never have been chosen for translation; in fact, he felt he could not advise An Gúm to publish the text: ‘I should not like to take the responsibility of approving the book. Indeed I cannot approve it – though I recognise that it is wonderfully fair for a Protestant writer. I would suggest leaving the decision to Fr. Murphy who represents

the Archbishop' (1931). At this stage, many readers of the book presumed that the author, Ethel Mary Wilmot-Buxton, was a Protestant; however, it is stated in another of her books, *A Catholic History of Great Britain*, that she was a Catholic: 'It is, in particular, satisfactory that this History should have been written by a Catholic...Miss Wilmot-Buxton, writing about Catholic times, can look through Catholic eyes and understand the evidence' (Martindale, 1921, vi). The presumption that the author was a Protestant shows how sensitive the Department of Education staff and the clergy were to any criticism of the Catholic religion.

The original text was sent to Father Murphy, who signed his name in *An Gúm* correspondence as Micheál Ó Murchadha (1931d). As already mentioned, the original, English-language text was used in a number of Catholic Secondary Schools (Mac Lellan, 1931). While acknowledging this, Father Ó Murchadha insisted that it would not be right to publish the Irish translation under the name of *An Gúm* without making substantial changes to the text. He believed that more changes to eliminate the prejudice towards Catholics were necessary, and that it would only then be a good history book for Irish speakers (1931). This makes it clear that Father Ó Murchadha was not troubled by the fact that the English version of the text was used in Irish secondary schools, but that he also thought it necessary to censor the Irish version before it was suitable for schools.

Father Ó Murchadha found fault with specific pages of the text (1931). For example, he drew attention to pages 148–9 of the original book, in which the work of Martin Luther is praised in the following detail:

He had done a great work in calling men's attention to the evils existing within the Church, and had hurried on a movement of reform, which it is quite certain was bound to come within the next few years. The popes still ruled in Rome, but their power was very much lessened, and as the new doctrines spread to other kingdoms, their sovereigns, each in turn, became, in more or less degree, independent of their authority. But, except in England, it took many long years of fighting and despair before the reformed Faith was allowed to exist in the different countries. To throw off a galling chain of authority was one thing: to allow one's subjects to be divided upon a matter which involved much beside religion, was quite another (Wilmot-Buxton, 1923, 148–9).

Although a translation of this piece is available in the *Taoisigh Eorpa* manuscript in the National Archives, it does not appear in the published translation. Therefore, it is not expressed in the Irish-language publication that Luther, a critic of the Catholic Church, did great work in drawing attention to the problems within the Church and accelerated the reform movement. Likewise, the text does not mention that the power of the Popes in Rome was lessened and that leaders became more independent of their authority, nor that religion was not the only reason for the conflict (Wilmot-Buxton, 1933).

Father Ó Murchadha also objected to page 163 of the original text, in which a Catholic massacre of Protestants is described as follows: ‘One of their little towns was given up on condition that their lives were spared. The promise was given, but the soldiers decided that they need not keep faith with heretics. The men were massacred, the women shut up in a barn and burnt’ (Wilmot-Buxton, 1923). Again, the translation of this piece is to be seen in the *Taoisigh Eorpa* manuscript, but it is excluded in the Irish publication (Wilmot-Buxton, 1933). One would imagine that it was omitted because it portrays Catholics in a negative light. On the same page, these Protestant people are described as ‘harmless’, which was translated in the *Taoisigh Eorpa* manuscript, but not the final publication.

After receiving Father McKenna’s and Father Murphy’s response, the Deputy Secretary advised that the translation be published as a work of general literature and not as a school textbook. With this arrangement, An Gúm would not be obliged to print the *imprimatur* of the Department of Education at the start of the translation, yet it would still be available to schools. If printed as a school textbook, however, this *imprimatur* would be required to stipulate that the Department of Education deemed the book suitable for secondary school students (1931c). This response is similar to the Department’s reaction to the case of *Fánaí*, one of the few known examples of An Gúm censorship. This original work by Seán Óg Ó Caomhánaigh was published in 1927. After receiving complaints from the clergy about a love-scene in the book, An Gúm recalled the unsold copies, and published it again in 1928 with the controversial sections omitted (Ó Brosnacháin, 2001, 38). The *imprimatur* is to be seen on the first publication (Ó Caomhánaigh, 1927), but has been removed from the second (Ó Caomhánaigh, 1928).

As a result of the changes that the translator was advised to make to *Taoisigh Eorpa*, he had to wait almost a year to receive the second half of his payment for the work.² When he submitted the amended translation, he remarked that he had been reluctant to make the changes as the Irish version was to be published as a translation (1931). When this Irish translation did appear, it did not make any attempt to acknowledge that pieces of the original text had been omitted (Wilmot-Buxton, 1933). In general, the An Gúm staff made an effort to carry out censorship behind closed doors. As León Ó Broin, a civil servant, writer, and An Gúm employee, explains: 'We discovered early in the proceedings that An Gúm had to have a self-imposed censorship. After all, we were part of a government department subsidised from public funds...None of our trouble became public' (1986, 67–8). In 1929, the *Censorship of Publications Act*, enacted provisions for the prohibition of the sale and distribution of 'unwholesome literature' (Saorstát Éireann, 1929). No Irish-language book was placed on *The Register of Prohibited Publications, 1929–1967*; however, Irish language books were censored. The only difference was that Irish-language books were not censored officially, nor were these instances of censorship made public (Nic an Bhaird, 2012, 57).

Few publishers were able to compete with An Gúm in the Irish book market until the 1940s, when a book club, An Club Leabhar, was established, which in turn provided a steady demand for Irish books. In 1945, An Gúm's largest competitor, Sáirséal agus Dill, was established; this company was strongly opposed to the censorship practices of An Gúm.³ It was not part of the Department of Education, and was therefore not under the same pressure to censor texts. An Gúm was under the influence of those who saw translation as a filter, a way of cleansing texts of foreign impurities before Irish speakers read them. Policing translation was in this way only

² Micheál Ó Siochfhradha stated that he had finished the translation in a letter to Seán Mac Lellan on the 11th of September 1930, and he was not given the second half of his payment until the 25th of August 1931 (ref NA).

³ However, Sáirséal agus Dill were also put under pressure to censor one book; *Maraíodh Seán Sabhat Aréir*. They published this book in 1964 with sections omitted, so that the Club Leabhar would accept it. In the end the company published one version of the book for the Club Leabhar, in which there was a blank space in place of the pieces that were omitted, and another version which they placed on sale in shops (Ó hÁinle, 2005, 12–14).

one element of a larger ideological project aimed at using Irish to create a more conservative national culture (1996, 160). In the case of *Makers of Europe*, the Irish translation was used to create a more Catholic version of a text. In Father Ó Murchadha's opinion, a Protestant viewpoint was shown too clearly in the text, and this censorship was an effort to prevent the Irish-speaking public from reading, and the government from publishing, what were perceived as the strongest aspects of a Protestant opinion (1931). The government would not publish anything which expressed a negative attitude towards the Catholic Church.

While there are a few known examples of An Gúm's censorship of original works,⁴ more research must be carried out to achieve an understanding of An Gúm's use of the process of translation to censor texts. The case of *Makers of Europe* is particularly egregious because the English version of the text was already in use in Irish secondary schools. It is clear from this case that An Gúm would not translate details that damaged the Executive Council's preferred image of a nationalistic and Catholic Ireland, even if they were already available in English. As no Irish-language book was placed on *The Register of Prohibited Publications, 1929–1967*, because they were not officially censored, deeper research is required to identify what other books were edited in the process of translation into Irish. Further analysis of original books, translations and An Gúm files must be undertaken to reveal the comprehensive history of the censorship of Irish texts during this period.

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⁴ For instance, the aforementioned *Fánaí* is a well-known example of an original work which An Gúm censored (Ó Brosnacháin, 2001, 38).

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