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Stephanie Rains

To cite this article: Stephanie Rains (2015) Going in for Competitions, Media History, 21:2, 138-149, DOI: [10.1080/13688804.2014.995611](https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2014.995611)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2014.995611>



Published online: 06 Jan 2015.



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# GOING IN FOR COMPETITIONS

## Active readers and magazine culture, 1900–1910

Stephanie Rains

*This article assesses the extensive 'reader competitions' run in popular magazines and story papers of the early twentieth century. Using examples from Irish story papers, it examines the appeal of these competitions to both the publishers and the readers. For readers, competitions offered an opportunity to display skills which combined the results of universal education with the more playful knowledge that was part of popular parlour games and other leisure activities of the time. They also offered readers an opportunity to 'write back' to the mass media, with indications of an extremely high level of interactivity between readers and editors, including reader suggestions for competition ideas, and disputes regarding the rules and judging of contests. The article goes on to argue that these competitions were themselves significant examples of mass media structures of the time, relying as they did on the specific forms of print culture and upon mechanisms of industrial time and communication processes.*

**KEYWORDS** popular culture; readers; Irish identity; early twentieth century press history; journalism studies; popular weeklies

### Introduction

James Joyce once told his friend Eugene Sheehy that, when completing his University College Dublin admissions form in 1898, he listed 'going in for competitions' as his father's occupation.<sup>1</sup> While this may have been a rather weary sneer at John Joyce's inadequate attempts to improve the family finances, it was also a recognition of one of the abiding enthusiasms of the era; prize competitions run by magazines were enormously popular, vying with each other to offer both amusement and (in the case of British magazines) lavish prizes. Even if Joyce were being sarcastic about his father's attempts to make money from magazine competitions, he obviously recognised their appeal, having entered a 'missing word' competition in *Ideas* himself, and later in *Ulysses* he would have Leopold Bloom recall entering a poetry competition in *Shamrock* magazine during his boyhood.<sup>2</sup>

Magazine competitions were a central feature of popular culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, constituting one of the most interactive features of the 'new journalism' which sought to attract new readers by abandoning much of the traditionally formal editorial tone. Like any really successful cultural phenomenon, they simultaneously served several interest groups. As Brandon Kershner has argued, 'publishers were responding to an unprecedented growth and diversity in the genres of popular periodicals and popular fiction and to the concomitant unprecedented increase in competition for a limited readership'.<sup>3</sup> If this were true of British publishers, attempting to either retain or attract readers in an increasingly competitive market, it was even more

true for Irish magazine publishers. By the start of the twentieth century, Ireland was flooded with British commercial publications, many of them benefiting from considerable economies of scale by comparison to those of Irish publications. Competitions—which readers might feel they had a better chance of winning than the large-scale British contests—were one of the ways by which Irish publishers sought to overcome their British competition.

For readers, competitions not only offered a direct source of amusement or entertainment, but they also offered a chance to demonstrate certain skills or knowledge. For one of the first generations to have near-universal literacy and formal education, these competitions (simple as most were) may well have offered a pleasing reminder of personal accomplishments which were still notable by comparison to their parents' or grandparents' generations. And competitions offered one of the platforms by which readers could interact with magazines, by 'writing back' in a literal and metaphorical sense. Using examples from popular Irish 'story papers' of the era, this article will focus on the nature of this 'active reading' offered by competitions. It will also argue that these competitions were themselves significant examples of mass media structures of the time, reflecting as they did the specific forms and mechanisms of print culture, industrial time and mass communication.

Story papers became a very significant publishing format well before the start of the twentieth century, and as their name suggests, they focused upon short and serial fiction. Their readership often encompassed entire families, even if their principal market was young male readers. The main story papers published in Ireland by the early twentieth century were *Ireland's Own*, the *Irish Packet*, the *Irish Emerald* and the *Shamrock*, all of which were penny weekly papers based mainly in Dublin. Even estimated circulation figures for these papers are almost non-existent, and those which do exist are entirely unverified. These seem to suggest, however, that the Irish story papers' circulation varied between 30,000 and 80,000 copies per week during the early twentieth century (at a time when the population of the entire island of Ireland was just over 3 million).<sup>4</sup> Because their target market was the upper-working class and lower-middle class, they were also predominantly Catholic and nationalist in sympathy, but unlike the daily press (especially in Ireland during this period) these sympathies were always tangential to their more central commercial purposes, and it is that populism and broad readership which makes them a useful case study of reader interaction.

### Story Competitions

As reflected in Leopold Bloom's fictional memories of entering a poetry contest in 1877, magazines had been running competitions for readers since well before the start of the twentieth century. The British publishing market was very crowded long before that, and some publications were moved to offer prizes of enormous value, such as *Tit-Bits'* competition in 1883 in which the first prize was a house.<sup>5</sup> Six years later, *Tit-Bits'* greatest rival, *Answers*, ran a competition to win £1 a week for the rest of the winner's life (the competition involved entrants guessing the amount of gold in the Bank of England), apparently attracting 700,000 entrants.<sup>6</sup> In January 1901, an Irish magazine editorial noted that the current issue of *Tit-Bits* was its 1000th, and added, 'Sir George Newnes is modest

over his gigantic success, the pioneer of many other similar successes. He attributes it to the system of giving prizes which he introduced.<sup>7</sup> In 1905, the career of one of Britain's most prolific popular novelists, Edgar Wallace, was nearly ruined when he ran a competition in the *Daily Mail* to promote his novel *Four Just Men* (readers had to guess the murder technique) without correctly limiting his prize liability to just one correct entrant—a competition which should have cost £500 to stage rapidly escalated to £5000 as more and more readers submitted correct entries.<sup>8</sup> When they were run less ineptly than Wallace's effort however, the point of these competitions for the magazines was to boost circulation by making the competitions—especially those with very valuable prizes—a source of publicity and interest among readers. That increased readership not only created direct extra revenue through sales, but also increased the magazine's appeal to advertisers, who were often the real source of profit for publications, especially those which appealed to the mass market and had a low cover price.

The most common way to ensure that a competition boosted circulation was by requiring readers to submit a coupon from the magazine with each entry. This meant that each entrant had to have their own copy of the magazine in order to obtain a coupon. The fact that many of the penny weekly papers aimed at working-class or lower-middle-class readers ran contests almost continuously during the first decade of the twentieth century—despite frequently weary editorial comments about how difficult and time-consuming they were to operate—probably indicates a keen awareness of the extent to which individual copies of their magazines were shared among multiple readers. Competitions, and the need which they created for each entrant to buy their own copy, were therefore extremely valuable in boosting sales. This was obviously understood by most readers, and sometimes it was even openly referred to by editors, such as the occasion in 1905 when the editor of the *Irish Packet*, during a debate about the structure of a contest, commented, 'The competition does not purport to be wholly disinterested. It is intended to induce readers to further encourage the sale of the *Irish Packet* by inducing others to buy and collect their coupons'.<sup>9</sup>

Magazines sometimes attempted to draw newsagents into competitions as well, obviously recognising their role in promoting publications to potential readers. In March 1905, the *Irish Emerald's* 'Puzzle Picture' competition not only required readers to enclose a coupon with their entry, but also the coupon asked them to name the newsagent where they purchased their copy of the magazine, and when the results were published later in the month, the 'winning' newsagent's name and address was published alongside that of the winning entrant.<sup>10</sup> A similar competition, asking readers for the name of their newsagent, was run three years later in *Ireland's Own*.<sup>11</sup> But the *Irish Packet* took the involvement of newsagents in circulation-boosting competitions to its logical conclusion, and actually ran a competition for newsagents in October 1905. It was, they declared, 'open to all who sell newspapers entailing no heavier responsibility than the fair display of the placards of the *Irish Packet* and a reasonable recommendation of the paper to intending customers'. The prize was to be awarded to the newsagents able to demonstrate either the greatest increase in actual sales or the greatest increase in proportionate sales.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, the Irish magazines saw newsagents' goodwill as a way in which they might overcome the greater advertising budgets of British imports, which

would often have been accompanied by expensive posters to be displayed in newsagents' windows.

Irish magazines could not possibly run competitions with such lavish prizes as those of their British rivals. Even the most successful of Irish publications could not hope to aspire to the circulation figures of the larger British magazines, given the disparity in population size between the two countries. Because of this, they were smaller operations in all senses—smaller print runs, smaller advertising revenues and, inevitably, smaller competition prizes. Nevertheless, the competitions run in Irish magazines were extensive—several magazines often had more than one competition running in any given week—and their prizes varied from the token (such as an *Ireland's Own* fountain pen) to the fairly substantial (the *Irish Packet* sometimes offered first prizes as high as £25). The number of entries for these competitions also varied, with some causing the editor to complain of a paucity of entries, and others causing him to delay publishing the results because the magazine's office had been overwhelmed by the number of entrants. In order to understand the degree of enthusiasm and interest they provoked, it is worth considering the precise form of these competitions; a true craze of the mass media age, they showed considerable self-consciousness by both editors and readers about the forms and structures of the popular press.

Given that so many of the popular magazines which ran competitions were 'story papers', it is not surprising that story competitions were probably the most common and longest-running form of contest they ran. Typically, readers were invited to submit a short story, the winner receiving both prize money (often a guinea, which would have been a significant sum to the readership of story papers) and the reward of having their work published in the magazine. They were often published on the front or front-inside page, and *Ireland's Own* made a point of publishing the author's full name and address as part of the stories' masthead each week. When the *Irish Packet* was launched the year after *Ireland's Own*, its emphasis upon encouraging readers' fiction contributions suggests that running story competitions and publishing work by these amateur writers was a central part of its business plan. For a few readers these competitions were a springboard for a professional career as a writer of short fiction for the popular press. For the majority, however, it was clearly no more than an amusement and an opportunity to win a guinea. Nevertheless, even for these more casual entrants to story competitions, the work involved in planning, writing and submitting a short story (most were approximately 3000 words long) would have been considerable, and suggests a high degree of commitment. It also suggests that many readers found the process of writing enjoyable in itself, and had absorbed a considerable amount of 'professional' knowledge about genre, plotting and narrative from their reading of story papers. Indeed, the extremely generic nature of many of the stories they submitted only emphasises how well the authors had understood the codes and conventions of magazine fiction. When the editor of *Ireland's Own* complained, in 1912, that he could summarise the majority of stories he received as 'The pretty girl cannot marry the nice young man because he is poor, and her father owes the gombeen man, or some other objectionable character, money. Generally things turn out right, and generally America is in some way responsible for the necessary dollars', he was inadvertently acknowledging how thoroughly his readers had absorbed the structures of the material he, like the editors of all other story papers, had been publishing.<sup>13</sup> The

process of readers attempting to write such a story to submit to a competition would have involved self-conscious deconstruction of the other stories they read in the magazines. For a readership whose formal education often ended in their early teens (at the latest), this was an act of autodidacticism as well as amusement. Indeed, the story competitions were perceived by the magazine editors and their readers to be the most challenging form of competition, and beyond either the abilities or perseverance of most readers. Nevertheless, and even allowing for those readers who were dedicated and repeated contestants, the fact that *Ireland's Own* alone was able to print a prize-winning short story every week throughout the first decade of the twentieth century suggests that there was a considerable degree of enthusiasm among its general readership for the sustained effort required to produce a printable—albeit generic—short story.

### Word Game Competitions

Even the most generic short story did require literary skills and a degree of commitment which many readers did not have, however. This meant that editors were perpetually trying to devise forms of contest which would have a wider appeal, and yet also stay within the bounds of the laws forbidding lotteries or other games of chance. Editors frequently had to explain to readers that it was not legal for them to run a contest in which the winner could be 'picked out of a hat' rather than by consideration of the merits of their entry. So in November 1905 for example, the editor of the *Irish Packet* had to explain to a reader who had suggested the magazine run a competition in which the prize was given 'to the applicant whose guess of the number of applications is the nearest to the mark' that this would have been in contravention of the Lotteries Act.<sup>14</sup> The view of many readers, by contrast to that of the law, seemed to be that contests which tested the skill or knowledge of contestants were inherently unfair, as those without that skill or knowledge would not then have an equal chance of winning. This attitude appears to have been a persistent problem for the *Irish Packet* in particular, which actually suspended its competitions for part of 1905 on the grounds that the 'spirit of competition' was not strong enough among its readers, the editor adding that, 'while the weekly competitions were running there were complaints from time to time that the subjects were too difficult for the ordinary reader'.<sup>15</sup>

Despite this rather testy exchange between the editor and some of his readers, the *Irish Packet*, along with other Irish publications, did continue to run competitions which—to judge from their longevity—must have been popular with readers. It was also the case that many of these were tests of literary skills of some kind. The most common included limerick contests, joke and riddle competitions and 'missing word' games. In January 1908, *Ireland's Own* launched a new limerick contest, in which readers had to supply the last line to rhymes printed each week. In the first week, the initial lines were "'Good Morning! A Happy Leap Year!'/Said a gushing young artist named Weir/To a "sitter" named Rose/Who replied "I propose —".<sup>16</sup> The magazine had obviously taken into account concerns over competitions being too challenging for readers, however, and supplied at the end of this rhyme a list of words (pier, auctioneer, musketeer, etc.) which contestants could use to complete the final line. Later that year, the magazine's editor commented that,

To devise a new and entertaining competition is a matter of far greater difficulty than the general public can have any idea of. In order to please all, it must be fairly simple, interesting, amusing and withal, giving plenty of scope for a variety of answers – last, but not least, substantial prizes must be offered to make it at all worthwhile.<sup>17</sup>

Competitions which included some visual as well as literary elements were probably an attempt to entice the participation of readers who did not enjoy—or feel able—to play contests which relied on literary skills or general knowledge alone. Nevertheless, these games often did test literacy, especially those which used pictures to illustrate homonyms or words' double meanings. So in 1906 *Ireland's Own* ran a 'Well-Known Names' competition (in conjunction with Thomas Cook and Son, the prize being a first-class holiday to Killarney), in which readers had to surmise the Irish surname indicated in each of a series of cartoons. One of these, for example, consisted of a drawing of a knee preceded by the letters 'Mc' and followed by the letters 'ill'.<sup>18</sup> Another pictorial competition run by *Ireland's Own* was 'Placem', in April 1908. They published cartoons of body parts such as heads, torsos and limbs, and readers were invited to cut out these cartoons and assemble them into whole drawings of people, each with the correct limbs and heads. These reassembled cartoons were then to be pasted onto a piece of card and submitted to the magazine—the first prize was a bicycle.<sup>19</sup> This competition was not unique in requiring competitors to cut out shapes and reassemble them in order to enter—from the magazines' perspective, this would have rendered entry coupons unnecessary, as the form of the competition itself required competitors to cut up the magazine, both preventing more than one entry per copy and also probably making the sharing of the magazine less attractive. Other competitions continued to use visual clues, even when they did not have to be cut out of the page. In 1908 the *Irish Packet* ran a 'Read the Fan' competition, in which a partially closed fan was printed on the page. Each of its visible leaves contained a letter—readers had to deduce the well-known proverb which would have been revealed if the fan were fully opened.<sup>20</sup> This of course is an example of a pictorial contest in which the use of a drawing made no difference to the literary skill or knowledge needed to solve the puzzle. The successful entrants still needed a good knowledge of proverbs, and the ability to solve 'missing letter' puzzles, and all entrants—successful or not—had to be motivated by an enjoyment of attempting such literate games.

In fact, despite the regular references in editorial columns to the need not to make competitions too demanding, almost all of the word plays and puzzles required not only some specific literacy skills, but more importantly a literate frame of mind which would derive enjoyment and a sense of achievement from word or letter games. One of the most striking examples of this can be seen in the success of the *Irish Packet's* 'Poon' competition. Beginning in January 1908, the competition took the form of readers being supplied each week with two lines of a poem, which they then had to complete by adding 'two lines of some other well-known poem so that the completed stanza will appear to make sense, even if it doesn't'.<sup>21</sup> The contest therefore required a knowledge of poetry and a good sense of metre and rhyme. The winner of the first week's competition completed the lines 'Breathes there the man with soul so dead/Who never to himself hath said', (from 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel' by Walter Scott) with the lines 'Give me but what this ribbon bound/ Take all the rest the sun goes round' (from 'On a Girdle' by Edmund Waller).<sup>22</sup> Not only did

the editor declare that this competition had been particularly popular with readers in its early weeks, but also it was still running a full year later and still receiving apparently enthusiastic entries from readers. This was in the same magazine which had, a few years earlier, rejected a reader's suggestion of a competition based upon making new sentences from lines taken from different parts of the magazine as 'a little too difficult to tempt the general reader'.<sup>23</sup> What this suggests then is that even the 'general reader' of the early twentieth century, with a formal education which typically did not extend far into his or her teens, was nevertheless both confident in, and enthusiastic about, puzzles involving poetry and rhyming. Given that most readers would have had fairly limited access to books of poetry, *Irish Packet* readers' facility and enthusiasm for this competition was probably based upon the widespread practice of memorising poetry for recitation.

The form of this competition, like that of several others involving word games such as rhymes, anagrams and missing letter puzzles, seems reminiscent of the parlour games of the period, and was therefore probably drawing upon skills and knowledge which many lower-middle-class readers of the period would have developed as part of home and social life. The many requests to swap or buy second-hand sheet music and song lyrics, as listed in the magazines' classified columns, were also a consequence of the culture of lower-middle-class parlours. The fact that the 'Poon' competition drew upon this culture of songs, recitations and games probably contributed significantly to its success, because it tested knowledge and skills which were already embedded in readers' leisure culture.

If the competitions which succeeded with readers were those which allowed them to use skills of which they already felt some confidence, they also needed to function efficiently within the forms and mechanisms of the mass media and mass communication. More specifically, they had to work well within a rhythm of weekly publication of questions or challenges and also daily postal deliveries of answers or solutions. Even more importantly, they had to work as print culture—so for example the readerships' probably very detailed knowledge of popular music was not transferable to the format of magazine publication, because it could not communicate sound. The same applied—to a large extent—to visual culture, because the penny weeklies affordable to lower-middle-class readers could not print many detailed images (or photographs) due to both the cost of setting images themselves, and also the fact that they were printed on cheap paper which was not suitable for images more complex than simple line drawings. Hence the strong emphasis upon language, words and sentences; these were the technical forms from which popular print culture was constructed, and any reader interaction with them also had to fit into these forms. That interaction also had to be conducted through the postal system—meaning that readers had to be disciplined to meet entry deadlines, as well as to conform to other mechanisms of written communication. Regular editorial injunctions not to post entries before the specified date of competitions' end, but also not after the required entry date, as well as requirements that entries be submitted in particular forms (most obviously the *Irish Packet's* requirement that entries be on their branded postcards), and be laid out in particular ways, indicate that for many readers these competitions were an induction into the processes of industrial time and modern communication systems. In 1905, for example, the *Irish Emerald's* list of winners of its 'Word Hunt' competition was concluded with an announcement headed 'Why Some Competitors Failed'. This, the editor explained, was because many of them,



...disqualified themselves by not complying with the conditions laid down, and this again was due in most cases to not reading them properly. Some did not address the envelopes properly, others omitted to mark at top left-hand corner of the envelope the number of words sent in by them ... we hope that those who thus disqualified themselves will be taught a lesson as to the need of watchfulness and care in filling coupons...<sup>24</sup>

This rather authoritative tone is somewhat at odds with the deliberately conversational and approachable tone of other editorial statements in the story papers. This authoritarian note was more or less universal however whenever submissions for publication in the magazines were under discussion. The shift from a confiding and chatty tone to a paternalistic and authoritarian one marked the limits of new journalism's projection of an equal relationship between editors and readers. While editors might cheerfully request reader suggestions for the magazine, they reserved the right to adjudicate on which material was published and under what conditions.

### Cheating and Disputes

Certainly, readers often had strong opinions about competitions. Not only did they regularly make suggestions as to new kinds of competitions they thought editors should introduce, but they also queried the fairness of the criteria by which competitions were judged. In 1905, for example, the *Irish Packet* briefly ran a competition in which readers were invited simply to send in coupons cut from copies of the magazine, the reader who sent in the most coupons winning a prize of one sovereign. The editor was unsympathetic to a reader who complained that this form of competition discriminated against faithful but poorer readers who could not afford to purchase extra copies of the magazine. However, the competition did not last long, presumably in the face of more reader objections. In 1908, a reader wrote to *Ireland's Own* about their contest based on anagrams of famous Irish names, complaining that

I consider your plan of awarding 1st prize for the first correct list opened objectionable. Suppose there are 20 lists all correct, and that you award 1st and 2nd prizes, respectively, to the two first opened, all the others would have next to nothing for their labour.<sup>25</sup>

The reader went on to suggest that all those who sent in correct answers should win a proportionate share in the combined first and second prizes. A debate about this, between the editor and a number of readers, continued over several weeks. There were clearly suspicions among readers too that contestants who lived in Dublin—closer to the offices of most magazines—would have an advantage in competitions by being able to submit their entries earlier than readers who lived further away. Editors were moved to address this concern by pointing out that no entries were opened until after the closing date, thus meaning that 'every reader, whether he lives in the remotest part of Ireland, or in the capital, is on a perfectly even footing'.<sup>26</sup> The outrage expressed by some readers at any infringement of fairness in the running of competitions was itself an indicator of the fervour of the competitions craze, however.

One way to win the first prize in competitions, of course, was to cheat. Given the stated objections from some readers to the 'unfairness' of relying upon skills or knowledge

not everyone shared, and aided by the sheer volume of popular print culture circulating within Ireland by the early twentieth century—it is not surprising that plagiarism was a fairly regular occurrence. This was a particular concern for short story competitions, but poetry and riddle contests were also vulnerable to cheating.

*Ireland's Own* made its first public reference to plagiarism within three months of its first issue, when it published a letter (signed 'Fair Play' and entitled 'Piracy') complaining that the postcard competition running since the magazine's first issue, in which readers had to supply brief comic anecdotes on the back of a postcard, had been won by an entry copied from the British magazine *Answers*. The letter concluded, 'If the Irish people cannot make up a story, original, to send in, let them not try to obtain money by false pretences by sending in postcard stories copied from English periodicals'.<sup>27</sup> Just over a year later, the editor of the *Irish Packet* complained of having been sent a story which had been published in the *Weekly Freeman* in 1902, and some time later again denounced a reader who had submitted a story that had recently been published by the *Dublin Evening Telegraph*—he threatened to name the next plagiarist who sent in an entry, although this appears never to have happened.<sup>28</sup> In 1912 the editor of *Ireland's Own* commented darkly that, 'a few writers—or copyists—have transgressed [the rule against plagiarism] and their names have disappeared forever from our list of contributors. If people send in copied stories as their own, they lay themselves open to severe legal penalties'.<sup>29</sup>

More organised forms of cheating were sometimes referred to in editorials and readers' letters. Competitions which relied upon readers to vote for the winning entry (as short story or anecdote competitions often did, presumably as another way of boosting circulation, since votes were cast using cut-out coupons) were also open to vote-rigging, either by the magazine itself or by syndicates of readers. In 1904, a concerned reader wrote to the *Irish Packet* regarding the £100 short story competition they were currently running, to be decided by readers' votes. He claimed that similar contests in *Answers* had been rigged by readers forming a syndicate and buying multiple copies of the magazine—he went further and claimed that the offenders in that instance had been Irish, and that the *Irish Packet* editor's confidence that a 'spirit of fair play' would predominate among readers was misplaced.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, for prizes as large as £25 (up to six months' income for many readers of the *Irish Packet*) or the even more valuable prizes of some British magazine competitions (such as the *Tit-Bits* house of 1883), the cost of purchasing multiple copies of the magazine in order to rig the vote might well have been financially worthwhile. In this instance, the editor of the *Packet* merely assured readers that there had been no 'suspicious surges' of circulation in any given locality, and did not appear to take the threat of organised cheating very seriously. The editor of *Ireland's Own* did once concede that,

I know that there was one instance in which a responsible person in a paper did succeed in cheating the public for some time by working a lot of different addresses in collusion with some other people. They were caught and some years imprisonment was the sentence. The heads of the firm were in no way to blame.<sup>31</sup>

The manufacturers of branded goods would become, in the decades after World War One, the principal inheritors of the 'prize competition' as an important form of advertising and a mechanism for building customer loyalty, and the origins of this are visible much earlier in the twentieth century. In 1909, *Lady of the House* (Ireland's principal women's magazine)

contained advertisements for Wright's Coal Tar Soap, which was running a competition in conjunction with the *Daily Mail*. There were '100 Cash Prizes', the first of which was £5 5s. The competition took the form of a line-drawing advertisement for Coal Tar Soap, split into sections and printed irregularly on the page. Readers were invited to cut out the sections and paste them into positions which would reassemble the drawing.<sup>32</sup> In 1910, *Lady of the House* ran a 'Prize Debate' contest for which the topic was 'Are Corsets Injurious?' and the prizes were 'beautiful modern corsets' from Messrs Pretty & Son of Ipswich. The contest was of course a very thinly disguised advertisement for the brand.<sup>33</sup> And in 1911 the Christmas Double Number of *Ireland's Own* published advertisements for a competition being run by The Savoy Confectioner's Co Ltd of Grafton Street. Billed as 'Grand Xmas Competition. 100 Splendid Prizes for "Ireland's Own" Readers', the competition (for which, unsurprisingly, the prizes were boxes of chocolates) required contestants to 'write us a letter (it need not be long) giving your opinion on the merits of Savoy Cocoa. Simple, isn't it? Do not bother about "literary" style...'. The announcement went on to state that 'The Judging will be in the hands of Mr Kevin J Kenny and Mr Brian O'Kennedy, of Kenny's Advertising Agency Dublin...'; a clear indication of where the contest had originated.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

Reader competitions in the popular press therefore spanned a wide variety of forms and degrees of difficulty. From the challenge of plotting and composing a 3000-word short story down to the relative ease of completing a 'missing word' contest, readers of even the cheap 'story papers' had considerable choice of competitions. The fact that these contests were so plentiful, so widespread, and so long-lasting suggests that collectively, the entertainment they offered to readers was considerable. The most successful seem to have drawn upon the skills supplied by the era's universal education system, but also those connected to the wider popular pastimes of the working- and lower-middle classes, especially the recitation, rhyming and word-play of parlour games. But these competitions also provided readers with the chance to 'write back' to the publications they read; not only as contestants submitting their entries, but also as correspondents to the editors, suggesting competition ideas, disputing modes of judging and even acting to police instances of cheating or plagiarism. As such, they provided an important platform for frequent and sometimes lively interaction between editors at the forefront of the 'new journalism' and their increasingly demanding readers.

## Notes

1. Sheehy, *May It Please the Court*, 24.
2. Kershner, *Joyce, Bakhtin and Popular Literature*, 6.
3. *Ibid.*, 4–5.
4. See Brennan, *Allegiance*, 25 for a discussion of *Ireland's Own's* sales during this period, and 'Our Coupon Competition. Result for September'. 1905. *Irish Packet*, November 14, for mention of that paper's circulation at that time.
5. Law and Sterenberg, "Old v. New Journalism and the Public Sphere; or, Habermas Encounters Dallas and Stead," 10.

6. Kevin Williams, *Read All About It!*, 127.
7. "Entre Nous" (*Irish Figaro*, January 5, 1901). Also see Jackson, "George Newnes," for a thorough discussion of the 'new journalism' pioneered by Newnes and *Tit-Bits* magazine. Jackson includes many examples of competitions run by Newnes, but places more emphasis upon the editorials and information or advice columns of *Tit-Bits* in her discussion of the growth of 'new journalism' and its interaction with readers. A more explicit discussion of competitions as 'interactivity' between readers and texts is found in Griffen-Foley, "From Tit-Bits to Big Brother," which draws parallels between the 'participatory media' of the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries.
8. David Glover, *Introduction, The Four Just Men*, xiv–xvi.
9. "A Chat with the Editor" (*Irish Packet*, October 28, 1905).
10. "Our Prize Competitions" (*Irish Emerald*, March 18 and March 25, 1905).
11. "Curly QQQ. Interesting! Easy! Novel! Amusing!" (*Ireland's Own*, March 18, 1908).
12. "A Chat with the Editor" (*Irish Packet*, November 4, 1905).
13. "Our Readers' Page" (*Ireland's Own*, February 21, 1912).
14. "A Chat with the Editor" (*Irish Packet*, November 25, 1905).
15. *Ibid.* (October 21, 1905).
16. "Ireland's Own Name Hunt" *Ireland's Own*, January 1, 1908).
17. "Our Readers' Page" (*Ireland's Own*, March 11, 1908).
18. "Ireland's Own Free Trip to Killarney for 24 Well-Known Names" *Ireland's Own*, March 28, 1906).
19. "'Placem'. Yet Another Grand Pictorial Competition" (*Ireland's Own*, April 29, 1908).
20. "Read the Fan" (*Irish Packet*, January 25, 1908).
21. "Can You Poon? If So, Do It Now!" (*Irish Packet*, January 4, 1908).
22. "Great Success of the Poon Competition" (*Irish Packet*, January 11, 1908).
23. "A Chat with the Editor" (*Irish Packet*, October 21, 1905).
24. "Why Some Competitors Failed" (*Irish Emerald*, October 28, 1905).
25. "Our Readers' Page" (*Ireland's Own*, February 19, 1908).
26. "Our Prize Competitions" (*Irish Emerald*, April 29, 1905).
27. "Piracy" (*Ireland's Own*, February 18, 1903).
28. "A Chat with the Editor" (*Irish Packet*, January 23 and February 18, 1904).
29. "Our Readers' Page" (*Ireland's Own*, March 6, 1912).
30. "A Chat with the Editor" (*Irish Packet*, October 1, 1904).
31. "Our Readers' Page" (*Ireland's Own*, May 5, 1915).
32. "Lady of the House" (May, 1909).
33. *Ibid.* (April, 1910).
34. "Grand Xmas Competition. 100 Splendid Prizes for 'Ireland's Own' Readers" (*Ireland's Own*, December 6, 1911).

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**Stephanie Rains**, Faculty of Arts, Celtic Studies & Philosophy, Maynooth University, Iontas Building, Maynooth, Co Kildare, Maynooth, Ireland. Tel: 00-353-1-7086980; E-mail: [stephanie.rains@nuim.ie](mailto:stephanie.rains@nuim.ie)