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Defiance Behind a Pretty Face: The Deceptive Femininity of Irish

Women in *Punch*

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Abstract

Scholars have long considered the Victorian satirical magazine *Punch* to be a window into the opinions and sensibilities of its predominantly middle-class English audience. Not only did the publication humorously comment upon life in Victorian England, but it often captured aspects of the colonial tension felt between England and its closest overseas colony, Ireland. Although much scholarly attention has been given to the figure of the Irish man in the Victorian periodical press, very little has been written on contemporary depictions of his feminine counterpart, the Irish woman. The omission is curious as the Irish woman represents an interesting figure for study. While the English stereotypes of Irish men in the nineteenth century were preoccupied with Irish male physical appearance—violent, animalistic, subservient—the Irish woman, in the eyes of their English draughtsman, dangerously belied a single archetype, I argue in this paper, precisely because her appearance did not always indicate her Irishness. Therefore, in order to identify the Irish woman's nationality, artists in *Punch* often aligned Irish women to certain stereotypes of Irish behavior or used them to subvert the expectations of middle-class values. When appearance alone was not enough to classify the Irish woman, supposedly Celtic and feminine actions, attitudes, and sympathies dominated contemporary characterizations. The study of these depictions of Irish women in *Punch* reveals larger assumptions and anxieties that the average middle-class English public harbored towards Irish women.

Keywords: Victorian Britain, English periodical press, Anglo-Irish relations, *Punch* magazine, depictions of Irish women

Although much scholarly attention has been given to the figure of the Irish man in the Victorian periodical press, very little has been written on contemporary depictions of his feminine counterpart, the Irish woman. The omission is curious, as the Irish woman represents an interesting figure for study. While the English stereotypes of Irish men in the nineteenth century were preoccupied with Irish male physical appearance—violent, animalistic, subservient—the Irish woman, in the eyes of their English draughtsman, dangerously belied single archetype, precisely because her appearance did not always indicate her Irishness. Therefore, in order to identify the Irish woman's nationality, *Punch* artists often aligned Irish women to certain stereotypes of Irish behavior or used them to subvert the expectations of middle-class values. When appearance alone was not enough to classify the Irish woman, supposedly Celtic and feminine actions, attitudes, and sympathies dominated contemporary characterizations. *Punch*, perhaps the most popular satirical magazine of the Victorian era, offers an interesting glimpse into the opinions and sensibilities of its predominantly middle-class, English audience. The study of these depictions of Irish women in *Punch* begins to reveal larger assumptions and anxieties that the average middle-class English public harbored towards Irish women.

Stereotypes of Irish men in the Victorian Periodical Press

Over the course of the Victorian period, the figure of the Irish Celt underwent a drastic transition. However, even before the Irish man became a frequent derisive figure, there existed a long tradition of including the Irish man in the Victorian periodical press (*Apes and Angels* 29). The volume of these depictions suggests an underlying preference in the satirical press for masculine portrayals of the Irish. Although they were less derogatory, the physical features of these examples still generally demonstrated some corresponding stereotypical character trait that

the early Victorian audience would recognize as characteristically “Irish.” In his seminal work on the subject of Irish men in Victorian caricature, L. Perry Curtis Jr describes early Victorian depictions of the Irish man as being characterized by “snub-nosed, big-mouthed, and prognathous” features (*Apes and Angels* 31). This less than complimentary appearance popular in the early Victorian period was rooted in the stereotype that historian Stephen Howe defines as the Irish man as backward and “uncultivated” (16). In the eyes of the English middle-class, such crude and rustic stereotyping would have confirmed the popular, paternalistic sentiment towards maintaining the 1800 Act of Union. However, with the rise of Fenian violence in the mid-1860s, the periodical press began sapping the Irish Celt of his humanity (*Apes and Angels* 37). The ultimate culmination of this depiction, according to L. Perry Curtis Jr., resulted in caricatures of the Irish man that were “more monster than man” (*Apes and Angels* 37). In this way, monstrous depictions became synonymous with stereotypes of Irish rebelliousness, which dovetailed with an increasingly tenuous political relationship between Ireland and England. Michael de Nie tracks this bestial depiction of the Irish even further beyond the depictions of the Fenians in the 1860s to the portrayals of the Land League in the 1880s (*The Eternal Paddy* 217-22). Here too, de Nie shows depictions of the rebellious Irish in the comic press were consistently “subhuman” (217). These include classic examples of the “simianized” Irish that relied on recognizable features such as “the simious nose, long upper lip, huge projecting mouth... jutting lower jaw, [and] sloping forehead” as well as depictions of the Irish as grotesque, violent pig-creatures (*Apes and Angels* 29, *The Eternal Paddy* 217). The characteristics, further indicative of the simian trope, not only represented the brutish violence of the Irish rebels, but it also came to imply the “assumed primitive state” of the Irish peasantry (*The Eternal Paddy* 210). Therefore, even if they were not explicitly being vilified, Irish men were nevertheless portrayed as less

intelligent and less evolved than their English counterparts. Throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, bestial depictions of the Irish-as-terrorists crowded the pages of the Victorian comic press and continued to dominate much of the critical discussion.

However, all depictions of the Irish did not fall into this category of the subhuman rebel. Even during periods of Fenian rebellion, there seemed to be a distinction between the vilified, savage Irish rebels and the men that still represented a “Loyal Irish” contingent (*Apes and Angels* 37). Although these Irish men appeared sympathetic by comparison, they still retained some prognathous features though considerably less exaggerated (*Apes and Angels* 37). In this way, the prognathous features and physical appearance remained central to even the relatively flattering caricatures of Irish men. These stereotypes of Irish men in political cartoons captured the English public’s prejudices and preconceptions about Irish men’s violence, primitiveness, and general inferiority (“Pigs, Paddies, Prams and Petticoats” 42).

Victorian Middle-Class Values: The Question of Respectability

In spite of what the treatment of the Irish man within the pages of the Victorian comic press might lead one to believe, even satirical publications could not escape middle-class ideals regarding respectability. This could particularly be seen in the style and tone of *Punch* by the latter half of the nineteenth century. As historian Henry J. Miller argues, artists at *Punch* had to learn to walk the line between humor and respectability earlier in the century (268). Not only did the growing prevalence of Evangelicalism introduce a stricter standard of morality, but there was also a growing readership of women and children for the magazine (Miller 271). John Leech, a prolific and influential caricaturist at *Punch* during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, contributed to the publication’s evolution to meet the demands of the new market with satire that

was “harmless and never at the expense of others” (Miller 269). In this way, *Punch* cartoons attempted to adhere to middle-class values of decency, propriety, and domesticity (Miller 272).

These standards of respectability were also extended to the way that female subjects could be portrayed in *Punch*. This was particularly evident in *Punch*'s adherence to the domestic ideology of the middle-class. Victorian domestic ideology defined the “woman’s sphere” as the home and the woman’s concerns as those pertaining to the household and family. (Davidoff and Hall 309). In the same way, *Punch* cartoons of the late decades of the nineteenth century often constructed comedic conceits involving women within the purview of the domestic sphere. This trend is evident in *Punch*'s 1894 “True Hospitality” that satirizes a hostess’ accidental faux pas at a dinner party (Figure 1). The cartoon pokes fun at the hostess’ enthusiastic exclamation that she is “so glad” that her dinner is the first decent meal that her guest has eaten in six weeks.



Figure 1: “True Hospitality” (*Punch*, 3 March 1894)

Rather than being appalled, the hostess 'pride in her domestic achievement of presenting a man with a decent meal overwhelms her reaction. "True Hospitality" also highlights the prominence of the woman's role in domestic affairs by positioning the hostess at the head of the table. Although her reaction is the source of the humor, the cartoon made her the object of satire without fundamentally attacking her femininity or good intentions. In the same way, many cartoons chronicle women's misadventures raising children. The unfortunate mother in the 1893 "A Too Inquiring Mind" must handle the innocent but difficult question posed by her young son (Figure 2). Not only is the woman in the cartoon caring for her son, she is also engaging in the respectably feminine leisure activity of knitting. Her son's question, "Was I *knitted!*" suggests that he has seen her knitting often enough to assume the only explanation for his creation must be his mother's knitting.

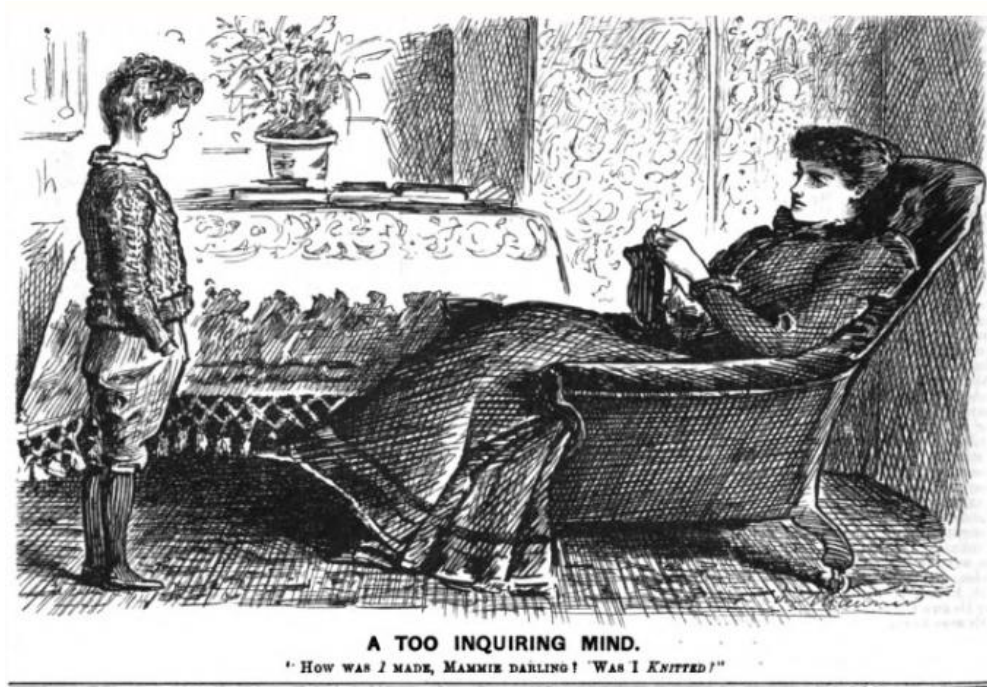


Figure 2: "A Too Inquiring Mind" (*Punch*, 21 January 1893)

This cartoon underscores both the English woman's domestic role and her role as mother. While it would be fallacious to claim that *Punch* only portrayed women inside this domestic sphere,

many of the examples that captured the kind of “harmless,” “respectable” satire upheld ideals of middle-class respectability. Portraying Irish women represented an interesting paradox for *Punch*, as the constraints of respectability did not extend to the Irish or any other “minorities or marginal groups” (Miller 282).

Erin and the English Ideal of Ireland

While Irish women have been largely excluded from scholarly considerations of the Irish caricature in the Victorian periodical press, the figure of Erin represents a notable exception to this trend. Erin, as well as the analogous figure of Hibernia, refers to the feminine personification of Ireland who was often portrayed as a young chaste maiden (“The Four Erins” 70, 84).

Although she was born out of a tradition of Irish art and storytelling, Erin was also appropriated by the English to further a larger pattern of gendering the colonial encounter with Ireland (“The Four Erins” 71-76). English popular culture often imagined their colonies as female in order to justify the colonial conquest and continued involvement vis-à-vis patterns of gender norms (“The Four Erins” 72). In this way, fair and fragile Erin—as opposed to the brawny John Bull or the stalwart English lion—was a tool used by opponents to Irish nationalism to reinforce the idea that Ireland or Erin was incapable of controlling her own interests and containing threats like the Fenians and other comparable threats (“The Four Erins” 89).

Erin also became essential to visual depictions of Ireland and Irish relations. The figure of Erin and Hibernia were compelling shorthand when invoking the trope of the colonial “damsel in distress” in comic publications. Depictions of Erin often featured her being protected from the various threatening incarnations of Irish rebellion by some representative figure of England be it John Bull, William Gladstone, or Britannia (“Pigs, Paddies, Prams and Petticoats” 46). This vulnerable depiction of Erin allowed Victorian cartoonists to portray the necessity of English

involvement in preserving Erin against the Irish brutes. In the periodical press, Erin also became the Irish figure who entertained British politicians as they tried to “charm and seduce” her with legislation (“Pigs, Paddies, Prams and Petticoats” 46). De Nie points to a telling example from an 1886 edition of the contemporary publication *Fun* in which William Gladstone was portrayed as a suitor for Erin when rumors of a home rule bill abounded (“Pigs, Paddies, Prams and Petticoats” 46-47). As a symbol of the Irish colony, Erin acted as the recipient of Irish legislation from the revolving door of English politicians.

As a significant departure from the style of the villainized figures of the Irish in the periodical press, Erin also came to represent the favorable potential of the Irish colony. Unlike the “simianized Paddy,” Erin was not dehumanized and othered in the same way that the rebellious Irish man was (“Pigs, Paddies, Prams and Petticoats” 46). In fact, she was often placed in opposition to symbols of Irish Rebellion. In this way, Erin came to represent a “loyal Irish majority” who continuously clung to her English savior (“Pigs, Paddies, Prams and Petticoats” 45). Especially when compared to the seditious Irish rebels, Erin represented a vision of Ireland that better conformed to the vision of English paternalism.

Deceptively Irish: Maids, Mothers, and Working-Class Girls

While the figure of Erin was by and large protected by this idealization, such protection was certainly not extended to the figures meant to represent “real” Irish women. However, unlike the Irish men in the Victorian periodical press, representations of Irish women were not always immediately recognizable via their dehumanized appearance. Nonetheless, they were often subjected to varying amounts of scrutiny and contempt regarding their Irishness. Although the appearance of these Irish women often seemed to align her with the ideal of Erin or even her English counterpart, she nonetheless represented a member of the colonial “other.” Therefore,

the Irish woman needed to be controlled and separated from the national English sense of self. *Punch* artists often went about this by comically excluding the Irish woman from the values of middle-class respectability. These working-class Irish women portrayed in *Punch* often even defied the standards of respectability that the middle-class attempted to prescribe to the lower classes. Therefore, while managing conflicting expectations of race, gender, class, and idealization, *Punch* artists nonetheless managed to sufficiently characterize Irish women as distinctly and unfavorably Irish.

Although it was well into the trend of characterizing Irish men as violent savages, the Irish maid in Charles Keene's 1877 "A Set-Down" (Figure 3) appeared to escape such dehumanizing stereotypes. Keene endowed her with facial features that were delicate and attractive, consistent with the way that English women were depicted in *Punch* (Miller 270). Notably, her features were marred by none of the prognathism that characterized even the most favorable depictions of Irish men. In addition to her humanity, the maid also retained her femininity. Her dress also contrasted the ragged, disheveled appearance of the Fenian caricatures. Her manner of dress was both neat and becoming of her station; she appeared to conform to English middle-class standards for their domestic servants. Without the caption christening her "Biddy," nineteenth century slang for an Irish maid, it would be difficult to immediately identify the Irish maid from any other English maid ("Biddy"). In this way, Biddy more closely resembled the English ideal of Erin than the vicious Paddies that infested the pages of *Punch*. However, although she maintained her feminine appearance, Keene also used "A Set-Down" to introduce the idea that Irish women harbored an impertinent spirit reminiscent of their male counterparts. The humor of "A Set-Down" revolved around Biddy's response to her



Figure 3: "A Set-Down" (Punch, 19 May 1877)

Mistress' displeasure at the maid's thumb print marring the dinnerware. Rather than accepting the critique and apologizing, Biddy retorted that the Mistress is being exceedingly "particular." She proceeded to double down on her bold response by reproaching her mistress for not even appreciating the quality of the thumb print. In this way, the Irish maid begins to move into the space of characteristic Irish impertinence. The caption also functioned on several different levels in order to drive home the insolence of Biddy's sass. On one hand, the "Set-Down" referred on the most basic level to a play on the sit-down meal that the Mistress and her husband hoped to enjoy. However, a mid-nineteenth century definition of a "set-down" recontextualizes the

caption as it denoted both a severe scolding and a humiliating rebuff (“Set-Down). Keene played with a double entendre in the cartoon. While the Mistress intended to reprimand Biddy for her mediocre cleaning of the dishes, Biddy usurped her Mistress’ attempt to correct her. In this way, the “set-down” links the Irish maid to an aggressive, disrespectful attitude that is unbecoming of a domestic servant.

Furthermore, Keene’s composition of the cartoon contributed to the unusual dynamic at play between the Irish maid and her Mistress. Although the Mistress originally intended the “set-down” to reprimand Biddy, Biddy occupies a higher position than her Mistress in the frame. Spatially, this suggests that Biddy wields a position of power in the scene. In this way, Biddy seems to be talking down to her Mistress with her disrespectful retort. In addition to the downward angle of Biddy’s face, there also appears to be a level of contempt in her otherwise delicate features. Finally, although he does not play into the interaction between Biddy and her Mistress, the husband’s reaction further indicates the unexpectedness of Biddy’s reaction. In spite of its relative lack of detail, the husband’s expression suggests genuine shock at the way the “set-down” turned out. Rather than correcting their maid’s behavior, this English couple received an insolent, characteristically Irish, retort. While Biddy’s appearance adhered to hegemonic standards of femininity, her response began to suggest that Irish women may also embody a certain amount of Irish insubordination. Unlike “True Hospitality” and “A Too Inquiring Mind,” which created comedic conceits that did not offend the respectability of their subjects, the humor of “A Set-Down” derives from maligning the Irish maid as incompetent and disrespectful. With its treatment of Biddy, *Punch* departs from its characteristic “harmless” humor to send up the Irish maid.

Although not a maid, the 1894 “Tripping Merrily” continued the trend of the young, Irish working-class woman whose temperament and sympathies overcome the attractiveness of her appearance. The short story, “Tripping Merrily,” that accompanied the cartoon in Figure 4 chronicles a boat trip made by several English people. While stopping in Queenstown, County Cork to acquire a few “knickknacks,” they meet with the “daughter of Erin,” who appears in the image. The story offered an interesting insight into the way that the English men perceived the young, attractive, working-class Irish woman. A great deal of attention was given to how attractive the narrator finds her. In fact, we were introduced to her through physical description. The narrator describes her as “a delicately pale beauty of Erin, dark-haired, slim waisted, and as elegant as might be any natty girl from County Trim” (“Tripping Merrily” 143). His initial impression of the Irish shop girl centered around her appearance: her dark hair, slim waist, elegance, and fashionable style. Because of this, the narrator repeatedly associated Irish shop girl to Erin. She was described initially as a “beauty of Erin” and a “daughter of Erin.” Similarly, the narrator also described the shop girl’s demeanor as generally melancholy, an emotional state often attributed to Erin (“The Four Erins” 75). Because he connected her to the ideal of Erin, he believed that if he expressed his pity for the continued violence in Ireland she would certainly agree and express a more English stance on the Irish “O’Capulet and O’Montague rows.” The figure of Erin influenced the narrator’s perception and mediated his expectations of the Irish shop girl.

However, reality came to correct the narrator’s idealization of the Irish shop girl when she responds. In spite of her delicate beauty that reflects the figure of Erin, her sympathies firmly stood with the Irish people and their actions. The Irish shop girl’s response to his regret that shillelaghs were permitted was “an’ what would the poor Boys use, an’ they not allowed fire-

"TRIPPING MERRILY."

THAT holiday cruise on board the good steamship *Cannie Donia*! Did I dream it? or was it a reality? "Are there visions about?" It seems like yesterday or like years ago, and I know it was neither. "Old KASPAR'S,"—or let us say middle-aged KASPAR'S,—"work was done" *pro tem.*, and he could not neglect so great an opportunity, nor refuse so inviting an invitation as that sent him by Sir CHARLES CHEERIE, the Chairman, to come aboard for the trial trip of the G.S.S. *Cannie Donia*. So I, middle-aged KASPAR, work done as aforesaid, did then and thereby become TOMMY the Tripper, and, as such, went aboard the gallant SS. abovementioned, all-to-the-contrary, nevertheless, and notwithstanding.

And what a goodly company! Sir CHARLES and Lady CHEERIE, perfect host and hostess in themselves. Here too was our TONY, M.P., waggish as ever. "I am not down on the official list of guests as 'TORIAS,'" quoth he. "And why?" I gave it up. "Because," says he, answering his own conundrum, "I am a free and independent scribe, and there is nothing to bias me. Aha!" The sea air agrees with TONY, M.P. "And where *ould* the Member for Berkshire be," he asks, pro-ounding as it were another and a better puzzle. "but aboard a bonnie barque? My bark," he continues gaily, "may be worse than my bite, but—" Here the bugle-call to breakfast sounds, and from ocular evidence I can roundly assert that whatever his bark may be. I will back his bite—and this without backbiting, of which, as I trust, neither of us is capable—against that of any two of his own size and weight. Yet TONY *en mangeant* is not the dog in a manger, no, not by any means! With one eye to the main chance, and another to the corresponding comfort of his co-breakfasters, so pursueth he his steadfast course, as indeed do we all, to the astonishment of most of us, through the shoals of toast and butter; over the shallows of eggs; safely through the Straits of Kipper and Kurrie; with a pleasant time in Hot Tea Bay; then through a Choppy sea, between the dangerous rocks of Brawn and Bacon; into the calm Marmaladean Sea, where we ride at anchor and all is well.

After breakfast, the cigar, or pipe, with conversational accompaniment, what time we pace the quarter-deck. Prognostications as to probable weather are "taken and offered" by nautically-attired guests, who, in a general way, may be supposed from their seagoing costume "to know the ropes." Here is the ever amiable and truly gallant Sir PETER PLURAL, looking every inch the ideal yachtsman, as honorary member of the Upper House of Cowes and Kyde Piers. Wonderful man Sir PETER! knows everybody, is liked by everybody; has been yachting and sailing and voyaging for any number of years; knows even the smallest waves by sight, and, if asked, could probably tell you their names! One day he will publish his reminiscences!

We anchor off Queenstown. The estimable, jovial VALENTINE VULCAN, M.P., from the North, must ashore to purchase some trifling knickknacks by way of mementoes of the visit. Instead of "knickknacks" he lays in a stock of "knock-knocks," yelped "shillelaghs," which are served out to him by a delicately pale beauty of Erin, dark-haired, slim waisted, and as elegant as might be any natty girl from County Trim. She shows us some dozen shillelaghs with hard, murderous-looking, bulbous knobs.

"Phew!" whistles VALENTINE VULCAN, M.P., weighing one of these dainty sticks in his hand. "You might get rather a nasty crack from this." I agree with him, and the sad daughter of Erin regards us sadly and sympathetically.

"Maybe," I think to myself, "she has lost a friend or a lover in one of these confounded O'CAPULET and O'MONTAGUE rows. Poor girl!"

And I eye her with a look wherein admiration is tempered with pity. It occurs to me that I will say something appropriate, just to show her how I, a stranger and a Saxon, feel for her. I: may lead her to express her hearty detestation of these faction-fights, and of these deadly fræas with the armed constabulary. So I say, with a touch of deep indignation in my tone, "It's a shame," say I, "that such things as these"—and I nod frowningly at the shillelaghs which VULCAN, M.P., is twirling meditatively, one in each hand, as if right and left were about to fight it out—"it's a shame that such things as these should be permitted!" The pale, sad, beautiful daughter of Erin, regards me mournfully, and then, in a tone expressive of astonishment blended with firm remonstrance, she asks,—

"An' what *ould* the poor Boys use, an' they not allowed fire-arms?"

That was all. No smile is on the lips of Erin's pale daughter. She is apparently in earnest, though both VULCAN and myself, talking it over subsequently, unite in opinion that, perhaps, she had been availing herself of this rare and unique opportunity of "getting at" the Saxon.



Saxon (referring to the shillelaghs). "It's a shame that such things as these should be permitted!"

Daughter of Erin (plaintively). "An' what *ould* the poor Boys use, an' they not allowed Fire-arms?"

So she went on recommending sticks and photographs, and did a good bit of business with our generous VULCAN, M.P., who returned, laden with gifts for various fellow-guests aboard the good SS. *Cannie Donia*.

What amusing nights and delightful days! The ladies—bless 'em!—all charming, and very Barkisses in their perpetual "willingness" to do anything and everything that might give pleasure and afford amusement. Two fairy-gifted maidens entertain us mightily with a capital dramatic sketch of their own composition; others follow suit, playing the piano; and a *sestette* perform, without previous rehearsal, glee, madrigals, part-songs, and choruses to popular plantation melodies, under the leadership of that masterly musician TOM TONDEROL, whose only regret is that he has not been able to bring on board with him his sixteen-horse-power-fifty-stopped-sixteen-pedal organ (designed and made by the eminent firm of BELLOWES, BLOWER & Co., at a cost of some few thousand pounds), though, as he explains to us, he would have done so, had this musical mammoth been only compressible within the limits of an ordinary carpet bag.

However, *à propos* of organs, we have with us a representative of one of the greatest organs—of the Press—full of wise saws and modern instances; as jolly as a sandboy, or rather as a schoolboy out for a holiday. A sailor every inch of him, and this is saying a great deal, as he must be over six feet, and broad in proportion.

Appropriate, too, as aboard "the craft," is the presence of the Great Grand Secretary, Mr. BENJAMIN BOAZ, A.M., P.G.M., &c., &c., and the still Greater, Grand Something Else, P.P.M., &c., Sir JONATHAN JACHIN, mysterious officers, *Arcades ambo*, of the Secret Rites of Masonry, full of nods, winks, becks, wreathed smiles, signs, secrets, fun, frolic, and tales galore.

Ah! the happy days! And the happy evenings! What excellent "toasts" and "returnings of thanks" by my Lord AFFIDAVIT, by Sir POSSEIDON A VINKLO (President of the Anchorite Court), by ANDREW McJASON A VINKLO (senior of the Argonautic Firm that built the good ship *Cannie Donia*), and the sprightliest speech of all by Sir CHARLES CHEERIE!

Round to Falmouth, up the Fal, "with our Fal, la, la," as singeth our brilliant *sestette* to piano, or, to quote Sir JONATHAN, "our P. an' O." accompaniment.

Then S'uth'ards! Then . . . But "here break we off."

Thus do I briefly make some record of a "trial trip"; and may no trip that any of us may make, whether involving a trial or not, have worse results than has this, of which, beginning and finishing happily and gloriously as it has done—and such be the *Cannie Donia's* fate evermore—I am privileged to write this slight record, and proud to account myself henceforth as

ONE OF THE TRIPPERS.

Figure 4: "Tripping Merrily" (Punch, 22 September 1894)

arms?” Although the image caption described her tone as “plaintive,” the story characterized her response very differently. The narrator described her tone as “astonishment blended with firm remonstrance.” Unlike “plaintive,” “remonstrance” denoted a forceful reproach. In this way, the shop girl’s forceful and subversive reaction more closely resembled Bidley’s impertinent attitude than Erin’s melancholy demeanor. In the same way, although her facial expression lacked the contempt captured in Bidley’s, it does seem to express surprise and dissent. Although the Englishmen are left wondering if her response was merely intended to “get at the Saxon,” the Irish shop girl’s response suggested that she not only harbors an insolent temperament but also sympathizes with their “poor boys.” “Tripping Merrily” furthered the portrayal of the Irish woman, who in spite of their attractive appearance, harbored a temperament and sympathies that aligned with the Irish stereotype of rebellion.

One of the most well-studied examples of the violent, simianized Irish stereotypes is John Tenniel’s 1867 “The Fenian Guy Fawkes” (Figure 5). Most of the scholarly attention has been lavished on the titular Fenian Guy Fawkes himself while the Irish woman behind him has received none. However, her inclusion in the cartoon has a lot to say about middle-class English conception of the Irish woman’s role in the ongoing issue of Fenian violence. 1867, the year that “The Fenian Guy Fawkes” was published, was a year that saw an increase in Irish insurrection (Whelehan, xiii). In particular, on the thirteenth of December, just fifteen days before the illustration was published in *Punch*, a group of Fenians famously bombed the Clerkenwell prison in London in a botched attempt to free the Fenian prisoners being held there (Whelehan 72). With the Fenian threat now striking closer to home, *Punch* produced a cartoon that not only indicted the Fenian bombers represented by the Fenian Guy Fawkes, but also included a figure of

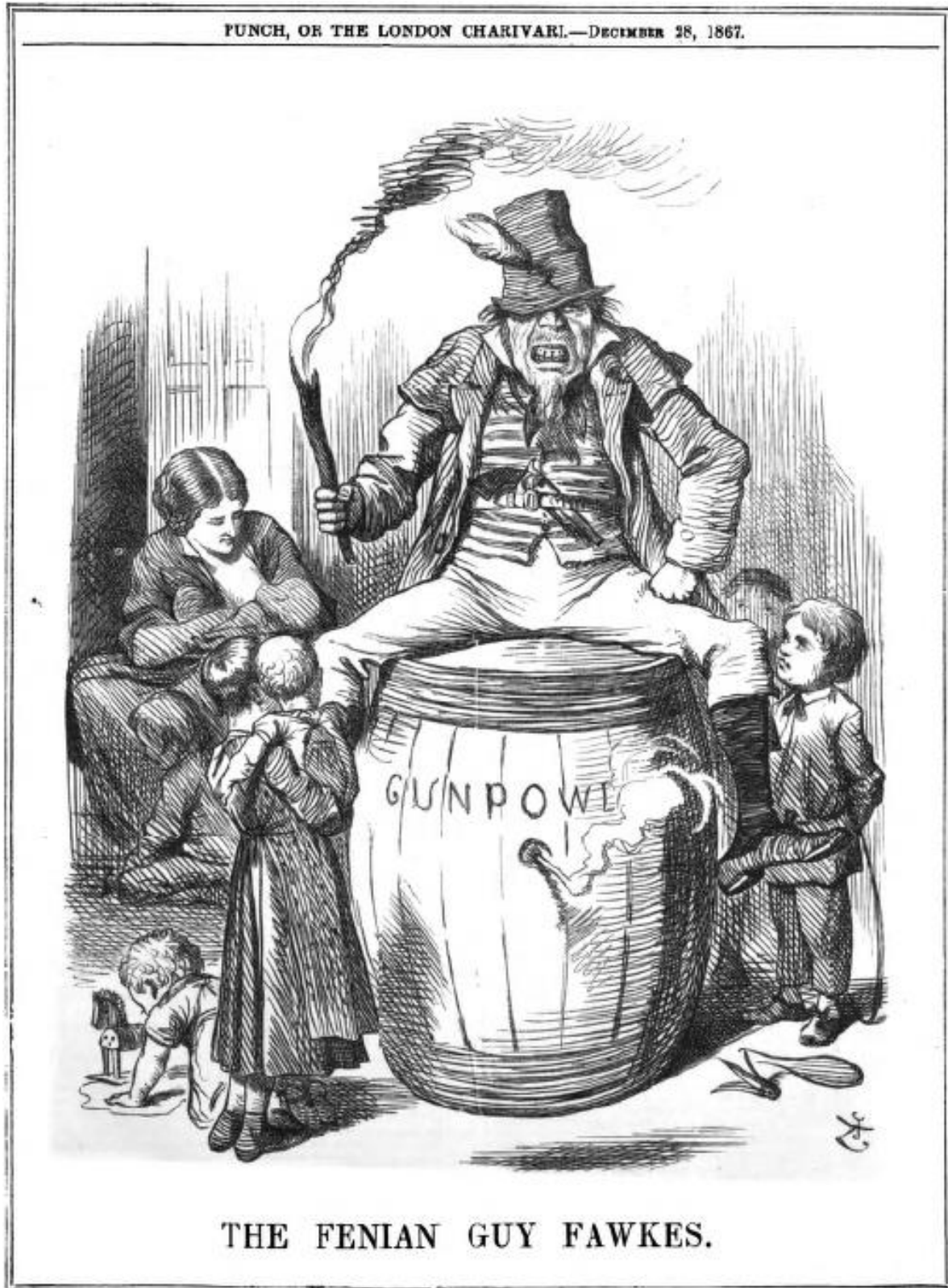


Figure 5: "The Fenian Guy Fawkes" (Punch, 28 December 1867)

indicted the Fenian bombers represented by the Fenian Guy Fawkes, but also included a figure of a nursing Irish mother. The question therefore becomes is the Irish mother an inevitable victim of the growing threat of Fenian violence or has she too been found guilty in the court of the Victorian periodical press?

On one hand, the Irish mother stood to be among the next victims of the Fenian bombings. As previously mentioned, even in the heightened world of satirical cartoons there existed a relative sympathy for the “Loyal Irish” among *Punch*’s artists (*Apes and Angels* 37). The Irish mother’s proximity to the Fenian agitator’s gunpowder plot might remind the audience that innocents among the Irish, in this case represented by women and children, would also be obliterated by the continued Fenian violence. The Irish mother could also be associated to some extent with the idealized figure of Erin. Like Erin, the representation of the Irish woman as a nursing mother certainly plays into a larger trope of vulnerable femininity (“The Four Erins” 86). This may further align the Irish mother with an innocent and pitiable contingent in need of English protection.

Although this reading would suggest that the artists encouraged sympathy be extended toward the Irish woman, the cartoon did not definitively label her blameless. Although her vulnerable femininity aligned her with Erin, the Irish mother’s reaction to the Fenian menace was entirely unlike that of Erin. While Erin habitually fainted towards the nearest English protector in her appearances in *Punch*, the Irish mother appeared entirely unfazed by the destructive madman in her midst. In this way, her vulnerable nursing acted as her own indictment – she was so comfortable with the Fenian threat that she was able regularly attend to her youngest child. The deviation from the representations of Erin’s plea for paternalistic protection suggested that the Irish mother may not be so innocent after all.

In the same way, the Irish mother fails to live up to the domestic ideal dictated by the English middle-class. To begin with, the Irish fecundity that the nursing mother represented its own threat to English authority for the middle-class English audience. The audience's perception of Irish families would likely have been influenced by the reputation of Irish emigrants in England's large towns and cities. Irish emigrant communities were invariably characterized as not only filthy and immoral, but also rapidly expanding (Davis 130, Swift 264). Therefore, the audience would associate the Irish family less with domestic bliss and more with the implicit threat of an expanding Irish population in both England and Ireland. Furthermore, the children surrounding the Fenian Guy Fawkes were fascinated, not terrified, by him. The boy on the righthand side of the cartoon, whose face is the most visible and detailed of the children, seemed particularly impressed as he gazes up at the wild bomber. Therefore, the interest that the Irish children lavish on the Fenian Guy Fawkes suggested that the children represent Fenians and Irish Nationalists in the making, not victims. The responsibility, however, was not leveled at the children. Instead, according to the values of the Victorian middle-class, the mother became the guilty party. The mother's duty involved caring for her children. In this case, that certainly would have involved steering them away from the homicidal maniac. By allowing them to continue staring in admiration at the Fenian Guy Fawkes, the Irish mother seemed to be enabling them to idolize him. In this way, the Irish mother with the baby at her breast is indicted for producing the next generation of Fenian agitators.

The figure of the Irish woman received a distinct but unmistakably anti-Irish treatment in *Punch*. Although she lacked the immediately recognizable, derisive physical characteristics of the Irish man, the Irish woman harbored an impertinent attitude and rebellious sympathies that defied her attractive appearance. The incongruous characteristics of the Irish woman rendered

her separate from her English counterparts. Her deceptive Irishness also reified the English attitude that the Irish require supervision to keep both the rabble-rousing Fenians and their insolent wives, mothers, and sisters in line. While this pattern of representation speaks to one dominant trend in the Victorian periodical press, the figure of the Irish woman can hardly be confined to a single stereotype. Further analysis of *Punch* and other satirical publications of its ilk stand to uncover more subversively threatening depictions comparable to the deceptively attractive Irish woman as the Victorian periodical press sought to diffuse their own anxieties about the Irish woman through humor.

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