

Moynihan, Senan

by Sonya Perkins

Moynihan, Senan (1900–70), Capuchin friar and editor, was born John Moynihan on 24 November 1900 in Meenascarthy, Camp, Co. Kerry, the youngest of eight children (six boys and two girls) of Thomas Moynihan and his wife Mary, who were farmers. The Moynihan farm extended over thirty-six acres and was the second largest farm in the townland of Meenascarthy. John junior was educated at Aughaesia national school for eight years and at St Brendan's Seminary in Killarney for four years before entering the Vincentian All Hallows College in Dublin in October 1918. He was following in the footsteps of his older brother Francis Moynihan (1892–1947) who subsequently became the editor of the *Advocate* in Melbourne and, according to the *Kerryman* in 1954, unquestionably the greatest editor and publisher in the history of the catholic church in Australia. John Moynihan's stay was brief. He left, of his own accord, after six months. Thomas O'Donnell (1864–1949), president of All Hallows, wrote that he appeared not to be in earnest and to take his life and his studies lackadaisically.

Moynihan joined the Capuchin order in 1920 and took the name Senan. His ordination card apparently does not survive, but he was probably ordained in 1928. The reasons for his selection as editor of the *Capuchin Annual* are obscure, nor do we know whether he had any prior experience of publishing. Nonetheless, in December 1929 the first issue of the *Capuchin Annual* was published under his editorship when he was just 29 years old. Over the following quarter of a century, the *Capuchin Annual* became his life's work, and Fr Senan established it as one of Ireland's most popular and influential cultural journals. Though the Franciscan ethos endured, within a few years the cultural agenda dominated. The first issue of the *Capuchin Annual* (dated 1930) ran to 236 pages and was priced at one shilling. Great attention was paid to the visual presentation from the outset: it was printed on toned art paper; colour reproductions were introduced in 1934 on the frontispiece, in the form of a tipped-in colour plate, and colour sections became regular features.

While most articles in the first number in 1930 were written by Franciscans on topics such as 'An apostle of Lourdes' and 'Franciscan piety', by 1934 there was a shift in the balance between the proportion of religious and secular contributors: of thirty-one articles in this edition, just under half were written by members of religious orders. By 1940 there was one sole representative feature writer from the Capuchin community and his contribution was a whimsical piece about his desire to visit Ireland. Fr Senan replaced the Franciscan contributors with many of the same writers who contributed to *Ireland To-day* and the *Bell*. He commissioned work from Thomas MacGreevy (qv), Pearse Hutchinson, Maurice Walsh (qv), Francis MacManus (qv), Francis Stuart (qv), Donagh MacDonagh (qv) and others – in fact, several of these writers wrote first for the *Capuchin Annual* before being taken up

by the *Bell*. Benedict Kiely (qv) credits Fr Senan with publishing the first collection of poetry by Roibeard Ó Faracháin (qv), and for encouraging his own literary aspirations when he first met Fr Senan in 1939 – Kiely subsequently contributed articles to every edition of the *Capuchin Annual* from 1942 to 1948. Fr Senan paid high fees to his contributors. Kiely, again, recalled that he had generous ideas on advances and retainers, and Seumas MacManus (qv), on receiving his fee, cautioned Fr Senan that no Irish publication could afford to pay the stunning figure of three guineas for (of all things) poetry.

Not all contributions to the *Capuchin Annual* were of the standard of Kiely or MacManus, and there was a clear editorial bias towards Fr Senan's pet topics – Patrick Pearse (qv), Éamon de Valera (qv) and Co. Kerry – regardless of the literary merit of the writers. However, the concentration of contributions from the leading writers and poets of the period during Fr Senan's editorship (1929–54) is too marked to dismiss, and indicates both an awareness of 'literary' Ireland and an editorial intention to commission and publish literary work. There are several themes developed in the *Capuchin Annual* under Fr Senan's editorship that are worthy of examination: catholic social theory, the role of the Irish language, social problems such as emigration and housing, and, notably, Northern Ireland. In the 1943 edition Fr Senan published a 78-page article entitled 'The real case against partition' by 'Ultach', since identified as J. J. Campbell (James Joseph Campbell (qv)), a moderate nationalist, future QUB professor and BBC governor. The article was reprinted as *Orange terror: the partition of Ireland* in 1943, and at least 10,000 copies were printed.

The 1940s represented the pinnacle of Fr Senan's achievements. The *Capuchin Annual* of 1940 included a full-page, signed declaration that 25,000 copies of that edition had been printed – to put this in context, Sean O'Faolain (qv) claimed a circulation of 5,500 for the *Bell*. In 1942 Fr Senan formed a discussion circle that included Benedict Kiely, Thomas MacGreevy and Eoghan Ó Tuairisc (qv) to discuss issues relating to catholic corporatism and social justice. The group invited Jacques Maritain, the leading neo-Thomist philosopher of the age, to lecture to them in Dublin in 1942. In 1945 Fr Senan chaired the organising committee for the exhibition of Jack B. Yeats (qv) at the National College of Art in Dublin, and in 1946 was appointed to the board of the NGI. In 1950 the minister for agriculture, James Dillon (qv), included him on his list of nominees to the first Arts Council. During this time Fr Senan also edited the Capuchin periodical the *Father Mathew Record* (1930–41), increasing its circulation and transforming it from simply promoting temperance to a publication with a broader appeal, and its sister publication, the quarterly review *Bonaventura* (1937–41). He was also the author of *Angelic shepherd* (1951), a commemorative volume in honour of Pope Pius XII.

Ill health (there are references in his papers to congestion of the lungs, diabetes and even cancer) and financial difficulties eventually overtook Fr Senan. The debt at Capuchin Periodicals on 1 May 1954 was £71,234. The reasons for this debt are

not yet fully known, but no doubt the high production costs of the *Capuchin Annual* played a part. In 1954–5, loans totalling £40,000 were transferred to Capuchin Periodicals from the provincial account. Fr Senan's resignation notice appeared in the *Capuchin Annual* of 1953–4. Thereafter the periodical reverted to its original mission to act as a medium for the propagation of Franciscan history and ideals, and Fr Senan moved on, first to the Capuchin friary in Cork, then to Kerry. In August 1958 he informed the minister provincial of his decision to leave the Capuchin order. He sought refuge with an old school friend, Redmond Prendiville, archbishop of Perth, and asked to be incardinated in his diocese. The archbishop agreed and appointed him as chaplain to the sisters at St Anne's Nursing Home, and in August 1959 Fr Senan left Ireland. He died in his house at St Anne's Hospital in Perth on 26 July 1970, and is buried at Karrakatta cemetery, Perth.

Valuation lists, 1859–1947, no. 7 (County of Kerry, electoral division of Deelis); Census of Ireland, 1901, www.census.nationalarchives.ie; Irish Capuchin Provincial Archive, uncatalogued collection; Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, Archbishop Redmond Prendiville papers; Leeds University Library: special collections, Fr Senan Moynihan papers; *Capuchin Annual* (1930–55); *Kerryman*, 11 Dec. 1954, p. 52; Brian P. Kennedy, *Dreams and responsibilities: the state and the arts in independent Ireland* (1990); Susan Schreibman, 'Introduction to the *Father Mathew Record*' (1999), original text created for Thomas MacGreevy Archive, www.macgreevy.org; Clair Wills, *That neutral island: a cultural history of Ireland during the second world war* (2007); Marianne Elliott, *When God took sides: religion and identity in Ireland – unfinished history* (2009); Kelly Matthews, *The Bell magazine and the representation of Irish identity: opening windows* (2012); information from Sr Frances Stibi, archivist, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Perth (2012)