

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS & THE IRISH REVOLUTION

1918—1923

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ABSTRACT

The Irish revolution of 1918—1923 not only led to the establishment of an independent Irish state; it is also recalled for the notoriety of the Black and Tans, the gendarmerie of war veterans recruited by the British government to fight a war of reprisals against the IRA. Historians have held that public perceptions of the war in Ireland were crucial to its outcome. In particular they cite critical press coverage as instrumental in turning the British public against the government's policy in Ireland. But there has been no study which thoroughly examines the work of journalists and writers who went to Ireland at this time.

This thesis uses the published work of journalists and writers, evidence from archives in Britain, Ireland and the United States, journalists' memoirs and contemporary press criticism to explain the role journalists played in the conflict. It shows how British and American newspaper correspondents were able to report from Ireland with far greater freedom than they enjoyed during the First World War. Aided by their sympathy for the Irish cause and splits among the political elite in London, British correspondents set out to restore their reputation as crusading truth tellers by making visible practices of colonial warfare that would usually have remained hidden. American correspondents were enlisted by British officials as mediators. The war occurred in an age when the press and public opinion were thought to have a crucial influence on politics. Both the British government and the Irish revolutionaries tried to define the news. While examining the professional assumptions and rituals of the correspondents, the thesis examines the impact of wider political ideas on journalism. And it looks at how famous literary journalists used Ireland as a site for debates about their own societies.

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INTRODUCTION

The Anglo-Irish war of 1919-1921 finally ruptured the constitution of the United Kingdom, drawing a line under one hundred and twenty years of turbulent history since the Act of Union. In the Republic of Ireland it is referred to as the War of Independence, celebrated as the heroic struggle which forged a new sovereign state. In Britain it is retrospectively regarded as the first loosened brick that presaged the crumbling of the whole edifice of Imperial rule, vindicating Lord Salisbury's prediction in 1883 that if Irish separatism succeeded the Empire would disintegrate step by step.¹ Corelli Barnett has described the treaty which ended the war and established the Irish Free State as "of the utmost significance for the future of British power"² and in her history of the Empire Jan Morris writes that "it was in Ireland that the prototype of imperial revolution was launched, the precursor of all the coups, rebellions and civil wars which were to harass the British empire from now until the end."³

The new state was not established by defeating the British forces on the battlefield; the IRA guerrillas and the panoply of civic organisations allied to them were merely able to endure long enough to force the British government to negotiate a new settlement. It was a moral victory, not a military triumph. In the view of the Irish historian Michael Laffan,

¹ H.V. Brasted: 'Irish Nationalism and the British Empire in the Late Nineteenth Century' in Oliver MacDonagh, W.F. Mandle and Pauric Travers (eds): Irish Culture and Nationalism 1750—1950 (Macmillan, London, 1983) p 84

² Corelli Barnett: The Collapse of British Power (Eyre Methuen, London, 1972) p 184

³ Jan Morris: Farewell the Trumpets (Faber, London, 1978) p 219

“Lloyd George’s government changed its policy more in response to international hostility and to the shame and revulsion felt by British public opinion, than as a consequence of military weakness or defeat.”⁴

Corelli Barnett makes the same point from a different angle: “[The] British decided the question of Ireland not in the light of whether or not, on drawing a balance of political and strategic factors, Ireland was worth holding, but out of humanitarian qualms as yet rare in a barbarous world. [This] was a demonstration that the British ruling classes and British public opinion after the Great War were ill-suited to the preservation of their imperial inheritance.”⁵

The common theme of both these explanations is the power of public opinion to determine the strategic decisions of the British government. What ‘public opinion’ means at any given moment is often an elusive concept; pursuing it and nailing it down in this or any specific historical context would be material for an entire thesis by itself. What is certain is that any consideration of public opinion in Ireland, Britain or the rest of the world during the Irish revolution would have to deal with news, analysis and opinion that appeared in the daily press, political journals and contemporary books of commentary. This thesis will examine a range of this material with a heavy and consistent emphasis on the accounts and views of those who actually visited Ireland, whether as reporters tied to daily deadlines, essayists enjoying more literary licence and leisure or novelists bending their talents to the capture of contemporary history. All of this work is journalism of one form or

⁴ Michael Laffan: **The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Fein Party 1916—1923** (Cambridge University Press, 1999) p 295

⁵ Barnett op. cit. p 185

another, although as will become clear, the specific form employed has as much significance for how we should read these observations as the content.

This journalism is regularly acknowledged by historians of the period as having had an influence on the outcome of the war. In the first comprehensive nationalist account of the War of Independence (published in 1937 and endorsed by Eamon De Valera) Dorothy McArdle writes of how “great English newspapers...were tirelessly exposing the brutal terrorist regime” in Ireland.⁶ But this was a reference to April 1921, within a few months of the truce and after several of the worst incidents of the war. In fact, she gives credit for the original exposure of British tactics in Ireland to committees of activists both Irish and English, implying that the press correspondents joined a bandwagon near the end of its journey.⁷ Sometimes she refers to British journalists collectively as “the English Press”; other times they are labelled ‘sympathetic’ or representatives of ‘conservative opinion.’⁸

In the latest history of the war Michael Hopkinson goes much further than McArdle in giving the journalists credit for undermining the British campaign; in his estimate journalists from the Fleet Street papers did more for the cause of the Irish rebels than their own formidable publicity effort. “For all the volume of propaganda, the greatest effect was almost certainly achieved by visiting British journalists...The eyewitness reports by muckraking correspondents were much more readable,

⁶ Dorothy McArdle: The Irish Republic (Corgi edition, London, 1968) p 407

⁷ Ibid p 330

⁸ Passim but see for example p 278 and p 302

colourful and entertaining than the propaganda sheets and came with dramatic photographs of burning buildings and the suffering and terrified populace... While it was important that a free press exposed British atrocities to world attention, events actually spoke for themselves. It is doubtful that Britain could have hidden the harsh truth from the rest of the world.”⁹ Given how much attention these historians devote to the influence of the press, it’s surprising how little attention they pay to journalistic practice. Hopkinson’s conclusions raise more questions than they answer: Why should the writings of British journalists produce such an “effect”? What are “muckraking correspondents”? Was the fact that they worked for a free press the only reason they exposed British authorities? And if “events actually spoke for themselves” why did it need a special breed of correspondent (‘muckraking’) to communicate what was going on in Ireland?

There is also a contrary view to McArdle and Hopkinson, an assumption that far from being relentlessly critical of coercion in Ireland the British press had connived to demonise the IRA through constant repetition of the worst assaults carried out by the Volunteers. In a book on the origins of the troubles in Northern Ireland during the last three decades of the twentieth century, Richard Bourke argues that during the Irish revolution “the British press had teemed with reports of unconscionable extremities...perpetrated by the Republican forces” and that this contributed to “an air of profound suspicion” during the peace negotiations which began in London in the autumn of 1921.¹⁰ This

⁹ Michael Hopkinson: **The Irish War of Independence** (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 2002) p 45

¹⁰ Richard Bourke: **Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas** (Pimlico, London, 2003) p 121

assertion led to him being accused of believing “that IRA atrocities existed primarily in the pages of the British press”¹¹ but the real question is which version of history is right?

Granted, for all of these authors the work of journalists during the Irish revolution was but one part of a much bigger mosaic. However, since all of them attach such importance to the press coverage of the war their often contradictory arguments and assumptions cry out for a more systematic exploration. Some writers have attempted lengthier and more considered surveys of this terrain. D.G. Boyce’s book, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles: British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy*, published more than thirty years ago, is still the main account of the development of British mentalities during the revolution. It is especially enlightening on Ireland’s place in the English conception of the British nation. But his focus is on opinion in London rather than reportage from Ireland: he sees the press as “a forum of national debate”, quoting a particular newspaper when “it advocated certain views with a reasonable degree of consistency...”¹² Thus, Boyce is more concerned with political argument in London than eyewitness accounts of street warfare in Dublin and, when it comes to newspapers, pays more attention to the views of editorial writers than to the professional practice of reporters.

¹¹ Kevin Myers: ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *The Irish Times*, Tuesday, September 16, 2003. Bourke later replied: “Mr Myers drew the conclusion that because I mentioned the reporting of such outrages I must be implying that they did not in fact take place – which, of course, they did.” *The Irish Times*, Tuesday, February 10, 2004.

¹² D.G. Boyce: *Englishmen and Irish Troubles: British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1972) p 200—201

Aside from this broad approach to public opinion, the other lens affording a glimpse of the press coverage of Ireland is that of the propaganda campaign by the Irish revolutionaries. In his book on the alternative government that the revolutionaries established in Ireland to undermine the authority of the British government, Arthur Mitchell devotes some attention to the venerated propaganda efforts of the revolutionaries, listing the attributes of the publicity department that in his view contributed to its success. “It had the advantage of representing a nation fighting for self-government; it had the attraction of the underdog confronting and sometimes besting the bigwig, the brasshat and the bully. It possessed the Irish capacity for the ready welcome, for making visiting journalists feel like accepted companions in a common venture. It skilfully revealed and proclaimed excesses on the part of the old regime, yet was selective in the material it supplied: while almost always avoiding lies and fabrication, it said little about the IRA and its acts of violence.”¹³ All this may be true but the instrumental focus on the Irish propagandists – how they did it, how good they were at it – closes off any exploration of what the journalists they sought to influence brought to this encounter or, indeed, the nature of the shared ideas that made them “accepted companions in a common venture.” Later I will devote a chapter to the Irish propagandists, examining them not as *sui generis* wizards of persuasion but in relation to their British counterparts, to the journalists whom both sides wanted desperately to influence and, as well, to other contemporary instances where revolutionary movements suddenly discover the importance of trying to

¹³ Arthur Mitchell: Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dail Eireann 1919—22 (Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1995) p 101—102

get a good press, notably Mexico and Cuba. For now, I want to argue that writing about the propaganda battle on its own falls short of the account that is needed of the nature of journalistic coverage of the Irish revolution. Partly this is because looking at propaganda covers only one route through which journalists and writers engaged with the revolution in Ireland. And also because my research has revealed that at the time there was a vigorous and intense discussion in political and cultural circles in Britain and the United States about the nature of the press, public opinion and propaganda, a discussion which connects with the larger political issues of the day but which is nowhere reflected in accounts of the foreign press coverage of Ireland. To this extent these accounts are woefully superficial, an afterthought that goes nowhere near filling the gaping hole in the literature.

The evident reluctance in Irish historiography to interrogate the work of journalists is puzzling since historians of modern Ireland enthusiastically use the press as a source. The evidence of newspaper reports is often cited but rarely tested. McArdle's chronicle of the birth of the Irish Republic is a case in point here; her book is peppered with references to British and Irish newspapers. And there are many other examples, particularly in studies of the Land War and Home Rule movement when Ireland received extensive coverage in the British press.¹⁴ One explanation might be that these historians have a schizoid view of what appears in the newspapers, trusting the record of cold print while holding in low esteem those who produce it. For instance, David

¹⁴ For examples see Conor Cruise O'Brien: **Parnell and His Party 1880—90** (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1957); T.W. Moody: **Davitt and Irish Revolution 1846—82** (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981)

Fitzpatrick relies heavily on newspapers for his intensive study of the War of Independence in County Clare¹⁵ but elsewhere reveals a disdain for the competence of even the most distinguished reporters. In his biography of the revolutionary Harry Boland he notes how Henry Wood Nevinson misidentified Boland and a colleague in his report of speeches they delivered in Washington. “Like many journalists”, Fitzpatrick comments acerbically, “Nevinson was evidently at his sharpest on the morning after.”¹⁶ This waspishness resonates with a more general scorn for journalistic writings among certain critics. Croce dismissed journalism as “writings without any originality or profundity [crafted by] men with few mental scruples and almost no aesthetic sensibility.”¹⁷ And one literary historian has summarised a widespread view in the academy of the failings of journalism, “a factual, conventional, heavy-handed commercial practice, the antithesis of literature’s integrity and creativity.”¹⁸ Even many media scholars often choose to ignore the *content* of journalism in their attempt to fit it into more overarching sociological schemes, an issue I will return to in more detail later. My argument is that even if some of these criticisms are correct it would be a mistake to take them as a licence for ignoring a hugely important cultural practice.

The Irish revolution occurred at a time when mass circulation newspapers had come to maturity, dominating the political landscape. In

¹⁵ David Fitzpatrick: **Politics and Irish Life: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution** (Cork University Press, 1998 edn)

¹⁶ David Fitzpatrick: **Harry Boland’s Irish Revolution** (Cork University Press, 2003) p 402, n 100

¹⁷ Quoted in Brendan Dooley: ‘From Literary Criticism to Systems Theory in Early Modern Journalism History’ in **Journal of the History of Ideas** Vol 51, No. 3 (1990) p 461

¹⁸ Kate Campbell: ‘On perceptions of Journalism’ in Kate Campbell (ed): **Journalism, Literature and Modernity: From Hazlitt to Modernism** (Edinburgh University Press, 2000) p 1

1913 R.A. Scott-James had noticed that newspapers had become a universal addiction. “The reading of newspapers has become a habit all over the civilized world...And now almost every man in the most modestly assured position begins his day with a perusal of the morning paper. It is with the workman when he travels by train or tram to his work, and it is replaced by the evening paper when he returns. It has insinuated itself into our culture, affording us the new material upon which to exercise such ideas as we may possess.”¹⁹ The newspaper was the symbol of modern city life, signifying the bustle and dynamism of alert, up to the minute populations. In his memoirs, Hamilton Fyfe, a veteran Fleet Street foreign correspondent, and editor of the *Daily Herald* reminisced how : “You cannot take a step in a town, or even a village of any size, without having the ubiquity of the Press forced on your notice. Both early and late, newspaper contents bills, when there was plenty of paper, used to meet the eye. Vans carrying evening papers are conspicuous in the traffic. From nine o’clock in the evening until after midnight morning-paper lorries are discharging at every main-line railway terminus; special newspaper trains are leaving one after another.”²⁰ The effect is to conjure up a network of unavoidable stimulus. An American, writing on the eve of the First World War, may have been guilty of hyperbole in describing the extent of the influence of the press but he came up with an arresting metaphor for his sense of how newspaper culture had infiltrated modern consciousness. “We see it visibly affecting pretty nearly all we do and say and think, competing with the churches, superseding Parliaments, elbowing out literature,

¹⁹ R.A. Scott James: **The Influence of the Press** (S.W. Partridge & Co, London, 1913) p 11

²⁰ Hamilton Fyfe: **Sixty Years of Fleet Street** (W.H. Allen, London, 1949) p 168

rivalling the schools and universities, furnishing the world with a new set of nerves.”²¹

This idea finds a curious resonance in Virginia Woolf’s diaries where the jangling of that “new set of nerves” creates a commotion in the real nerves of the individual conscience. In her entry for October 25th, 1920, Woolf notes the funeral procession through London that day for the Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence McSwiney who died on hunger strike in Brixton prison. The spectacle prompts her to feel that “life itself...for us in our generation [is] so tragic—no newspaper placard without its shriek of agony from some one.”²² A year later the news from Ireland was still touching a nerve: “People go on being shot & hanged in Ireland...The worst of it is the screen between our eyes & these gallows is so thick. So easily one forgets it – or I do. For instance why not set down that the Maids of Honour shop was burnt out the other night? Is it a proof of civilisation to envisage suffering at a distance...?”²³ Joseph Conrad was struck by the same phenomenon in relation to accounts of atrocities in war: “In this age of knowledge our sympathetic imagination...remains strangely impervious to information, however correctly and even picturesquely conveyed.”²⁴ Conrad seems more resigned to accepting a kind of innate callousness than Woolf but for our purposes their reflections point up the ubiquity of news and suggest the

²¹ Sydney Brooks: ‘The Press in War-Time’ in North American Review, Vol CC, December, 1914, p 858

²² Anne Olivier Bell (ed): The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume II: 1920—1924 (The Hogarth Press, London, 1978) p 72—73

²³ Ibid p 100

²⁴ Joseph Conrad: Notes on Life and Letters (J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1921) p 112

degree to which the contemporary press seemed to be demanding new levels of response to world events.

Little of the historical work on the Irish revolution has grasped this *zeitgeist*. Curiously, an acclaimed fictional treatment of the Irish revolution has shown greater awareness of this context than the historians. In *Troubles*, the first of a trilogy charting the decline of the British Empire, J.G. Farrell writes of a crumbling Anglo-Irish seaside hotel whose inhabitants seem wilfully oblivious to the rampant decay all around them and the war going on outside. Their plight is symbolic of the inexorable marginalisation of the Irish ascendancy. The text is regularly interrupted with passages of Irish and world news extracted from contemporary newspapers which shape the views of the central character, Major Brendan Archer, a shellshocked veteran of the trenches who has a more lucid appreciation of unfolding events than most of the guests at the hotel. It is the newspaper which gives the Major his bearings even when he himself becomes a witness to history. On a visit to Dublin, the Major finds himself walking along a street where an IRA squad assassinate a retired army officer who worked as an intelligence agent in Dublin Castle. Although he had “seen bright blood scattered on the pavement” it was only by reading the newspaper that he was able to make sense of it: “It was the newspaper which had explained to him what he had seen.”²⁵ The effect of reading about the assassination he had witnessed was to persuade him to accept it. Just as for Woolf and Conrad, the newspaper draws the Major into the flow of world events but his response is to feel that the daily reports are designed to reconcile

²⁵ J.G. Farrell: *Troubles* (Phoenix edition, London, 1993) p 102

readers to the inevitability of history. The Major imagined that the newspaper reports were “poultices placed on sudden inflammations of violence. In a day or two all the poison had been drawn out of them. —They became random events of the year 1919, inevitable, without malice, part of history...A raid on a barracks, the murder of a policeman on a lonely country road, an airship crossing the Atlantic, a speech by a man on a platform...this was the history of the time. The rest was merely the ‘being alive’ that every age has to do.”²⁶ This was his intellectual response to reading the newspaper; but the experience also unsettled his nerves: “He could hardly bear to open the newspaper, for it seemed that the war, which he thought he had escaped, had pursued and caught him after all.”²⁷ Eventually he becomes accustomed to it “as he had once become used to the dawn barrage.”²⁸ What is worth noting here is the power ascribed to the newspaper reports, an impact similar to that described by Woolf and Conrad. The Major, of course, is a fictional character and J.G. Farrell is a novelist. But his book is based on an extensive survey of some of the newspapers of the time; J.G. Farrell begins an analysis lacking in the historical literature, an absence that this thesis aims to address.

There is another correspondence between Farrell’s fiction and contemporary commentary on the press. In *Troubles* the Major has an argument with Sarah – the daughter of the local Roman Catholic bank manager with whom he falls in love – about reports of atrocities in the newspapers: a story about a woman who had pig rings inserted in her

²⁶ Ibid p 102

²⁷ Ibid p 290

²⁸ Ibid p 318

buttocks for supplying milk to the police; a donkey knifed to death for carrying turf to the RIC barracks. Sarah replies that these stories were invented by the British to tarnish Sinn Fein and adds with evident vehemence: “We’ve no way of knowing whether the newspapers tell the truth. Everything belongs to the British in Ireland. Everything.”²⁹ Several years before this fictional exchange took place, James Joyce wrote an article about Ireland in an Italian newspaper in which he cited the story of an old man on trial for murder in the west of Ireland who couldn’t understand English and whose interpreter failed to make his case in the courtroom. Joyce informed his Italian audience that the old man, “a deaf mute before the judge”, was “a symbol of the Irish nation at the bar of public opinion. Like him, Ireland cannot appeal to the modern conscience of England or abroad. The English newspapers act as interpreters between Ireland and the English electorate... So the Irish figure as criminals, with deformed faces, who roam around at night with the aim of doing away with every Unionist.”³⁰ Once again, Farrell in his fiction has hit upon an issue that contemporary writers had raised in commentary: could English newspapers be trusted to represent Irish reality? As we shall see later, this doubt was given considerable polemical mileage by Sinn Fein propagandists, even though they were simultaneously helping British journalists to write that reality. The nationalist revolutionaries could refer to “journalists who had come to sneer” while at the same time – *pace* McArdle – quoting the British press in support of their cause.³¹

²⁹ Ibid p 84

³⁰ Kevin Barry (ed): **James Joyce: Occasional, Critical and Political Writing** (Oxford University Press, 2000) p 146

³¹ David Hogan (Frank Gallagher): **The Four Glorious Years** (Irish Press, Dublin, 1953) p 62

So far I have been arguing that this thesis addresses an important topic tantalisingly acknowledged but underexplored in Irish historiography. What will the thesis bring to scholarship on the media? I will argue that while conventional historians fail to critically analyse the press, media scholars invariably ignore or discount history. For many of the canonical books of journalistic practice published over the last thirty years history is at best incidental. Herbert Gans's study of American magazines and television networks, Gaye Tuchman's work on news production and Jeremy Tunstall's account of the working lives of British journalists are still cited for their insights into modern media practice.³² But their work is grounded in the present (or the present of the 1970s). James Curran has written of this pioneering work that its "main limitation... is that it is sociology. Its conclusions become potentially misleading if they are viewed as generalizations that apply outside their specific setting."³³ Some of this work also tends to abstract the media from its historical setting, flattening out perspective and producing an atrophied account of institutional structures devoid of the nuances of politics, circumstances and time. Paolo Mancini makes a similar point in his criticism of the persistence of classical liberal theories of the press as the main model of reference for media studies. "Journalism and, more generally, media structures do not grow up in a vacuum. They are born and develop within a network of interactions and negotiations with a

³² Herbert Gans: **Deciding What's News** (Pantheon, New York, 1979); Gaye Tuchman: **Making News** (Free Press, New York, 1978); Jeremy Tunstall: **Journalists at Work** (Constable, London, 1971)

³³ James Curran: **Media and Power** (Routledge, London, 2002) p 46

number of other social systems and factors, most of all with economics and politics.”³⁴

To some extent what I have outlined here in my discussion of the approach of Anglo-Irish historiography to the press and the attitude of some media scholars to historical context is a version of a long established struggle between history and sociology. Peter Burke has characterised this tension in terms of “Historians [regarding] sociologists as people who... lack any sense of place or time [and] sociologists [who] see historians as amateurish myopic fact-collectors without a method, the vagueness of their data matched by their incapacity to analyse them.”³⁵ Or in Charles Tilly’s succinct caricature of a sociologists viewpoint: “History does the transcription, sociology the analysis”³⁶ My aim in this thesis is to use both history and sociology to reach a better understanding of the role of the press during a decisive event in Irish, British and indeed world history; to look at both the Irish revolution and the professional practice and mentality of foreign correspondents through a new optic. James Curran has suggested that one way of addressing his concerns about the trend towards ahistorical media scholarship would be to “fold the history of the British media into a narrative of British society.”³⁷ In looking at the nature of journalistic coverage within the narrative frame of a particular moment of

³⁴ Paolo Mancini: ‘Political complexity and alternative models of journalism: The Italian case’ in Myung-Jin Park and James Curran: **De-Westernizing Media Studies** (Routledge, London 2000) p 265

³⁵ Peter Burke: **Sociology and History** (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1980) p 13—14

³⁶ Charles Tilly: **As Sociology Meets History** (Academic Press Inc., New York, 1981) p 5

³⁷ Curran: **Media and Power** op. cit. p 47

revolutionary change in Britain, Ireland and the empire I am hoping to make some contribution towards moving scholarship in this direction.

As I indicated at the outset, my focus in this thesis will be on the work of journalists and writers who came to Ireland during the revolution. Media history scholarship has been curiously neglectful of individual journalists. Some of the best examples of media history tend to focus on broad themes across long time spans: Michael Schudson on the emergence of objectivity as a professional totem in the United States, Jean Chalaby on the development of the modern press in Britain, Mark Hampton on changing ideas of the place of the press in British democracy.³⁸ Philip Knightley's much cited book about war correspondents from the Crimean war to Vietnam raises many interesting questions but tends more to impressionistic narrative than rigorous analysis.³⁹ All of these studies are valuable and I will make use of their insights in this thesis. But none of them look at how specific journalists wrote about specific events. The scarcity of such work cannot be explained by a bias against writing about individuals. The media history for my period – from the end of the First World War to the early 1920s – is distinguished by intense interest in press barons. There is a proliferation of biographical studies of figures such as Northcliffe, Beaverbrook and Rothermere as well as detailed accounts of the buying and selling of titles by a small band of plutocrats. More general

³⁸ Michael Schudson: Origins of the Ideal of Objectivity in the Professions: Studies in the History of American Journalism and American Law 1830—1940 (Garland, New York, 1990); Jean Chalaby: The Invention of Journalism (Macmillan, London, 1998); Mark Hampton: Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850—1950 (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2004)

³⁹ Phillip Knightley: The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth Maker (Quartet, London, revised edition, 1982)

accounts of the press at this time, such as the work of Stephen Koss, are also exclusively concerned with the men at the top; editors are regarded as the only figures of consequence in newspapers and weeklies.⁴⁰ The contribution of reporters and writers is regarded as unworthy of detailed consideration; they remain anonymous editorial fodder whose treatment brings to mind E.P. Thompson's famous remark about "the immense condescension of history." In this thesis I want to shift the perspective from the boardroom and the editor's desk to the correspondents on the ground.

In taking this approach I am not discounting the extent to which institutions, politics and professional routines and conventions influenced and shaped the work of correspondents who reported from Ireland – indeed, as will become clear in the chapters which follow these influences will be at the heart of my analysis of the coverage. But my argument is that some of the most well known work on the early twentieth century press in Britain and the United States betrays a tendency to regard what actually appeared in newspapers as merely the impoverished literary by-product of larger institutional and economic forces. Ferdinand Braudel once dismissed the history of events as felt and described by contemporaries on the grounds that it was concerned with "ephemera...which pass across the stage like fireflies, hardly glimpsed before they settle back into darkness and as often as not into

⁴⁰ Stephen Koss: **The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain** (Fontana edition, London, 1990) and **Fleet Street Radical: A.G. Gardiner and the Daily News** (Allen Lane, London, 1973)

oblivion”⁴¹ and this I would argue seems to be the view some media scholars take of actual journalism. What I believe is a more balanced assessment was offered by J.A. Hobson, the theorist of imperialism. Hobson published much of his most serious intellectual work in newspapers and magazines; he reported on the Boer War for the *Manchester Guardian*. In his autobiography he noted how “In certain high intellectual quarters journalism has always been treated as the lowest of printed matter, as vulgar necessity...degrading in its thought and literary form...” But Hobson protested that this attitude revealed a failure to discriminate. He acknowledged that “the hasty unchecked publication of news and opinions which strict ‘journalism’ implies has obvious dangers to truth and literary style...” But he argued that “in its best form, in the current commentary upon important events, it has virtues of its own to set against and qualify the defects of its hasty production. Not only has it a vitality and bite of thought, feeling and expression, caught from the immediacy of the happenings it handles, but its very fragmentation evades some of the dangers that beset the longer, formal, more scientific, and philosophical expositions which claim the seats of intellectual authority.”⁴²

This thesis argues that understanding the way journalists and writers chose to record and comment on the day to day developments in Ireland is an essential step towards an assessment of the Irish revolution itself and the role of the press and journalism in that phase of world history.

⁴¹ Quoted in Niall Ferguson: ‘Virtual History: Towards a ‘chaotic’ theory of the past’ in Niall Ferguson (ed): **Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals** (Picador, London, 1997) p 58—59

⁴²J.A. Hobson: **Confessions of an Economic Heretic** (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1938) p 85—86

The reason the journalist can be restored to the centre of the picture is that by the turn of the nineteenth century writers for the commercial press had established a degree of independence concomitant with their assertion that they were members of a profession and that their “credibility derived in large part from a command of facts.”⁴³ This is often overlooked by some writers impressed by what they see as the apparently limitless power of the press barons to dictate what appears in their news columns. Even Max Weber worried at the time that “the journalist worker gains less and less as the capitalist lord of the press, of the sort of ‘Lord’ Northcliffe, for instance, gains more and more political influence.”⁴⁴ But by the 1920s in Britain and the United States it is clear that journalists were allowed (and would expect to enjoy) a degree of freedom to interpret events for themselves; special correspondents sent abroad and literary figures commissioned for special assignments enjoyed special licence. Thus, as Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini observed in their survey of media systems, while journalists “have rarely asserted and almost never achieved the right to control media organizations outright...they have often been successful in achieving significant relative autonomy within those organizations.”⁴⁵ A vivid definition of that sense of entitlement to autonomy is provided by a former editor of the *Jerusalem Post* in Hallin and Mancini’s book. Explaining why he resigned when his paper was taken over by an interfering Canadian proprietor, the editor said: “Journalism is an

⁴³ Mark Hampton: Visions of the Press op.cit. p 76—77

⁴⁴ Max Weber: ‘Politics as a Vocation’ in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds): From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (Routledge, London, 1991) p 97

⁴⁵ Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini: Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics (Cambridge University Press, 2004) p 35

enterprise in social judgment. The object of that judgment is the historical present, the fast flood of daily events. Journalism plucks from this infinite flow those events deemed worthy of public regard, reporting them as honest witness... and it seeks by...interpretive judgement to help place those events in a more explicit context of narrative understanding.”⁴⁶ This sense of independence, particularly the ideal of the “honest witness,” would have been shared by special correspondents during the Irish revolution. Of course, as I have already indicated, many different influences – some professional, some institutional and some political and cultural – would have shaped their judgment of events. But in the early twentieth century the idea of journalists as interpreters of reality and not mere stenographers or hired scribes had begun to take hold as evidenced by the advice offered by one writer at the time to prospective recruits to the trade that ‘the journalistic eye is now of far greater importance than the journalistic pen’⁴⁷

The professionalisation of journalism was one development in evidence in the British newspapers this time. There were also broader shifts in perceptions of the function of the press in democratic society. In his research on the role of the press in Britain from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Mark Hampton identified two broad conceptions of how the press fitted into politics. What Hampton calls the “educational ideal” placed the press in the classic liberal tradition of

⁴⁶ Ibid p 40

⁴⁷ E.H.L. Watson: Hints to Young Authors, London (1906) quoted by Kate Campbell: “Journalistic Discourses and Construction of Modern Knowledge” in Laurel Brake, Bill Bell and David Finkelstein (eds): Nineteenth Century Media and the Construction of Identities (Palgrave, London, 2000) p 42

politics of public discussion: “[The] press was regarded as a powerful agent for improving individuals...[Newspapers] could ‘influence’, ‘inform’ or ‘elevate’ readers... [In] the most idealized version, newspapers were seen as creating an arena for public discussion on the ‘questions of the day.’”⁴⁸ This notion, Hampton argues, held sway until around the 1880s. In the second tradition, the ‘representative ideal’, which took full form in the early part of the twentieth century, the press did not so much influence readers as reflect their views. “In this rendering, newspapers conveyed the opinions, wants, or needs of readers, crystallizing them into a powerful form that could bring pressure to bear on Parliament. This version of the press is most nearly conveyed in the press’s label as the ‘Fourth Estate’: the press was the champion of the people... Rather than seeking to involve the mass readers in a discussion or seeking to persuade these readers, those who articulated the representative ideal offered to speak on their behalf.”⁴⁹ Hampton does not posit a schematic transformation from one paradigm to the other; rather he suggests that, although the representative ideal was dominant by the early 1920s, strong vestiges of the educational ideal were still invoked to explain the purpose of the press, particularly the ‘elite’ newspapers.⁵⁰

By the time of the Irish revolution, therefore, the press had begun to articulate a vision of itself as a vigilant defender of the interests of the public. In January 1918 *The Spectator* declared that the “The function of the Press – and it may be a public service of untold good – is to act as

⁴⁸ Mark Hampton: Visions of the Press in Britain op.cit. p 9

⁴⁹ Ibid p 9—10

⁵⁰ Ibid p 13

critic and watchman, to be perpetually warning the country of the dangers that beset the State.⁵¹ At the end of that year the *Daily Telegraph* was stepping up to the watchdog role. Noting the lack of publicity about the allied intervention in the civil war in Russia (“a war...such as would have filled the newspapers at any normal time”) the *Telegraph* put itself forward as proxy for the electorate demanding that “the nation is entitled to know how the war is going, and what end to it is contemplated by the Government.”⁵² As we shall see later, these justifications came to the fore during the war in Ireland. British newspapers came into conflict with the government over their coverage and had recourse to versions of this “Fourth Estate” myth to defend themselves. The practice of the American correspondents whose work I examine in Chapter 5 is also informed by a sense of the mission of the press.

There is a trail of evidence of how politicians accepted rather than resisted the positioning of the press as a ‘Fourth Estate.’ In 1908 Asquith told the Imperial Press Conference that ‘the press is the daily interpreter and mouthpiece of the tastes, the interests, the ideas – one might go further and say the passions and the caprices’ of the electorate.”⁵³ In 1919 two commentators sympathetic to the Labour Party estimated that the press was “for the purposes of democratic government, practically the sole education which the mass of the people

⁵¹ Ibid p 137

⁵² Hugh Brogan: *The Life of Arthur Ransome* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1984) p 227

⁵³ Quoted in Mark Hampton: *Visions of the Press in Britain* op. cit. p 109

at present has...”⁵⁴ By the time he wrote his war memoirs in the 1930s, Lloyd George could claim that public opinion dominated the actions of British governments.⁵⁵ Allowance must be made, of course, for the fact that this point was made to trumpet the superiority of the British system over European dictatorships. But there is plenty of evidence – some of which we shall see later on with reference to Ireland – that Lloyd George was profoundly convinced of the centrality of the press to politics.⁵⁶ This was not just a politician’s folly: a contemporary political scientist estimated that there were only two ways for public opinion to find expression in democracies: “One is the vote at elections, the other is journalism.”⁵⁷ And even where “elections were pro forma rubber stamps for the state, tsar and kaiser needed to manipulate and control the thing represented as ‘public opinion’ in a way that their ancestors did not.”⁵⁸

The emergence of the press as the “Fourth Estate” paralleled the enlargement of the electorate. In the general election of 1918 – when Sinn Fein scored its dramatic breakthrough in Ireland – all males over twenty-one and all women over thirty were allowed to vote for the first time. The overlapping of the newspaper audience and the electorate

⁵⁴ F.H. Hayward and B.N. Langdon-Davies: **Democracy and The Press** (The National Labour Press Ltd, Manchester, 1919) p 4

⁵⁵ Quoted in Gary Bass: **Stay the Hand of Vengeance: The Politics of War Crimes Tribunal** (Princeton University Press, 2000) p 73

⁵⁶ His most recent biographer has affirmed: “Throughout his career Lloyd George took the press very seriously...he was ever conscious that the press and those who controlled it had unique resources for interpreting and influencing public opinion.” Note that this view takes in both the educational and the representative ideal. John Grigg: **Lloyd George: War Leader, 1916—1918** (Allen Lane, London, 2002) p 614

⁵⁷ E.L. Godkin: **Unforseen Tendencies of Democracy** (Boston, 1898) quoted in Quagliariello, Gaetano: **Politics Without Parties: Moisei Ostrogorski and the Debate on Political Parties on the Eve of the Twentieth Century** (Avebury, Aldershot, 1996) n 5, p 158

⁵⁸ C.A. Bayly: **The Birth of the Modern World 1780—1914** (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2004) p 484

made press and politics evermore interlinked. One historian has concluded that 1918 was a watershed for the role of the media in politics: “In twentieth-century Britain, mass politics has always been constituted in the mass media: to think of these as separate developments is to miss the centrality of these mediated imaginings.”⁵⁹ This is the context in which we must assess the government’s response to the correspondents’ reports from Ireland in later chapters.

It was not only the newly expanded electorate that shaped the relationship of the press to politics. The First World War had been a ‘total’ war, a conflict where the whole population was mobilised in an enormous collective effort to fight and sustain the fight. For the first time the press had been deployed as “a weapon of warfare.”⁶⁰ In the politician’s eyes public opinion was now synonymous with morale and “propaganda began to emerge as the principal instrument of control...and an essential weapon in the national arsenal.”⁶¹ Lloyd George acknowledged to C.P. Scott over breakfast at Downing Street in December 1917 how a combination of co-option and censorship had kept the true horror of the war hidden from the public. “If people really knew the war would be stopped tomorrow”, Lloyd George admitted. “But of course they don’t and can’t know. The correspondents don’t write and the censorship would not pass the truth.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Bill Schwarz: ‘Politics and Rhetoric in the Age of Mass Culture’ in History Workshop Journal No.46 (1998) p 154

⁶⁰ Niall Ferguson: The Pity of War (Basic Books, New York, 1999) p 212

⁶¹ David Welch: Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 1914—1918: The Sins of Omission (The Athlone Press, London, 2000) p 1

⁶² Quoted in Phillip Knightley: The First Casualty op. cit. p 93

After the war there were second thoughts about the success of the propaganda effort. By becoming, in Philip Elliott's term, "the self-appointed script writer to the national morale" the press had undermined trust in the veracity of its news.⁶³ Norman Angell argued that the newspapers had been corrupted. "Those who cared to exercise a little vigilance could see in every other column of their newspaper the trail of propaganda. What the reader not 'in the know' often took for unalloyed 'news' was, as a matter of fact, often a partial statement concocted for military or political purposes in the 'Information Department' of some interested Foreign (or Home) Government."⁶⁴ Another contemporary commentator, Walter Raleigh, agreed that the press had helped to hold the nation together but in so doing had failed to fulfil a basic need of the British people which made their patriotism superior to that of Germans: their desire to be allowed to regularly exercise reason and imagination. Instead of presenting facts the newspapers had dealt in "flattery and flight": they had been timid in admitting to reverses and never admitted the humanity of the enemy.⁶⁵ "If I had my way", Raleigh concluded, "I would staff the newspaper offices, as far as possible, with wounded soldiers, and I would give some of the present staff a holiday as stretcher bearers. Then we should hear more of the truth."⁶⁶ But newspaper staff themselves were not immune to second thoughts about the collusion between the government and the press during the war. When Desmond FitzGerald, the head of the Irish revolutionaries' publicity department,

⁶³ Philip Elliott: 'All the World's a Stage or What's Wrong with the National Press' in James Curran (ed): **The British Press: A Manifesto** (Macmillan, London, 1978) p 143

⁶⁴ Norman Angell: **The Press and the Organisation of Society** (The Labour Publishing Company Ltd., London, 1922) p 20

⁶⁵ Walter Raleigh: **The War and the Press** (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1918) p 9—10

⁶⁶ *Ibid* p.18

visited London to see the correspondents from foreign newspapers he noted that their wartime experience made them wary of anything they construed as propaganda.⁶⁷ I will be discussing the response of British journalists to wartime propaganda in the next chapter. But when we come to consider the adversarial reporting of the British campaign in Ireland it is essential to bear in mind the context of the post-war criticisms of the press. Equally, this general distrust of propaganda is the context for the discussion of the publicity work of the revolutionaries and the British authorities in Ireland in Chapter 4. For Angell, the deceptions of war spilled over into peacetime; he now believed it was more profitable for the press to pedal familiar falsehoods rather than confront “unpleasant truth.”⁶⁸ And he concluded that the press had become “perhaps the worst of all the menaces to modern democracy”⁶⁹ and “the main instrument by which any real movement towards a new social order is resisted.”⁷⁰

This debate was being conducted while a new international order was taking shape with little resistance from the allied powers. Anthony Smith has remarked that, although the First World war was fought by bureaucratic states with colonial empires, it “promoted the cause of ethnic nations across Europe...”⁷¹ In many places the invigoration of nationalist movements was assisted by the great powers. “[The] empires committed suicide during the 1914—18 war by fomenting nationalism

⁶⁷ Letter from Desmond FitzGerald to Dail Eireann, January 1, 1920, Desmond FitzGerald Papers, Archive Department, University College Dublin, P80/14/1

⁶⁸ Angell: The Press and the Organisation of Society, op. cit. p 37—38

⁶⁹ Ibid p 16

⁷⁰ Ibid p 17

⁷¹ Anthony Smith: ‘War and Ethnicity: the role of warfare in the formation, self-images and cohesion of ethnic communities’, Ethnic and Racial Studies Vol 4, No. 4 (October 1981) p 387

as a form of political warfare against their opponents.”⁷² By the time of the Paris Peace Conference the old colonial system was being challenged by two universalist ideologies: Lenin’s appeal for world revolution on one side and Woodrow Wilson’s crusade for self-determination on the other. Toby Dodge has written that the legitimacy of the colonial system was being undermined by America’s growing economic superiority. “If markets were to be open, if consumers across the world were to be allowed freedom of choice, then there was little room for colonial notions of tutelage and protected markets. This argument gained ideological coherence when Wilson began to counter Lenin’s internationalist appeals to the working class with propaganda aimed at extolling the freedoms and prosperity to be achieved by self-determining nations.”⁷³ Forced to take sides, Wilsonian internationalism, for all its drawbacks, was the only choice from a British point of view. But the currency given to the notion of self-determination was a gift for Ireland’s revolutionaries. All successful revolutions of the twentieth century, as John Dunn has observed, “succeeded by establishing a government of a nation state in a world of other nation states.”⁷⁴ The post-war international order gave a new legitimacy to Ireland’s historic claim to nationhood.

All this is important for this thesis because the shifting ideas of a new international settlement would have informed the correspondents

⁷² Mark Mazower: **Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century** (Allen Lane, London, 1998) p 45

⁷³ Toby Dodge: **Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied** (Hurst and Company, London, 2003) p 5

⁷⁴ John Dunn: **Modern Revolutions: An Introduction to an Analysis of a Political Phenomenon** (Cambridge University Press, 1972) p xii

heading to Ireland to cover the revolution. When they arrived they would also be exposed to local versions of universal arguments because, as Ben Levitas pointed out in a discussion of arguments about anti-Semitism between Irish polemicists, “all sides of the cultural and political debate [in Ireland] fed off international currents of thought.”⁷⁵ Now more than before these political thinkers and activists would have to connect the cause of Irish nationalism with world events. The vogue for publicity and propaganda was animating colonialists as well. C.A. Bayly has suggested that public relations was a kind of ‘new imperialism’. But diffusing the empire message cut both ways: “At the same time, spokesmen of the colonized peoples also began to present their case more vigorously in metropolitan circles with the aid of telegrams, newspapers, and high-profile publicists.”⁷⁶ Irish revolutionaries were aware of the need to appeal to this new international public sphere which exalted humanitarian values. In the late nineteenth century, Patrick Ford, the editor and proprietor of the most widely read newspaper among Irish-Americans, the *Irish World*, aligned the Irish cause with slave emancipation, arguing that Ireland’s suffering was not singular but part of worldwide oppression of the common man.⁷⁷ Ford advocated that Irish revolutionaries must connect with similar movements around the world and especially in the British empire. “The concept of Indians as brown Irishmen, as discontented and as revolutionary-minded as themselves, was a basic tenet of Ford’s

⁷⁵ Ben Levitas: **The Theatre of Nation: Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism 1890—1916** (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2002) p 91

⁷⁶ C.A. Bayly: ‘Representing Copts and Muhammadans: Empire, Nation and Community in Egypt and India, 1880—1914’ in Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C.A. Bayly (eds): **Modernity and Culture from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean** (Columbia University Press, New York, 2002) p 160

⁷⁷ T.W. Moody: **Davitt and Irish Revolution** op.cit. p 142

strategy.”⁷⁸ An argument running through this thesis will be that the reporting of the Irish revolution was the culmination of that strategy. The interest shown by the journalists who converged on Ireland to report the war, the commentary and reportage connecting Ireland to world themes and the prominence given to the Irish struggle in newspapers around the world combined to allow George Gavan Duffy, the first Minister for Foreign Affairs in the new government of the Irish Free State, to boast in a memorandum in 1922 that “[We] are still beyond question, in high favour among influential people on the continent and our Envoys will be much sought after. The reasons are: first that Ireland is a world-race with great possibilities...”⁷⁹

The first half of this thesis will follow in a broadly narrative frame the course of the war in Ireland and the shifts in the reporting of events by British correspondents. Chapter 1 will offer a brief account of the state of Ireland in 1919 when the newly elected Sinn Fein MPs refused to go to Westminster and assembled in their own Irish parliament, Dail Eireann. I will trace how the First World War at first appeared to postpone a final reckoning with the ‘Irish Question’ but then provided the opportunity for the rebellion of 1916, the dramatic rise of Sinn Fein and the eclipse of the constitutional nationalists. In the second half of Chapter 1 I will discuss in detail the impact of the war on the British press and examine the prevailing notions of what it was to be a special

⁷⁸ H.V. Brasted: ‘Irish Nationalism and the British Empire’ op. cit. p 89

⁷⁹ Quoted in Donal Lowry: ‘New Ireland, Old Empire and the Outside World, 1922-49: The Strange Evolution of a “Dictionary Republic”’ in Mike Cronin and John Regan (eds): **Ireland: The Politics of Independence, 1922—49**, Macmillan, London (2000) p 173

correspondent through the memoirs of Philip Gibbs and Henry Wood Nevinson.

Chapters 2 and 3 will explore in detail the work of British correspondents in Ireland, the growing adversarial nature of their relationship with the government in London and the impact their work had on a London audience. I have looked at a variety of newspapers and weeklies including the *Morning Post* which was notorious for its “rabid, even violent, anti Irish stance...”⁸⁰ But I’ve concentrated on the work of correspondents for the *Daily News*, the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* because these are the papers which took the lead in oppositional reporting of the war. Their coverage was often criticised by the *Post* and other right-wing journals but, since I’m interested more in the professional practice of relatively autonomous correspondents rather than merely the political positions of their newspapers, I regard this debate as a context rather than the centre of my inquiry. Most mainstream journalism in Britain was arguably ‘liberal’ in a broad sense, a label which did not imply inevitable defiance of authority as is sometimes mistakenly assumed. The celebrated ‘liberal’ editor of the *Daily News*, A.G. Gardiner, worried constantly that his special correspondent covering the revolution in Russia, Arthur Ransome, was out of line with British foreign policy. Gardiner was sensitive to “the atmosphere in official circles.”⁸¹ In 1918 he wrote to Ransome to express his hope that he “would not embarrass the *News* by writing in too pro-Bolshevik and anti-interventionist a vein” And he was glad

⁸⁰ John M. McEwen: ‘The National Press During the First World War: Ownership and Circulation’ in *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol 17, No 3 (July 1982) p 472

⁸¹ Hugh Brogan: *The Life of Arthur Ransome* op.cit. p 190

when he received signs from Ransome that he had the approval of British authorities, “reassuring to an editor who did not want to drift too far into opposition.”⁸² Gardiner was eventually forced to resign because of his constant criticisms of Lloyd George but the *News* continued its adversarial Irish coverage which hurt the prime minister directly.⁸³ These examples illustrate that, at a time of great flux in British politics, adopting the traditional approach of viewing newspapers through the lens of their stated political outlook misses a great deal of complexity. I believe my approach, of looking at correspondents, is a more fruitful route of investigation.

Chapters 4 to 6 will step outside the narrative frame of the war to examine in detail some specific issues. In Chapter 4 I will look at the propaganda war and at how both sides tried to interest the journalists in their cause, making the point which other treatments of this missed: that it was an acute understanding of the modern media world and the function of news and propaganda which informed both sides.

Chapter 5 will swing the focus away from Britain to the United States. Using the personal papers of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s correspondent in Ireland, Carl Ackerman and the work of Francis Hackett, an editor at the *New Republic* and an Irishman who sympathised with Sinn Fein's cause, I will look at two contrasting schools of American journalism: one heavily informed by professionalism and the ideal of objectivity, the other partisan and inspired by the original ideology of muckraking.

⁸² Ibid p 208—209

⁸³ Stephen Koss: Fleet Street Radical op. cit. p 265—267

Finally in Chapter 6 I examine the work of three literary figures who visited Ireland at the time of the war. G.K. Chesterton's book *Irish Impressions* is a study of Ireland at the beginning of the rebellion in which Chesterton absorbs the Irish nationalism into his overarching critique of modern industrialism (an example of a tradition in which English writers project their own fantasies onto Irish reality.) Wilfred Ewart, then a best selling novelist, was sent by the *Sunday Times* to describe conditions in Ireland in 1921 and wrote a travelogue heavily influenced by his experiences in the trenches in France. Finally, V.S. Pritchett, starting out on his literary career, was the Dublin correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* during 1923 and was an acute observer of the early days of the new Irish state which was the fruit of the revolution.

CHAPTER 1

The Impact of War

The Irish revolution that became a focus of attention in the British press – and gradually in newspapers around the world – in 1919 cannot be considered in isolation from the cataclysmic changes wrought by the First World War. In 1914 the ‘Irish question’ – the source of profound controversy in modern British politics – seemed to be on the brink of settlement. Ireland was finally to have its own administration while still remaining part of the United Kingdom and the British Empire. The issue of Home Rule had threatened to provoke a civil war in 1912 when the Ulster Unionists refused to accept it and vowed – with the support of the Conservative Party – to resist with violence. But the conflict in Europe superseded this poisonous domestic controversy; decisions on how to implement the Home Rule bill to the satisfaction of all sides were deferred until the end of the war, a milestone then considered to be merely months away. The Irish Parliamentary Party, which had finally won the concession of Home Rule from Westminster, prepared itself for power. But by 1918 the Home Rulers – the major political force in the country for almost half a century – had been supplanted by separatists. This chapter will explain how this extraordinary reversal came about and provide an outline of the troubled country to which foreign correspondents came in numbers in 1919.

The war changed Ireland – but it also changed journalism. Since this thesis concentrates on the work of British and American correspondents

in Ireland – both reporters and freelance writers – I will trace the impact of the war on the British press and on journalistic practice in general. “Before 1914 it was not seriously considered to be the responsibility of government to explain, still less to justify, its policies to the public at large...”¹ But by 1918 – when Ireland once more began to move to the centre stage of British politics – controlling, influencing and reacting to the news had become a major concern of the government in London. This profoundly affected the work and self-image of the most glamorous footsoldiers of the newspaper world, the special correspondents. In an attempt to establish a context for the later consideration of the coverage of Ireland I will sketch out what it meant to be a “special” at the end of the First World War through a close examination of the careers of two men who were official war correspondents in France, Philip Gibbs and H.W. Nevinson. Both of them had important connections with Ireland and both wrote memoirs and autobiography which reflected on what it was to be a journalist at this time.

On August 5th 1914 *The Irish Times*, the chief organ of Irish unionism, hailed the declaration of war with what seems, in retrospect, a grievously misplaced sense of relief and optimism: “We believe that the people of these kingdoms are today more cheerful than they have been at any time since the war cloud began to gather over Europe”. This was not editorial jingoism or war mongering, at least in its traditional sense. The editorial soon revealed that the inspiration for such a breezy embrace of war in Europe was an intensely parochial anxiety. “In this

¹ Philip Taylor: “Publicity and diplomacy: the impact of the First World War upon Foreign Office attitudes towards the press” in David Dilks (ed): **Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain’s Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century Vol 1** (Macmillan, London 1981) p 42

hour of trial the Irish nation has 'found itself' at last", *The Irish Times* declared with undisguised relief. "Unionist and nationalist have ranged themselves together against the invader of their common liberties."² For *The Irish Times*, and many others in the British Isles, the war between the Great Powers would help to draw a line under one of the most dangerous periods in the history of the United Kingdom since the Act of Union in 1800. In the summer of 1914 Ireland was preparing for its own war. Thousands of volunteer militiamen were drilling in Ulster to oppose Home Rule; thousands had mobilised in the rest of Ireland in support of it. In the previous four years the struggle between Liberals and Unionists in the House of Commons over Home Rule for Ireland had threatened a grave constitutional crisis.

The issue had dominated Irish politics – and by extension Westminster – for a generation. "The promise or threat of Home Rule was the driving force behind every substantial faction in Irish politics from 1870 to 1916."³ Pressure from the increasingly disciplined Irish Parliamentary Party in the House of Commons during this period won a series of concessions from both Liberal and Conservative governments – tenant-right, rent control, subsidies for tenants to purchase farms from their landlords, a national university. Such was the success of constitutional Irish nationalists that they were able to "[provoke] state intervention in Irish social and economic affairs to a degree quite unparalleled in the rest of the United Kingdom."⁴ Their pivotal coup had been Gladstone's

² Quoted in David Fitzpatrick: Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921 op.cit. p 53

³ Ibid p 72

⁴ Jose Harris: Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870—1914 (Oxford University Press, 1993) p 204

adoption of Home Rule as part of Liberal policy for the pacification of Ireland. But this success had turned Irish Home Rule into the most divisive issue in British domestic politics. Gladstone's decision split his Liberal party and for Conservatives his conversion amounted to, in Lord Randolph Churchill's words, "trafficking with treason".⁵ Every time the Liberals succeeded in passing a Home Rule bill they were thwarted by the House of Lords. However, in 1911 the Commons voted to remove the veto power of the House of Lords after it had rejected Lloyd George's 'People's Budget'. Now, with the Irish nationalist MPs keeping the Liberals in power, the way was open for Home Rule. Ireland became, as Roy Foster has pointed out, "the issue upon which the landed and plutocratic interests decided to confront Lloyd George's welfare politics."⁶ When a Home Rule bill was introduced in April 1912 its enactment was inevitable. The reaction in Ulster, home to the majority of Irish unionists (almost overwhelmingly Protestant), was the creation of a mass movement and the recruitment of a private army which threatened civil war if they were to be forced to accept Home Rule with Ireland run by a predominantly Catholic parliament in Dublin. The refusal of Ulster Protestants to accept Home Rule drew support from all the leading figures of British Conservatism who "denied the right of the government to force the unionists to fall under the sway of a polity other than the UK parliament."⁷ For Unionists, Home Rule for Ireland meant separation, the eventual disintegration of the United Kingdom and, in time, the unravelling of the entire British empire. As

⁵ Quoted in Conor Cruise O'Brien: **Parnell and His Party** op. cit. p 194 n. 3

⁶ R.F Foster: **Modern Ireland 1600—1972** (Allen Lane, London 1988) p 465

⁷ Paul Bew: **Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism 1912—1916** (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994) p 53

one writer framed it in terms of the popular First World War marching song “ ‘Goodbye Tipperary’ was tantamount to saying ‘Farewell Leicester Square.’”⁸ After British officers at the Curragh barracks near Dublin said they would resign rather than fight against the volunteer army raised by Ulster unionists, the high command of the British army made it clear they were not prepared to coerce Ulster into Home Rule. A majority of the cabinet appeared reluctant to even attempt to overrule the military.⁹

So it is in the context of the United Kingdom being torn apart by Home Rule that the relief of *The Irish Times* at the outbreak of war should be viewed. Indeed, the paper’s hope that the war would unify the divided factions in Ireland seemed to have some justification at the time. In a sober speech to the House of Commons the Irish nationalist leader John Redmond pledged his support for the war effort and committed his volunteers in the south to co-operating in the defence of Ireland. To his own followers, Redmond could scarcely conceal his delight, remarking tactfully that “as things stand now, our position has been improved enormously by the foreign complications.”¹⁰ The reason for his pleasure was that the war gave Redmond – “a kind of imperialist nationalist”¹¹ – the opportunity to demonstrate that Ireland under Home Rule would be just as loyal to the King (if not even more so) as it was during the Union. At the same time the Ulster Unionists would be deflated: threatening

⁸ Keith Jeffery: **The British Army and the Crisis of Empire 1918—1922** (Manchester University Press 1984) p 75

⁹ J.J. Lee: **Ireland 1912—1985** (Cambridge University Press, 1989) p 18

¹⁰ David Fitzpatrick: **Politics and Irish Life** op.cit. p 91

¹¹ D. George Boyce: **Ireland 1828—1923: From Ascendancy to Democracy** (Blackwell, Oxford, 1992) p 80

violence to resist Home Rule under the guise of allegiance to the Crown now seemed ludicrous. The national emergency provoked by the declaration of war had left them “imprisoned by their patriotism.”¹² Catholic nationalists now seemed poised to outdo their Protestant brethren in the north when it came to patriotic devotion. Even non-unionist newspapers declared it the duty of Irishmen to fight the despotic Germans. The head of the Catholic church in Ireland, Cardinal Logue, provided doctrinal support for the war when he condemned “the barbarity of the Germans in burning Rheims Cathedral.”¹³

The War Office pitched its recruitment campaign to suit the circumstances: leprechauns, shamrocks, harps and saints were the staple illustrations on recruiting posters in Ireland and frequent appeal was made to the Irish fighting spirit, duty, honour and the atrocities allegedly committed by the enemy.¹⁴ But the response to the recruitment campaign among Catholic Home Rulers was not as enthusiastic as their leaders might have hoped or expected. In the words of one caustic assessment “while most Irishmen professed to approve of others fighting, they preferred not to participate in person.”¹⁵ Others have argued that recruitment in Ireland did not differ that much from other parts of the Kingdom and that “there could hardly have been an individual Irishman or woman who did not personally know someone

¹² John O. Stubbs: “The Unionists and Ireland, 1914—1918” in Historical Journal No. 33, Vol 4 (December 1990), quoted in Bew: Ideology and the Irish Question op.cit. p 142

¹³ Keith Jeffery: Ireland and the Great War (Cambridge University Press, 2000) p 12

¹⁴ Mark Tierney et. al: “Recruiting Posters” in David Fitzpatrick (ed): Ireland and the First World War (Lilliput Press and Trinity History Workshop, Dublin 1988) p 54—56

¹⁵ Fitzpatrick: Politics and Irish Life op.cit. p 92

serving in the colours.”¹⁶ In the end over two hundred thousand Irishmen participated in the war and some thirty five thousand were killed.¹⁷ The burden of the war fell mostly on Protestants in the North. But the conflict also had cataclysmic consequences for the Ascendancy families in the South. The writer Lennox Robinson observed that “the Big Houses were emptied of all men of a fighting age [the Great War being] the last chapter in the history of many families.”¹⁸ Keith Jeffery argues that the idea of the ‘lost generation’ applies most forcefully to the Ascendancy class in southern Ireland.¹⁹ By the end of the war “in all too many Irish country houses in 1919 the Young Master was no more than a memory and a photograph in uniform on a side-table.”²⁰

Throughout the worst horrors of the war the Irish gentry supported the soldiers at the front in ways “almost indistinguishable from those followed in the quietest, loyalist village in the British Isles.”²¹ At the same time much of Catholic Ireland, those not seduced by the recruiting officers, enjoyed the fruits of the economic boom that the war brought to the home front. Thousands crossed the Irish Sea to work in munitions factories and as seasonal labourers on farms in England.²² In Ireland tenant farmers who had graduated to being proprietors, thanks to the

¹⁶ Jeffery: **Ireland and the Great War** op. cit. p 6 and Kevin Myers: “The Irish and the Great War: A Case of Amnesia” in Richard English and Joseph Morrison Skelly (eds): **Ideas Matter: Essays in Honour of Conor Cruise O’Brien** (Poolbeg Press, Dublin 1998) p 104

¹⁷ Myers p 103—104

¹⁸ Quoted in Jeffery: **Ireland and the Great War** op. cit. p 70

¹⁹ Ibid p 70

²⁰ Mark Bence-Jones: **Twilight of the Ascendancy** (Constable, London 1993) p 187

²¹ Fitzpatrick: **Politics and Irish Life** op.cit. p 56

²² David Fitzpatrick: “The Overflow of the Deluge: Anglo-Irish Relationships, 1914—1922” in Oliver MacDonagh and W.F. Mandle (eds): **Ireland and Irish-Australia: Studies in Cultural and Political History** (Croom Helm, London 1986) p 86

government land acts, benefited from increased prices and families of serving soldiers received state allowances.²³

This ready identification with Britain's war was a feature of the ambivalent nature of Irish society at the turn of the twentieth century. The Great Famine fifty years before had hastened the pace of Anglicisation to the extent that "town culture in Ireland was essentially a variant on British provincial culture, the main difference being the religious life and the content of the political culture."²⁴ But as the war began it seemed that even religious and cultural dissension could be subsumed by constitutional nationalism as it stood on the brink of succeeding in its long struggle towards creating a viable Irish nation. Home Rule appeared to be more assured than ever and commitment to the war in Europe seemed to offer moderate Irish nationalism the opportunity to fulfil its promise that Ireland could be self governing *and* an important part of the British empire. " 'Ireland a nation' was a slogan equally acceptable to friends and enemies of Britain, each of whom could assign what meaning they chose to the phrase."²⁵

The Irish Parliamentary Party's detractors in the more extreme nationalist groups appeared to be morally disarmed. Desmond Fitzgerald, the IRA's director of publicity during the War of Independence in 1921, recalled how only seven years earlier he and his comrades were "a very small minority, without influence, impotent."

²³ D.G. Boyce: **Ireland 1828—1923** op. cit. p 88

²⁴ Tom Garvin: **The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics** (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1981) p 103

²⁵ Fitzpatrick: **Politics and Irish Life** op.cit. p 78

John Redmond's exhortations that Irish people should support Britain, he wrote, had "really represented the views of the majority of the Irish people."²⁶ The movement to which Fitzgerald belonged was at once cultural and political. Those who came under the umbrella title of 'Irish Ireland' included language enthusiasts who saw true nationality in the restoration of Gaelic, sports administrators promoting ancient Irish games and economic nationalists who believed Ireland was being sucked dry by the English connection. They were all determined to do something about what the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe referred to as "the leprosy of Anglicisation."²⁷ Many were mortal enemies of the Irish Parliamentary Party. One moderate leader, Eoin MacNeil regarded the party's MPs as enfeebled and corrupt and referred derisively to their conduct at Westminster where they "had wheedled, fawned, begged, bargained and truckled for a provincial legislature."²⁸ His contempt was shared by groups of more political militants. Some, like the Irish Republican Brotherhood were conspiratorial revolutionaries seeking to emulate the Fenian rising of the mid nineteenth century. Others, including Sinn Fein, had a separatist agenda without being quite sure how to achieve it.²⁹

Until 1914 these parties and movements existed on the fringes. But the war created the conditions in which they came into their own. Instead of unifying the nation under the Crown as *The Irish Times* and the Irish Parliamentary Party hoped, the war helped to transform Ireland from an

²⁶ Garret FitzGerald: "The Meaning of the Rising" in *The Irish Times* July 13-18, 1991, quoted in Bew: *Ideology and the Irish Question* op. cit. p xvii

²⁷ Michael Laffan: *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Fein Party 1916—1923* p 224

²⁸ Ibid p 11

²⁹ Ibid p 11—33

emerging pillar of Empire into a site of nationalist agitation of the kind that could be seen all over Europe by 1918. By the end of the war self-determination had eclipsed Home Rule as the slogan of the day.

How did this happen? For one thing the war which had seemed to hold no terrors for the parliamentary nationalists turned out to be corrosive of their hold on the public imagination. Nobody expected that the fighting would be so prolonged or so bloody. As trench warfare continued with no conclusion in sight, the prospect of actual Home Rule receded into the distance and as a consequence the parliamentarians seemed more ineffective than ever. There was nothing on which to expend their campaigning energies; and while the carnage in France depressed potential recruits it emboldened the extremists who believed that it presented an opportunity for action. In November 1915 Sir Matthew Nathan, the under-secretary for Ireland, warned Redmond's deputy, John Dillon, that Sinn Fein was gaining support at the expense of the parliamentarians.³⁰ Secondly, pervasive militarism itself helped to give an impetus to "the undercurrent of sedition"³¹ in Irish nationalist politics. The formation of the Volunteers to resist Home Rule in Ulster had prompted the launching of a countervailing force among nationalists. Mobilisation was the prevailing method of political action. "For unionists, nationalists and republicans alike, soldiery was an idea to be extolled rather than a menace to be confronted."³²

³⁰ F.S.L. Lyons: **John Dillon: A Biography** (Routledge & Keegan Paul, London 1968) p 366

³¹ Ibid p 365

³² David Fitzpatrick: "Militarism in Ireland 1900—1922" in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds): **A Military History of Ireland** (Cambridge University Press 1996) p 379

The Easter Rising of 1916 was a shock for the British government.³³ The men who carried it out formed a conspiracy within a conspiracy; the anti-recruiting campaigns, pro-German sentiments and the manoeuvring of the Irish Volunteer force itself provided a cover of threatening but not apparently bellicose agitation. The conspirators plans were indeed closely guarded, so much so that their plans to involve most of the Volunteer movement on Easter Sunday backfired.³⁴ Famously the rebellion was carried out with scant regard for the possibility of victory. Its driving force, Patrick Pearse, believed in a blood sacrifice that would revive the spirit of the Irish nation. At the end of 1915 – four months before the Rising – he exulted in the possibilities offered by the war in Europe for rousing Ireland from its lethargy. “The last six months have been the most glorious in the history of Europe. It is good for the world that such things should be done. The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields...Ireland will not find Christ’s peace until she has taken Christ’s sword. What peace she has known in these latter days has been the devil’s peace, peace with sin, peace with dishonour...”³⁵ Pearse saw his redemptive role as equivalent to that of Christ³⁶ but other leaders of the rebellion also shared a poetic commitment to separatism and saw their task as an effort to awaken the nation to the depth of that dishonour. They were joined by the socialist and Labour leader James

³³ On April 22nd, 1916 – two days before the Rising took place – Nathan wrote to his boss Augustine Birrell: “I see no indications of a rising.” Ibid p 368

³⁴ British naval intelligence were made fully aware of the conspirator’s plans by intercepted German naval codes but kept officials at Dublin Castle in the dark for fear of revealing to the Germans that their codes were compromised. But the fact that the Dublin administration seemed oblivious of the Rising contributed to its reputation for incompetence. See Laffan: **The Rensurrection of Ireland** op. cit. p 36—40

³⁵ F.S.L. Lyons: **Ireland Since the Famine** (Fontana, London, 1976) p 334—339

³⁶ Ibid p 338

Connolly, who – though he had disavowed Pearse’s rhetoric about the purifying goodness of war by characterising anyone who thought that way as “a blithering idiot”³⁷ – seized the moment as an opportunity for revolution. Connolly felt betrayed when socialist movements around Europe abandoned internationalism to join their national war efforts. Influenced by the revolutionary rhetoric of some of the separatist leaders he became convinced that “Irish independence was a prerequisite for socialist success.”³⁸

The Rising that lasted for six days during Easter Week of 1916 was “the most serious and sustained rebellion in Ireland for more than a century” even though the casualties – 450 killed and 2,500 wounded – bore no comparison with the slaughter in France.³⁹ Neither did the tactics employed: the British army had little experience of urban warfare and the kind of battle played out on the streets of Dublin “was an extremely rare military phenomenon...”⁴⁰ The rebels had seized key buildings in Dublin, the most famous being the General Post Office. It was from the steps of the GPO that Pearse read out the Proclamation of the Irish Republic: “Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom...”⁴¹ British forces arrived from the rest of Ireland and from England, rapidly outnumbering the rebels and, with very effective use of artillery, pounded them into surrender within six

³⁷ Foster: Modern Ireland op.cit. p 479

³⁸ Ruth Dudley Edwards: James Connolly (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1998) p 123

³⁹ Laffan: The Resurrection of Ireland op. cit. p 46

⁴⁰ Charles Townshend: Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion (Allen Lane, London 2005) p 301

⁴¹ Ibid

days. Accounts by people who were in Dublin at the time emphasise confusion, uncertainty and rumour. There is little evidence of any public support for the rebellion: the citizens of Dublin either looted the destroyed shops in the city centre, “[watched] the fight at the Post Office as if it were a Cinema show”⁴² or, by the end, abused the defeated insurrectionists as they were led away to prison. But over the next few weeks it became clear that Pearse’s notion of a dramatic sacrifice that would transform the consciousness of Irish people had come to pass and that F.S.L. Lyons’s description of the Rising as “the point of departure...for all subsequent Irish history”⁴³ was well justified.

In Britain the Rising was seen as a stab in the back. The charges against the rebels arrested in Easter Week specifically accused them of “assisting the German enemy.”⁴⁴ John Redmond himself publicly declared that the rebellion had been engineered in Berlin.⁴⁵ Even in the confusion of the events in Dublin there was a sense of dread that some draconian response was being prepared. Almost immediately after the suppression of the Rising, John Dillon wrote to Redmond: “You should urge strongly on the government the *extreme* unwisdom of any wholesale shooting of prisoners.”⁴⁶ The wording here suggests that such a “wholesale” response was believed to be a possibility even at such an early stage. *The Irish Times* – which had looked forward to the harmony among Irishmen that the Great War would bring – was “thirsting for

⁴² J.R. Clark diary quoted in Laffan: **The Resurrection of Ireland** op.cit. p 46

⁴³ Lyons: **Ireland Since the Famine** op. cit. p 369

⁴⁴ Jeffery: **Ireland and the Great War** op. cit. p 53

⁴⁵ Lyons: **John Dillon** op. cit. p 380

⁴⁶ Lyons: **John Dillon** op.cit. p 373

blood”.⁴⁷ It soon got its wish. Ninety death sentences were imposed and over a ten-day period in early May there were fifteen executions, the martyrs including Pearse and other leaders of the Rising. The effect, according to observers at the time, was cumulative: “Day by day, as the Rebellion itself receded...into memory...the tale of executions was told piecemeal.”⁴⁸

When parliament debated the Rising on May 11th, Dillon – with the authority of someone who had been marooned in his house near the centre of Dublin throughout Easter Week – described how the civilian authorities had become powerless in the face of military government. He brought news from Dublin of rumours of secret executions at military barracks. In a passage which illustrates how the repression was transforming the perception of the rebels, Dillon told the Commons: “[It] is not murderers who are being executed; it is insurgents who have fought a clean fight, a brave fight, however misguided, and it would have been a damned good thing for you if your soldiers were able to put up as a good a fight as did these men in Dublin – three thousand men against twenty thousand with machine-guns and artillery. (An Hon. Member: ‘Evidently you wish they had succeeded.’) That is an infamous falsehood...They have held us up to public odium as traitors to our country because we have supported you at this moment and have

⁴⁷ Ibid p 375

⁴⁸ Warre B. Wells and N. Marlow: A History of the Irish Rebellion of 1916 (Maunsell & Company Ltd., London, 1916) p 204—205

stood by you in this great war...” Dillon accused the prime minister Asquith of “washing out our whole life’s work in a sea of blood.”⁴⁹

- Dillon’s desperation had its source in an intuition that constitutional nationalism was being swept aside by the emotional reaction to the brutal suppression of the Rising. John Redmond saw the Rising as an attempt to destroy his party and the reaction of the British government appeared almost calculated to help in robbing the parliamentarians of legitimacy. Redmond and his colleagues had repudiated the Rising; their passionate rhetoric in the House of Commons had failed to stop the executions. In June 1916 Dillon warned Lloyd George: “Since the executions we have a *new* Ireland to deal with – seething with discontent and rage against the government. Old historic passions have been aroused to a *terrible* extent.”⁵⁰ The promises of the parliamentary party – that Home Rule could be won by trusting the British government to do the decent thing – were shown to be naïve and useless; distrust of British intentions seemed a more astute attitude in the light of what had happened. The beneficiaries of this were the revolutionaries who were now organising through Sinn Fein. Within months of the executions requiem Masses were being held in memory of the rebels and pictures of the leaders were being circulated and displayed in people’s houses. “The symbols of the Easter martyrdom were being forged...into the iconography of a new political movement.”⁵¹ The national crusade which had been the property of the parliamentary party for the previous thirty years was now taken over by the inheritors of the mantle of the

⁴⁹ Lyons: **John Dillon** op.cit. p 381—382

⁵⁰ Lyons: **John Dillon** op.cit. p 395

⁵¹ Fitzpatrick: **Politics and Irish Life** op. cit. p 111

Rising and they revitalised politics. A police inspector in Co. Clare noticed several weeks after the Rising that the locals had become less friendly towards his constables; by December they were regarded as enemies.⁵²

The context for the Rising – it occurred during the preparations for the Battle of the Somme – is crucial in explaining the British response. Trying to allay Dillon, Lloyd George excused the executions in Dublin in terms of the brutalisation caused by the war. “People are getting accustomed to scenes of blood” Lloyd George wrote. “Their own sons are falling by the hundred-thousand and the nation is harder and more ruthless than it has ever been.”⁵³ Lloyd George seems to have been aware of the impact of the harsh measures. When he replaced Asquith as prime minister in December 1916 the conciliation of Ireland became a priority for the cabinet: the prisoners were released before Christmas, producing an effect in Ireland that was “electrifying”.⁵⁴ However, on the ground, the military authorities in Ireland continued to be as repressive as ever in the year that followed. As support for Sinn Fein and the commemoration of the Rising increased, more meetings were banned, football matches and cattle fairs were disrupted by soldiers searching for suspects, and more people were arrested and imprisoned. The indiscriminate nature of this policy meant that it drew in many people whose sympathies for extremism and rebellion were passive or lukewarm. In David Fitzpatrick’s assessment “the Castle made heroes out of nobodies and provoked savage indignation among countless

⁵² Ibid p 8

⁵³ Lyons: **John Dillon** op.cit. p 391

⁵⁴ Townshend: **Easter 1916** op.cit. p 369

families which had previously supported the new movement, if at all, only out of herd instinct.”⁵⁵ Sinn Fein had now absorbed proponents of violent and civil resistance to British rule under one banner. The threat of conscription in the spring of 1918 “crystallized the wide nationalist front which had been in gradual formation since 1916”, with Sinn Fein now giving a lead to the old-style parliamentarians and the Catholic clergy.⁵⁶ This was the prototype for the military/civilian organisation which would wage the Anglo-Irish War.

If the First World War was a major agent of revolutionary change in Ireland it also had a profound impact on the outlook of Anglo-American journalists. During the war all belligerent governments realised that the press was as much a resource as the artillery gun or the tank. The mass media “opened new avenues for reaching vast new populations.”⁵⁷ After the war the man who had run the British government’s Press Bureau, Sir Edward Cook (himself a distinguished liberal journalist), praised the loyalty of the newspapers in co-operating with voluntary censorship. Cook believed that “the Press did all that it possibly could, and often more than from a strictly journalistic point of view might reasonably have been expected, to print everything that the Departments desired to impart to the public.”⁵⁸ Cook regarded the press as crucial for “reinforcing and sustaining” the national impulse towards war. He gave as an example the coverage of Lord Kitchener’s call to arms and the daily accounts of recruiting drives in different localities. “Great

⁵⁵ Fitzpatrick: **Politics and Irish Life** op. cit. p 124

⁵⁶ Towshend: **Easter 1916** op. cit. p 381

⁵⁷ Alice Goldfarb: “Words as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany During the First World War” in **Journal of Contemporary History** Vol. 13, No. 3 (July 1978)

⁵⁸ Sir Edward Cook: **The Press in War-Time** (Macmillan and Co., London 1920) p 51

influence must be attributed to the forces of suggestion, encouragement and rivalry which were thus brought into action and which could not have been so powerfully exerted in any other way...[The newspapers] were *avant-couriers* of necessary policy.”⁵⁹ In Cook’s conceit, the press was “the reporter-in-chief to the nation, and in that capacity it holds up to the rest of the world a mirror of the country’s activities, thought purposes and *moral*.”⁶⁰

Cook formed this view of the press as the means by which the nation came to know itself at a pivotal moment in the history of journalism in Britain and the United States. The early twentieth century was the heyday of mass circulation, national newspapers run by financially independent proprietors who had emerged in the Victorian era.⁶¹ The economic pressures faced by the press barons meant that their newspapers had to be intensely competitive in pursuit of larger circulations. The editorial and technical resources of newspapers expanded rapidly with “rising levels of paging, bigger editorial staffs and, above all, massive promotion”, all a consequence of increased investment.⁶² News coverage was a key measure of editorial advantage and reporters were sent out to discover facts that could produce commercial return.⁶³ Editors vied with competitors to publish

⁵⁹ Ibid p 4—5

⁶⁰ Ibid p 9

⁶¹ See James Curran and Jean Seaton: **Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain** (Routledge, London 1988) p 46—63 and D.G. Boyce: “Crusaders without Chains: Power and the Press Barons 1896—1951” in James Curran et al: **Impacts and Influences: Essays on Media Power in the Twentieth Century** (Methuen, London 1987)

⁶² Curran and Seaton: **Power Without Responsibility** op. cit. p 53

⁶³ Michael Schudson notes that in the United States it was at the turn of the twentieth century that “reporters were for the first time actors in the drama of the newspaper world.” Michael Schudson: **Origins of the Ideal of Objectivity in the Professions** op. cit. p 162

“scoops”, or at least ensure that their own paper carried the same stories as its rivals. Facts became the currency of success or failure. Jean Chalaby has identified the era of the press barons as the moment when news displaced opinion as the main content of newspapers and “information became the prime element...and the main commodity in the trade...Press-owners and editors devoted increasingly important resources to collect information from local, national and international sources.”⁶⁴ The “reporter” emerged as a recognisable figure, forging a distinct form of communication that became the news story. Since “many editors conferred on foreign news an exceptional importance”,⁶⁵ an outstanding performance by the right reporter possessed of flair and commitment could make a big story a major money spinner for his newspaper. The circulation of the *Daily News* had trebled on the strength of its coverage of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870.⁶⁶ From then until the First World War began “the publicity given to politics and foreign affairs was increased a thousand times. More people were informed, or misinformed, about the Empire and England’s relations to her neighbours than ever before.”⁶⁷ Special correspondents and foreign correspondents had come into their own. “Their deeds, their sweeping narratives, their bold assumption of policy-making authority and, above all, the swiftness of their communications gave them a status that none had attained before and few have achieved since.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Jean Chalaby: **The Invention of Journalism** op.cit. p 79

⁶⁵ Ibid p 79

⁶⁶ Ibid p 84

⁶⁷ Oron J. Hale: **Publicity and Diplomacy – with special reference to England and Germany 1890—1914** (Peter Smith, Massachusetts, 1964) quoted in Philip Taylor: “Publicity and Diplomacy” op. cit. p 45

⁶⁸ John Hohenberg: **Foreign Correspondence: The Great Reporters and Their Times** (Columbia University Press, New York, 1964) p 113

The exalted position which these correspondents saw themselves occupying, and the way in which they were encouraged to cultivate this role by their editors, can be deduced from a letter from the managing director of *The Times*, C.F. Moberly Bell, to a war correspondent in 1894 advising him to adopt a position of restrained detachment towards the flow of events. Moberly Bell cautioned that “we are historians, not history makers.” Around the same time he instructed a newly appointed correspondent that his duties were: “1. The transmission of all authentic news of importance without regard to any particular view which may be entertained by the correspondent personally or any particular policy which may be advocated by the paper. 2. The transmission of your own appreciation of the situation, well founded and without any personal prejudice.”⁶⁹ But there was a tension at the heart of this advice which would become a persistent complication for the professional self-image of many correspondents. On the one hand *The Times* man was being asked to keep his personal views out of his news copy. On the other, he was being encouraged to become an authority on his subject, an aspiration which would mean that the correspondent’s own judgment – albeit “well founded” – would become a critical ingredient in his reporting. As we will see shortly, this tension between the idealised freedom of the newspaper correspondent to use his own judgement, and the necessity of conforming to editorial direction and the industrial discipline of the newspaper, is a recurring theme in the memoirs of journalists of this era. The harnessing of the press to the war effort made

⁶⁹ Quoted in Robert W. Desmond: **The Information Process: World News Reporting to the Twentieth Century** (University of Iowa Press, 1978) p 325

this tension even more acute. Hamilton Fyfe tells of how, after he had mentioned some kindly act by German soldiers in his despatches to the *Daily Mail*, he received an admonishing cable from the editor:

“‘Nothing wanted’, he said, ‘about good kind Germans. There are no good Germans but dead Germans.’”⁷⁰ Similarly he accepted that much of what he wrote for the paper from Petrograd about the situation in Russia was only for Lord Northcliffe and the cabinet to see:

“The British nation did not at the time hear anything about the nearness of revolution in the autumn of 1915.”⁷¹ On his way home he bought German newspapers in Stockholm and saw “how they told about us exactly the same lying stories that the British and French press were telling about them.”⁷²

When the war began, the War Office refused to give official recognition to reporters to follow the action on the orders of Lord Kitchener, who had hated war correspondents since the Sudan campaign sixteen years earlier when he dismissed them as “drunken swabs.”⁷³ But a group of younger correspondents made their way to France and, at the risk of arrest and imprisonment, travelled towards the Belgian border. Philip Gibbs, a reporter for the *Daily Chronicle*, went to Paris at the beginning of the war but soon decided that he had no hope of getting credentials to go to the front. “It was, it seemed, to be a secret war, and the peoples who had given their sons and husbands were to know nothing about it,

⁷⁰ Hamilton Fyfe: *My Seven Selves* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1935) p 193—194

⁷¹ *Ibid* p 194

⁷² *Ibid* p 213

⁷³ Philip Knightley: *The First Casualty* op.cit. p 69

except by brief bulletins which tell them nothing or very little.”⁷⁴ Gibbs and some of the other younger reporters set out on their own, without permission, to find out what was happening in the north-east. He recounted how many of these impetuous correspondents “were arrested, put into prison, caught again in forbidden places, re-arrested and expelled from France. That was after fantastic adventures in which they saw what war meant in civilized countries; where vast populations were made fugitives of fear; where millions of women and children and old people became wanderers along the roads in a tide of human misery...”⁷⁵ This rich parade of incident contrasts with Sir Edward Cook’s avowal that the early part of the war was characterised by tedium and that “there was nothing to tell.”⁷⁶

Despite procuring Red Cross credentials in an effort to stay at the front, Gibbs ended up being detained for two weeks. He was released after his editor in London pulled strings with a minister at the Foreign Office. Gibbs thought this had put paid to his career as a war correspondent in France. “The game was up I thought. I had committed every crime against War Office orders. I should be barred as a war correspondent when Kitchener made up his mind to allow them out.”⁷⁷ But he was wrong. Early in 1915 the British military authorities relented to pressure from the cabinet to allow correspondents into the field. The intention was to increase the supply of morale-boosting ‘news’, not to allow a

⁷⁴ Philip Gibbs: **The Pageant of Years: An Autobiography** (William Heinemann, London, 1946) p 141--142

⁷⁵ Philip Gibbs: **Realities of War** (Hutchinson & Co., London 1929) p 11

⁷⁶ Sir Edward Cook: **The Press in War-Time** op. cit. p 48

⁷⁷ Gibbs: **The Pageant of Years** op. cit. p 162

reflective or critical portrait of life and death on the battlefield.⁷⁸ Gibbs was one of five official war correspondents who, kitted out in army uniform were provided with a house to work in, daily transport to the front, conducting officers and on-the-spot censors.⁷⁹ The Gibbs who had been disdainful of official sanction became a kept man of the high command.

In his memoirs and autobiography published after the war, Gibbs – who was knighted for his work as an official correspondent – betrays a sense of shame about his submission to the censorship. In *Realities of War*, published in 1929, he writes of an encounter between the correspondents and General Haig. The general listened to the journalists’ petition to be allowed to mention the names of combat units in order to “give honour to the troops”. Haig appeared sympathetic: “I think I understand fairly well what you gentlemen want. You want to get hold of little stories of heroism and so- forth to write them up in a bright way to make good reading for Mary Ann in the kitchen and the man in the street.” But Gibbs and his colleagues took umbrage at this “slur” on their profession. “We took occasion to point out to him that the British Empire which had sent its men into this war yearned to know what they were doing and how they were doing and that their patience and loyalty depended upon closer knowledge of what was happening ...” At this, Hague relented and ordered a relaxation of rules so that men and their units could be

⁷⁸ Philip Knightly suggests the Cabinet was swayed by a letter from the former American President Theodore Roosevelt saying the only real war news written by Americans was coming from the German side and the refusal by British and French censorship was harming their cause in America. See Knightley: **The First Casualty** op. cit. p 79

⁷⁹ Gibbs describes the working conditions of the correspondents in **Realities of War** op. cit. p 15–26 and **The Pageant of Years** p 163–167

identified more often in despatches. This achieved, Gibbs appeared satisfied: “in later stages of the war I personally had no complaint against the censorship and wrote *all that was good to write* of the actions day by day, though *I had to leave out something of the underlying horror of them all*, in spite of my continual emphasis, by temperament and by conviction, on the tragedy of all this sacrifice of youth.”⁸⁰ [my italics]

This passage is more than a little apologetic about the accommodations necessary to continue reporting from France. In his autobiography, *The Pageant of Years*, published in 1946, the question of his co-operation with the censorship still bothers him. He explains how he was hurt by a passage in Lloyd George’s war memoirs stating that “Gibbs lied merrily like the rest of them.”⁸¹ This, Gibbs writes indignantly, was “grossly untrue” and “very unjust”.⁸² But Lloyd George knew exactly how reticent Gibbs had been in public. In 1917 he wrote to C.P. Scott about a dinner he had attended in Gibbs’ honour when the correspondent had returned from France. Lloyd George described it as “the most impressive and moving description of what the war in the West really means...Even an audience of hardened politicians and journalists was strongly affected.”⁸³ Despite his protests, Gibbs was aware of what he had held back. A few pages after accusing Lloyd George of lying he writes of a conversation with his wife, Agnes, while he was home on sick leave from France in August 1918. “She hated the despatches of

⁸⁰ Gibbs: *Realities of War* p 27—28

⁸¹ Gibbs: *The Pageant of Years* op. cit. p 207—208.

⁸² Ibid p 208

⁸³ Alice Goldfarb: “Words as Weapons” op. cit. p 482

war correspondents always holding out a hope which was never fulfilled, always describing the heroic valour of boys who, of course, were sentenced to death. In the end she hated mine, for the same reasons and I didn't blame her because that was the truth."⁸⁴ Later in his autobiography Gibbs expresses a desire to put things right nearly two decades after the end of the war. "We writing men, especially we war correspondents, had something to say after our last despatches had been written. It was to put in all that the censor or our self-imposed censorship, had omitted...It was our bounden duty to tell the truth, however terrible."⁸⁵

By this stage, of course, telling the terrible truth would not achieve the same impact; for a journalist, there must have been a sense of futile atonement about disclosing the true face of the war long after his last despatches had been written. Gibbs' tone of regret suggests that the status of the exalted "special correspondents" was in crisis by the end of the First World War. For Gibbs, becoming a war correspondent was "the crown of journalistic ambition and the heart of its adventure and romance."⁸⁶ Other reporters admired and envied the 'specials'. Gibbs describes one of the most famous journalists in Fleet Street at the turn of the century, Charlie Hands of the *Daily Mail*. Hands had made his name during the Boer War. "There was something in him, his dead honesty of mind, his whimsical humour, his gift for comradeship with all manner of men, which made friends for him in many ports and cities..."⁸⁷ Hands

⁸⁴ Ibid p 226

⁸⁵ Ibid p 242

⁸⁶ Philip Gibbs: Adventures in Journalism (William Heinemann, London 1923) p 179

⁸⁷ Ibid p 41

had won for himself a measure of freedom from editorial direction which was the distinguishing mark of the special correspondent and which other reporters craved: "Harmsworth had an affection for him and gave him more rope than he would have allowed any other man."⁸⁸ The notion of the special correspondent as a journalist given more licence than others is echoed in another sketch of Hands by Tom Clarke, an editor at the *Mail*. In his memoir of working for Lord Northcliffe, Clarke describes how Charlie Hands was "worshipped by the younger folk as the greatest of special correspondents of world wide experience and reputation...[he] had won a pedestal for himself which placed him well beyond the clatter of the crowd."⁸⁹

Gibbs too had succeeded in rising above the common run of journalists but he recognised that such eminence was insecure and that there was a fine line between the glamour and freedom of the special correspondent and the "clatter of the crowd." His memoirs paint an extraordinarily candid portrait of life on Fleet Street – especially frank for a trade and a genre given to myth-making. In his autobiography he describes journalism as a "bacillus" and compares the lure of Fleet Street to a spell which makes the journalist addicted to the illusion that he is a privileged observer of the machinery of power. "Away from it he feels exiled and outside the arena of life. As a journalist, and especially as a special correspondent, he sees behind the scenes of the whirligig and is one of its recorders."⁹⁰ He begins one account of his career by warning young people that a life in journalism is not "a primrose path" but a job

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Tom Clarke: My Northcliffe Diary (Victor Gollancz, London 1931) p 42

⁹⁰ Philip Gibbs: The Pageant of Years op. cit. p 71

little different to other kinds of white collar industrial labour. “It is of uncertain tenure because no man may hold on to his job if he weakens under nervous strain or quarrels on a point of honour with the proprietor who pays him or with the editor who sets his task.” The young reporter, according to Gibbs, is “the Slave of the Machine” and he sets out to disabuse his readers of any notions of idealism. “I have known the humiliation of journalism, its insecurity, its never-ending tax upon the mind and heart, its squalor, its fever, its soul-destroying machinery for those who are not proof against its cruelties...The young reporter has to steel his heart against these disappointments. He must not agonize too much if, after a day and night of intense and nervous effort, he finds no line of his work in the paper, or sees his choicest prose hacked and mangled by impatient sub-editors, or his truth-telling twisted into falsity.”⁹¹ One of the thrills is to hear the news before it is published, another to become close to historic events. On more than one occasion he likens journalism to a peep show: in *The Pageant of Years* he writes of how a press credential takes its owner to “the front seats of the peep-show.”⁹² And in *Realities of War* he describes his daily trips to the frontline as an official war correspondent “going to another little peep-show of war.”

Gibbs was not the only journalist of high reputation to be seduced by the illusion of proximity to great events. One of the most famous liberal journalists of the era was Henry Wood Nevinson who had managed to establish a reputation as a special correspondent independently of the

⁹¹ Gibbs: Adventures in Journalism op. cit. p 1—2

⁹² Ibid p 72

newspapers which employed him. Gibbs described Nevinson, a veteran of crusades and campaigns, as “a hater of war, though a lover of liberty, passionate in his championship of the little nations and the underdogs everywhere.”⁹³ Nevinson began his career at the *Daily Chronicle* (Gibbs’ paper) and in his memoirs describes how journalism for him was a reluctant calling. “Like most people outside the profession I thought of ‘mere journalists’ with mingled curiosity and contempt. Drawing a sharp line, like most people, between ‘journalism’ and ‘literature’ I was all on the side of literature. What was worse, like most people, I regarded a journalist as a man without convictions – a conscienceless person who would write equally willingly for any opinion or cause, provided he were paid. Like most people, in my ignorance I did the profession insufferable wrong, but my ignorance was profound.”⁹⁴ Nevinson, like Gibbs, describes the deepest satisfaction of a journalistic career as the opportunity to feel part of history. He reflects that he might have been a literary man and confesses admiration and, perhaps, a touch of envy for those who spin stories from their imagination. But he decides that the price of this more exalted life of the mind was an absence of adventure and impoverished experience. “I can say: ‘I have lived.’ I have seen much, suffered much, known many noble characters, and in the affairs of this actual, though transitory, world have been given the opportunity of playing some part.”⁹⁵

During the Boer War Nevinson had remained in Ladysmith during the famous siege, enduring daily shelling and watching one of his

⁹³ Philip Gibbs: *The Pageant of Years* op. cit. p 94—95

⁹⁴ H.W.Nevinson: *Changes and Chances* (Nisbet & Co., London 1923) p 183

⁹⁵ Ibid p 183—184

colleagues die of typhoid fever. But just as Gibbs and Clarke describe, the machine-like quality of the newspaper organisation could still bear down on even the most distinguished special correspondent. Despite his heroic and death defying performance in Ladysmith Nevinson discovered at the end of the siege that there was no telegram of congratulation, only “sneers, taunts and complaints” from his new editor. “I began to realise the distinction between one editor and another and to understand that the greatness of a paper depends upon its editor alone.”⁹⁶ Nevinson contrasts the life of a war correspondent before the Great War with the new sense of the value of controlled reportage from the frontline in France. During the Boer war “a correspondent with the British army had to look after his own supplies and transport and the task, as a rule, occupied about half his working time.” But as an officially accredited correspondent in France fifteen years later “the Staff motor appeared at the door exactly at the appointed time; a friendly Staff officer accompanied me to whatever part of the line or advance I wished to visit...food appeared, falling like manna from heaven without any stir; servants appeared when required, like slaves in the ‘Arabian Nights.’”⁹⁷

Both Nevinson and Gibbs give an important account of what it was to be a special correspondent for British newspapers in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The tension between a sense of autonomy and submission to the controlling hand of the organisation; the sense of adventure and participation in key moments of history; the licence with

⁹⁶ Ibid p 260--261

⁹⁷ Ibid p 229—230

language and the sense of having some influence on politics will all come into play in the consideration of the work of the correspondents sent to Ireland to cover the War of Independence. The upheaval in Ireland affected both their careers in different ways.

Nevinson describes how he first visited Ireland in August 1897 finding “an excess of beauty that was overwhelming.”⁹⁸ Returning in the spring of 1899 to investigate a riot in Co. Cork he began to make connections among literary and political circles in Dublin, and then visited Ireland so often that it became “hard to avoid confusion of impression if not of events.”⁹⁹ Seventeen years later Nevinson, now nearing sixty, was recovering in the Chilterns from an illness which developed during his reporting in the Dardanelles, Salonika and Egypt when he heard the news of the Easter Rising. “I could only learn from the papers how the Rising was suppressed, and many of my Irish friends were executed, not at once in the hot blood of vengeance, but in batches morning after morning, the lists being served up to the English breakfast-tables with the bacon, eggs and marmalade.”¹⁰⁰ Nevinson had met the leaders of the Rising; he had visited Patrick Pearse at his school and spoken from the same platform as James Connolly.¹⁰¹ In the months after the rising he campaigned unsuccessfully for a reprieve for Sir Roger Casement, the former British diplomat and human rights campaigner who was hanged in August 1916 for helping to import arms from Germany.¹⁰² In the following years Nevinson would be one of the British correspondents

⁹⁸ H.W. Nevinson: Changes and Chances op. cit. p 181

⁹⁹ Ibid p 206

¹⁰⁰ H.W. Nevinson: Last Changes, Last Chances (Nisbet & Co., London 1928) p 87

¹⁰¹ Ibid p 88—89

¹⁰² Ibid p 92—118

covering what he called “the Black and Tan terror.”¹⁰³

Gibbs resigned from the *Daily Chronicle* “and the best salary I had ever earned in Fleet Street” in 1919 in protest against Lloyd George’s policy in Ireland. The *Chronicle* had been bought by a syndicate acting on behalf of Lloyd George in 1918.¹⁰⁴ The paper’s new Irish policy was to support the despatch to Ireland of the gendarmerie known as the Black and Tans. Gibbs felt he could no longer work for the *Chronicle* because “it seemed to me shameful...that after a war which was supposed to be for liberty and the self-determination of peoples, we should hire a lot of young thugs and let them loose upon the Irish.”¹⁰⁵

There was another dimension of professional shame felt by Gibbs and his colleagues which provides a crucial context for understanding the coverage of the Irish revolution. The emergence of propaganda as a mobilising force during the war and the eagerness with which the press had collaborated with the censorship exposed reporters to vilification. Norman Angell described the press as “an almost insuperable obstacle to the truth becoming known”, the very opposite of the myth that journalists cherished.¹⁰⁶ This disillusionment was, as we have seen, shared by the correspondents themselves. Hamilton Fyfe believed that journalists had lost pride in their craft and the failures of the press during the war caused it “to be jeered at and distrusted, created around it an

¹⁰³ H.W. Nevins: Changes and Chances p 212

¹⁰⁴ James Curran and Jean Seaton: Power without Responsibility op. cit. p 54

¹⁰⁵ Philip Gibbs: The Pageant of Years op. cit. p 266

¹⁰⁶ Norman Angell: The Press and the Organisation of Society op. cit. p 69

atmosphere of suspicion.”¹⁰⁷ The Viennese satirist, Karl Krauss, had denounced the newspaper reporters, holding them responsible for the “impoverishment of the imagination which makes it possible for us to fight a war of annihilation against ourselves...[they] now implant in us the courage in the face of death which we need in order to rush off into battle...[Their] abuse of language embellishes the abuse of life.”¹⁰⁸

Krauss’s critique finds a curious echo in Gibbs’ post-war estimation of the correspondent as a conduit for politicians. “It is he who brings them alive to the public and takes down the words they speak on great occasions – words of wisdom maybe or words of folly, or words of doom which pronounce sentence of death on masses of youth who go willingly to sacrifice because of their leadership or their lies.”¹⁰⁹

As we shall see in the following chapters, the correspondents who went to Ireland declared repeatedly that their mission was to expose the government’s lies about the real nature of the campaign to crush the rebellion. As Alice Goldfarb has argued, the confluence of news and propaganda during the First World War had “permanently debased the coinage of public dialogue” but at the same time “disillusionment also laid the foundation for a new scepticism...”¹¹⁰ The unity of the political elite during the Great War attenuated the range of legitimate dissent: “if a large paper went right against the national will...it would be

¹⁰⁷ Hamilton Fyffe: *Sixty Years of Fleet Street* op. cit. p 172

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Niall Ferguson: *Pity of War* op. cit. p 240—241

¹⁰⁹ Philip Gibbs: *The Pageant of Years* op. cit. p 72

¹¹⁰ Alice Goldfarb: “Words as Weapons” op.cit. p 495—496

ruined.”¹¹¹ But as we shall see, Ireland was different and it gave the British press an opportunity to re-vindicate itself.

¹¹¹ Hilaire Belloc: **The Free Press**, George Allen & Unwin, London (1918) p 29

CHAPTER 2

Correspondents versus Black and Tans

In the previous chapter we saw how events in Ireland during the Great War led to the ascendancy of the separatist movement and the collapse of constitutional nationalism as a political force. The erasure of the Irish Parliamentary Party from the political map was all but complete in the General Election of December 1918 when Sinn Fein won seventy-three seats and the parliamentary party just six: Sinn Fein had campaigned on securing recognition for Ireland as an independent republic and the election result signified that “the separatist option had...replaced the Home Rule compromise.”¹ In this chapter I will begin to examine how British correspondents covered the newly assertive Ireland and the first signs of what rapidly became the Irish revolution. The defining moment of this new era was the convening of Dail Eireann in Dublin on January 21, 1919. Dail Eireann, a Gaelic term meaning “assembly of Ireland”, was the fulfilment of a dream of the separatist leader Arthur Griffith who argued that instead of taking their seats in Westminster, Sinn Fein MPs should gather in Dublin to proclaim their own national parliament and behave as if they had the power to legislate for their own nation. I will look at how this key event – the opening act of the rebellion which followed – was portrayed by newspaper correspondents sent to Dublin to cover it.

The Sinn Fein MPs who assembled in Dublin on January 21, 1919 to establish their own Republican parliament instead of taking their seats in

¹ R.F. Foster: Modern Ireland op. cit. p 489

the House of Commons attracted a great deal of attention from the world's press. The *Daily News* reported that there were fifty British and foreign journalists present in the Mansion House for the inaugural session.² This meant that reporters outnumbered politicians by a ratio of two to one, since all but twenty-seven of the seventy-three Sinn Fein MPs were interned or imprisoned. The *News* described the setting for this public act of defiance – the Round Room of the Mansion House in Dawson Street, the very heart of colonial Dublin – as “a dingily ornate pavilion in the Regency style which was built in a hurry for the entertainment of King George IV when he visited Dublin in 1821.”³ The correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* noticed a further irony in the timing of the first session of the separatist assembly: through “one of those coincidences which only happen in Ireland” soldiers from the Dublin Fusiliers, just returned from France, had been lunching in the Mansion House just before the historic inauguration of Dail Eireann. “As they walked out to the tune of ‘God Save the King’, the Republicans walked in.”⁴

The ceremonial opening of a parliament is an event that would usually produce an enactment of the press ritual which Philip Elliott has noted is a response reserved for “stories which reflect on the stability of the social system by showing it under threat, overcoming threat, or working in a united consensual way.”⁵ The treatment of such occasions is characterised by “considerable emphasis...on the symbolic significance

² *Daily News* January 22, 1919 p 1

³ Ibid

⁴ *Manchester Guardian* January 22, 1919 p 5

⁵ Philip Elliott: “Press Performance as a Political Ritual” in Harry Christian (ed): *The Sociology of Journalism and the Press* (Sociological Review Monograph 29, University of Keele, 1980) p 142

or interpretation of events.”⁶ But the assembly established by Sinn Fein in Dublin in 1919 did not provoke a familiar response among the correspondents who arrived from London: it perplexed them. Dail Eireann may have had the form (and even, to the extent that it was — composed of elected representatives chosen in a British General Election, the substance) of an event of established symbolic significance but its legitimacy was contested: it was not a sanctioned ceremony of the kind which would allow the correspondents to reach for their stock phrases and pour their prose into the readymade mould demanded of time-honoured ritual. Therefore, a tone of incongruity was maintained in many of the correspondents’ reports. The solemnity of the occasion was both underlined and undermined.

“On the whole it was a very interesting and notable function but one can hardly say it was impressive”, wrote the *Daily Mail* correspondent.⁷ The *Manchester Guardian* was no less begrudging: “[Dail Eireann] solemnly proclaimed Ireland’s independence, appointed ambassadors to the Peace Conference, where they have not yet been bidden, passed an address to the free nations of the world and made some pretence of framing orders for its domestic procedure. Despite its importance, the session was not thrilling.”⁸ But *The Times* was most damning of all. “History will probably date the definite decline of the Sinn Fein movement from the day when the National Assembly was opened in Dublin...One may say indeed that the whole of Ireland has a new

⁶ Ibid

⁷ *Daily Mail* January 22, 1919 p 5

⁸ *Manchester Guardian* January 22, 1919 p 5

consciousness today of the utter barrenness of a policy which won nearly half a million votes at the General Election.”⁹

A persistent theme was the incomprehension displayed by the MPs and the public as they were addressed from the platform in Gaelic. The *Daily Mail* correspondent noted that the Irish language was delivered by the speakers “with varying degrees of fluency and the audience, at least those near me, understood with even wider variations of comprehension.”¹⁰ And the *Guardian* correspondent thought it wise to sketch in the anthropological background to explain the significance of the use of a foreign tongue: “The Irish patriot suffers one galling disadvantage: that is an ignorance of his native tongue. Off the shores of the Atlantic, not one in a hundred can do more than pass the time of day in Gaelic...But however convenient it would, of course, have gravely offended the national spirit to carry on the debates of the national assembly in the language of the Sassenach, and the result was a self-denying ordinance which kept some of the members quite silent and even reduced others to mere French.”¹¹

The document promulgated by Dail Eireann that day was the Declaration of Independence in which the MPs declared “foreign government in Ireland to be an invasion of our national right which we will never tolerate” and demanded “the evacuation of our country by the English Garrison.” But this foundation text for a new Irish Republic also acknowledged the context of the First World War: “We claim for

⁹ **The Times** January 23, 1919 p 11

¹⁰ **Daily Mail** January 22, 1919 p 5

¹¹ **Manchester Guardian** January 22, 1919 p 5

our national independence the recognition and support of every free nation in the world, and we proclaim that independence to be a condition precedent to international peace thereafter.”¹² This attempt to link the cause of Irish nationhood to the sweeping redrawing of the map of Europe was even more overtly stated in an accompanying “Message to the Free Nations of the World”. This statement laid claim to special status for Ireland in international relations:

Internationally Ireland is the gateway of the Atlantic. Ireland is the last outpost of Europe towards the West: Ireland is the point upon which great trade routes between East and West converge: her independence is demanded by the Freedom of the Seas: her great harbours must be open to all nations, instead of being the monopoly of England.

Specifically, there was an attempt to join Ireland’s case to President Wilson’s espousal of self-determination as an end in itself:

Ireland to-day reasserts her historic nationhood the more confidently before the new world emerging from the War, because she believes in freedom and justice as the fundamental principles of international law, because she believes in a frank co-operation between the peoples for equal rights against the vested privileges of ancient tyrannies, because the permanent peace of Europe can never be secured by perpetuating military dominion for the profit of empire but only by establishing the control of government in every land upon the basis of the free will of a free people...¹³

Such rhetorical grandeur cut little ice with the British correspondents in Dublin; the tone of many of their despatches was sarcastic or whimsical. The general conclusion was that the whole exercise was futile. Thus the *Daily Mail* reported that the gathering in the Mansion House could easily be mistaken for “a meeting to found a new musical society or

¹² Ronan Fanning, Michael Kennedy, Dermot Keogh, Eunan O’ Halpin (eds): Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume 1, 1919-1922 Royal Irish Academy (Dublin) 1998 p 1

¹³ Ibid p 2

something of that kind.”¹⁴ This analogy was an echo of a phrase which appeared in the *Guardian*’s preview of the occasion: officials from the Irish administration regarded Dail Eireann as a “debating society” reported the *Guardian*. There was no question of preventing the meeting from going ahead because the assembly would be sure to turn out to be “a tame business.”¹⁵ At this stage, the officials in Dublin Castle were taking the optimistic view that Sinn Fein’s act of defiance was so much bluster and that the dramatic pageantry of Dail Eireann would fade into inconsequence if ignored. Shortly before the ceremony in the Mansion House, the Viceroy of Ireland, Lord French, had expressed just such a view to the cabinet in London. Lord French wrote with some assurance that “the end of it will be that these seventy-three devils will very soon go bag and baggage over to Westminster.”¹⁶ Clearly the similarity between this official view and the interpretations of the correspondents visiting Dublin demonstrated that they were responding to the lead given to them by Dublin Castle. Two days after Dail Eireann’s inaugural session, *The Times* correspondent in Dublin declared that “the Irish Government’s decision to tolerate the assembly is shown to have been wise.”¹⁷

The optimism among officials in the Castle that the new generation of Irish nationalists could be contained and controlled is reflected in another theme running through the despatches from Dublin after Sinn Fein’s landslide election victory. The correspondents stressed that Sinn

¹⁴ **Daily Mail** January 22, 1919 p 5

¹⁵ **Manchester Guardian** January 21, 1919 p 5

¹⁶ Lord French to Walter Long, January 12, 1919 quoted in Eunan O’ Halpin: **The Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland 1892-1920** (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1987) p 180

¹⁷ **The Times** January 23, 1919 p 11

Fein's success would expose its leaders to moderating influences. *The Times* reported in early January that the more moderate Sinn Fein leaders "appear to be anxious to do nothing which might alienate middle-class opinion in the United States."¹⁸ Around the same time the *Manchester Guardian* reported that responsibility had sobered Sinn Fein leaders and led them to revise their timetable for delivering Irish independence: "years" could elapse before the Republic arrived and in the meantime the masses had to be educated. "From playing the conqueror, Sinn Fein must undertake the part of missionary and not until the unity of the faith is established may we expect the fulfilment of the promises of the days of conflict."¹⁹ Similarly the *Daily Mail* correspondent in Dublin reckoned that Sinn Fein leaders realised "that having captured the great bulk of the emotional voters, it is now necessary to make a favourable impression on the substantial business class."²⁰

The emphasis in many despatches on the possibility of Sinn Fein leaders eventually doing business with the government was not far off how the cabinet in London and the Irish Administration in Dublin hoped that things would turn out. With the Irish question no longer overtly divisive at Westminster, "bipartisanship, supported by military force was (it was hoped) a means of bringing nationalist Ireland to accept the reality of Home Rule as defined by the British."²¹ At a cabinet meeting in February, the new Chief Secretary for Ireland, Ian Macpherson, argued

¹⁸ *The Times* January 8, 1919

¹⁹ *Manchester Guardian* January 6, 1919 p 4

²⁰ *Daily Mail* January 20, 1919 p 3

²¹ D.G. Boyce: *The Irish Question and British Politics, 1868-1996* (Macmillan, London, 1996) p 67

in favour of releasing Irish political prisoners using precisely the same analysis of Sinn Fein as was appearing in the press. Macpherson confided to his colleagues that he had been in touch with some Sinn Fein representatives and knew that “certain leaders, if released, would be valuable to the Government of Ireland and would prove a moderating influence” because they were “terrified of the responsibility their colleagues were taking and were very anxious to rescind from it.”²²

But this apparent confidence co-existed in the official mind with an unfocused anxiety that events in Ireland might take a different course – a lurch towards revolution rather than accommodation. This strain of anxiety is also reflected in the correspondents’ interpretations of developments in Ireland. When McPherson referred to the terrifying responsibility which the elected Sinn Feiners had taken on he was identifying the possibility that a movement dedicated to overthrowing the existing constitutional order might eventually be outflanked by its violent wing, the Irish Volunteers. By 1919 the Volunteers – a minority of whom had led the Easter Rising in 1916 – were “independent, organised and determined”.²³ The government was aware of the threat they posed, Lord French advising the cabinet that the Volunteers were “a Republican secret society in the worst and most dangerous sense.”²⁴ Just as Lord French could be both optimistic that Sinn Fein’s star would fizzle out and at the same time fearful of a full scale insurrection, the reports in the London press betrayed a vague concern about an

²² Quoted in O’ Halpin: Decline of the Union op. cit. p 187

²³ Charles Townshend: The British Campaign in Ireland, 1919—1921 (Oxford University Press, 1975) . p 14

²⁴ Ibid

unpredictable turn of events. Thus, just before the first meeting of the Dail, the *Manchester Guardian*'s correspondent reckoned that if words and resolutions did not bring an independent Republic any nearer "the danger will again arise that the activists who are prepared to stake all...to realise their ideals, will again offer a sacrifice to their cause."²⁵ After the Mansion House gathering the *Guardian* correspondent again warned of dangers lurking in the background. "There must come a time when the National Assembly will get tired of twiddling its thumbs at the Mansion House. Unless it is to be dismissed as a mere pantomime, it will have to do something sooner or later, and, circumscribed as it is, any action would seem to imply violence."²⁶ Similarly, *The Times* adverted to "darker forces" behind the idealists of the national assembly which were "quite prepared to sweep it out of existence when the time comes."²⁷ And paradoxically, after finding much to mock in the inaugural meeting of the Dail, the *Mail* worried that "the Irishman's proverbial fear of ridicule" might provoke the separatists to more extreme measures.²⁸

Most of the correspondents were unable to provide readers with any informed explanation of the relationship between the idealists in Dail Eireann and the "darker forces" readying themselves to come out of the shadows. However, one of the reporters who early on showed some inclination to delve deeper was Hugh Martin, a correspondent for *Daily News*. After the Sinn Fein election victory many of the papers published

²⁵ **Manchester Guardian** January 6, 1919 p 4

²⁶ **Manchester Guardian** January 23, 1919

²⁷ **The Times** January 23, 1919

²⁸ **Daily Mail** January 23, 1919

articles assessing the state of Ireland but Martin was the only correspondent to distinguish between Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the conspiratorial group behind the rebellion in 1916.

- Before Dail Eireann convened Martin went to the west of Ireland to try to find out what was meant by those in Dublin who lamented that "the provinces are getting out of hand." In a despatch on January 16 he set out to explain the history of support for political violence in rural areas. The left wing of the Sinn Fein movement, he wrote, was threatening to take charge of affairs through the violent methods used by the Fenians in the rebellion of 1867. "Fenianism has never died out in Connaught. Down here, the physical force men, few in numbers but resolute in temper and supremely contemptuous of the main body with its 'moral force' programme, still press their secret doctrine as they have been preaching it this fifty years. They are never in the ascendant except at times of extraordinary national emotion. Such a time, it is only too plain, we are rapidly approaching now."²⁹

Less than a week later, on the same day that Dail Eireann met in Dublin, two police constables were shot dead in an ambush in Co. Tipperary. This incident is now regarded as the beginning of the Anglo-Irish war.³⁰ The policemen were transporting gelignite by horse and cart from Soloheadbeg quarry in Co. Tipperary when they were set upon in mid afternoon. A council employee accompanying them gave evidence that the masked men had shouted "Hands up!" before shooting the constables

²⁹ Daily News January 16, 1919 p 5

³⁰ F.S.L. Lyons Ireland Since the Famine op.cit. p 408—409

and then making off with their rifles and the gelignite.³¹ Generally, the British press separated their accounts of the ambush from the reports on the meeting of Dail Eireann. The *Manchester Guardian* reported on January 24 that the Sinn Fein leaders in Dublin were shocked by the murders in Tipperary. "They do not talk freely to the English journalists but English people will misunderstand the situation entirely if they think that these casual and cold blooded murders form any part of the official Sinn Fein policy. On the contrary, they are utterly repudiated and detested in Harcourt Street [the Sinn Fein headquarters]."³² For the *Guardian* correspondent the evidence suggested the killings in Tipperary appeared to be a private act of assassination. But even so he concluded that "all the same, with a so-called central authority which has repudiated all the laws of the realm, and which inferentially has invited nearly half a million electors who called it into being to defy the existing order by every means in their power, it might easily assume the form of an epidemic..." Once again it was Hugh Martin who was able to point up a larger significance for the ruthless attack on the police constables.

The day after the incident Martin described the police murders as the only clue to the possible future direction of events. "They show what has been so clearly evident all along: that a central gathering of well meaning idealists such as the 'Dail Eireann' is utterly unable to control

³¹ **Daily News** January 22 and January 23 1919 p 5 & p 3; **Daily Mail** January 22 and January 23 1919 p 5 & p 5

³² **Manchester Guardian** January 23, 1919 p 6. In a book published more than twenty years later, Desmond Ryan, a journalist sympathetic to Sinn Fein bore out the **Guardian's** insight: "Even the Dublin volunteers, that is to say the more militant section...criticised Soloheadbeg sharply...they believed the capture of arms and gelignite could have been made without loss of life..." Desmond Ryan: **Sean Treacy and the Third Tipperary Brigade IRA** (Anvil Books, Tralee 1945) p 59

the physical-force men in the provinces. These men, as I wrote recently from Sligo, hold Dublin meetings of mere talkers about moral force in the utmost contempt. It is probably not too much to say that the coincidence of the murders with the opening of the assembly was no mere accident, but a message deliberately sent...to the 'talking shop' in the capital. The secret movement in Ireland is forever working below the surface of the open movement, striving to control it and force its hand. Dail Eireann, formidable as its organisation of passive resistance may possibly prove, is less important than it looks. It has the appearance of power while the reality lies in the hands of men who hold, in spirit of all past experience, that the salvation of Ireland is to be found in gelignite and revolvers."³³ Gradually, over the next six months, Hugh Martin's view that the real power was in the hands of the gunmen gained credence in other British press reports. It was represented as a relentless and disturbing threat to peace, though at the same time its agents remained shadowy and nameless; in most reports the origins of the violence were rarely subjected to scrutiny. The perception that order was breaking down was based on a series of incidents around the country and a sense of unease among the correspondents' informants in Dublin. In early May the *Daily Mail*, in an article about the anger provoked in loyalist circles by the arrival of an Irish American delegation, referred to "the flood of sedition and disloyalty inundating the country."³⁴ The previous day *The Morning Post* reported the discovery of 260 bombs buried beneath the kitchen floor of a house in

³³ *Daily News* January 24, 1919

³⁴ *Daily Mail* May 7, 1919 p 6

Cork.³⁵ On May 12, the *Post*, the *Mail* and the *Daily News* all carried a report of a raid by seventy to eighty masked men on Ballyedmond Castle in Co. Down, the residence of a former officer in the Ulster Volunteer Force. The *Mail* reported that the raiders "bound and gagged all belated wayfarers they met near the castle, to which they drove up in motor cars..."³⁶ It was "beyond doubt", the *Morning Post* correspondent reported from Belfast, that the raiders had come from the south marking "...the first time Sinn Feiners outside Ulster have invaded the province for their nefarious work."³⁷ The Chief Secretary himself told the House of Commons a little more than a week later that although Ireland was more prosperous than any other country in the world revolutionary acts were growing steadily in force.³⁸

It is from about this time – the summer of 1919 – that one can detect a growing impatience among the correspondents with the ineffectuality of Irish policy and a steady drift towards a more adversarial framing of events. Partly this is expressed as exasperation with the frequency of violent incidents and the breakdown of order (not surprisingly, a tone particularly noticeable in the unionist *Morning Post*). But there was also a growing sense that an opportunity for a settlement had been squandered, that the violence was a consequence of the British government not taking Ireland and Sinn Fein seriously. Consumed by the negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference, Lloyd George regarded Ireland as a low priority and "for most of 1919 [the cabinet] showed no

³⁵ The Morning Post May 6, 1919 p 7

³⁶ Daily Mail May 12, 1919

³⁷ The Morning Post May 13, 1919 p 7

³⁸ Daily News May 15, 1919 p 2

interest in getting to grips with the problem.”³⁹ Left to his own devices in Dublin, the Irish Secretary, Ian Macpherson, was allowed to translate this inertia into a policy of refusing to engage with Sinn Fein and an indiscriminate determination to repress “disorder”. This negative policy increasingly became a target for criticism by the correspondents in Ireland. At the end of May *Daily News* published a long article by Robert Lynd about his recent visit to Ireland. Lynd was the paper's assistant literary editor, a Belfast Presbyterian who had become a nationalist and was already the author of a pamphlet, “The Ethics of Sinn Fein”.⁴⁰ He noticed that in some Dublin shops rosary beads were on sale stained in the Sinn Fein colours: orange, white and green. He wrote of meeting a journalist who had come to Ireland “to see the marks of the iron heel.” Lynd's own conclusion was that there was “no denying that the military occupation of the country is more thorough and more threatening than it has ever been in history... The huge policeman that you see walking in the streets of Dublin with a revolver in his belt is but an image of what is now being offered to Ireland as a substitute for freedom.” But Lynd reported that Sinn Feiners were phlegmatic about coercion. “They have a theory that whatever happens cannot but end in favour of Ireland. They seem to have a paradoxical belief that England cannot injure them without terribly injuring herself. They do not believe they could defeat the armed forces that might be sent against them but they believe that they could defeat the purpose of those who make use of the armed forces.”⁴¹

³⁹ O' Halpin op. cit. p 191

⁴⁰ Laffan: **The Resurrection of Ireland** op. cit. p 218

⁴¹ **Daily News** May 30, 1919 p 4

One way to defeat the purpose of the British government was to subvert the normal attitudes of the community to violence. On Sunday September 7th a party of soldiers from the Shropshire Light Infantry regiment were on their way to a Wesleyan church in Fermoy, Co. Cork, carrying rifles without ammunition. As they approached the church they were attacked by a group of armed men who had driven up in cars. One soldier was shot dead, another seriously wounded. The assailants gathered up the soldiers' rifles and made off.⁴² As they sped along the roads outside Fermoy, trees were felled by sympathetic local people to hinder pursuit by the police and military.⁴³ At the inquest into the death of the soldier killed in the raid the jury refused to describe his death as murder; the foreman of the jury said it was their opinion "that these men came for the purpose of getting rifles, and had no intention of killing anybody."⁴⁴ A few hours after this verdict some two hundred soldiers from the Shropshire Light Infantry and the Royal Field Artillery regiments took to the streets of Fermoy smashing shops and houses in the town square and two of its main streets. The jewellery shop owned by the foreman of the inquest jury was destroyed.⁴⁵ Led by an officer in mufti blowing a whistle they looted drapery stores and shoe shops; "...soldiers were seen marching back to barracks swinging boots and shoes in their hands."⁴⁶ The troops were followed by a band of women

⁴² The Morning Post September 8, 1919 p 8; Daily News September 8, 1919 p 1

⁴³ The Morning Post September 9, 1919 p 7

⁴⁴ The Times September 9, 1919 p 12

⁴⁵ Daily Mail September 10, 1919 p 5; Daily News September 10, 1919 p 5; The Times September 10, 1919 p 10

⁴⁶ Daily News September 10, 1919 p 5

who took some of the loot themselves.⁴⁷ It was the first military reprisal noted in the British press.

In an editorial the *Manchester Guardian* described the military riot as “a very ugly incident, explained, but not at all excused, by the fact that it appears to have been begun as an act of retaliation.” It suggested that there was no reason to suppose that acts of violence such as the attack on the soldiers outside the church were approved by the leaders of Sinn Fein. “It is bad enough that these acts of violence should be committed by ignorant and exasperated peasants but it is far worse when the forces which are there to represent law and order begin to take a hand in the game. Violence of course tends to breed violence and the whole wretched business goes to show how essential it is that wise and courageous statesmanship should step in to put an end alike to the cause and to the consequences of disaffection.”⁴⁸ The editor of *The Times*, Henry Wickham Steed, had already described the cabinet's Irish policy as “hopeless”⁴⁹; now the paper reacted to events at Fermoy with a combination of repulsion and anger. Although suggesting that the inquest jury had been intimidated into returning its hostile verdict, an editorial condemned the soldiers’ riot, believing it would “increase the feeling of disgust with which all classes here have read the recent news from Ireland.” *The Times* despaired of the government’s policy: “Are we never to get farther in Ireland than a state of deadlock, in which government negation of all policy is based upon existing disorder, and

⁴⁷ *The Times*, *The Morning Post*, *Daily News* September 10, 1919

⁴⁸ *Manchester Guardian* September 10, 1919 p 4

⁴⁹ Quoted in D.W. Hayward: *The British Press and Anglo-American Relations With Particular Reference to The Irish Question 1916-1922* (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Manchester 1960) p 163

that disorder – growing by the day – can be used to justify inaction and to relegate policy to a future always more remote.”⁵⁰

The early months of 1920 in Ireland saw a significant escalation in attacks by the Volunteers on the Royal Irish Constabulary. The strategy was to drive the police out of their isolated rural barracks, capture weapons and stretch their resources to breaking point. In the capital a special group of agents recruited by Michael Collins had begun systematically assassinating detectives of the Dublin Metropolitan Police whose job was to collect political intelligence.⁵¹ The Irish police – established in the mid nineteenth century as a semi-militarised force to head off insurrection – were the most visible face of the Crown in Ireland but their role was ambiguous: they were at once “a foreign importation”⁵² and, at the same time, a force made up overwhelmingly of Catholic Irishmen.⁵³ Thus, the humiliating epithet of “traitors” and a policy of cajoling neighbourly rejection of local police officers enabled the eventual military assault to be all the more effective. Over time the effort to soften up the RIC by turning it into a pariah force proved highly effective. After the Easter Rebellion in 1916 a police inspector in one county observed that it took nearly six months for people to become less friendly towards the local police; in another few months they were regarded as enemies.⁵⁴ This collective froideur would fatally

⁵⁰ **The Times** September 10, 1919 p 11

⁵¹ F.S.L. Lyons: **Ireland Since the Famine** op.cit. p. 411-413

⁵² Charles Townshend: **Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance since 1848** (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983) p 67

⁵³ Charles Townshend: “Policing Insurgency in Ireland” in David M. Anderson and David Killingray (eds): **Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism and the Police 1917-65** (Manchester University Press, 1992) p 25

⁵⁴ David Fitzpatrick: **Politics and Irish Life** op.cit p 8

compromise the RIC's crucial function as an intelligence service for Dublin Castle, a role which required a village police constable to possess skills of "observation of human character no less exact than that expected of a novelist."⁵⁵

By 1920 the more daring and better organised of the Volunteer units, now equipped with their captured armoury, were prepared to undertake operations that struck at the heart of British authority in Ireland. Eighteen police officers were killed during the last eight months of 1919. During the following twelve months 176 officers were killed and another 251 wounded.⁵⁶ The writer, Darrell Figgis, himself a Sinn Feiner, recalled that wherever one travelled in Ireland after Easter 1920 one saw the roofless walls of burned out police stations, sandbags still piled in the windows.⁵⁷ In August a military intelligence officer wrote to his superiors that "Anyone passing a police barrack with its locked doors and seeing the constables looking out through barred windows will at once realise that no body of men could preserve its morale under such conditions."⁵⁸ The separatists matched their military achievements with political success, winning municipal elections and setting up their own courts to bypass the official magistrates who dispensed local justice. They also managed to establish harmonious co-ordination between the politicians in Dail Eireann, a labour movement that was broadly sympathetic to nationalism, and the Volunteers who held the guns. In summary, the movement had turned into "a classic prototype of guerrilla

⁵⁵ Ibid p 4

⁵⁶ Ibid p. 412, 417

⁵⁷ Darell Figgis: **Recollections of the Irish War** (Ernest Benn, London 1927) p 282

⁵⁸ Townshend: "Policing Insurgency in Ireland" op. cit. p 36

action across the whole face of society.”⁵⁹ Significantly, it was in 1920 that the Irish Volunteers adopted the title Irish Republican Army.⁶⁰

Yet however much the rebels defined the intensifying campaign as a war, the British government refused to do so. At a meeting with his Irish officials in Downing Street at the end of April 1920 Lloyd George declared that the rebellion in Ireland had to be crushed whatever the cost. “If there were a truce”, he said “it would be an admission that we were beaten and it might lead to our having to give up Ireland.” The Viceroy, Lord French, asked the prime minister if he would go so far as to declare war and Lloyd George replied: “You do not declare war against rebels.”⁶¹ Practically, this meant the government relied on the increasingly demoralised police force to fight the guerrillas. When more and more policemen buckled under the strain and resigned, the government came up with the idea of reinforcing the Royal Irish Constabulary by recruiting an “emergency gendarmerie” in Britain which would become a branch of the RIC.⁶² These two paramilitary divisions came to be known as the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries.⁶³

Part of the rationale for introducing English recruits with hardly any experience of Ireland was an attempt to supersede the vulnerability of the Catholic and Irish constables to pressure from their neighbours. Foreigners would also have fewer constraints about being ruthless. The

⁵⁹ Charles Townshend: The British Campaign in Ireland op. cit. p.59

⁶⁰ Ibid p. 60

⁶¹ Notes of a conversation at Downing Street, April 30, 1920, CAB 23/21/62

⁶² See conclusions of conference at Downing Street, May 11, 1920 CAB 23/21/141

⁶³ R.F. Foster: Modern Ireland op.cit. p. 497-498. A lack of police uniforms forced the new recruits to combine the black RIC jackets with khaki – hence the nickname “Black and Tans” after a famous hunt in the south of Ireland.

Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries represented “a ‘stiffening’ element which implied that the reliability of the main body of the force was on a par with other colonial police forces.”⁶⁴ Winston Churchill tried to suggest that the new recruits were an elite, declaring that they had been chosen “from a great press of applicants on account of their intelligence, their character, and their records in the war.”⁶⁵ But a historian has more dispassionately described them as “for the most part young men who found it hard to settle down after the war, who had become used to a career of adventure and bloodshed, and who were prepared to try their luck in a new sphere for ten shillings a day all found.”⁶⁶ By the time these recruits had arrived in numbers by the middle of 1920, the republican forces “...held the initiative at many levels across most of Ireland and the King's writ had ceased to run... British authority, as distinct from mere power, was broken and...any future British policy in Ireland could only be implemented by coercion.”⁶⁷ The only question was what form that coercion would take. With the British government reluctant to accept that a state of war existed and declare martial law across Ireland, it was left to the RIC and the new *gendarmerie* to respond to the furtive, unexpected attacks by the guerrillas with their own brand of terror.

Despite all the signs of declining morale the RIC maintained its discipline during the early stages of the guerrilla campaign. For instance, Robert Kee points out that although fourteen policemen were

⁶⁴ Townshend: “Policing Insurgency in Ireland” op cit p 26

⁶⁵ Quoted in Richard Bennett: **The Black and Tans** (Barnes and Noble, New York, 1995 edition) p 37

⁶⁶ Lyons op. cit p. 415

⁶⁷ Townshend op. cit. p. 69

killed between December 1918 and January 1920 there had been no retaliation by officers who, given an intense professional solidarity made all the more powerful by being subject to a widespread social boycott, were painfully aware of the sufferings of their colleagues.⁶⁸ Despite one isolated riot by police after the shooting of a constable in Thurles, Co. Tipperary⁶⁹, the telling symptoms of the corrosive effect of attacks and intimidation were increased resignations and a growing difficulty in finding new recruits.⁷⁰ The Thurles riot might have remained an isolated case but for the arrival of ex-servicemen from England. Contrary to Winston Churchill's rosy appraisal of their competence, the former veterans had little training and many of them had been unemployed since the end of the First World War: "Their only service experience had been in trench warfare which had a brutalising rather than ennobling effect..."⁷¹ They had no experience of Ireland or the day to day routine of a rural barracks and the constant engagement with local communities that was the main task of policemen trying to keep the peace. "Plunged into the boredom of rainswept rural Ireland, and frustrated by the harassing operations of a near-invisible opponent, too many of them took refuge in drink."⁷² Within months the higher ranks of the RIC were despairing of their effect on discipline; one officer tactfully reported that "the character of the force is changing a good deal" under the influence of the ex-servicemen. And long after the war was over

⁶⁸ Robert Kee: **The Green Flag: A History of Irish Nationalism** (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1972) p 667

⁶⁹ Kee op. cit. p 667

⁷⁰ Joost Augusteijn: **From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare: The Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence 1916—1921** (Irish Academic Press, Dublin 1996) p 202—203

⁷¹ Richard Bennett: **The Black and Tans** op. cit. p 38

⁷² Charles Townshend: **Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century** (Faber and Faber, London, 1986) p 58

other RIC veterans recalled the Black and Tans as “all English and Scotch people...very rough, f-ing and blinding and boozing and all.”⁷³ There is some evidence that the Black and Tans were equally at odds with the civilian Unionist population they were meant to defend from Sinn Fein. The writer Brian Inglis, in his memoir of a Protestant upbringing, describes how his grandmother’s distrust of the Black and Tans was greater than her distaste for Sinn Fein. “This dislike had been shared by many of her unionist apolitical friends. At least with the rebels, their argument ran, you had known where you stood, whereas the Black and Tans, recruited by dubious methods – the riff raff of demobilised regiments, the sweepings of British jails – did not know a Unionist from a Republican and hardly bothered to make the distinction.”⁷⁴

The conflict in Ireland developed in 1920 into a pattern of tit for tat violence between the newly assertive volunteers and the more fiercely combative and militaristic police force. “Spontaneous outbreaks of rioting and vandalism by policemen or soldiers gradually gave way to a more deliberate and habitual use of arson...Reprisals mushroomed as the guerrilla war escalated through the summer of 1920.”⁷⁵ Through the work of the correspondents of the main London papers this vicious cycle of violence did not escape the notice of the British public. “From March 1920 routine killings of both Crown servants and – by one party or

⁷³ Quoted in Peter Hart: **The IRA and its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork 1916—1923** (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998) p 82

⁷⁴ Brian Inglis: **West Briton** (Faber and Faber, London 1962) p 31. It is noteworthy that Inglis uses classic Sinn Fein terminology – “the sweepings of British jails” – to present the views of his family’s Protestant friends.

⁷⁵ Hart op cit p 80

another – ordinary citizens began to appear in the newspapers with a monotony which was soon to dull the senses.”⁷⁶ Coverage of this unacknowledged war of reprisals was marked by a profound shift in how the story of the troubles in England was framed by the British correspondents. The main threads of explanation up to then – despair over disorder, optimism about the possibility that some compromise could be reached by reasonable men on both sides and a desire of the reform of the Irish administration – were all distilled to a question of the legitimacy of the British government's methods in Ireland. Some historians who have acknowledged this critical coverage seem to believe it only began in response to particularly egregious acts of reprisal or after a prolonged series of incidents. Thus, Jon Laurence, writing about Ireland in the context of general perceptions of brutalisation after the Great War, asserts that “The war in Ireland made little impact on the British public until September 1920, when a series of high profile reprisals by government forces received extensive coverage in the British press.”⁷⁷ And Peter Clarke devotes much attention to J.L. Hammond’s work for the *Nation* in 1921, referring to “his passionate exposure of British police”.⁷⁸ But the evidence I have amassed here shows steadily growing disillusionment in British press coverage of Ireland that predated the arrival of the Black and Tans and was not confined to just a few reporters. It is true that, as Laurence points out, coverage of the reprisals starts to make a greater impact in the autumn of

⁷⁶ Kee op cit p 668

⁷⁷ Jon Laurence: “Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain” in *Journal of Modern History* 75 (September 2003) p 577 .

⁷⁸ Peter Clarke: *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge University Press, 1978) p 213

1920 but, as we have seen earlier, British correspondents were writing about the behaviour of the security forces well before then.⁷⁹

A useful starting point for tracing this process is the work of Hugh Martin of the *Daily News*. Although well disposed towards Sinn Feiners in 1919 he was convinced that there was “every reason to believe that [they] would jump at the chance of helping to work a sound measure of Home Rule within the Empire.”⁸⁰ By late 1920 he had begun to see the Black and Tans as the enemies of moderation. He travelled the country to report on atrocities, filling his reports with testimony from local people and rarely mentioning the official versions. The Irish-American journalist, Francis Hackett – whose work we will look at more closely in a later chapter – observed Martin in the summer of 1920 interviewing the Mayor of Limerick (who was later shot in his bed). Hackett found Martin’s forensic questioning “rather trying”, describing him as “a neat, precise, slender man in black and white with good small features but the severity of a moral accountant. His profession has taught him the need of cautiousness, but his cautiousness implied mistrust, a sort of high Liberal mistrust of the well meaning but impulsive natures with which he had to deal.”⁸¹ General Sir Nevil Macready, the Commander-in-Chief of British forces in Ireland, wrote to Martin's editor complaining that he seemed "determined to get only

⁷⁹ Laurence does acknowledge that there were “many incidents of reprisal before Balbriggan hit the news.” “Forging a Peaceable Kingdom” op. cit. p 577, n. 92.

⁸⁰ *Daily News* January 16, 1919

⁸¹ Francis Hackett: “The Price of Being Irish”, *The New Republic*, March 23, 1921, p 94. Hackett reported that after Martin left, the Mayor’s wife declared that “he’s a nice man and you can trust him but he’s an English Liberal and he won’t face the truth.”

one side of the story.”⁸² Martin's work was influential among his colleagues and frequently cited in the House of Commons by critics of the government's Irish policy – as we will see in the next chapter. Arriving in Dublin for a lengthy reporting tour, Martin often took his cue from what was appearing in the Irish press to travel to the scene of the latest atrocities. This must have alarmed the authorities, for at the beginning of 1919 the Irish censor, Lord Decies had advised his colleagues that “practically every provincial correspondent for the Dublin newspapers is a Sinn Feiner” and that all of them were disposed to write up any incident of military discipline in the most unfavourable terms possible. “This pollution of news sources will be a lasting trouble”, Decies warned prophetically.⁸³

In October 1920 Martin went to investigate shootings in villages in Co. Tipperary where two young members of the IRA had been shot dead after being dragged from their beds. Witnesses he interviewed corroborate each other's description of the assailants.

One who acted as an officer wore a cap and had a khaki coloured muffler tied round the lower part of his face. The others were dressed in long coats similar to those worn by the police, and soft hats. They had on “white masks and handkerchiefs fastened so as to conceal every feature but the eyes.”⁸⁴

Martin's reporting became heavily sarcastic about the official line. He challenged the government in London, frequently addressing himself directly to the Irish Secretary, Sir Hamar Greenwood. A report by

⁸² Macready quoted by Sir Hamar Greenwood, Chief Secretary for Ireland in the House of Commons, November 4, 1920; **Hansard Fifth Series**, Vol 134 Col 720

⁸³ Lord Decies: Report on censorship for December 1918, **CO 904/167/370-371**

⁸⁴ **Daily News** October 28, 1920 p. 3

Martin on a series of floggings of local people in Galway by the security forces began with an ironic prologue.

By the usual methods of beleaguered governments, whether in Ireland or in Russia, a fairly complete and accurate list of active revolutionaries has been secured. With this as a chart, the police methodically set to work, more than a month ago, not as Sir Hamar Greenwood puts it, to prevent and detect crime and to arrest the criminal, but to strike terror with so savage a hand into the heart of the whole community as to force it to evacuate, so to speak, its "bad men."... Part of my time has been occupied with interviewing the young men whom the police have been whipping, kicking and otherwise instructing in the elements of British citizenship...⁸⁵

Back in Dublin three days later Martin left his hotel to investigate a police raid in the street outside, and was threatened by an Auxiliary cadet with a revolver.⁸⁶ In early November he went to Tralee in Co. Kerry where the police were terrorising the townspeople after two officers were kidnapped by the rebels. A notice pinned to the wall threatened "reprisals of a nature not yet heard of in Ireland" if the kidnapped officers were not returned safely. When Martin and a colleague approached a group of policemen standing in the deserted main street of the town, they told him they were looking for a correspondent called Hugh Martin of the *Daily News* in order to kill him. Martin pretended to be another journalist from a different newspaper and escaped to Dublin.⁸⁷ News of the threat to Martin was carried by the other London papers and in the foreign press.⁸⁸ Pursued in parliament, the new Irish Secretary, Sir Hamar Greenwood conceded an interview to the *News* in order to reassure the public that the

⁸⁵ Ibid October 21, 1920 p. 3

⁸⁶ Ibid October 25, 1920 p. 1

⁸⁷ Ibid November 3 & 4 p. 1

⁸⁸ See the despatch of a French correspondent reprinted in the Daily News November 5, 1920

government still believed in freedom of the press. Somewhat disingenuously, Greenwood declared that the government believed that what Ireland suffered from was a *lack* of publicity and argued that it was trying to help, not hinder, correspondents who wanted to disseminate the truth about the conflict.⁸⁹ In a reply published the following day, Martin absolved the British government of any responsibility for the threats made against him but his explanation could hardly have been the type of publicity that Greenwood desired. Martin wrote that the “...discipline among the forces of the Crown is so lax that a journalist who endeavours to report truthfully how those forces are behaving has not been able to do so lately without danger to his personal safety.”⁹⁰

Martin had not been alone in putting reprisals at the centre of debate about Ireland. Correspondents from the *Manchester Guardian* had accompanied him to scenes of random shootings of civilians, burnt out creameries, and streets of wrecked and looted shops in Sligo, Tipperary, Kerry and Longford. Accounts of the increasingly undisciplined behaviour of the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries also appeared in *The Times*. Henry Wood Nevinson travelled the country in search of atrocities. In his diaries he describes coming to Dublin on a boat full of young Black and Tan recruits⁹¹ and driving to Balbriggan where the Black and Tans had burnt down a factory and thirty-five houses.⁹² The following month he came over to tour Tipperary, Cork and Kerry and

⁸⁹ *Daily News*, November 4, 1920

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, November 5, 1920

⁹¹ H.W. Nevinson Journals, October 5-6, 1920 in *Papers of Henry Wood Nevinson*, Bodleian Library, Oxford e621/4

⁹² *Ibid*, October 8

Limerick, noting burned creameries and talking to priests and local people (including a man who said his house had been burned down because he gave an affidavit to Hugh Martin).⁹³ In Co. Clare he met a niece of Matthew Arnold – “very cultivated and intellectual” – who “gave us a private lecture on reprisals as the only means of avenging murders since law will not work.”⁹⁴

Collectively, the correspondents resisted attempts by the government to portray them as dupes of Sinn Fein propaganda. A *Guardian* editorial elevated the British correspondents in Ireland to the status of sole purveyors of truth.

The correspondents of the English newspapers are neither terrorised nor misled nor corrupted. They have furnished the most trustworthy and the only trustworthy account of the horrible condition into which the Government has allowed Ireland to sink. With Sinn Fein issuing propaganda on the one hand and Dublin Castle on the other, they are the only means of enlightenment that the public have and the only means by which, if at all, the Government can be forced to do its duty.⁹⁵

The editor of the *Guardian*, C.P. Scott, had long stood for a form of patriotism which embraced a willingness to criticise the state or the government of the day. Mark Hampton has pointed out that during the Boer War, Scott was as much perturbed by the threat posed to free speech by jingoism as by the conduct of the campaign against the Boers.⁹⁶ And, Hampton argues, this position made Scott and his colleagues even more scrupulous about an honest factual portrayal of

⁹³ Ibid, November 13—18

⁹⁴ Ibid, November 19

⁹⁵ **The Manchester Guardian** October 23, 1920 p. 8

⁹⁶ Mark Hampton: “The Press, Patriotism, and Public Discussion: C.P. Scott, The *Manchester Guardian*, and the Boer War, 1899—1902” in **Historical Journal**, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2001) p 187 and p 189

events: “since the *Guardian*’s opposition to the war hinged as much on the threat war posed to public discussion as on the immorality of the war itself, it could not afford to compromise the ‘sacred’ nature of the ‘facts’ upon which discussion was based.”⁹⁷ Thus the editorial defending all the British correspondents in Ireland can be read as an attempt to assert the authority of the public sphere for judging events. But the *Guardian*’s editorial is more than that again; it is a restatement of the classical liberal theory of the press, with the journalist cast as a beacon of enlightenment in a murky sea of competing claims. How different this is from Sir Edward Cook’s appraisal of the press during the Great War (cited in the previous chapter) as the ever-willing propagator of official policy and a crucial force for sustaining morale. Thus, critical coverage of the campaign in Ireland provides an opportunity for the most prestigious organs of the British press to rally around the myth of their own tainted heroism.

As he prepared to return to London on the eve of Armistice Day, Hugh Martin reflected on how he had arrived in Ireland a few months earlier intensely sceptical about stories of reprisals coming from Irish sources. “Three months ago, the world ‘reprisals’ merely recalled the later stages of the Great War. Today, to the whole of the English-speaking world it means one thing and one thing only – the method by which Great Britain is waging war upon Ireland. It has been my duty to watch at close quarters the unfolding of this drama...And now as I leave the theatre for a little while to share in my own country’s celebration of the victory of the idea of freedom, what else can I, as an Englishman, do except bow

⁹⁷ Ibid p 189

my head in shame?”⁹⁸ Martin’s feelings of mortification arose from how the war in Ireland undermined his sense that Britain stood for justice and fair play. The idea that the British government was betraying its own ideals in coercing Ireland is repeatedly evoked by other journalists in reportage and commentary during this period. Mark Hampton noted a similar theme in the *Manchester Guardian*’s coverage of the Boer War: “the desirability of fighting the war in accordance with traditional English notions of honour and decency.”⁹⁹ But these ideas had acquired even greater force by the time of the Irish rebellion because Britain had defined the war against Germany as a struggle between civilisation and barbarism, morality and militarism.

The proof of this thesis for British propagandists was provided by outrages committed by the German army during its occupation of Belgium. The official British report on German atrocities in Belgium, written by Lord Bryce, was translated into ten languages and thousands of copies circulated around the world.¹⁰⁰ Until then it was assumed that European armies would never stoop to the cruelties considered a unique trait of the methods of warfare deployed by inferior nations.¹⁰¹

Revulsion at the terrorism described in the Bryce report “gave voice to a radical idea, that warring nations could not break the law with impunity and must pay.”¹⁰² At the end of the war the British Attorney General, Lord Birkenhead stressed “the importance of using British standards to

⁹⁸ *Daily News* November 11, 1920 p. 3

⁹⁹ Mark Hampton: “The Press, Patriotism and Public Discussion” op. cit. p 191

¹⁰⁰ Larry Zuckerman: *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I*, (New York University Press, 2004) p 132

¹⁰¹ *Ibid* p 23 and p 121

¹⁰² *Ibid* p 120

judge German war criminals.”¹⁰³ Thus the rhetoric of universal idealism deployed to distinguish British civility from Germany inhumanity during the First World War rebounded twice over against British policy in Ireland. Firstly, it became a powerful touchstone for judging the British government and a ready point of ironic comparison for journalists describing the suppression of the rebellion in Ireland. And it also created expectations that it was right to hold violators of the honourable norms of warfare to account and seek sanction against them in international law. As Philip Gibbs reflected, “civil law was abolished in Ireland, at a time when English idealists were pleading for its extension to international affairs as a nobler method of argument than that of war.”¹⁰⁴

Germany justified its methods rather than concealed them:

schrecklichkeit, or “frightfulness”, was openly proclaimed as official policy in the parts of Belgium under the control of the German army.¹⁰⁵

The word became synonymous with barbaric cruelty; it crops up repeatedly in the reports from Ireland of the activities of the Black and Tans accompanied by the highly charged label “Prussian.”¹⁰⁶ In his book about the war in Ireland Hugh Martin describes Lloyd George’s policy as “Potsdam ruthlessness.”¹⁰⁷ The dangers of “Prussianism” appearing in Britain were raised by liberal commentators several years earlier during the First World War. In *Questions of Peace and War*,

¹⁰³ Gary Bass: *Stay the Hand of Vengeance* op.cit. p 73

¹⁰⁴ Philip Gibbs: *The Hope of Europe*, (William Heinemann, London, 1921) p 70

¹⁰⁵ Modris Eksteins: *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, (Mariner Books, New York, 2000 edition) p 158

¹⁰⁶ For examples see “The Proclamation of Anarchy” in *The Nation*, October 2nd, 1920, p 4—5 and Robert Lynd in the *Daily News*, November 16, 1920.

¹⁰⁷ Hugh Martin: *Ireland in Insurrection*, (Daniel O’ Connor, London, 1921) p 42

published in 1916, L.T. Hobhouse predicted that “the self-contained, disciplined, military State is the political entity of the coming future.”¹⁰⁸ And, according to Peter Clarke, the introduction of conscription in 1918 appeared to J.A. Hobson as “the kernel of the system of Prussianism which was being established.”¹⁰⁹ It was Ireland which provided tangible evidence to support these auguries.

A curious feature of the reporting from Ireland was the uncertainty among the correspondents about how to view the agents of the policy they identified as a strain of Germanic “frightfulness”. Save for hostile exchanges like those described by Hugh Martin there were no interviews with the ordinary ex-servicemen who made up the regular Black and Tans or the ex-officers of the Auxiliary Division. British ministers defended these men as the heroes of the Western Front and, at first, even critics avoided questioning their characters, blaming the government for encouraging them to carry out reprisals.¹¹⁰ Later, when their deeds had become notorious, even the house journal of the Milner imperialists, the *Round Table*, was describing them as “soldiers of fortune...fitted for little but fighting.”¹¹¹ Certainly the correspondents treated them with extreme wariness. For Henry Wood Nevinson distaste was leavened with class prejudice. He recorded how he was pleased to hear from officers in the regular British army in Ireland that they refused to accept that most of the Auxiliaries had ever been officers at all and he himself concurred, offering that “neither the accent of many among them, nor

¹⁰⁸ Peter Clarke: *Liberals and Social Democrats* op. cit. p 177

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p 181

¹¹⁰ Jon Laurence: “Forging a Peaceable Kingdom” op.cit. p 578—579

¹¹¹ Ibid p 580

their language, nor their conduct, is such as I have been accustomed to among officers during my thirty-five years' knowledge of the British Army."¹¹² But for one of the *Manchester Guardian's* correspondents, Donald Boyd, these men were merely more damaged versions of every man who had endured the nightmare of the trenches: "One of the wretched things was that the Auxiliaries were men like ourselves, who had just come out of the war...They weren't strangers; they were ourselves askew."¹¹³

Just as coverage of the Black and Tans peaked in the autumn of 1920, two dramatic episodes of the war were partly enacted as spectacles on the streets of London, literally bringing the conflict home to a British audience. The first of these was the death on October 24, 1920, of the Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence McSwiney, a leading republican who had been on hunger strike for seventy-four days to protest against the establishment of military courts under the Restoration of Ireland Act. Significantly, McSwiney's death occurred in Brixton Prison and his funeral, which entailed his body being carried in a procession through London to Euston Station for its return to Ireland, brought the charged emotion of a distant conflict to the central streets of the metropolis. Crowds gathered on the footpaths as the procession passed. A correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* remarked how "the intensity of expression of the mourners struck everyone" present.¹¹⁴ For many, the *Guardian* reported, it was the first time they had seen the Sinn

¹¹² H.W. Nevinson: "The Anglo-Irish War" in *The Contemporary Review*, Vol 120, July, 1921, p 22—23

¹¹³ Quoted in David Ayerst: *The Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper* (Collins, London, 1971) p 423

¹¹⁴ *The Manchester Guardian* October 29, 1920 p. 7

Fein flags of green, white and orange. But, the correspondent noted, the attitude of the crowd was one of deep respect even among those who had been condemning the dead Lord Mayor.¹¹⁵

Elsewhere in the paper, in a regular, informal column called “Our London Correspondence”, a writer reflected on how the procession had caused “a good deal of wonder” among the many foreign correspondents who had come to London to watch it:

The circumstances were very extraordinary and it is difficult to imagine a parallel of them in any other country. The Lord Mayor of Cork was an officer of the Irish Republic, which declared itself at war with England. Here was all the assistance of the police and the city authorities to carry through a great demonstration, with rebel flags and rebel uniforms and the whole greeted with respect by the English people.¹¹⁶

Describing the procession in the *Daily News* Robert Lynd noted that McSwiney's funeral in London had all the appearance of the funeral of a prince. “Hawkers in the street with Cockney voices were selling mourning cards with prayers for the dead man's soul, paper handkerchiefs with a programme for the day's events, green flags with gold harps and Republican rosettes.” For Lynd, Terence McSwiney's funeral was an animated history lesson that was eagerly absorbed by the crowds that lined the streets of London.

The windows along the route were filled with work-girls, photographers, families and their friends...for the most part it was a silent crowd – a crowd a little bewildered perhaps at finding itself the spectator of a chapter of history. London, I think, learned more Irish history yesterday than it had ever learned before. Only half-learned it perhaps. But it bared its head before the tragedy of it.

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Ibid p. 6

The funeral that London saw yesterday was no isolated or rare event. It is a funeral that is being repeated in Irish town after Irish town and in Irish village after Irish village...What London saw yesterday is an image of all Ireland.¹¹⁷

The second event which impressed the British mind with the horror of the Irish conflict concerned the deaths of young men closer to home. In November 1920 the IRA carried out one of the most ruthless operations of its campaign when eleven British officers identified by the IRA Chief of Staff Michael Collins as intelligence agents, were shot dead in a couple of hours on a Sunday morning in central Dublin. Some of the officers were shot as they awoke from sleep in the presence of their wives.¹¹⁸ For British correspondents used to reporting the deaths of Irish policemen the swift and brutal extension of casualties to their own countrymen was shocking. The *Daily News* described the assassinations as “the worst massacre of British officers since the India mutiny.”¹¹⁹ the *Morning Post* was driven to link the Irish rebellion with the triumph of Bolshevism in Russia, concluding, in an editorial that the future of civilisation itself was threatened by the IRA and that unless the rebels were crushed their example would be copied elsewhere: “...in all parts of the Empire conspirators are watching the drama of Ireland and waiting for the sign which will definitely tell them that they can ring up the curtain with confidence and call the world's attention to their stage.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ *Daily News* October 29, 1920 p. 1

¹¹⁸ The killings, on November 21, and the reprisal which followed that afternoon when Auxiliaries fired into a crowd at a football match killing eleven spectators and one of the players, are described in Lyons op. cit. p. 418—419

¹¹⁹ *Daily News*, November 22, 1920 p. 1

¹²⁰ *The Morning Post* November 22, 1920 p. 6

The accounts of the funeral of the officers shot in Dublin betray an acute sense of perplexed horror at what the conflict in Ireland was coming to mean for Britain. The *Manchester Guardian* described the cortege in Dublin as “the strangest of funeral processions.”

All the solemn ceremony that the army has evolved for the honouring of its dead was observed, yet the troops moved in a formation that might have been appropriate during a march through an enemy country. Before the real procession came in sight one saw first a patrol of six steel-helmeted soldiers who carried rifles at the trail, then an armoured car with machine-guns peering from its turrets...Great crowds assembled along both banks of the river and on the bridges. They were reverent and quiet...one failed to observe any man who did not take off his hat and stay uncovered until the gun-carriages had passed. From other sources one hears that it was not like that everywhere and that a great many hats and caps were forcibly removed from the heads of their wearers by Auxiliaries and thrown into the Liffey.¹²¹

The writing repeatedly points to a disconcerting untrustworthiness in the visual evidence: the “solemn procession” turns out to be a dangerous march; loyal Ireland is revealed as “an enemy country”; the reverent crowd is silently but pointedly disrespectful. This is a remarkable passage, describing a scene that could have been cinematically arranged to provide a snapshot of historical change. It also serves as a coda for the press coverage of the whole period, illustrating a key political moment when “events which are normally signified...in a negotiated way begin to give an oppositional reading.”¹²²

This sense of dissonance is also present in two accounts of the same funeral procession when it arrived in London en route to Westminster

¹²¹ **The Manchester Guardian** November 26, 1920 p. 9

¹²² Stuart Hall: "Encoding/Decoding" in Stuart Hall et. al: **Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies** (Hutchinson, London, 1980) p 138

Abbey. *The Times* reported that the massed bands of the Irish Guards occupied the centre of the procession

...but not their music nor the crepe-bound colours so sharply stirred the crowds in the street, perhaps, as did the presence in the *cortege* of a detachment of Auxiliary RIC, the "Black and Tans". They wore khaki uniforms with black or khaki Balmorals and all were heavily armed. Near them marched men of the RIC carrying sidearms outside their long black overcoats.¹²³

In Westminster Abbey another *Times* correspondent noted that "a stir of bewilderment passed through the congregation who saw marching upwards from the west door a body of armed men in a dark uniform strange to London."

For a moment a corner of the veil of mystery that covers Ireland was lifted: these grim-featured carbineers were not soldiers but policemen of the civil garrison which Great Britain maintains in Ireland, the Royal Irish Constabulary. These were the men whom the tragedies of the last two years have made famous, the stern instruments of justice, and the immediate victims of revenge.¹²⁴

The *Morning Post* correspondent also noticed the impression made by the "grim featured carbineers" from Ireland.

Extreme interest was aroused by firing parties of the "Black and Tans" and the Royal Irish Constabulary; for who could resist the thought that every man of them is fighting, with imminent peril by day and night, the battle in which so many gallant gentlemen fell last Sunday?...Young men and men a trifle older, wearing officers' khaki uniform, black "Kilmarnock bonnets", armed with rifles, bandoliers round their chest, and heavy revolvers slung from the waist, they looked a determined and fearless band, very adequate for the grim work on which they are engaged.¹²⁵

¹²³ *The Times* November 27, 1920 p. 10

¹²⁴ *Ibid*

¹²⁵ *The Morning Post* November 27, 1920 p. 7

For the correspondents and the general public the appearance of these bizarre figures in London is fascinating and horrifying in equal measure. Their reaction is heavy with a foreboding that the war in Ireland would have more profound consequences for England than had yet been imagined.

CHAPTER 3

The Crusading Press Restored

The ceaseless coverage of the reprisals in the latter half of 1920 gradually put the government on the defensive. Lloyd George and the Irish Secretary, Sir Hamar Greenwood, spent much of their time in the House of Commons unconvincingly deflecting questions about Black and Tans on the rampage, questions informed by the detailed despatches from rural Ireland in the London papers. One way of tracing how the correspondents were able to influence the political argument is to follow the debates in the House of Commons where the government was held directly accountable for its policy in Ireland. The coalition government established by Lloyd George dominated the Commons; independent liberals – whose figurehead was the former Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith – had only twenty-six seats. And although the rest of the opposition was composed of fifty-nine Labour MPs, the Coalition was in no danger of being defeated in a vote. However, as D.G. Boyce has noted, the lack of a threat in simple votes was “compensated by the vigour with which the parliamentary Opposition attacked the government over the conduct of its Irish policy. The independent Liberals were effective in debate, and, with the Labour members, plied the government with embarrassing questions about the behaviour of the Crown forces in Ireland.”¹ As we shall see, much of the evidence on which these embarrassing questions were based came from the reports of the British correspondents in the London papers. This often led to

¹ D.G. Boyce: Englishmen and Irish Troubles op.cit. p 61

explicit criticism of the journalists by government spokesmen and the widening of the debate on Irish policy to include a dispute over the veracity of the press. Further, the terms in which the government's opponents framed their critique of Irish policy echoed the interpretation of the newspaper correspondents that the tactics being used to put down the rebellion in Ireland were a significant departure from the standards of British political morality.

"Reprisals" became a major political issue in Britain in the autumn of 1920, largely because of the coverage of the activities of the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries in the British press. The word appears for the first time in the index to Hansard in Volume 133, covering a period from August to October. Up to then there had been several revenge attacks by British forces on civilian targets, many of them described in the pages of the British press. One incident in the town of Balbriggan, about twenty miles north of Dublin, crystallised outrage over these assaults. Following the shooting dead of two local officers from the Royal Irish Constabulary, their comrades took revenge by killing two local Sinn Fein leaders and burning property, including the hosiery factory which was its main source of local employment. An editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* likened the destruction in Balbriggan to the sacking of the Belgian town of Louvain by German forces during the First World War.² A month later Herbert Asquith made the same comparison in the House of Commons.³ This was an early example of how the interpretations of the newspaper correspondents in Ireland made

² The Manchester Guardian, September 22, 1920

³ Hansard Fifth Series Vol 133 Col 946

their way into political debate in London (although, as we have seen in relation to “Prussianism”, this popularisation of conceits was circulatory). Indeed, many of the debates about the Black and Tans in parliament turn on whether the information in the public domain is trustworthy and whether the portrayal of the war in Ireland offered by the correspondents – both from Britain, the US and Europe – can be believed.

Over months criticism of the government’s policy was pressed by the same handful of MPs: Asquithian Liberals, “high-minded Tory aristocrats”⁴ and the few remaining Irish nationalists MPs. Each group had its own motivations and interests (which sometimes overlapped) but what is striking is the extent to which these MPs relied on the reports of the newspaper correspondents in Ireland for the evidence they used to argue their case against the government. A typical exchange took place in the Commons on October 25th, 1920, when Hamar Greenwood was asked by T.P. O’ Connor, the Irish Nationalist MP for Liverpool, “whether in view of the statements of the English correspondents in Ireland of responsible English journals that they themselves saw convincing evidence of the wounding and flogging of men in the villages in the West of Ireland by officers of the Crown, the right. Hon. Gentleman persists in the denial that such outrages have occurred.”⁵ When Greenwood protested that there was not enough time to answer the question another Nationalist MP from Belfast, Joe Devlin, interjected: “Did you not see it in this morning’s papers? It could have

⁴ Robert Skidelsky: Oswald Mosley (Macmillan Papermac edition, 1981) p 93

⁵ Hansard Fifth Series Vol 133 Col 1326-1327 [October 25, 1920]

been read there.”⁶ After complaining about the difficulty of gathering official information, Greenwood declared that he had “no convincing evidence of the flogging and wounding of several men in the West of Ireland” and concluded: “I believe the world is horrified at the murders of policemen and soldiers in Ireland and I do not believe the world accepts the malignant untruths suggested in the question.”⁷ Devlin then intervened again: “Does the Right Hon. Gentleman assert that the representatives of the *Manchester Guardian*, *The Times* and other English newspapers are enemies of the British Empire?”

Greenwood: I do not say it and I do not assert it.

Mr Devlin: May I ask if the Right Hon. Gentleman is aware that clear, precise and specific charges of this character have been made by these English representatives of the great English journals and they have been published in this country; therefore if he states that all who make these charges are enemies of the British Empire, does he declare that these gentlemen are enemies of the British Empire?

Greenwood: I have answered that.⁸

Throughout the debates on reprisals the press reports are cited by critics of the government as an independent source of information; by relying on what the newspapers are publishing about Ireland these critics are advertising their own lack of partisanship. Joe Devlin – the only MP representing an Irish constituency who regularly spoke in parliament – often presented himself as a neutral, speaking against the powerful state on behalf of those who found themselves caught between the two sides

⁶ Ibid Col 1327

⁷ Ibid Col 1327-1328

⁸ Ibid Col 1328

in the war in Ireland. He accused Greenwood of waging war on innocent men: “You make the lives of non-combatants impossible. It is for these people that I plead and who I am here to defend.”⁹ Devlin argued that having recourse to the reports in the British press further bolstered his claim to impartiality. He countered Greenwood’s dismissal of his statement that the town of Templemore in County Tipperary had been wrecked by pointing out: “Of course, I get my information from English papers. I am not in touch with Sinn Fein.”¹⁰ An argument stressing the independence of the press also underpinned Asquith’s contribution to the debate on November 24th, 1920, to discuss the events of Bloody Sunday, three days earlier. Asquith concentrated on tracing the accumulation of evidence over the previous few months that the activities of the police in Ireland were sanctioned by an unacknowledged reprisals policy. In Asquith’s terms, the detail in the charge sheet against the government was provided by the journalists’ reports on the Black and Tans. He exalted the foreign correspondents who had gone to Ireland – and not only those from Britain – as a source of untainted truth.

We have evidence, not from Sinn Fein sources, or anybody connected with that movement but of a vast body of absolutely independent, impartial [men], representing the great organs of the Press not only of this country but of America, France and other parts of the civilised world...who, without any prepossession or prejudices were sent there (HON MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!)... We have the evidence of these men who have been on the spot, and who are thoroughly qualified by experience, as well as by honesty and judgment, not to distort the facts.¹¹

⁹ Hansard Fifth Series Vol 135 Col 658 [November 24, 1920]

¹⁰ Hansard Fifth Series Vol 134 Col 700 [November 4, 1920]

¹¹ Hansard Fifth Series Vol 135 Col 489 [November 24, 1920]

Similarly, T.P. O'Connor held up the press as the only way of penetrating the deceit of the government: "We have one last refuge against the conspiracy of silence, of evasion with regard to these events in Ireland."¹² He is full of praise for Hugh Martin in particular, describing him as "one of the most admirable and able journalists we have today, and Ireland owes to him, as to many another English journalist and English politician, a debt of gratitude which she can never adequately repay." It was Martin who had exposed the conduct of the British forces in Ireland and the policy of reprisals that Hamar Greenwood and the British government refused to acknowledge.

The Chief Secretary, in that Garden of Eden innocence, in that role of young and maidenly innocence in which he poses...knows nothing about the destruction of creameries. Mr Hugh Martin tells us all about it. He knows nothing about the execution of men by the Black-and-Tans. Mr Hugh Martin tells us all about it. He is one of the men who have held up the liberty of Ireland and the honour of England and of the English Press to which he belongs.¹³

The threats against Martin described in the previous chapter were raised in the Commons by the Liberal MP, Lieutenant Commander J.N. Kenworthy, who asked Hamar Greenwood if he would "give immediate orders that in no circumstances are any journalists in Ireland, British or foreign, to be attacked or punished by the police except under due process of law." Greenwood replied that he had no information about the threat Martin had reported but he promised that the government would "take every step in their [*sic*] power to prevent any attack on any journalist in Ireland" adding that "Ireland is the freest country in the

¹² Hansard Fifth Series Vol 134 Col 687 [November 4, 1920]

¹³ *Ibid* Col 687

world – for journalists.”¹⁴ Later, when pressed by other MPs about Martin’s case, Greenwood expressed surprise that any reporter in Ireland should believe himself to be in danger, noting acerbically that “it is not an unpopular thing in Ireland to pretend to be in danger, and, therefore, become a hero.”¹⁵ Greenwood assured MPs that Martin was secure in Ireland no matter how controversial his reports:

“I can assure Mr Hugh Martin that he can sleep every night in any bed he likes in Ireland. He said mean and inaccurate things of the police, but they will stand guard over him, and they will let him say what he likes about them. He is as safe in Ireland as he would be in Fleet Street, no matter what he says; and Mr Martin or any other pressman will be welcome to Ireland, whatever his own political views on the policy or views of the paper he represents.”¹⁶

What is significant about this passage is how Greenwood tried to undermine Martin’s authority by implicitly denying that anything he had published was a fact. Martin, according to Greenwood, said “mean and inaccurate things” about the police. Thus his writings express *opinions* which do not demand contestation or refutation as facts would; they may be irritating or annoying but the police “will let him say what he likes about them.” Here Greenwood was asserting that the reporting from Ireland – far from being a reflection of reality – was merely a political *argument* advanced by those opposed to the government or by journalists whose work was, of necessity, dictated by the politics of their newspaper. This line of attack was potentially damaging because, at this time, the provision of untainted information and the affirmation of formal independence from political parties was an essential feature of

¹⁴ Hansard Fifth Series Vol 134, Col 359-360 [November 3, 1920]

¹⁵ Hansard Fifth Series Vol 134, Col 719 [November 4, 1920]

¹⁶ *Ibid* Col 720—721

newspapers' claim to legitimacy in the political arena.¹⁷ And indeed, as we have seen, this was the basis for the authority which the government's parliamentary critics attached to the newspaper accounts of reprisals. Greenwood tried to advance his case even further by suggesting that the journalists reporting from Ireland were not just giving vent to anti-government *views* (either their own or those of their proprietors) in place of collecting *facts*: they were also prepared to have their scripts written for them by Sinn Fein.

Greenwood introduced this charge during a debate on a censure motion proposed by the Labour Party in October 1920. He asserted that a minority of British newspapers were prepared to accept the word of the Sinn Fein propagandists who said "everything that can be said, regardless of fact, to besmirch the name of the United Kingdom and of the British Empire and to besmirch the names of loyal servants of the Crown..."¹⁸ Other journalists – presumably more hostile towards the rebels – had had their lives threatened and had been forced to leave Ireland (although when pressed the Chief Secretary couldn't supply the House with their names.)¹⁹ In November Greenwood returned to this theme: "[The Sinn Fein propagandist] has a most elaborate system of dealing with pressmen. He goes so far as actually to prepare what he likes them to say, and hands it out to them."²⁰ This formulation, expressed as if it were a revelation, depends for its impact on the presentation of Sinn Fein's dealing with the press as a departure from

¹⁷ See Jean Chalaby: **The Invention of Journalism** op.cit. p 79 and p 110

¹⁸ **Hansard Fifth Series** Vol 133 Col 935-936 [October 20, 1920]

¹⁹ Ibid. Unlike Hugh Martin these unnamed journalists were apparently not pretending to be heroes.

²⁰ **Hansard Fifth Series** Vol 134, Col 719 [November 4, 1920]

the norm, as if journalists had never been used like this before. In fact it seeks to exploit the post-war disillusion with propaganda on the principle that “those with purposes produce propaganda; those whose only purpose is to reflect reality produce news.”²¹ Later in November, responding to Asquith’s encomium for the correspondents in Ireland, Greenwood combines his charge that they are merely peddling their own opinions with the accusation that the correspondents’ despatches were being elaborated with the help of Sinn Fein. The Chief Secretary directly challenged Asquith’s assertion that the journalists were honest recorders of the facts. He argued that – especially in the case of the Americans – the reporters were the puppets of Sinn Fein. “I do not look [favourably] upon the opinions of certain American correspondents who, enjoying the hospitality of the murder gang itself in Ireland, traversed that country and sent their newspaper matter to America to weaken the Anglo-American friendship that happily exists, and to do their best to condemn the British Empire.”²² Accounts of reprisals in the press had only the appearance of being a narrative of facts according to Greenwood; these despatches were tendentious, often sent from remote areas of Ireland where the veracity of their detail was beyond scrutiny. “It is when you get a murder in the far West of Ireland, from which a correspondent can send the news that suits his paper – [HON. MEMBERS: “No!”] Yes, that is the usual case on which a reprisal charge is founded.”²³

²¹ Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester: “News as Purposive Behaviour: On the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents and Scandals” in American Sociological Review Vol 39 (1970) p 105

²² Hansard Fifth Series Vol 135, Col 497 [November 24, 1920]

²³ Hansard Fifth Series Vol 135, Col 502 [November 24, 1920]

Yet, for all his denunciation of the press Greenwood was never able to act on his criticisms. He could accuse Hugh Martin of being biased and untrustworthy and even of contriving his own notoriety by claiming that his life was endangered. But the Chief Secretary was constrained from barring Martin from visiting Ireland or subjecting him to the same censorship as Irish newspapers. On the contrary, such was the contemporary esteem for publicity among politicians that Greenwood – at the very same time as he denounced reports of reprisals as mere fabrications – had to present himself as a friend of the press. Thus the Chief Secretary protested that “I have myself gone out of my way to provide motor cars and facilities of every kind for the Press of all parts of the world to see Ireland as it is, because I believe...the more publicity Ireland gets from people who visit it, the stronger and more united will be the support, not only of this country but of civilisation, behind the British Government.”²⁴

The disingenuousness of Greenwood’s pleading that the government welcomed honest reporting of events in Ireland was pinpointed by the Tory, Lord Robert Cecil. “In the minds of some Hon. Members”, Cecil declared, “there is no such thing as a reputable newspaper unless it supports the Government.” He noted reports in reputable papers that reprisals had been authorised by Ministers. Despite Greenwood’s fulminations about the coverage from Ireland Cecil observed that there was no sign of any challenge by the government to the facts appearing in the press; instead “speech after speech is delivered by Ministers of the

²⁴ Hansard Fifth Series Vol 134, Col 719 [November 4, 1920]

Crown and there is no denial.”²⁵ Of course Greenwood knew that the Black and Tans were committing reprisals but he could not stop or control the coverage of the war in Ireland by British and international correspondents. He could only try to discredit the reporters, a strategy undermined from the beginning by the simultaneous enthusiasm with which he welcomed publicity and further weakened by the sheer volume of articles describing reprisals. Greenwood’s uncomfortable dilemma was highlighted by a question put by the Labour MP, J.R. Clynes: If the government could prove that the reporters were distorting the facts, he asked, why did it not submit events in Ireland to an impartial inquiry by members of the political establishment?

I marvel at the light-hearted way in which the Chief Secretary reproved the journalists of this and other countries. What purpose can these men have to serve other than that of going to Ireland and reporting the facts that they see? Is there any journalist representing a newspaper on the side of the Government who could materially dispute, or who has attempted to disprove, any of these statements made by representatives of papers which happen to be opposed to the Government? The fact that these crimes have taken place, that civilians have been killed, that property has been destroyed and burned, has attracted to Ireland correspondents from various parts of the world, and, without wishing to do any damage to our reputation or the level of our credit, these men have told the truth.²⁶

The government failed to impugn the integrity of the correspondents or discredit the wielding of their despatches with rhetorical flourish in parliament to condemn its Irish policy. The sheer weight of the press interest in Ireland, not just from Britain but from the rest of the Empire, the United States and Europe, created a stream of bad publicity that none

²⁵ **Hansard Fifth Series** Vol 134, Col 726 [November 4, 1920]

²⁶ *Ibid* Col 517

of Greenwood's evasions and denunciations could counter. In February, 1921, when Captain Anthony Wedgwood Benn moved a motion declaring that the government's Irish policy had failed and "involved the officers and servants of the Crown in a competition in crime with the offenders against the law" he could cite the continuing bad publicity for British conduct just as Asquith had three months previously.²⁷

Wedgwood Benn surmised that American sympathy was beyond retrieval and continued: "In France the newspapers are full of Ireland. I could quote statements of newspapers of very different opinions all condemning the Irish administration. In Italy every paper is full of news from Ireland, with pictures of the happenings there and accounts of the anarchy and disorder."²⁸ The Independent Liberal, J.N. Hogge, noted that the journalists were defining how history would regard the period. "The facts are being recorded under one headline, 'The Irish Revolution'."²⁹

Hamar Greenwood, as the parliamentary defender of the government's Irish policy, could affect a weary insouciance when confronted with the supposed calumnies of the press. But behind the scenes the cabinet was anything but indifferent towards the correspondents' reports. In July 1920 Austen Chamberlain wrote to his sister after a cabinet discussion on Ireland which he found "puzzling and most distressing." Chamberlain worried about the resolve of his colleagues: "A sensational Press upsets their nerves & makes them impatient, first

²⁷ **Hansard Fifth Series** Vol 136 Col 603 [February 21, 1921]

²⁸ Ibid Col 606

²⁹ **Hansard Fifth Series** Vol 134, Col 692

clamorous for stern measures & then screams itself into hysterics when it sees what stern measures mean in practice.”³⁰ There is plenty of evidence in the cabinet minutes of this acute sensitivity to the press coverage of Ireland. On August 13th, 1920, the minutes recorded that “strong measures would be required to put down...the extremists” but worries were expressed that “there might come a point when public opinion would desert the Government.”³¹ Later that month, according to Thomas Jones, the Irish minister, Edward Shortt made a case for releasing the Lord Mayor of Cork Tom McSwiney from Brixton Prison, partly on the grounds that “practically the whole press” supported his release and that this represented public opinion.³²

What is really significant is how what was appearing in the press about Ireland was affecting those pushing for a hard line as much as those seeking a compromise with Sinn Fein. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson – an Irishman and intransigent Unionist – was not someone easily moved to haunting doubt by anti-militarist sentiment. He had little sympathy for civilian scruples, contemptuously referred to politicians as “frocks” and lampooned the premise of the Versailles treaty as “All ‘Peoples’ love each other, therefore have a League of Nations.”³³ But on Ireland throughout 1920 – as the British correspondents served up stories of atrocities and

³⁰ Robert B. Self (ed): The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters: The Correspondence of Sir Austen Chamberlain with his sisters Hilda and Ida 1916—1937 Volume 5, (Cambridge University Press, 1995) p 138—139

³¹ Cabinet minutes for August 13th, 1920, CAB 23/22/116

³² Thomas Jones: Whitehall Diary Volume 1: 1916—1925, (Oxford University Press, 1969) p 36—37

³³ Major-General Sir C.E. Callwell: Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries Vol II (Cassell & Co, London 1927) p 256

outrages committed by the Crown forces – Wilson’s relationship with Lloyd George became increasingly strained because of his opposition to encouraging or at least ignoring unauthorised reprisals. Wilson noted in his diary the Prime Minister’s “amazing theory that someone was murdering two Sinn Feiners to every loyalist the Sinn Feiners murdered...he seemed to be satisfied that a counter-murder association was the best answer to Sinn Fein murders. A crude idea of statesmanship, he will have a rude awakening.”³⁴ On September 29th he wrote:

I had 1½ hours this evening with Lloyd George and Bonar Law. I told them what I thought of reprisals by the ‘Black and Tans’ and how this must lead to chaos and ruin. Lloyd George danced about and was angry but I never budged. I pointed out that these reprisals were carried out without anyone being responsible; men were murdered, houses burnt, villages wrecked...I said that this was due to want of discipline, and this *must* be stopped. It was the business of the government to govern. If these men ought to be murdered, then the Government ought to murder them. Lloyd George danced at this, said no Government could possibly take this responsibility.³⁵

The striking feature of Wilson’s opposition to reprisals is his sense that they were futile because people in Britain were either ignorant of the strategy or opposed to it. In August, Wilson recorded in his diary that he had had a visit from Lord Riddell, the proprietor of the *News of the World*, who asked what message he should give to his three and a half million readers. “I replied ‘Let the Cabinet give up whispering in 10 Downing Street and come into the open. Let them hoist the flag of England and rally England round them. With the English behind us there is nothing we can’t do, and without England there is nothing we

³⁴ Ibid p 251

³⁵ Ibid p 263

can do.”³⁶ A month earlier he had – according to his diary – told a confidant that “if he [Wilson] was in the House of Commons he would march down to Lloyd George and say: ‘You have two courses open to you. One is to clear out of Ireland and the other is to knock Sinn Fein on the head. But before you do this latter you must have England on your side, and therefore you must go stumping the country explaining what Sinn Fein means.’”³⁷

In early 1921 H.A.L. Fisher warned his cabinet colleagues that the longer the war went on “the more certain does it become that great bodies of opinion in this Country will swing over to the Republican side.”³⁸ By May, during a discussion of a possible truce, Churchill – the original champion of the Black and Tans – was advising that it was “of great public importance to get a respite in Ireland” because the news from there was damaging “the interests of this country all over the world; we are getting an odious reputation; poisoning our relations with the United States...”³⁹ Fisher himself now estimated that the war was “degrading to the moral life of the whole country” and even Balfour, arguing against concessions to Sinn Fein, accepted that “naturally we should wish to end this uphill, sordid, unchivalrous, loathsome conflict – we are sick of it.”⁴⁰ Lloyd George agreed that “the country is a little unhappy. That is because nobody is informing the country.”⁴¹ But as we

³⁶ Ibid p 255

³⁷ Ibid p 253—254

³⁸ “The Position in Ireland: Note by the President of the Board of Education”, March 1, 1921, **CAB 24/120/CP 2656**

³⁹ Thomas Jones: **Whitehall Diary Volume 1** op.cit. p 69

⁴⁰ Ibid p 66

⁴¹ Ibid p 68

know the press *was* informing the country, though not in the way Lloyd George would have wished.

The concern for the press – both in parliament and around the cabinet table – was not just a function of Lloyd George’s well attested obsession with publicity. Both contemporary observers and historians since have argued that the First World War, aside from placing a premium on propaganda, allowed the press to become a powerful voice in parliamentary politics because of the wartime truce between the major parties. The press was credited with helping to engineer the downfall of Asquith in 1915 with “editors and leader-writers...unusually well placed not only to catch and reflect, but indeed create, a widespread mood of dissatisfaction with the existing order of things, government above all.”⁴² Some contemporaries argued that it was “government by journalism” with the press becoming “a substitute for parliament.”⁴³ The elaboration of this argument depends on dissecting the intimate relationships between proprietors, editors and politicians in “the concentric circles of political society”⁴⁴ But, as I argued in my introduction, there is a need – especially in the case of the Irish revolution – for shifting the perspective away from the kingmaking manoeuvres of press barons in Westminster and the practice of high politics at Whitehall dinner parties towards the work of journalists on the ground, particularly the special correspondents. It was the reports

⁴² J.M. McEwen: “The Press and the Fall of Asquith” in *The Historical Journal*, Vol 21, No. 4 (1978) p 865

⁴³ George Boyce: “The Fourth Estate: the reappraisal of a concept” in George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate (eds): *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, (Constable, London, 1978) p 27—28

⁴⁴ Stephen Koss: *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press* op.cit. p 712

written by these correspondents – rather than the representations made by proprietors – that unsettled politicians in London.

— It was not just reporting from Ireland that was having an impact on parliament or the cabinet. In her study of how the British government tried to manage the news from India, Chandrika Kaul found that, by the early twentieth century, the press was the primary source of knowledge about the empire for most people in Britain. “The influence of the quality papers on the decision-making elite, as well as the popular press on more general readers, helped to create the climate of opinion within which Parliament and Government functioned.”⁴⁵ Just as Hamar Greenwood felt he must publicly encourage journalists to visit Ireland (even though he despised their critical coverage), the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, identified the provision of facilities to help the press obtain news as one of his departmental priorities. Chandrika Kaul points out that “for Montagu, a Government, even an imperial one, could not govern without explanation and needed to promote its policies through active publicity.”⁴⁶ She characterises parliamentary and press opinion on India as “interdependent,” a diagnosis which could easily describe the relationship outlined earlier between parliament and the press coverage from Ireland.⁴⁷ With party structures weakened during the war⁴⁸ and no strong parliamentary counterweight to Lloyd George’s coalition, it was no surprise that the correspondents in Ireland were

⁴⁵ Chandrika Kaul: **Press and Empire: The London Press, Government News Management and India circa 1900—1922**, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1999) p 92—93

⁴⁶ Ibid p 114

⁴⁷ Ibid p 93

⁴⁸ Bill Schwarz: “Conservatism and ‘caesarism’, 1903—22” in Mary Langan and Bill Schwarz (ed): **Crises in the British State 1880—1930**, (Hutchinson, London, 1985) p 47—48

enlisted by the government's critics. At the time the absence of a major opposition party in the House of Commons was noted by the American political scientist A.B. Lowell; he cited the government's Irish policy as an example of what he called an "atrophied" public opinion: without an alternative governing party to oppose the government "[the] English people were in somewhat the position of a jury without counsel to present the evidence in systematic order and argue their respective sides of the case."⁴⁹ It was the correspondents in Ireland, through their newspapers, who initially stepped into this role.⁵⁰

On the surface British newspaper correspondents made unlikely critics of the government coercion in Ireland. As we have seen already, the reputation of the press was low in 1918 after its willing collaboration with government propaganda during the First World War. H.G. Wells summed up a widespread view when he wrote in 1921 that "there has been a considerable increase of deliberate lying in the British press since 1914, and a marked loss of journalistic self-respect...a considerable proportion of the [news] is rephrased and mutilated to give a misleading impression to the reader."⁵¹ The government had depended on the co-operation during the war. Lloyd George had frankly acknowledged to C.P.Scott that "if people really knew [how horrible it is] the war would be stopped tomorrow. But of course they don't and can't know. The correspondents don't write and the censorship would not pass the

⁴⁹ A.B. Lowell: **Public Opinion in War and Peace**. (Harvard University Press, 1923) p 260—261

⁵⁰ It was later taken up by the Labour Party and the cross-party campaigning group, the Peace with Ireland Council (secretary, Oswald Mosley).

⁵¹ Quoted in Mark Hampton: **Visions of the Press** op.cit. p 147—148

truth.”⁵² This was clearly a case of where the press became, in Philip Elliott’s phrase, the “self-appointed script writer to the national morale.”⁵³ Why was it that the press did not perform similarly in the case of Ireland?

The key difference was that, although there was no large and effective opposition in the House of Commons, the British political elite were deeply split over the future of Ireland; during the four years of the Great War there had been public agreement among the major political parties on the principle of fighting the war. Given the symbiotic relationship between journalism and politics these different circumstances would have a profound effect on the capability of journalists to express dissent. In his study of the American media during the Vietnam war Daniel Hallin found that journalists were sensitive to the state of debate among politicians in Washington. “In situations where political consensus seems to prevail”, Hallin concluded, “journalists tend to act as ‘responsible’ members of the political establishment, upholding the dominant political perspective and passing on more or less at face value the views of the authorities assumed to represent the nation as a whole. In situations of political conflict, they become more detached or adversarial, though they normally will stay well within the bounds of the debate going on within the political ‘establishment’ and will continue to grant a privileged hearing, particularly to senior officials of the executive branch.”⁵⁴

⁵² Quoted in Phillip Knightly: The First Casualty op.cit. p 93

⁵³ Philip Elliott: “All the World’s a Stage” op. cit. p 143

⁵⁴ Daniel C. Hallin: The ‘Uncensored War’: The Media and Vietnam, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1986) p 10

This insight is wholly applicable to British press coverage of the Irish revolution. As we have seen, in parliament and public debate, Lloyd George's Irish policy was assailed by Tory dissenters, the Labour Party and not least Asquith, who, in Peter Clarke's phrase, spoke with "the authority of the premiership."⁵⁵ We have also examined the divisions in the cabinet where some ministers were even arguing that Sinn Fein had the moral support of the Irish people.⁵⁶ The split in the cabinet was also reflected in Dublin Castle. A new group of talented civil servants was sent over from London in 1920 after Sir Warren Fisher had condemned the previous administration in an official report as "almost woodenly stupid and quite devoid of imagination."⁵⁷ The views of the newcomers were "fundamentally in tune with the idea of Irish self-government within the Empire."⁵⁸ The career in Ireland of one of them was later described by a colleague as "a long struggle against militarism."⁵⁹ And echoing the arguments of opponents of coercion inside the cabinet, another of the new Castle administrators confided to his diary that the price paid in dignity for tolerating the methods of the Black and Tans was "grievously heavy."⁶⁰ So not only could correspondents in Dublin set their reports in the context of the views of anti-government politicians in London but they would also be aware of the views of

⁵⁵ Peter Clarke: **Hope and Glory: Britain 1900—1990**, (Allen Lane, London, 1997) p 98—99

⁵⁶ John McColgan: **British Policy and the Irish Administration 1920—22** (Allen & Unwin, London, 1983) p 2

⁵⁷ *Ibid* p 8

⁵⁸ *Ibid* p 14

⁵⁹ G.C. Duggan ("Periscope"): "The Last Days of Dublin Castle" in **Blackwood's Magazine**, August 1922 p 152

⁶⁰ Michael Hopkinson (ed): **The Last Days of Dublin Castle: The Diaries of Mark Sturgis**, (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1999) p 101

officials on the ground who were, to varying degrees, opposed to the policies they were meant to be implementing. Thus the correspondents in Ireland who wrote critically about the military campaign were not intervening from the margins but contributing to a sanctioned national debate which had engaged the most powerful politicians in the land.

They could also draw on a belief firmly established in British liberalism in the nineteenth century which held that states allowing freedom of expression were superior to those who denied it.⁶¹ Indeed, the belief in the innate capacity of the British public sphere to cope with debates which would be dangerous if allowed to flourish amongst lesser peoples was attested during the great Irish famine when “Irish journalists were censored, prosecuted and transported for what they wrote” while British journalists “probed and commented on issues that had been agonized over for generations, alternately sympathetic and irate as circumstances altered.”⁶² During the Crimean War it was *The Times* which aggressively advanced the argument that the mark of the “self-respecting races” was a free press: “There is only one rule for improvement and success, whether in peace or in war, and that is to be found in publicity and discussion.”⁶³ The post-war critique of the press alluded to earlier sprang from this tradition of legitimate dissent. The war in Ireland was one case where it was difficult to trump this argument by appeals to the greater good of national unity, especially as the establishment of mass

⁶¹ Olive Anderson: **A Liberal State at War: English Politics and Economics During the Crimean War** (Macmillan, London, 1967) p 70

⁶² Melissa Fegan: **Literature and the Irish Famine: 1845—1919** (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2002) p 35

⁶³ **The Times**, June 10, 1854, Ibid

democracy in 1918 had introduced “a new imperative” to seek consensus on government policies.⁶⁴ Nearly seventy years after forging its myth of fearless rectitude in defence of free speech and full disclosure during the Crimean war, *The Times* was able to mount the pulpit again to denounce Sir Hamar Greenwood’s lies and prevarications about the conduct of the Black and Tans in Ireland: “The country does indeed desire to know the truth in far larger measure than it has yet heard it; but it will strongly resent the idea that it is being told only what the Irish Government may consider good for it. It wants the facts, all the facts, clearly stated...It is...the unwelcome duty of the Press to record as best it can a situation of every-increasing gravity.”⁶⁵

This kind of editorial and its reporting from Ireland provoked a strong reaction to a paper still “regarded by the governing classes as a sort of oracle.”⁶⁶ Readers wrote in to say they were transferring to the *Morning Post* and circulation fell; the editor, Henry Wickham Steed, was sent threatening letters and received an offer of police protection (which he declined).⁶⁷ Lord Northcliffe did agree to an armed escort after a photograph of him with a bullet hole through the forehead was delivered to Printing House Square.⁶⁸ In May 1920 Northcliffe was passed a letter by his fellow proprietor, John Walter, which he had received from a friend who had just returned from India. “I believe your family

⁶⁴ Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff: **A Social History of British Broadcasting Volume 1, 1922—1939: Serving the Nation**, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991) p 11

⁶⁵ **The Times**, March 21, 1921

⁶⁶ F.W. Hirst: **The Six Panics and Other Essays** (Methuen & Co., London, 1913) p 156

⁶⁷ Henry Wickham Steed: **Through Thirty Years 1892-1922: A Personal Narrative**, (William Heinemann Ltd, London 1924) p 351—352

⁶⁸ J Lee Thompson: **Northcliffe: Press Baron in Politics, 1865—1922**, (John Murray, London, 2000) p 341

founded *The Times*”, the letter began. “All honour to them. They did much to build up our great Empire by their *Patriotism*. And *The Times* today is trying to destroy that Empire by its want of Patriotism.” It was soon clear that the coverage of Ireland had played its part in the collapse of confidence in the circles in which Walter’s correspondent moved. “Much Indian unrest, Egyptian unrest and Irish unrest, to say nothing of American self-satisfaction is due to the want of patriotism of your paper... Set Patriotism ever before you Sir, and return to Empire building, not petty squabbling and fault-finding.”⁶⁹

By December 1920 Walter ceased to make his points indirectly. He wrote to Northcliffe: “Is not the present a favourable opportunity for the paper to reconsider its attitude towards Ireland? I allude not so much to its policy as to its tone, which has been creating an impression for some time past that we are more anxious to damage Lloyd George than to achieve a settlement with the Irish. I believe that this attitude is losing the paper its authority as well as its readers.”⁷⁰ Northcliffe lent his support to Steed, though, as *The Times* official historians put it, “without conviction.”⁷¹ In mid-December *The Times* correspondents immediately described the burning of the centre of Cork city as a reprisal: “Lorries drove rapidly around the principal streets, and their occupants discharged their rifles at short intervals. There was a scene of panic and people fled in all directions... Before the curfew hour of 10 o’ clock the city was deserted by the ordinary public and incendiaries were going

⁶⁹ Letter from John Walter to Lord Northcliffe enclosing “letter from a friend”, May 19, 1920; Northcliffe Papers, British Library, Add. 62239/ ff 51-54

⁷⁰ Walter to Northcliffe, December 1, 1920; Northcliffe Papers Add. 62239/ ff 78-79

⁷¹ The History of The Times Vol IV, Part 2 (The Times, London, 1952) p 523

about burning and looting, removing valuables in portmanteaux.”⁷² The lack of hesitation in publishing such a damning report drew the condemnation of the *Morning Post* which charged that *The Times* “used at least to wait for evidence when something injurious to a British cause was alleged.” In March 1921, Steed had to fend off the commander of the British forces in Ireland, Nevil Macready, who wrote complaining about the “unreliability” of *The Times* correspondents in Ireland. Steed replied with a revealing explanation of the correspondents’ attitudes: “I have sent from time to time to Ireland men who constantly risked their lives during the war as accredited correspondents in recording the deeds of the British and Allied forces in France and in other theatres of war. But though they naturally went with feelings of loyalty and admiration for the Forces of the Crown, they returned filled with loathing at the manner in which operations in Ireland are conducted on both sides.”⁷³

Significantly, *The Times* and the other British newspapers were able to withstand criticism of their adversarial reporting from Ireland because the intense debate at the heart of the British government meant that it was difficult to impugn the patriotism of the correspondents; as we saw in the last chapter, C.P. Scott even defined criticism itself as a patriotic act. The campaign in Ireland was a limited war in which, as with the early days of American war in Vietnam, there was “a high premium on appearances.”⁷⁴ Reprisal was never admitted publicly as a policy or a

⁷² **The Times**, December 13, 1920 p 12

⁷³ Ibid p 573

⁷⁴ Philip Geyelin: “Vietnam and the Press: Limited War and an Open Society” in Anthony Lake (ed): **The Vietnam Legacy: The War, American Society and the Future of American Foreign Policy**, (New York University Press, 1976) p 169

tactic. The authority of the correspondents for filing despatches highlighting the brutality and ill discipline of a militarised police force fighting a covert war was underpinned by opposition to this counter-guerrilla strategy at the highest levels of the British political system. The special correspondents were able to use their status to directly challenge the government in the knowledge that, when attacked by the government's official spokesmen, they would be supported by influential public figures and further protected by the private views of senior politicians and civil servants.

Even though the influence of the reports from Ireland on political opinion in London appeared to resonate with a similar burgeoning sensitivity to the news from India, nevertheless the war in Ireland attracted far more notice than other imperial adventures. Small colonial wars may not have been as obscure to metropolitan publics as they were in the nineteenth century but they still merited little attention at this time, whichever empire was fighting them. Max Boot has written how in the United States – where the idea of empire still possessed novelty value – “few Americans paid attention to what their troops were doing on the periphery of empire.”⁷⁵ When news did reach the metropolis it was hardly timely. In the first seven months of 1920 when accounts of reprisals in Ireland were prominent in the pages of the London dailies, the RAF bombed villages in Iraq twenty-five times to punish tribes resisting the imposition of taxes. A revolt against British rule spread across the whole country in June and two divisions of British and Indian

⁷⁵ Max Boot: **The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power**, (Basic Books, New York, 2002) p 340

troops were deployed to suppress it. But the English public had little idea of operations in Iraq until mid-July when questions were asked in parliament.⁷⁶ And in the case of one of the most notorious episodes of British rule in India, the Amritsar massacre in April 1919, a combination of distance and censorship meant it took eight months before anything more scandalous than the official telegrams appeared in the London press, when the findings of the Hunter Committee hearings were first published by the *Express*.⁷⁷ In general, as one study of British counterinsurgency concluded, up until the early twentieth century “[even] when colonials were subjected to excessive force, Victorian racial attitudes ensured that there was likely to be little outcry over the brutalization of non-Europeans” so that scorched-earth campaigns were regularly undertaken without debate or censure. Crucially “[the] absence of intense media coverage removed yet another inducement to moderation.”⁷⁸ Despite the carnage in Europe, the peace-loving Victorian liberal caricatured by George Dangerfield – “he liked his wars to be fought at a distance and, if possible, in the name of God” – could still remain untroubled in 1920, at least in relation to colonial policing.⁷⁹

The Irish revolution was about to intrude itself on this state of wilful ignorance. Bill Schwarz has argued that “Ireland condensed the

⁷⁶ Mark Jacobsen: “‘Only by the Sword’: British Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 1920” in ***Small Wars and Insurgencies*** Vol 2, No. 2 (August 1991) p 323, 335 and 338

⁷⁷ Chandrika Kaul: ***Press and Empire*** op. cit. p 175. On April 19th, six days after the massacre, *The Times* reported that: ‘Troops came into collision with the mob, and there were 200 casualties among the rioters.’ Ibid p 165

⁷⁸ Thomas R. Mockaitis: ***British Counterinsurgency, 1919—1960*** (Macmillan, London, 1990) p 17

⁷⁹ George Dangerfield: ***The Strange Death of Liberal England***, (Paladin edition, London, 1970) p 21

anxieties about Britain's imperial position as no other could..."⁸⁰ And in the sense of holding the line against insurgencies and emerging nationalist movements this is true: in an effort to demonstrate how ludicrous was Lord Milner's recommendation in 1920 that Egypt be granted independence, Churchill suggested leaving out the word "Egypt" and substituting the word "Ireland", a small change that would "make perfectly good sense and would constitute a complete acceptance of Mr de Valera's demands."⁸¹ But I want to argue here that Ireland provoked anxieties beyond the obvious concerns of imperial defence. The intense press coverage of the Black and Tan campaign in Ireland exposed to public view tactics of colonial repression that normally lay concealed. And this at a time when someone like Edwin Montagu – who prided himself on his public relations skills – was trying to re-package the empire as an association dependent on good will rather than coercion.⁸² Derek Sayer has argued that the controversy over General Dyer's conduct at Amritsar was "a thinly coded discussion of Ireland." But I would argue that, equally, the assiduous coverage of the war by the foreign correspondents visiting Ireland made such an impact in British politics because the controversy it provoked represented a thinly disguised discussion of the normal but usually unseen methods of colonial warfare.⁸³

⁸⁰ Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz: "State and Society, 1880—1930" in Langan and Schwarz (eds): **Crises in the British State 1880—1930**, op. cit. p 13

⁸¹ Quoted in John Gallagher: "Nationalisms and the Crisis of Empire, 1919—1922" in **Modern Asian Studies**, Vol 15, No. 2 (1981) p 362

⁸² Addressing the House of Commons on the Amritsar scandal, Montagu asked the members: 'Are you going to keep your hold upon India by terrorism, racial humiliation and subordination, and frightfulness, or are you going to rest it upon the goodwill, the growing goodwill, of the people of your Indian Empire?' Quoted in Chandrika Kaul: **Press and Empire** op. cit. p 153

⁸³ Derek Sayer: "British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre 1919—1920" in **Past and Present**, Vol. 131 (May 1991) p 153

A common reaction to the Amritsar massacre among politicians once it became a matter of public controversy was that it was a grotesque aberration. Churchill told parliament it was “an episode...without precedent or parallel in the modern history of the British Empire...an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation.”⁸⁴ It was certainly not the British way of doing things. “Frightfulness is not a remedy known to the British pharmacopoeia” he concluded.⁸⁵ Such rhetoric was appropriate because at this time the common belief was that British military missions in foreign lands were conducted to the highest standards and for the best motives. By 1914, Glen Wilkinson has written, the British soldier was seen at home as “disciplined, regulated and orderly” and “had come to be equated with ideals of advancement and to be perceived as a harbinger of civilization. British troops took law and order with them to the far reaches of the Empire...”⁸⁶

The brand of law and order brought by British ex-servicemen to Ireland jarred massively with this myth. Oswald Mosley, who left the Coalition benches and joined the opposition when his speeches against reprisals were jeered, wrote that “every rule of good soldierly conduct” was being disregarded in Ireland.⁸⁷ Another Conservative, Lord Robert Cecil – Mosley’s mentor – repeatedly warned that the universal validity of

⁸⁴ Ibid p 154

⁸⁵ Ibid p 159

⁸⁶ Glenn R. Wilkinson: Depictions and Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers, 1899—1914, (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003) p 39

⁸⁷ Quoted in Jan Dalley: Diana Mosley, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2000) p 105

British notions of justice was being undermined by the government's policy in Ireland.⁸⁸ Reprisals, Cecil argued, subverted a basic principle of British law: "The experience of the world shows it is vital not only for conscience but for mere prudence to take care you only punish the guilty, and our law, the greatest system of law and order in the world, has shown no characteristic greater than the enormous precaution it erects around the innocent man to prevent him being brought into peril. This is lawlessness; reprisals are the very negation of law."⁸⁹ For Cecil, Britain's worldwide prestige was being ruined by the news of atrocities spreading around the globe from Ireland: a scandalous departure from its own legal norms exposed the empire as predatory, vindictive and unheroic.

I am confident that the British Empire stands only on the basis of justice and equity and freedom. Anything that attacks justice, equity and freedom attacks the whole basis on which the British Empire stands. That is really the issue in this matter, for it is the supremacy of the law that is the guarantee of freedom...There is nothing more valuable than the supremacy of the law, which, as this country has taught the world, is the great secret of freedom.⁹⁰

Just as with Churchill's denunciation of the Amritsar massacre, the behaviour of the Black and Tans in Ireland is set against an otherwise irreproachable imperial record in which coercion never featured. In this view, Ireland had been turned into a sinful corner of the Garden of Eden by a malevolent but inexplicably capricious display of official cruelty. The connection was never made between collective punishments

⁸⁸ Joseph Devlin noted that "one of the curious paradoxes of modern British life that the highest moral note has been sounded for freedom by Tories." Hansard Fifth Series Vol 138 Col 664 [February 21 1921]

⁸⁹ Ibid Col 675

⁹⁰ Ibid Col 679

dispensed in India – a wedding party flogged because it was judged to be an illegal gathering, men whipped in front of prostitutes for visiting a brothel during curfew – and similar medicine being dispensed in Ireland, such as the public floggings witnessed by Hugh Martin.⁹¹ Perhaps such a connection was deliberately or, at least, subliminally avoided. No doubt the revulsion against the methods of the Black and Tans voiced by many people was genuine, but the terms in which denunciations were formulated presented these tactics as an extraordinary departure from cherished national ideals. Sometimes this idea was pressed to excess. Philip Gibbs – who, as we saw earlier, resigned from the *Daily Chronicle* because of Lloyd George’s Irish policy – regarded the campaign in Ireland as terrorism. He believed Britain’s global supremacy depended on its reputation for fair dealing rather than the power of its guns:

Not deliberately, or without an immense amount of argument in self-justification, can we, as a people, accept a policy of brutality or tyranny. There is an inexhaustible store of generous feeling among English folk, amounting almost to weakness, in regard to smaller people than themselves, to all helpless and little things and to all under-dogs. That generosity can only be overwhelmed by a wave of passion, or blinded by ignorance that tyranny is at work or injustice established.⁹²

Gibbs did not come up with any examples of the display of British ‘weakness’ towards peoples smaller than themselves, but he did attempt an intriguing explanation as to how the reprisals policy was allowed to take shape in the first place. English newspapers, he alleged, were forced into a conspiracy of silence. Until a year after the war in Ireland ended, “[only] by rumours, by tales told privately, in whispers, by seeing

⁹¹ For India see Derek Sayer: “British Reaction to Amritsar” op. cit. p 141

⁹² Philip Gibbs: ***The Hope of Europe*** op.cit. p 71

smoke and suspecting fire, was the average Englishman aware of any dirty work which might besmirch our honour in the world.”⁹³ Later in the same memoir he acknowledges the work of Hugh Martin and others in thrusting “ugly facts...through the screen of silence.”⁹⁴ But the contradiction is instructive: the average Englishman could only countenance repressive colonial policing in circumstances where he was unaware of it.

For politicians the most discomforting feature of events in Ireland was that tactics of imperial repression usually concealed were now being documented and described in the daily press. Explaining the scale of denunciation to which Lloyd George was subjected, Garry Peatling has written that “British critics of government policy in Ireland were moved to a hysterical pitch of indignation because they could not reconcile visible policies of coercion in nationalist Ireland – in spite of their moderation compared to policies elsewhere in the British Empire – with their patriotic faith in Britain’s uniqueness.”⁹⁵ It was the press reporting from Ireland which made these policies visible. Some clear-sighted commentators did not need recourse to the language of exceptionalism to recognise what they were seeing. In a letter to Lady Gregory in November 1920 George Bernard Shaw questioned the need for further corroboration of the stories of atrocities appearing in the press. “What need have we of witnesses?”, Shaw wrote. “*The Daily News, The Manchester Guardian, The Times, and all the anti-Coalition papers are*

⁹³ Ibid p 73—74

⁹⁴ Ibid p 124—125

⁹⁵ G.K. Peatling: **British Opinion and Irish Self-Government 1865—1925: From Unionism to Liberal Commonwealth** (Irish Academic Press, Dublin 2001) p 180

publishing enough news of burnings and slaughterings to make Timour the Tarter turn in his grave...” But even on the anti-government side, Shaw jeered, “everybody prefers to go on screaming and clamouring for more telescopes to enable the English... to see the sun at noon.”⁹⁶

There are some obvious reasons why a war in Ireland would receive more extensive coverage in the British press than operations in Iraq – geographical proximity being one. In the next chapter we will examine why the Irish rebel cause acquired such legitimacy among the correspondents sent to Dublin. What the war highlighted was that – however hard the government might try to co-opt the press – in certain circumstances, where dissenting voices were compelling, the press could not be relied upon to reflect the official line. Chandrika Kaul has pointed out how the coalition ministers felt it increasingly necessary to include editors and journalists in the formulation of policy for India even though this desire was overshadowed by the ambivalence that “the London press was a free press at the heart of an imperial system of coercion.”⁹⁷ Ireland was a warning of what could go wrong from the official point of view.

We have seen in this chapter that the newspaper reporting from Ireland was the fabric from which the government’s critics wove their condemnation of Irish policy in the House of Commons. Detailed

⁹⁶ Dan H. Laurence (ed): **Bernard Shaw Collected Letters, Volume 3: 1911—1925**, (Max Reinhardt, London, 1985) p 697

⁹⁷ Chandrika Kaul: **Press and Empire** op. cit. p 111

quotation from the correspondents' despatches built a powerful mosaic of indiscipline and brutality by the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries which the government's main spokesman – the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Hamar Greenwood – was rarely able to rebut. Mostly he took refuge in evasion and prevarication. When this failed he attacked the credibility of the journalism from Ireland. Out of public view ministers were highly sensitive to the press coverage, as the cabinet minutes later revealed. In the absence of a powerful parliamentary opposition, the correspondents' despatches from Ireland acquired special authority for politicians. Partly this was because the publicity was now deemed essential for the successful running of the empire. Managing the press was a particular concern in India policy. Nevertheless, Ireland commanded more attention than other small wars in the empire. News of atrocities in Ireland arrived in London with far greater regularity than descriptions of repression in Iraq or India. Thus, as a result of the work of foreign correspondents, the activities of the Black and Tans gave the British public and people in the rest of world a glimpse of how the more remote corners of empire were subdued. This led politicians to denounce reprisals by the security forces in Ireland but excuse them as aberrant. It was the work of the foreign correspondents which created a debate about the normal standards of British colonial rule.

CHAPTER 4

The Propaganda War

In August 1921 a correspondent for *The Times*, Maxwell H.H. MacCartney, recently returned to London from a reporting trip in Ireland, wrote a chatty letter to Sinn Fein's Director of Publicity, Desmond FitzGerald, "I was quite the blue-eyed boy when I got back to the office" MacCartney gloated, "and must take this opportunity of thanking you and your office for much of such success as I have apparently managed to score in the eyes of *The Times*."¹ MacCartney was only one among many journalists whose reporting from Ireland was aided by Sinn Fein's publicity department. Many of them followed his example in finding the rebels' propaganda operation more alert, more persuasive and more attuned to their needs than the efforts of the government's spokesmen in Dublin Castle. Over time, the propaganda successes of the revolutionaries multiplied in inverse proportion to the impact of the government's attempt to define the crisis. As Sinn Fein's public relations campaign blossomed in scale and sophistication the officials in the Castle appeared more uncertain and increasingly overawed by the pace of events. In this chapter I will try to explain why, in the competition to win over the correspondents, Sinn Fein won and Dublin Castle lost.

¹ Letter from Maxwell H.H. MacCartney to Desmond FitzGerald, August 19, 1921 in Desmond FitzGerald Papers, Archives Department, University College Dublin, P80/43

The first point to bear in mind is that for the Sinn Fein leaders the presentation of their case for nationhood to the rest of the world was not a sideshow or a distraction but a central part of their strategy to force the British government to grant Irish independence. Their efforts were focussed initially on the Paris Peace Conference where national self-determination, thanks to President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points", was exalted as a panacea to protect the world from a repeat of the carnage seen on the Western Front. The Sinn Fein leader Arthur Griffith – one of those MPs absent from the Mansion House because he had been arrested – wrote to his followers from Gloucester Prison the day after the inaugural meeting of the Dail urging them to "above all concentrate on the Peace Conference..." Griffith warned them not to dismiss Wilson: "It is a mistake in tactics to suggest that Wilson is not sincere. If he is not the suggestion will not help Ireland, and if he be it will dishearten him. Our attitude should be that Wilson is a sincere man striving to give effect to his programme of freedom for all nations and struggling against all the forces of tyranny, imperialism and lusty world power which are seeking to dominate the Peace Conference."² A Sinn Fein delegation was sent to Paris to try to get Ireland's case onto the main agenda. They tried to get themselves taken seriously by the major players who were drawing up the map of a new world order. In this post-war context "global recognition of Irish sovereignty remained the goal by which true independence would be measured."³ But securing the sympathy of the delegates in Paris was only one objective of the Sinn Fein emissaries sent to the Peace Conference. At least as much

² Ronan Fanning, Michael Kennedy, Dermot Keogh and Eunan O' Halpin (eds): Documents on Irish Foreign Policy op.cit. p 3—4 Faith in Wilson turned out to be misplaced (see Chapter 7).

³ Donal Lowry: "New Ireland, Old Empire and the Outside World" op. cit. p 166

effort was directed into cultivating newspaper correspondents. When the attempts to win official recognition floundered, persuading the press to take an interest in Ireland became all the more important, as we shall see later.

Hundreds of journalists came to Paris for the conference and the French government established an extravagant press club in a house owned by a millionaire.⁴ In March 1919 one of the Irish delegates wrote back to Dublin from Paris reporting a significant response to the circulation of a document setting out the Irish case: “Practically every journalist who called on me during the ensuing week had the same story for me – about the excitement in diplomatic quarters... For a week or ten days after I had no time for any work outside press work. I was receiving journalists and visitors of all sorts and conditions from early morning till late at night – not leaving my room except for meals.”⁵ This encouraging progress report (which subtly hinted at self-sacrifice for the cause) was accompanied by a plea for more money. “What I want is a few thousand pounds – don’t be too greatly shocked by the light way I speak of it – for the purpose of smoothing a passage to the presence of the great men ...and of securing the ear of the press. *You can get nothing whatsoever done otherwise.* They all expect it...and whether they are politicians or journalists or even statesmen...I must say they are very frank in letting you know their point of view in the matter.”⁶

⁴ Margaret MacMillan: **Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War** (John Murray, London, pbck edition 2002) p 65

⁵ Ronan Fanning, Michael Kennedy, Dermot Keogh, Eunan O’ Halpin (eds): **Documents on Irish Foreign Policy** op.cit. p 8

⁶ Ibid p 10

Further evidence that the press came to be seen by Sinn Fein as its main hope of a breakthrough came in May when Eamon De Valera – the President of the self-declared Republic – wrote to the delegation in Paris telling them that copies of all documents handed to delegates at the Peace Conference should also be distributed to the press. De Valera expressed himself in the language of an eager public relations agent: “We must keep the Irish Question *continually hot* now before the public. This is the time for beginning our ‘big push’ *everywhere*.”⁷

The reality was that the Irish delegation was finding the French press unsympathetic, inclined, in their estimation, to be frightened of offending the British by writing about Irish separatism. But the mere experience of trying to cajole and persuade the correspondents to pay attention to Ireland was an education in journalistic practice. An Irish delegate wrote from Paris on June 22nd: “The only way to do effective propaganda is to get personal introductions to well-known and influential people and to get French writers interested in this way, for a paper will publish from a recognised correspondent a great deal that we would never get in otherwise...the only publicity you can count on here is what you can get through personally friendly writers and journalists...”⁸ This lesson was well learned: cultivating personal relationships with journalists and writers who came to Ireland was crucial to sympathetic coverage of the national struggle. This form of ingratiation was not limited to merely political argument. When the delegation in Paris informed Dublin that an eminent French

⁷ Ibid p 14

⁸ Ibid p 32

correspondent showed an interest in writing a series of articles about the Irish question, it was arranged that a copy of Yeats' poems be sent out to Paris for him.⁹

As hopes that the Irish delegation could get themselves an audience at the full conference began to fade, the attention of the Sinn Fein diplomats turned to making use of the contacts made in Paris to keep Ireland in the public eye. With money available from supporters in the United States it was suggested from Dublin "that a small number of select American Journalists together with representatives of the French and Italian Press should be invited to visit Ireland and see for themselves the conditions obtaining here." The headquarters staff insisted that they be carefully vetted: "You will realise the desirability of selecting these gentlemen carefully as it would not do to invite gentlemen here at our expense who could be got at by our friend the enemy."¹⁰ The work of the Irish delegation at the Paris Peace Conference was the embryo of an international publicity campaign that would flourish as the war developed. By the time of the truce in 1921 official Irish press bureaus had been established in Berlin, Rome, Madrid, Geneva and the United States.¹¹

The fact that a small independence movement was able to achieve such wide reach was largely due to the leadership of two English-born men, both connected to a wider network than other Irish revolutionaries, who

⁹ Ibid p 18 & 34

¹⁰ Ibid p 38

¹¹ Keiko Inoue: "Propaganda II: Propaganda of Dail Eireann, 1919-21" in Joost Augusteijn (ed): **The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923** (Palgrave, London, 2002) p 88

shaped Sinn Fein's publicity strategy throughout this period. The first head of the Propaganda Department of Dail Eireann was Desmond FitzGerald, an Imagist poet, born in London in 1888 and brought up there.¹² Until adulthood he only visited Ireland twice, once as a child and then when he was 21. In 1911 he married Mabel McConnell, the daughter of a prominent Belfast protestant businessman who had become an Irish nationalist. She had worked as a secretary for George Bernard Shaw and was friendly with Robert Lynd, the Belfast journalist who wrote regularly for the London press about Ireland. The couple came to live in Ireland in 1913 and it was then that FitzGerald began to work for the separatist movement in earnest. His son Garret FitzGerald (the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1973 to 1977 and Taoiseach between 1982 and 1987) suggests that his father's attraction to Ireland can be attributed at least in part to his admiration for Yeats.¹³ But it soon became clear after Desmond FitzGerald's arrival in Ireland that he had not come from London in search of poetry. At the end of 1914 he was expelled from Kerry by the police because of his activities in organising the Irish Volunteers; in 1915 he was sentenced to six months imprisonment for seditious speech. He was in the General Post Office in Dublin throughout the Easter Rising in 1916. After being arrested after the failed rebellion he spent a year in prison in England.¹⁴

¹² Lawrence Ginnell was in the post for a few months when he was arrested in May, 1919

¹³ Interview with **Garret FitzGerald**, Dublin, January 20, 2003. He recalled that when he was in the European movement, agitating for Irish membership of the EEC in the early 1960s he would brief foreign journalists and take them to meet the Irish prime minister, Sean Lemass. Some of the older journalists told him they had been briefed by his father in the Shelbourne Hotel. They said the waiters would always warn if the Black and Tans were coming.

¹⁴ "Notes on Desmond FitzGerald", **Desmond FitzGerald Papers**, Archives Department, University College Dublin P80/1453(1)

When Desmond FitzGerald took over the Propaganda Department in May 1919 he worked from No. 6 Harcourt Street in central Dublin, an address that was to become familiar to foreign correspondents covering Ireland. He retained the air of an upper-class bohemian. A colleague described him entering the office in a grey lounge suit, dust-coat open “with mincing step and supercilious air...a cigarette going and a magnificent pearl grey velours trilby...set a jaunty angle on his crispy light-brown hair.” But she concluded that “these affectations, however, masked an exceptionally brave character.”¹⁵ FitzGerald’s demeanour attracted other disapproving comments from his fellow (Irish) revolutionaries: one young activist recounted many years later coming across FitzGerald when they were both interned in the Curragh camp and being surprised by his “drawling English accent” as he discussed French literature with a professor. “I never dared to speak to FitzGerald as I quickly gathered that he was in the category of people satirised by the epigram: ‘My name is George Nathaniel Curzon/I am a most superior person.’”¹⁶ However, a personality so off-putting to a rank and file volunteer from Dublin could win the admiration of foreign journalists and writers. After FitzGerald’s death in 1947 a columnist in *The Irish Times* recalled seeing him walking into the Shelbourne Hotel to meet journalists with a yellow-backed French novel sticking out of his pocket. “Desmond FitzGerald was an intellectual revolutionary. He always had the greatest contempt for the *sans culottes*, and, in some respects, almost might be described as a reactionary... [But] he made quite a success of his job and his easy manner helped to convince

¹⁵ Kathleen Napoli McKenna: “Wielding Words and Other Weapons for the Cause” in ***The Irish Times***, Monday, December 24, 1979, p 10

¹⁶ Todd Andrews: ***Dublin Made Me: An Autobiography*** (The Mercier Press, Cork, 1979) p 177

foreigners that the *Sinn Fein* movement was something more than a mere upsurge of the Irish proletariat.”¹⁷ An obituarist in the *Manchester Guardian* pinpointed his success as a propagandist: “He had an admirable skill in directing [journalists’] movements by suggesting in such a way as to ensure without their knowing it that they would hear and see what he thought desirable and nothing else.”¹⁸

FitzGerald recruited another Englishman with a drawling accent to the Publicity Department. Erskine Childers, the author of a recently published and acclaimed spy novel, *The Riddle of the Sands*, had already acquired a flamboyant reputation among Irish nationalists. In a famous incident before the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, he had sailed to Germany on his yacht, the *Asgard*, and returned to Ireland with a consignment of arms and ammunition. The rifles were unloaded at Howth Harbour on the north side of Dublin and the Irish Volunteers marched away with them in an open act of defiance of the authorities. At first glance Childers had an unlikely CV for an Irish nationalist: born in London and educated at Haileybury school; a law graduate of Cambridge; British army officer in the Boer War; clerk in the House of Commons. His father was Professor of Oriental Studies at London University and a cousin of his father had been Chancellor in Gladstone’s government. Childers’ Irish connection came from his mother’s side of his family. She came from a prominent Anglo-Irish family who owned land in Co. Wicklow since before Cromwell came to Ireland in the

¹⁷ An Irishman’s Diary by “Nichevo”, *The Irish Times*, April 12, 1947; *Desmond FitzGerald Papers* P80/ 1452 (4)

¹⁸ Unsigned obituary, *The Manchester Guardian*, April 10, 1947; *FitzGerald Papers* P80/ 1452/ (2)

seventeenth century.¹⁹ Childers appears to have become convinced of the justice of Home Rule for Ireland around the time when he resigned from his job in the House of Commons in 1910 to attempt to become a Liberal candidate for parliament. In a lecture in London in 1912, later published as a pamphlet, Childers set out his strategy for winning Home Rule for Ireland in a way that could stand as a prescription for his later work with journalists: “England cannot be forced to accept the Irish ideal which I have ventured to place before you to-night. But she can be made to understand it, and I believe that if she understood it she would sanction it.”²⁰

By 1919 Childers was offended by how the Irish nationalist cause was being represented in the international press. Ireland, he wrote, was portrayed unfairly “as a stab-in-the-back rebellious province which didn’t help in the war.”²¹ When he was first brought by FitzGerald to the Propaganda Department at No. 6 Harcourt Street, Childers made an impression with the range of his contacts in London. One of FitzGerald’s acolytes showed Childers an article from the *Daily Mail* as an example of the kind of journalism Sinn Fein was trying to counter. Childers told him he had just spoken to the editor of the *Daily News* before setting out from London and he was confident that he could get some articles favourable to Sinn Fein printed in that paper.²² Later, the Sinn Fein leader Arthur Griffith told Brennan that Childers was a good

¹⁹ Michael McInerney: *The Riddle of Erskine Childers* (E & T O’ Brien, Dublin, 1971) p 18-25

²⁰ Erskine Childers: *The Form and Purpose of Home Rule* (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., London, 1912) p 32—33

²¹ Quoted in Jim Ring: *Erskine Childers* (John Murray, London, 1996) p 208

²² Robert Brennan: *Allegiance* (Browne and Nolan, Dublin, 1950) p 244

man to have: “He has the ear of a big section of the English people.”²³

It was clear that Sinn Fein leaders realised early on that Childers’ contacts in London “assured him access to necessary white space.”²⁴

But as with FitzGerald’s intellectualism, Childers’ ascendancy background, his British army career and his air of superiority also provoked resentment. There was a lingering suspicion of him. One pro-nationalist journalist remembered the gossip that dogged Childers:

“[He] had fought for the British and written *The Riddle of the Sands* to save the British Fleet from the Germans...he was a Major and a D.S.O. And Dublin laughed at his indignant letter to the Press after a military raid on his house, and some young pup in a second lieutenant’s uniform had dropped a cigarette on his best carpet. Jamey, was that all he had to vex him?”²⁵

In May 1919 Childers was sent to work with the delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. Like his colleagues who were already there he found it difficult to persuade journalists to write about Ireland; they were, he remarked, “nervous as old women about offending England.”²⁶ He was particularly scathing about the British delegation, people of his own class, graduates – like him – of public school and Oxbridge: he complained that they “paid court to him socially, and then poured ice-

²³ Ibid p 244

²⁴ Tom Cox: **Damned Englishman: A Study of Erskine Childers, 1870-1922** (Exposition Press, New York, 1975) p 108

²⁵ Desmond Ryan: **Remembering Sion: A Chronicle of Storm and Quiet** (Arthur Barker, London, 1934) p 283—284

²⁶ Jim Ring: **Erskine Childers** op. cit. p 211

cold water on his burning ideals.”²⁷ The resentment he felt crystallised a self-conscious rejection of his origins and what he might have been in favour of the risky adventure of Irish nationalism: “Pressed, they care nothing about anyone’s freedom in Europe and regard the whole thing as a means of curbing Germany. I have a kind of blind fury sometimes at seeing these cultured, cold-blooded, self-satisfied people making careers out of the exploitation of humanity and crucifying the Christs with a *bon mot* or a shrug.”²⁸ During his few months in Paris Childers judged that he made little headway in persuading the delegates to take the Irish cause seriously. But he was eventually persuasive in his dealings with the recalcitrant French journalists. In August 1919 *Le Temps* advocated a British withdrawal from Ireland and Childers was credited with this publicity coup.²⁹ He returned to London in August but by September he had moved his family to Dublin to begin work in the Propaganda Department. The move had not been an easy decision but the depth of commitment it entailed was revealed in a phrase used years later by his wife Molly to describe their steady conversion: “we gradually became ready to give ourselves to Ireland.”³⁰

Between 1919 and 1921 FitzGerald and Childers would between them mould Sinn Fein’s propaganda department into the most effective operation of its kind yet seen. In early 1919 its main function was to act as a research office for the Sinn Fein leadership, providing data for speeches and statistics and background information for the statements

²⁷ Quoted in Andrew Boyle: **The Riddle of Erskine Childers** (Hutchinson, London, 1977) p 252

²⁸ Ibid p 253

²⁹ Arthur Mitchell: **Revolutionary Government in Ireland** op.cit. p 100

³⁰ Jim Ring: **Erskine Childers** op. cit. p 207

prepared for the Peace Conference. It also prepared articles for the Irish provincial press, election literature for the General Election of 1918, and pamphlets to be distributed abroad.³¹ A few months after taking over the Department, FitzGerald devised a type of news-sheet called the “Weekly Summary” to be distributed to the Irish and international press once a fortnight. It listed “acts of aggression” committed by British forces in Ireland concentrating on details of place and time. The “Weekly Summary” was the prototype for perhaps the most successful instrument of the Sinn Fein propagandists: the *Irish Bulletin*. It was a mimeographed sheet launched on November 11, 1919, the first anniversary of the armistice. That first edition was circulated to only thirty people; the offices of the Dublin newspapers and friendly foreign correspondents staying in local hotels.³² But within a few months the *Bulletin* was being read by political figures in London and by politicians, diplomats and journalists in Europe and the rest of the world. The *Bulletin*’s success derived from the flair with which it described incidents in unconventional war developing in Ireland. In the words of Charles Townshend it “excelled in portraying an exchange of shots as a battle, the sniping of a police barrack as an assault or the breaking of windows by Crown Forces as the sacking of a town.”³³ But much of it was written in a more restrained, bureaucratic style which aimed to mimic the authority of official publications, categorizing incidents under headings such as “Arrests”, “Armed Assaults” and “Raids” in the same way as a police inspector might write a report to headquarters. Often, the

³¹ “Account of the Department of Publicity submitted by Desmond FitzGerald”, August 1921, **Ernest Blythe Papers**, Archives Department, University College Dublin P24/19

³² Kathleen Napoli McKenna: “The Irish Bulletin” in **The Capuchin Annual** (Dublin 1970)

³³ Charles Townshend: **The British Campaign in Ireland** op.cit. p 67

Bulletin's effect is achieved by the absence of the hyperbole that Townshend identifies as its hallmark. For instance, the following entries appeared in the *Bulletin* under the heading "Raids" in July 1920:

Raids: The residence of Mr P Dineen, recently elected Republican Member of Skibbereen District Council, Co. Cork was forcibly entered and searched by a British police and military raiding party.

British police and military raided the quarters of Mr P.J. Crowley, employee of the Dunmanway Union, Co. Cork.

Murders: Richard Lumley, a day-labourer, aged 60 of Rearcross, Co. Tipperary was shot dead without warning by a British military and police patrol, whilst on his way home from a wake at Abbey Hotel, Rearcross on the morning of July 4th.³⁴

Desmond FitzGerald's colleagues recalled how he encouraged this pared down style. To Kathleen Napoli McKenna he was "a stickler for unembellished truth" who would upbraid Frank Gallagher for indulging in exaggerations.³⁵ Ernest Blythe recalled that FitzGerald "resisted the pressure to which he was constantly subjected from most quarters in favour of painting outrages by British forces in a blacker hue than was justified by the facts and also the pressure in favour of accepting without investigation every report of an outrage which came in from the country." This for Blythe resulted in the *Bulletin* "having a reputation for reliability which few sheets of its kind can ever have enjoyed."³⁶ When FitzGerald travelled abroad to meet journalists the *Bulletin*

³⁴ "List of the Acts of Aggression committed in Ireland by the police and Military of the Usurping English Government, as reported in the Daily Press, for the week ending: Saturday, July 10th, 1920", ***Irish Bulletin Summaries 1919—21***, National Library of Ireland.

³⁵ Napoli McKenna, "Wielding Words and Other Weapons" op cit.

³⁶ Ernest Blythe: ***Sunday Independent***, April 13, 1947; ***Desmond FitzGerald Papers*** P80/1452 (6)

became his calling card and it became a major source for those writing about Ireland.

By 1920, as the guerrilla war intensified, the Sinn Fein Propaganda Department was regularly forced to move from one safe house to another. After curfew armoured cars carrying Black and Tan patrols would prowl through the streets. There were several near misses, raids on every house in the street save the one where the *Bulletin* was being produced. One house in the centre of Dublin was ransacked shortly after the Propaganda office had vacated it. For a while the *Bulletin* was compiled from a flat which FitzGerald had rented for his wife and newly born son.³⁷ In October 1920 the offices moved to the first floor of No. 11 Molesworth Street. A brass plate on the front door announced that the first floor was occupied by a company importing oil, a plausible business tenant in a smart neighbourhood. For Kathleen Napoli McKenna it was a case of hiding in plain sight.

What could be more daring, yet, at the same time more secure... than this respectable, aristocratic, snobbish Unionist street!...The Grandlodge of Freemasons, the Masonic Orphans' School, the Hibernian Church, the Molesworth Hall and the Church of Ireland Temperance Welfare Society were all neighbours of ours. In addition Messrs. James and James, the Crown Solicitors, occupied the halldoor flat, while in the flat above ours were installed two elderly, sourfaced, hoity-toity spinsters whom we surmised were engaged as librarians in Trinity College.³⁸

One weekend the whole street was raided except for the first floor of No. 11.

³⁷ Napoli McKenna, "Wielding Words and Other Weapons" op cit.

³⁸ Ibid

On another occasion, when a cordon was established around Molesworth Street, Frank Gallagher pushed his revolver into a stack of filed newspapers before slipping away.³⁹ A month later the offices were discovered during another weekend raid. All the newspaper files and printing equipment and the entire address list for recipients of the *Bulletin* were carried away by the police. The staff assembled in another underground office and produced a new *Bulletin* the following Tuesday. But readers were puzzled to receive two copies of the *Bulletin* that week: one was a fake issued by British intelligence and produced on an Underwood typewriter confiscated in the raid.⁴⁰

By that stage Sinn Fein spokesmen had established an extraordinary degree of trust with foreign correspondents. The correspondents would regularly come to meet FitzGerald and others in a house on Leeson Street, just south of the centre of Dublin.⁴¹ Frank Gallagher befriended Donald Boyd of the *Manchester Guardian*, writing to his fiancée about how much he liked him. One night Boyd invited Gallagher to the Abbey Theatre and then they both returned to Gallagher's flat.

We sipped tea and then I got Boyd to tell me his war experiences. He was exceptionally good remembering all the little things that give you a real idea of what it was like. The war and its horribleness has made him a pacifist for life and his effort is to try and make it impossible for all time. He will of course not succeed, but it is indicative of good in him to have that as his great aim.⁴²

³⁹ Kathleen Napoli McKenna: "A Battle of Wits for Publicity" in **The Irish Times** Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, December 25, 26, 27, 1979 p 10

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Letter from Frank Gallagher to Cecilia Saunders, November 13, 1921 in **Frank Gallagher Papers**, Trinity College Archives, Dublin 132

Gallagher confessed to having rowed with Boyd but reported that their differences had been resolved after the journalist “reformed greatly.” In any case, Gallagher wrote, the argument was of no consequence because Boyd “...was always with us and was only getting fractious because he, like the rest of us, didn’t understand much.”⁴³ The degree of trust established with some of the correspondents was shown by how, when Desmond FitzGerald was arrested in February 1921 and taken for interrogation at Dublin Castle, his wife got in touch with Boyd and Guy Moyston of the United Press news agency, “both excellent friends of ours, most sympathetic to our Movement and fond of Desmond in a personal way due to meeting him frequently...”⁴⁴ They contacted Basil Clarke, the Publicity Officer at Dublin Castle and McKenna claims this saved FitzGerald some rough treatment.⁴⁵

With FitzGerald removed, Childers took over the Propaganda Department. The move to Dublin had radicalised Childers. Initially he supported Home Rule and even in early 1919 Childers – like many others in Sinn Fein – would have settled for Dominion status of Ireland within the British Empire, the same kind of autonomy enjoyed by white colonies such as New Zealand and Canada. But by late 1919, when guerrilla warfare had overtaken diplomatic manoeuvring, Childers did not back away: he moved in step with the militarists. In his propaganda work he did not try to evade acknowledgment of physical force tactics and he criticised those who equivocated: “Nothing struck me more, when I first got insight into the publicity department, than the failure of

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Napoli McKenna: “A Battle of Wits” op cit.

⁴⁵ Ibid

the political side to take definite responsibility for the Army and its work – a fatal failure because...it was only by insisting that it was waging a legitimate war of defence and by basing propaganda on that principle that one could meet the torrent of defamation.”⁴⁶

Childers set about this work with diligence. His diaries are a log of meetings with foreign correspondents occasionally interspersed by the mundanity of life in the Dublin suburbs. His record of May 14th, 1920 reads: “To house with mother. To shops for wall-paper and linoleum. Weibel, Swiss journalist, spent evening.”⁴⁷ On June 3rd: “Took 11 train to Ennis. Travelled and lunched with Gregg of *New York World*. Lent him my SF Court cuttings.”⁴⁸ On August 29th: “21 callers! including...Editor of Christian Science Monitor and correspondent of ‘Matin.’”⁴⁹ And September 20th: “Coached McCarthy [Desmond] for interview with Castle official.”⁵⁰

Childers also visited London regularly to keep in touch with British politicians. For instance, he regularly fed material to Wedgwood Benn for use in questions in the House of Commons. In October 1920 he visited London for the opening of Parliament; his diary entry for October 20th serves to illustrate the range of his contacts in the British establishment. “On to lunch at Nat Lib Club with Hammond [J.L.]...After saw J.A. Spender, Donald McLean. Walked with latter to

⁴⁶ Boyle op. cit. p 257

⁴⁷ **Erskine Childers Papers**, Trinity College Dublin Manuscripts 7811 Diaries p 43

⁴⁸ Ibid p 55

⁴⁹ Ibid p 69

⁵⁰ Ibid p 73

House of Commons...Saw Asquith for half an hour. Urged same points as on Simon I think in vain.”⁵¹

In London Childers would also see Sinn Fein’s representative there, Art O’Brien, whose job was to distribute the *Bulletin* and introduce foreign correspondents who wished to come to Ireland. Reading the memos that passed between O’Brien in London and Childers in Dublin it is clear that Sinn Fein went out of its way to facilitate journalists who travelled to Ireland. Sometimes the consequences of this enthusiasm could be comic. In a memo to Childers in March 1921, O’Brien responds to a query for a payment of £20 to an “F. Morrell.” O’Brien explains that the name is “Moller” not “Morell” and that he was a correspondent for a Norwegian newspaper.

He called upon me about mid-October saying that he was crossing to Ireland the next night, that his paper had agreed to his going but had not sent him the necessary funds. He was himself low in cash and asked if I could advance him £20 until the end of the month. I advanced the amount and advised D.F. [Desmond FitzGerald]. The end of the month came but I did not see or hear from Moller. I then wrote to him. He called after some time, said that after all he had not been able to make the journey, asked for a further delay for repayment. He has been approached again twice since then, but he makes excuses. I am afraid we shall not see the £20 again...⁵²

Such rashness is indicative of O’Brien’s zeal to promote the cause, an eagerness which also extended to making Childers aware of his opinions on the general thrust of propaganda. In one memo O’Brien questioned

⁵¹ Ibid p 79

⁵² Memo from Art O’Brien to Erskine Childers 29/3/21, Art O’Brien Papers, National Library of Ireland Archives MS 8421/43

the labelling of casualties in the weekly summaries of incidents issued from Dublin. “It seems to me that the description ‘Constabulary Killed’ and ‘Military Killed’ are misleading to the foreign reader. It would be advisable to preface the word ‘English’ in both cases or ‘Enemy’. It is a great pity you continue to use the word ‘Constabulary’ and ‘Police’ because the foreign reader naturally comes to the conclusion that they are really ‘Constabulary’ and ‘Police’ whose only duty is to do the ordinary police duty. That is of course exactly the impression which the English Government seeks to make on the foreign reader’s mind.”⁵³ In a sign of how he increasingly sought to polarise the conflict Childers wrote back a few weeks later in agreement: “One of my changes was to eliminate ‘police’ from all publicity matter. But we cannot eliminate ‘Constabulary’ because the sections of English forces have sometimes to be distinguished.”⁵⁴

O’ Brien appeared barely satisfied by this response. By return post he challenges the use of the word “British” to describe the Crown Forces. “What does it mean? Who is our enemy? We have no direct quarrel with Australia, S. Africa, Canada, India etc. and they are part of the British Empire. So if the word ‘British’ is used in that sense it is obviously misleading. Nor have we a direct quarrel with Scotland or Wales, so that if the word ‘British’ is used to mean the people of Great Britain, it is equally misleading. Ireland has one enemy and one enemy in the world and that enemy is England. We should constantly make that plain to all the nations, whether they are in the British Empire or out

⁵³ Memo from Art O’ Brien to Erskine Childers April 19, 1921, Art O’Brien Papers MS 8421/45

⁵⁴ Art O’Brien Papers MS8421/46

of it. It is one of England's traps to make it appear that Ireland is the sulky naughty child in the great bright happy nursery of the British Empire."⁵⁵ In an extraordinary remark given Childers' background, O'Brien lays the blame for wrongheaded propaganda on years of ingrained Anglicisation: "Unfortunately even the best of our people have in some degree fallen a victim to the insidious poison of denationalising English education and we have to be constantly on the alert to guard against the effects of the poison."⁵⁶ The contempt for British culture registered here by O'Brien is repeatedly evident among Sinn Fein leaders, and seems to have been unaffected by the sympathy displayed by British journalists and the increasingly adversarial coverage in the London newspapers of the government's campaign to crush the rebellion. It will be recalled that Childers himself believed that the Irish cause was subject to a torrent of defamation in the British press when he joined the Sinn Fein Propaganda Department in 1919. How could Sinn Fein so readily discount favourable treatment at the hands of British journalists?

One reason the notion that Ireland was being incessantly defamed remained credible was its longevity: it had been a major theme of Sinn Fein propaganda in Ireland for several years. As the French historian Marc Bloch observed about atrocity stories during the First World War, "a false report is always born out of collective perceptions that exist before its birth."⁵⁷ Arthur Griffith, the Sinn Fein leader who had given

⁵⁵ Memo from Art O'Brien to Erskine Childers, May 3, 1921, Art O'Brien Papers MS 8421/45

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Quoted in Ian Ousby: The Road to Verdun: France, Nationalism and the First World War (Pimlico, London 2003) p 18

Childers the task of persuading English journalists that Irish aspirations were being brutally suppressed, had a very low opinion of the British press. Griffith was a tireless polemical journalist himself, described as “extraordinarily clever” by Augustine Birrell, the chief secretary in Ireland at the time of the 1916 Rising.⁵⁸ Much of his polemical writing in the leading Sinn Fein paper, *Nationality*, was devoted to denouncing the iniquity of British proprietors such as Lord Northcliffe and Sir William Hulton.

Fleet Street proprietors occupied the attention of Sinn Fein propagandists partly because they wished to contrast the nobility of Irish life with the tawdry immorality of urban Britain. Northcliffe was reviled not only as the publisher of *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* but because he also published a stream of children’s newspapers and magazines which found a ready market in Ireland. Sinn Fein writers condemned him as ‘the Cromwell of journalese (*sic*)’, an “evil genius” seducing people with “triviality or gross idiocy”.⁵⁹ One Sinn Fein journalist contrasted the ease with which tabloid scandal circulated in Ireland with the suppression of the separatists’ wholesome advocacy of a new Irish nation: “The grossest, most brutal, and most insane immorality may be, and has been, propagated by British newspapers and the British censor ‘winks the other eye.’”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Michael Laffan: **The Resurrection of Ireland** op.cit. p 16

⁵⁹ Ben Novick: **Conceiving Revolution: Irish Nationalist Propaganda during the First World War** (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2001) p 167

⁶⁰ *Ibid* p 132—133

More specifically Sinn Fein was focussed on discrediting British atrocity propaganda during the war. The aim was to neutralise recruitment campaigns shaped deliberately to have an appeal in Ireland. Posters --circulated by the recruiting sergeants played on Irish sympathies for Catholic Belgium; they also urged Irishmen to avenge attacks such as the sinking of the cruise ship the *Lusitania* off the southern Irish coast in May 1915 and tried to stir up fear of an invasion by the German army.⁶¹ Arthur Griffith blamed cowardly journalists on British papers for inventing scare stories. Commenting on reports of German soldiers attacking women and children in Belgium, Griffith wrote that the “factory for the manufacture of German atrocities” could be found in a pub in Fleet Street.⁶² He came up with the idea that Britain had erected a paper wall around Ireland: “on the inside she told Ireland what she wanted the Irish to believe about the world, and on the outside she told the world what she wanted to believe about Ireland.”⁶³

The irony was that the British government could only wish that it could be as successful at isolating Ireland as Griffith made out. Once the Anglo-Irish war began, the paper wall – if it ever existed – was in tatters and by the end of 1919 the government appeared to have lost control of the press coverage of Ireland. Initially prepared to share the Irish administration’s disdain for the de facto declaration of Irish independence by the Sinn Fein parliament in Dublin, the correspondents turned to urgent questioning of Irish policy as acts of violence

⁶¹ Ibid: for Belgium see p 104—107; for the *Lusitania* p 72—76 and for the danger of a German invasion p 120—125

⁶² Ibid p 107

⁶³ Arthur Mitchell: Revolutionary Government in Ireland op. cit. p 99

intensified. Correspondents who were in favour of self-government for Ireland bemoaned the use of military measures, the indecision among officials in Dublin Castle and the tendency of the government in London towards drift.

How did this happen? The root of the explanation lies in Dublin Castle. A French visitor to Ireland described the Castle as “A world in itself, a city within a city. It is at once the palace of the viceroy, a military barrack, the seat of administration and the office of the secret police...omnipotent and omniscient.”⁶⁴ The fulcrum of British rule in Ireland had changed little since the Act of Union in 1800. It was riven with sectarian intrigue, petty careerism and antiquated procedure.⁶⁵ By 1919 it was in a state of administrative paralysis: “The Castle was meant to run the country as well as to advise the British government on policy, and became a watchword for unaccountable and inefficient rule, criticised on every front for its top-heavy bureaucracy.”⁶⁶ In an article early in 1919 Hugh Martin had advised the new Chief Secretary for Ireland, Ian Macpherson, that he would find in Dublin Castle “the most bureaucratic system in Europe” dedicated to “a militarism more deeply entrenched than any in Whitehall”. There was, Martin wrote, “no government machinery in good working order...no public opinion on which to play except a mass of confused resentments. In short

⁶⁴ Kieran Flanagan: “The Chief Secretary’s Office 1853-1914: A Bureaucratic Enigma” in **Irish Historical Studies** Vol XXIV 1984-85

⁶⁵ Hopkinson: **Irish War of Independence** op. cit. p 3—10

⁶⁶ Ibid p 4

[Macpherson] will find chaos upstairs, downstairs and in my Lady's chamber with Brute Force sitting in the drawing room."⁶⁷

Signs of this inefficiency are especially visible in the Castle's censorship regime. Wartime censorship had been introduced in Ireland in 1914, mainly directed at the flourishing crop of Sinn Fein newspapers and magazines such as those edited by Arthur Griffith. Newspapers were shut down and presses seized but with little lasting effect. "Press censorship managed to close newspapers, but propagandists always found a way to avoid regulations."⁶⁸ After the Easter Rising in 1916 *ad hoc* measures were replaced by new, formal regulations based on the Defence of the Realm Act. The Chief Secretary, Augustine Birrell, told parliament it was imperative that "news should not reach the neutral countries and particularly our friends in America, which would be calculated to give them an entirely false impression as to the importance of what has taken place, important as that is."⁶⁹ But the new measures, for all their judicial formality, were scarcely more successful than the old piecemeal approach. Although most of the Sinn Fein propagandists were imprisoned in the months after the Rising the "mosquito press" – as the Official Censor, Lord Decies, referred to the nationalist papers – began to thrive again soon afterwards.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Daily News, January 16, 1919 p 5

⁶⁸ Ben Novick: Conceiving Revolution op.cit. p 36

⁶⁹ Quoted in K.D. Ewing and Conor Gearty (eds): The Struggle for Civil Liberties, Political Freedom and the Rule of Law in Britain 1914-45 (Oxford University Press, 2000) p 340

⁷⁰ Novick: Conceiving Revolution op. cit. p 36 and Lord Decies memorandum to the Under Secretary for Ireland, July 10 1917, Press Censorship Records 1916-1919, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin 3/722/3 (34)

The real problem was that the officials in Dublin Castle were unable to reconcile a policy of banning seditious speech with the reality of politics in Ireland. Lord Decies's tenure as censor in the years after 1916 is a record of bluster and uncertainty. A classic example of his lack of confidence is a letter he wrote to the Chief Secretary in January, 1917. Decies gives his views on a series of nationalist publications and then comments: "These observations lead directly to that most difficult question as to how far the discussion of the absolute independence of Ireland as a political theory, entailing, as it must, the development of anti-British feeling, is to be construed as "likely to cause disaffection". In dealing with this question I am most anxious to have guidance and if possible a definition."⁷¹

Indeed there is evidence that, unable to prevent the publication of nationalist propaganda, Decies real aim was to curb criticism of the Irish administration itself. In February 1917, he stopped a telegram from an Irish stringer to the *Manchester Guardian* about the latest wave of arrests of Sinn Feiners which concluded: "The trust of the man in the Irish street is gone with the snows of January. He reads everything today as a possible move in a rather shabby game of chicanery, and he is given to cynical thoughts when he reflects upon the high ideals of national liberty and free citizenship for which the Irish Divisions marched away to battle. Such is the atmosphere into which Irish affairs have drifted." Decies described the article as "most undesirable", drawing attention to implied criticism of government policy in the last

⁷¹ Lord Decies to the Chief Secretary, January 17, 1917: Press Censorship Records, Nat. Archives, Dublin 3/722/4 (160)

sentence by underlining it.⁷² The argument that censorship was more about self-protection for the Castle rather than curbing sedition was taken up repeatedly by Unionist journalists. On July 20th, 1917, the managing editor of the *Belfast Telegraph* wrote to Decies that “In our view it is at the present time a great crime to mislead the British public by permitting them to form the conclusion that matters are happy and peaceful in Ireland, when some parts of the country are seething in sedition. Would it not be a more logical course for the Government to prevent the delivery of seditious speeches, and the writing of seditious articles? To withhold from the British public all knowledge of what is actually happening in this country is to mislead it... It turns the censorship into a political instrument...”⁷³

In December 1918 Lord Decies submitted his final monthly report for the year and attached to it a letter of resignation. His ambiguous observations betray a sense of failure. In his resignation letter he advocates that censorship be ended because although “fully justified as a war measure” in peacetime it had become “weakened in authority and altered in character.” He has nothing but praise for the press who “have with hardly an exception endeavoured to help rather than hinder, and have conscientiously carried out those instructions which it was my duty to issue to them...this very fact is in my judgment a strong argument for the discontinuance of censorship while yet it retains a measure of

⁷² Memo from Lord Decies to Under Secretary for Ireland, February 26, 1917: Press Censorship Records, Nat. Archives, Dublin 3/722/3 (34)

⁷³ Letter to Lord Decies July 20th, 1917: Press Censorship Records, Nat. Archives, Dublin 3/722/3 (146)

goodwill.”⁷⁴ However, the same report contains a stark admission that censorship had failed to quell subversive journalism. “It may now be assumed that practically every provincial newspaper correspondent of the Dublin newspapers is a Sinn Feiner, and that incidents...are deliberately reported in the light most unfavourable to the authorities. This pollution of news sources will be a lasting trouble.”⁷⁵

As we have seen from the change in the tone of coverage by British correspondents in Ireland during 1919, Dublin Castle was left behind by the speed with which the press shifted its framing of the Irish story: increasingly in despatches the Castle itself was being identified as part of the problem, an obstacle to a fair settlement. When a new set of more able civil servants were sent from London to rescue the Castle administration in 1920 their fresh thinking about finding a way out of the crisis extended to relations with the press. The woeful reputation of the Irish Administration had enabled the special correspondents who came to Ireland for ever lengthier periods during 1919 and 1920 to become more detached and oppositional. Basil Clarke, who had been a correspondent for the *Daily Mail* during the First World War and then director of the Special Intelligence Branch at the Ministry of Reconstruction, was recruited to re-establish the authority of the Irish administration and arrived in Dublin Castle in August 1920.⁷⁶ Clarke’s mission was to inculcate a spirit of professionalism in handling the press. But within less than a year he was acknowledging failure. In a series of thoughtful memos he circulated among colleagues in 1921,

⁷⁴ Lord Decies: **Report on Censorship for December 1918**, Public Record Office, London, **CO 904/167/371-372**

⁷⁵ Ibid **CO 904/167/370-371**

⁷⁶ Sir Basil Clarke: “An Outlaw on the Western Front” in **World’s Press News**, November 15, 1934 p 2

Clarke complains that the communiqués written at the army press office were amateurish, adding that this was no surprise since they were soldiers first and handling the press “was as much a craft as paper-hanging or horse doctoring.”⁷⁷ Clarke laments that he has been unable to persuade the military to accept his propaganda policy; they had “admitted quite frankly that they did not believe in that policy.”⁷⁸ In another undated memo, probably written around the same time, Clarke refers to a series of “mishaps” in which the Castle’s credibility was seriously undermined when official accounts of major incidents were subsequently discredited. These mistakes, Clarke wrote, had been “deadly destructive of Government credit. I would say that these mishaps have in fact closed for us...a broad avenue of propaganda activities.”⁷⁹

An example of the kind of “mishap” Clarke may have had in mind (and of the military mentality towards the press which he was trying to refine) was the hamfisted attempt to censor news of the executions of four men in Cork on April 28, 1921. The four had been convicted of levying war against the king after being captured during and after an ambush in Co. Cork, an area where martial law had been declared. Correspondents for the Irish national papers based in Cork were ordered not to report anything about the executions beyond the bare fact that they had happened.⁸⁰ A *Daily News* correspondent who went to Cork to investigate (but took the precaution of returning to Dublin before

⁷⁷ Basil Clarke memo, April 18, 1921, CO 904/168/832-836

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Clarke CO 904/168/841

⁸⁰ Daily News, April 29, 1921 p 3

telegraphing his despatch to London) found that “so haphazard is the method in which the censorship appears to be administered that...no prohibition had been put on the sending of messages...to the English papers. Several were sent away before a military officer arrived at the post office to inquire about them.”⁸¹ The local correspondents who had sent the messages were ordered to appear at military headquarters the following morning where they were told by an officer that they were forbidden to send reports which reflected on the conduct of his men or encouraged the rebels. “No charge of inaccuracy was brought against them...but they were warned against describing such matters as the execution of rebels in a way which would be considered sympathetic to the victims” and threatened with expulsion if they defied the warning.⁸²

This was one of several examples where the censorship was sloppy and self-defeating, where the attempt to suppress certain kinds of news ended up magnifying bad publicity for the Crown Forces. The day of the executions in Cork, a party of Auxiliaries entered the offices of the *Freeman's Journal* in Dublin and ordered the staff out at gunpoint. Several foreign correspondents who were on the premises were forced into a small room; Guy Moyston of the Associated Press was singled out and told to take the next boat back to America.⁸³ The *Daily News* correspondent was among those subjected to rough treatment. They were asked by an intimidating officer if they personally had seen anyone

⁸¹ *Daily News*, April 30, 1921 p 3

⁸² *Ibid*

⁸³ Egon Larsen: *First with the Truth: Newspapermen in Action* (Baker, London, 1968) p 66-67

knocked about by Auxiliaries: “Among those who answered ‘no’ was a man who himself had been struck in the face with a revolver.”⁸⁴

Such incidents must have hastened the despair which Basil Clarke was giving vent to in Dublin Castle. But within a few months even he seemed to have given up any hope that the correspondents could be influenced or persuaded. In a revealing note sent in August 1921 to a Colonel Foulkes in the small press office that General Macready had established in army headquarters, Clarke explained how he had been trying to come up with some method of controlling the visiting correspondents. “I cannot think of any better way of meeting this problem than that of issuing licences to all newspaper men”, Clarke wrote, “and giving neither facilities nor information to any that are unlicensed.” He went on to suggest replicating the system that had been so effective during the First World War: a group of correspondents should be allowed to live with the Crown Forces, given housing, transport and telegraphic facilities (all of which they would pay for) and provided with guides who would also serve as disguised censors. “The effect of their being in so close (sic) contact with the Crown Forces would be to enable them to see problems and facts more intimately, accurately and probably, therefore, more sympathetically than would be the case if they were spectators from the outside.”⁸⁵ All of these observations amount to an acknowledgment that the Castle had lost the propaganda battle the previous year. The news had been defined by the special correspondents and the only way Clarke saw of recovering the

⁸⁴ Daily News, May 2, 1921 p 1

⁸⁵ Basil Clarke to Colonel Foulkes, August 10, 1921, CO 904/168/577

initiative was to return to a system of control which, by that stage, would have been impossible to impose.

In this chapter we have seen how gaining the confidence of the international press was a key objective of the Irish separatists. This strategy, set in motion at the Paris Peace Conference, was developed by Desmond FitzGerald and Erskine Childers, two highly talented literary figures with an impressive network of connections among foreign correspondents, Fleet Street editors and journalists, and key political figures in London. The flair and ingenuity of their efforts contrasted with the indecisive and leaden approach of officials in Dublin Castle. The censorship imposed by the Castle was irksome to those subject to it but ineffective in preventing coverage of Sinn Fein's rebellion. As disorder spread, visiting journalists gradually switched from taking their line from government sources to holding the government responsible for the state of Ireland. Despite this, Sinn Fein propagandists still maintained that their cause was given an unfair press. The reality was that foreign correspondents were about to become adversaries of British government policy in Ireland and effective instruments in its failure.

CHAPTER 5

American Correspondents in Ireland

A recurring theme of this thesis has been how the rebellion in Ireland acquired an international dimension in the minds of the journalists sent to cover it. We have seen how British correspondents repeatedly lamented that the conduct of the war was affecting Britain's status in the world, corroding the moral leadership it was felt to have won in its victory in the First World War and undermining its authority as motherland of the empire. But the criticism of one particular spectator of the war in Ireland from outside the empire was picked out as potentially devastating for Britain's future role. Among politicians and journalists the reaction of the United States was feared to carry more practical consequences for the exercise of British power in the world than the mere loss of a liberal reputation, disabling though that was thought to be.

By the end of the war the United States had come into its own as a major power. Where once it had been in debt to other nations it was now Europe's banker.¹ Its financial power was such that towards the end of 1917 Lord Northcliffe – in New York as head of the British War Mission – could send a cable to London describing the Americans as the “complete masters”; as he put it in his favoured cabbese, “if loan stops, war stops.”² When the Germans finally surrendered, President

¹ Paul Kennedy: **The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy 1865—1980** (Fontana, London, 1985 edition) p 148

² J.Lee Thompson: **Politicians, the Press and Propaganda: Lord Northcliffe and the Great War 1914—1919** (Kent State University Press, Ohio, 1999) p 160

Woodrow Wilson saw the peace settlement as a moment of opportunity for American diplomacy. Instead of retreating from the world, the United States would attempt “nothing less than to restructure its affairs.”³ Wilson defined his outlook against both the ancient European powers whose imperial rivalries were blamed for starting the war and the new revolutionary programme of Leninism: he envisaged the United States as “the historical agent of the world’s transformation from chaos and imperialism to orderly liberal rationality.”⁴ The White House legal advisor explained how the ravages of the war would guarantee the hegemony of Wilsonian idealism: “Europe is bankrupt financially and its governments are bankrupt morally. The mere hint of withdrawal by America by reason of opposition to her wishes for justice, for fairness, and for peace would see the fall of every government in Europe without exception...”⁵ The expansion of American trade was to be synonymous with progress, a view Wilson conveyed to a conference of salesmen in Detroit in 1916, telling them: “[You] are Americans and are meant to carry liberty and justice and the principles of humanity wherever you go. Go out and sell goods that will make the world more comfortable and more happy, and convert them to the principles of America.”⁶ A central tenet of Wilson’s ideology was that American power could be projected without imperial conquest, that “the United States could somehow be a great power without behaving like any previous great power.”⁷ This

³ Walter LaFaber: **The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad since 1750** (Norton, New York, 1989) p 344

⁴ N. Gordon Levin Jr.: **Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America’s Response to War and Revolution** (Oxford University Press, 1968) p 5

⁵ Margaret MacMillan: **Peacemakers** op.cit. p 18

⁶ N. Gordon Levin Jr.: **Woodrow Wilson and World Politics** op.cit. p 18

⁷ Niall Ferguson: **Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire**, (Penguin, London, 2005) p 63

was the context in which Britain now had to deal with the United States about Ireland.

Britain was chiefly concerned about the political influence of the vast Irish diaspora in the United States, particularly in Wilson's Democratic Party. Certainly, after the executions of the leaders of the 1916 rebellion, Irish-Americans were able to interest a broad swathe of American opinion in reviling British rule in Ireland.⁸ But Americans were even more worried about German involvement with the Irish rebels.⁹ By 1917, when the US had declared war on Germany, the police were suppressing meetings where anti-British rhetoric was heard. One senator declared in 1918 "The time for hyphenated Americans is over and the cowards and disloyalists in our country have got to be weeded out and held up to the execration which they deserve."¹⁰ Even so, when Britain began dismantling its propaganda effort in the US in early 1919, the embassy in Washington advised that there was still a need for combating the anti-British propaganda of Irish extremists."¹¹

By the time President Wilson arrived in Paris for the peace conference, Ireland was for American newspaper correspondents a key location on the troubled map of Europe. In the histories of American news agencies and the memoirs of contemporary American correspondents, deployments to Ireland are recounted as occasions for adventure, risk

⁸ F.M. Carroll: American Opinion and the Irish Question 1910—1923 (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1978) p 55

⁹ Ibid p 59

¹⁰ Ibid p 103—104

¹¹ Thomas E. Hachey: "British Foreign Office and New Perspectives on the Irish Issue in Anglo-American Relations 1919-1921" in Eire-Ireland, Vol 7 No. 2 (Summer 1972) p 5

and professional fulfilment, fully absorbed into the romance of foreign postings. For correspondents from Associated Press, the assignment to Ireland entailed working “under nerve-racking peril and difficulty in an atmosphere of ambushes, raids, killings and reprisals.”¹² A reporter from United Press International was driven blindfolded in a horse and carriage over bumpy roads to meet the Sinn Fein president, Eamon de Valera, and published an interview said to have enraged the British censors.¹³ In his memoirs, a *Chicago Tribune* correspondent recalled his time in Ireland as “a delight, an inspiration. Its people were wonderful, its fight against Britain was worth the sympathy of the world, its revolution was real.”¹⁴

On one conventional reading of the relationship between Ireland and the United States – framed by the supposed influence of the Irish-American diaspora – the empathy displayed in such comments is hardly surprising. American journalists would be expected to be cheerleaders for Sinn Fein, or at least susceptible to the romance of a rebellion in Ireland. But such a view would be inadequate to explain the actual practice of American journalists in Ireland. As we shall see in this chapter, an often symbiotic relationship between professional norms and political ideology did much more to shape the work of American journalists in Ireland than individual whimsy. For purposes of illuminating

¹² Oliver Gramling: ***AP: The Story of News*** (Farrar & Rinehart, New York, 1940) p 299

¹³ Joe Alex Morris: ***Deadline Every Minute: The Story of the United Press*** (Doubleday, New York, 1957) p 114—115

¹⁴ George Seldes: ***Tell the Truth and Run*** (Greenberg, New York, 1953) p 89. Seldes confesses, with vitriolic disillusion, that he later soured on Ireland’s revolution, finding to his dismay that a thing of beauty had been “altered and perverted into a shoddy middle-class stupid conservative uninspired unpoetic unromantic Free State and finally an independent Republic devoted to nothing more noble than the perpetuation of middle class respectability and the *status quo*.” (p 90)

comparison I have chosen to examine in detail the work of two American journalists: one a well known literary journalist in Washington who was also a partisan Irish nationalist; the other a foreign news correspondent who was an archetypal exponent of the newly established professionalism of American journalism and who leaned heavily on British military and intelligence officials to explain Ireland to a US audience. Looked at together they reveal how occupational identity, different attitudes to sources of information and political conviction could produce two different readings of the Irish revolution.

Francis Hackett, the distinguished literary editor of the *New Republic*, was a true believer in the Irish revolution. In 1920 Hackett – who was born in Co. Kilkenny and came to the United States when he was a teenager – told The American Commission on Conditions in Ireland (a panel of politicians, clergymen and journalists assembled by *The Nation* magazine in New York) that he had always sympathised with Sinn Fein’s aspirations but never believed they were practicable until 1919.¹⁵ Hackett himself was an oddity among the staff at the *New Republic*, most of whom were graduates of Ivy League colleges and appeared to John Reed as “aloof, calm and Olympian, removed from the world of factory and trench, picket line and caucus chamber, about which they wrote with such assurance.”¹⁶ By contrast, Hackett had never been to university and “could feel really at ease at a Socialist party convention

¹⁵ **Evidence on Conditions in Ireland: The American Commission on Conditions in Ireland** (Bliss Building, Washington DC, 1921) p 141

¹⁶ Robert A. Rosenstone: **Romantic Revolutionary: A Biography of John Reed**, Harvard University Press edition (1990) p 206—207

or a union strike meeting.”¹⁷ Edmund Wilson recorded how Hackett regarded monarchy as “the most fatuous of human institutions.”¹⁸ Among his colleagues he acquired a reputation as an Anglophobe.¹⁹ He clashed repeatedly with Walter Lippmann, particularly over the *New Republic*'s support for the war.²⁰ Hackett complained that he had never been consulted by the other editors about the decision and protested that he had backed Woodrow Wilson for the presidency because he thought he was the candidate most likely to keep the United States neutral.²¹

In the pages of the *New Republic* Hackett usually confined himself to book reviews and literary essays. His political differences with his fellow editors were mostly evident when he wrote about Ireland. After the war in Ireland began, the *New Republic*'s editors opposed coercion, advocating the withdrawal of British troops. Their position was that Ireland should be granted the Dominion status within the British Empire, an institution which commanded their admiration. “The existing relationship between the British Empire and its self-governing dominions is the most successful and instructive example of an essentially moral yet still effective tie among substantially independent peoples which history has to record. This is the novel ingredient of British Imperial politics and it is only by acting in the light of this admirable precedent that British statesmanship can prevent Ireland from remaining a source of weakness and demoralisation to the British

¹⁷ Charles Forcey: **The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly Wevl, Lippmann and the Progressive Era 1900—1925**, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1961) p 183

¹⁸ Edmund Wilson: **The Twenties: From Notebooks and Diaries of the Period**, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1975) p 100

¹⁹ Charles Forcey: **The Crossroads of Liberalism** op.cit. p 230

²⁰ Ibid p 90

²¹ Ibid p 260

Commonwealth.”²² But in contrast to Walter Lippmann and the other editors, Hackett held a much darker view of British imperial idealism. In a commentary on a statement by the British ambassador to Washington (published in the magazine as a letter, a sign of the distancing of Hackett’s views from the official editorial line) he dismissed the diplomat’s protestations that British policy in Ireland was essentially noble and disinterested as “hackneyed formulae” which should not fool Americans. “The inspiration of British policy in his time, he tells us, is to bring order out of chaos, to extend the boundaries of freedom, to improve the lot of the oppressed, to increase the material prosperity of the world... We know that Britain has extended the boundaries of oil territory as well as freedom, that it has inevitably been improving the lot of the oppressors as well as the oppressed.” To accept the Ambassador’s arguments (as his fellow editors at the *New Republic* appeared to do) would be to pervert American values. “[The ambassador] has taken the line that England’s role in this generation is everywhere the high moral role. This has never been true of any country and is not true of England.”²³

At the end of July 1920 Hackett and his wife Signe Toksvig, a Danish journalist, went to Ireland and spent eight weeks travelling around the country. Their mission, according to Hackett, was “not only to investigate the facts but to interpret them.”²⁴ In the months after his return he published a series of pieces in the *New Republic* describing the situation in Ireland. The question at issue, he asserted in his first piece,

²² *The New Republic*, October 27, 1920 p 207

²³ *The New Republic*, April 28, 1920 p 283—284

²⁴ *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland* op. cit. p 140

was “fundamentally moral.” Hackett described British policy under Lloyd George as illiberal and anti-democratic, reduced to reliance on the argument that holding Ireland was dictated by military necessity. In more than one sense, Hackett wrote, the war in Europe had left Britain too exhausted to deal with the rebellion in Ireland. “[Everyone] knows that tiredness is moral as well as mental. It is the moral conflict which Ireland excites that accounts for British khaki-mindedness, petulance and fatigue. Sinn Fein, on the contrary has no rat in its moral wainscot. Sinn Fein is calm, keen and cool. This difference in temper is deeply significant...”²⁵ Having asserted the moral superiority of Sinn Fein, Hackett attempted to further establish its programme as a natural cause for American liberals. “Is it Bolshevism?” he asked rhetorically. “Is it syndicalism? Is it godlessness and irreligion? Is it anarchy? On the contrary, it is the most simple and elementary political proposal, about as wild as woman-suffrage.” The demand that a nation have the right to legislate for itself was nothing new. “It involves an idea as old and as familiar, and as moss-grown, and as harmless, as the American Revolution of 1776.”²⁶

The following week Hackett published in the *New Republic* a description of the workings of one of the local courts that Sinn Fein had established across Ireland as rivals to the Crown courts in an act both of usurpation and propaganda. Hackett begins his article with a description of “Mr W.”, the Sinn Fein judge, selling sweets to children in his newsagents shop in an undisclosed location: “He was thin and worn, a

²⁵ The New Republic October 13, 1920 p 161

²⁶ Ibid p 163

seamed and grizzled man whose appearance had absorbed something of his stooped and ill-lit establishment.” We soon learn that the shopkeeper’s health had been broken during a spell in prison in England after the 1916 rising. While Hackett talks to Mr W, customers continued to arrive and, like the image of the children buying sweets at the outset, each transaction noted by Hackett establishes a picture of normality: a policeman (who obviously had no fear of entering a Sinn Feiner’s shop) bought a sports paper and was served with “perfect civility”; a young doctor – “well-conditioned”— paid for sweets and English magazines.²⁷ An IRA man arrived to inform Mr W. that they were about to bring in a man who has been living rough in the woods and to ask if, in his capacity as judge, he could have an order ready to commit the tramp to the workhouse. Hackett gives no reason why the man in the woods had been “exiled by his family and had for several years been living afoot like a hunted thing, half naked and famished and afraid.” But the effect of this story of rescue is to portray Irish revolutionaries as benevolent agents of social reform, a compassionate militia subject to the due process of law administered by civilians.²⁸ The next day Hackett goes to a session of the Sinn Fein court in a local village hall, still decorated for a recently-staged play. The hall is crowded with people who, like the customers in Mr W.’s shop, encompassed the broad base of Sinn Fein’s support: “young men and old, shawled women, grannies and boys...artisans, labourers, publicans, farmers, shopkeepers. A late arrival was a curate who took his place in

²⁷ The New Republic, October 20, 1920 p 188

²⁸ Ibid p 189

our row.”²⁹ Hackett is struck by the absence of formalities like oaths, constables and court attendants. When a row threatens to break out between a farmer and a shopkeeper who claimed his windows had been broken by the farmer’s untended cattle, two IRA volunteers rise from the mass of people in the hall to gently enforce order. Later they restrain an enraged defendant but – in Hackett’s telling – without crushing him. “The Volunteers held their ground with insistence, but they gave play to this fiery human nature – which is their own nature, but disciplined and responsible and dignified, the nature that has made these Irish courts.”³⁰

Aside from their undisguised partisanship Hackett’s articles on Ireland for the *New Republic* are clearly literary. His declared purpose not only to collect facts but to interpret them, his treatment of people and events through a series of novelistic scenes and the revelation of his political convictions in argument are evidence of an intentional transgression of the boundaries of standard journalism. The fact that he was writing for an intellectual magazine and not a mass circulation newspaper only partly accounts for his suppressed disdain for conventional reportage.³¹ Much more germane is the fact that Hackett, in all his years in journalism, never became a professional reporter.

He had no formal training in journalism of the kind that was then becoming popular in the United States. Having arrived from Ireland in

²⁹ Ibid p 189

³⁰ Ibid p 190

³¹ Some of this disdain was explicit in Hackett’s wife’s account of an interview they conducted with the editor of a Unionist newspaper in Belfast. The editor, she said, “thought we were typical American journalists, and he gave us what we considered to be the regular dope for American journalists. Much of it we knew...was not true.” ***Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*** op. cit. p 175

1900 at the age of eighteen he came to the attention of an editor at the *Chicago American*, according to his colleagues, while selling neckties in the basement of one of the city's biggest department stores.³² Hackett himself recounted how he was initially determined to succeed in the newsroom. "I was inexhaustibly keen as a reporter. It demanded direct contact with people in the throes of action."³³ The action of interest to the *Chicago American* was "police news": dramatic human interest stories of crime and murder. Hackett struggled to deliver what was needed and was sacked because he refused to lie to get hold of a photograph of a murder victim.³⁴ He managed to get himself a trial as a reporter on the *Chicago Evening Post* but after again failing to make an impression, concluded that he was only fit for writing editorials. "I was not cut out to be a reporter. On the local American scene I was befuddled about unfamiliar issues that made news, nor had I the audacity to extract details on the surface."³⁵ This explanation hints at how around this time the job of the American reporter was becoming increasingly subject to formal procedures and defined as the pursuit of a discrete set of details about a narrow set of issues.

At the time Francis Hackett was trying to make his way in Chicago newspapers, mainstream American journalism was abandoning its identification with literary bohemianism. "By the end of the nineteenth century the commercial popular press had transformed journalism into a business of news for the masses. A business model imposed on a craft

³² Floyd Dell: *Homecoming: An Autobiography*, (Farrar & Rinehart, New York, 1933) p 195

³³ Francis Hackett: *American Rainbow: Early Reminiscences*, (Liveright, New York, 1971) p 172

³⁴ *Ibid* p 176

³⁵ *Ibid* p 182

had changed its practices and ethics.”³⁶ Journalism had become “fact-centred and news-centred rather than devoted primarily to political commentary or preoccupied with literary aspirations” – as Francis Hackett was.³⁷ Rules were laid down in reporting manuals and new vocational courses (the first journalism school opened in Missouri in 1908).³⁸ President Woodrow Wilson himself encouraged journalists to move towards professional respectability, noting disparagingly that before 1900 every newspaper was a “law unto itself, without standards of either work or duty: its code of ethics, not yet codified like those of medicine or of law, had been, like its stylebook, individualistic in character.”³⁹ The first journalism textbook (published in 1894) clearly laid out what the new collective nostrum would be: ‘It is the mission of the reporter to reproduce facts and the opinions of others, not to express his own.’⁴⁰

Francis Hackett’s early discomfiture in the city rooms of the big Chicago papers was clearly a struggle to grasp how much this dictum had taken hold in American journalism. But it was certainly clear to other foreigners. In his study of political parties published in 1902 the German political scientist Moisei Ostorgorski observed that the American newspaper “considers itself in the first place as a purveyor of

³⁶ Stephen J.A. Ward: **The Invention of Journalism Ethics: The Path to Objectivity and Beyond**, (McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2004) p 212

³⁷ Michael Schudson: ‘The objectivity norm in American journalism’ in **Journalism** Vol 2, No.2 (August 2001) p 157

³⁸ Ward: **The Invention of Journalism Ethics** op cit p 209

³⁹ Ibid p 226

⁴⁰ Ibid p 210

facts, true, if such can be obtained, or otherwise...”⁴¹ And perusing an American textbook in 1913 a British press critic was appalled by how American journalists were all expected to conform to the same strict conventions: “It conjured up in the mind’s eye a vision of hundreds and hundreds of American towns, scattered over those vast States, producing similar newspapers on similar lines – hundreds and hundreds of newspapers training and sending out their professional journalists to carry on essentially the same work with the greater metropolitan papers – thousands and thousands of journalists migrating from newspaper to newspaper with the stamp of...reporter on their foreheads.”⁴²

This was not the kind of endorsement sought by Francis Hackett when he entered journalism; his repeated false starts in the Chicago newsrooms were largely a recoil against the kind of editorial regime which Michael Schudson has characterised as a form of “industrial discipline”.⁴³ Hackett became literary editor of the *Chicago Evening Post* and later, before he joined the *New Republic*, the editor of a muckraking magazine.⁴⁴ Muckraking journalists prized facts but not – as one American reporter believed the public desired them – “facts piled up to the point of dry certitude.”⁴⁵ The muckrakers deployed facts against organised interests and corrupt politicians in the service of their reforming convictions and in the belief that journalists “had the potential – through the power of the press and public opinion – to overcome the

⁴¹ Moisei Ostrogorski: **Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties Volume II**, (Macmillan and Co., London, 1902) p 321

⁴² R.A. Scott-James: **The Influence of the Press** op.cit. p 255—256

⁴³ Michael Schudson: ‘The objectivity norm in American journalism’ op. cit. p 162

⁴⁴ Charles Forcey: **The Crossroads of Liberalism** op.cit. p 174

⁴⁵ Michael Schudson: **Origins of the Ideal of Objectivity in the Professions** op. cit. p 168

weaknesses of political institutions.”⁴⁶ This was the sensibility that informed Hackett’s articles on Ireland for the *New Republic*. How differently did “professional” American reporters treat the Irish revolution? A useful way of examining this question is to turn to the work of a prominent American foreign correspondent for an influential East coast newspaper.

Walter Lippmann placed Carl Ackerman of the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* on his list of first-rate foreign correspondents, “men who know their way about the world.”⁴⁷ After graduating from Columbia University in 1913, Ackerman went to work for the United Press news agency in Washington covering the White House, the State Department and foreign embassies. In 1915 he moved to Berlin for UPI and during the war he covered both the eastern and western fronts (claiming to be one of the first American correspondents to fly over a battlefield in an army plane.) After the Russian Revolution he was a correspondent with the Allied intervention force in Siberia and also reported from China.⁴⁸ In early 1920 Ackerman was recruited by the *Public Ledger* to be the London correspondent for the paper’s new foreign news service.

Until 1913 the *Public Ledger* was, in the words of a contemporary observer, “one of the staidest of Philadelphia’s institutions, a perfect

⁴⁶ Morris Janowitz: ‘Professional Models in Journalism: the Gatekeeper and the Advocate’ in *Journalism Quarterly* (Winter 1975) p 622

⁴⁷ Walter Lippmann: *Liberty and the News*, (Harcourt, Brace and Howe, New York, 1920) p 79

⁴⁸ Brochure on Philadelphia *Public Ledger* Foreign News Service p 5 in Box 173, *Papers of Carl Ackerman*, Library of Congress, Washington DC

embodiment of... conservatism and propriety...”⁴⁹ Then it was bought by Cyrus H.K. Curtis, a successful magazine proprietor who aimed to turn it into an influential national newspaper, an American version of the *Manchester Guardian*.⁵⁰ It hired young reporters who were enthusiastic supporters of Wilsonian democracy. In 1918 the *Public Ledger* denounced American hostility towards the Russian Revolution, an editorial stance which provoked “intense conflict between its liberal editors and its conservative readers...”⁵¹ But after the Bolsheviks signed a peace treaty with Germany its editors “reverted to a cautious conservatism.”⁵² Thus, despite having “a remarkable foreign service which it has widely syndicated”⁵³, the paper laid itself open to the charge of being “a creature of many opinions but of no convictions...”⁵⁴

Ackerman began work as the London correspondent of the *Public Ledger* at the beginning of March 1920 and, as he confessed to his editor, his early despatches were largely composed from whatever news appeared in the London press while he waited to establish his own contacts.⁵⁵ On March 20th a despatch from Ackerman appeared in the *Public Ledger* which declared that Ireland was “in a state of civil war” as demonstrated by the occurrence of “a crop of crimes.” The evening newspapers in London, Ackerman reported, were “crowded with news

⁴⁹ Oswald Garrison Villard: Some Newspapers and Newspaper-men, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1926) p 151

⁵⁰ Ibid p 151—152

⁵¹ Christopher Lasch: The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution (Columbia University Press, New York, 1962) p 77

⁵² Ibid p 88

⁵³ Garrison Villard: Some Newspapers op cit p 153

⁵⁴ Ibid p 169

⁵⁵ Letter from Carl Ackerman to John J. Spurgeon, March 10th, 1920, John J. Spurgeon File, Box 131, Ackerman Papers

of riots, murders, robberies, hold-ups, raids and assassinations from Cork to Dublin.”⁵⁶ Early the following month, Ackerman made his first visit to Ireland. The anarchy suggested by the news reaching London was not reflected in his initial despatches from Dublin. Instead of a state of disorder he found a country in a ferment of convivial intellectual debate: “As I saunter about the city meeting almost every hour some new leader or representative citizen, because all men of all factions and beliefs and parties are exceedingly approachable and cordial, I am impressed by the seriousness and firm convictions which all hold. Even those who pride themselves on their detached viewpoint become after fifteen minutes’ conversation the most confirmed partisans. Like all revolutionary movements, this one in Ireland has its camp followers from every corner of the globe. There are Englishmen, Frenchmen, Americans, and may be Germans for all I know, in every camp. Each leader has his satellites, who, over whisky and soda and champagne, sing the praises of each leader and his ‘solution of the Irish problem’ all based upon distrust in England.”⁵⁷

Travelling by train to Cork he was struck by the ubiquity of rebel sympathisers and described a city in which the revolutionaries were in control. “They...drove me to my hotel; they served me in the restaurant; they showed me about the city; they talked revolution and independence late into the night; they greeted me again this morning. Everywhere I look, everywhere I go, I meet Sinn Feiners...Everywhere people appear

⁵⁶ Philadelphia **Public Ledger**, March 20, 1920

⁵⁷ Philadelphia **Public Ledger**, April 4, 1920

determined, defiant, confident.”⁵⁸ By contrast with the cocksure swagger of the revolutionaries, the police were portrayed by Ackerman as isolated, cowering figures without authority. “As I drove or walked about the city I met the same groups of eight, ten or twelve members of the Royal Irish Constabulary, huddled together in a corner of the post-office building or at a theatre or a street corner, armed with rifles, also defiant. But their defiance was pathetic. Last night eight of these policemen, armed with rifles and revolvers, were standing in a corner of two buildings near the post office, silent and, from outward appearance, terrified, while across the street crowds of young men, women and boys passed, avoiding the police as if they were contaminated.”⁵⁹ By the time of his next visit in July, Ackerman had reached an unequivocal conclusion: “The facts about Ireland today are these: There are two governments, Sinn Fein and the British; there are two armies, Republican and royal.”⁶⁰

Ackerman’s reportorial eye, when engaged, could be keen and watchful. Arriving at the ferry port in Dublin he took note of how “even Irish sailors showed feeling” towards the British troops helping them to unload ships. But the railway station nearby was “about as dead as some depots in Poland during German invasion when all inhabitants had fled.”⁶¹ In an unpublished draft of a magazine article he described how one day a car drove past him down the quay of the River Liffey with its roof torn to shreds. “In the rear seat, behind the chauffeur, sat a Black-

⁵⁸ Philadelphia **Public Ledger**, April 6, 1920

⁵⁹ Philadelphia **Public Ledger**, April 6, 1920

⁶⁰ Philadelphia **Public Ledger**, July 20, 1920

⁶¹ Entry for June 30, 1920 in “London Notes”, **Ackerman Papers**

and-Tan trooper holding one of his comrades whose face, hands and green uniform were covered with blood. Death was running them a close race to the Royal Hospital on the hill.”⁶² However, these vignettes were incidental to Ackerman’s work. Investigating the war in more detail, beyond the scenes that were thrust in his path, held little interest for him. He stayed in the city; there are no accounts of visits to the scenes of ambushes or reprisals in rural areas or of civilians caught up in the war. And the tactics of the IRA or the Black and Tans – the obsessive focus of interest for British correspondents in Ireland, as we have already seen – rarely concerned him.

Ackerman’s view of the conflict in Ireland was that of the disinterested yet appreciative spectator, observing a battle of wills with cool discrimination. A few months after Ackerman began his posting in London he and his colleagues in other European capitals were chided by Spurgeon, their editor in Philadelphia, for writing daily about “a new move on the political chessboard” rather than thinking of “news in the human sense.”⁶³ Significantly, in an article specially commissioned by the *New York Times* to mark the truce in 1921, the chessboard is the analogy Ackerman himself chose to explain the conflict. The war was rendered as a contest between two well-matched adversaries. “No matter what the Irish did the equilibrium of British statesmanship was maintained, and each time the British Government made a move on the chessboard of negotiation or warfare the Irish counter move was a master stroke. The Irish sense of humour and British poise prevented

⁶² Typescript entitled “When Ireland’s Freedom Hung by a Thread”, Speech/Article/Book File, Box 174, Ackerman Papers.

⁶³ John J. Spurgeon to Carl Ackerman, May 25th, 1920, Spurgeon File, Box 131, Ackerman Papers

the checkmate until the hour arrived for the settlement of the century-old score.”⁶⁴ A joust between “Irish humour” and “British poise” placed the war on a very different plane to Francis Hackett – who saw the issues at stake as “fundamentally moral” – or the British correspondents for whom the campaign of reprisals by the Black and Tans called into question Britain’s claim to be a beacon of civilisation in a barbarous world. How did Ackerman arrive at his particular understanding of the Irish revolution? One explanation is to be found in the intimate affinity between the beliefs of a generation of American foreign correspondents and Wilsonian ideology. Another derives from the conception of journalism and their own professional role held by Ackerman and his colleagues in the mainstream American press. As we shall see, both explanatory threads are intertwined.

Ackerman believed that being American endowed his work as a foreign correspondent with unique and desirable qualities. A brochure for prospective clients of the *Public Ledger* foreign news service informed them that it stood for “fair play – for the broadest, bravest and most chivalrous Americanism”. Its correspondents, including Ackerman, had spent years acquiring expertise in European capitals but subscribers were assured that they had not been corrupted by exposure to Old World intrigues: they were “native Americans who [would] see the Old World through American eyes” and they had been “instructed to take no sides, play no favourites, reflect no prejudices.”⁶⁵ The brochure included a tribute paid to Ackerman by the American ambassador to Berlin during

⁶⁴ The New York Times, August 7, 1921

⁶⁵ Ledger Syndicate News Service brochure p 1, Box 173, Ackerman Papers

the war who contrasted Ackerman's "unimpaired Americanism" with the pro-German tendencies of the other correspondents, complimenting him on his "splendid patriotism under fire."⁶⁶ When he resigned from the *Public Ledger* in 1921, after a series of disputes with his editors, Ackerman wrote that he had wanted "a foreign service which is all-American, which aims for accuracy and reliability first and which is free of propaganda and foreign entanglements..."⁶⁷

This depiction of specific professional ideals – fairness, accuracy, reliability – as inherently American is characteristically Wilsonian. In the sense that Wilson believed Americans brought a set of intrinsic ideals to politics, Ackerman believed the same about the American contribution to journalism. And in his approach to international relations, Ackerman had revealed himself as a true Wilsonian long before he began to report on Ireland. In a series of books written out of his foreign assignments, Ackerman aligned himself with the policies of the Wilson administration. Covering the American intervention in Mexico he concluded that continuing guidance from Washington was indispensable if Mexico was to fulfil its potential to become a great nation.⁶⁸ He even identified a local whom he suspected of spreading pro-German propaganda as "a trouble breeder, who might, with advantage, be watched by the [US] Department of Justice."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ledger Syndicate News Service brochure p 4—5 Box 173, **Ackerman Papers**

⁶⁷ Carl Ackerman to Cyrus H.K. Curtis, publisher, **Philadelphia Public Ledger**, July 8, 1921, Curtis File, Box 133, **Ackerman Papers**.

⁶⁸ Carl W. Ackerman: **Mexico's Dilemma**, (George H. Doran Company, New York, 1918) p 136

⁶⁹ *Ibid* p 59

After his time with the Allied forces in Siberia he dismissed Bolshevism as merely a passing fad and, in a somewhat tortured metaphor, conceived a vision of progress entirely commensurate with Wilson's doctrines. "The pendulum of history has swung from reaction to revolution, but civilization has been advanced only when the pendulum swung backward and forward evenly over the arc of Time...It is the task of the peoples and governments of the world to generate the gravity which makes the pendulum swing ceaselessly and regularly, ticking the hours of progress which make the days of happiness and the centuries of advancement."⁷⁰ The provision of facts to an enlightened public opinion would be the motor of this pacific evolution. "The senseless demands of the radicals find no support among the great mass of people in any country where the facts can be shown. Facts are the deadliest arguments against reaction and revolution..."⁷¹

Perhaps most revealing of all is a note Ackerman made in the diary he kept while living in London (and which is mostly devoted to his work on Ireland). On January 10, 1921, he transcribed a passage from a book by an English traveller to the American colonies in the mid-eighteenth century: "An idea, strange as it is visionary, has entered into minds of the generality of mankind, that empire is travelling westward and everyone is looking forward with eager and impatient expectation to that destined moment when America is to give law to the rest of the world. But if ever an idea was illusory and fallacious I will venture to predict that this will be so." Then Ackerman added his own gloss to this rash

⁷⁰ Carl W. Ackerman: Trailing the Bolsheviki: Twelve Thousand Miles With the Allies in Siberia. (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1919) p xi—xii

⁷¹ Ibid p 258

dismissal of eventual American hegemony: “But was not this prophesy...fulfilled in 1917, 1918, 1919? One hundred and fifty years for an idea to develop and be expressed.”⁷² The notion that America would “give law to the rest of the world” was central to Wilson’s vision of the part he would play in a new post-war settlement.⁷³

Ackerman’s adherence to a Wilsonian worldview was not merely an intellectual position. In London he received daily guidance on his despatches from Colonel Edward House, President Wilson’s former confidant and fixer, who had been retained by the *Public Ledger* as an advisor on diplomacy.⁷⁴ Several years earlier, when the *Public Ledger* was trying to establish itself as a major liberal paper, House had made friends with several of its young journalists, entertaining hopes of making the paper “a semi-official organ of the Wilson administration.”⁷⁵ He may not have achieved this, but he did convince some key journalists that “he represented the pinnacle of political wisdom.”⁷⁶ Certainly Ackerman’s diary reveals that during his time as London correspondent Colonel House had a major influence on his reporting. He refers to the

⁷² Carl Ackerman: “London Notes 1920-21”, Box 1 **Ackerman Papers**

⁷³ The British historian and diplomat H.A.L. Fisher wrote that at Versailles “the American president shone...with the lustre of a Messiah.” Quoted by Ronan Brindley: “Woodrow Wilson, Self Determination and Ireland 1918—1919: A View from the Irish Newspapers” in **Eire-Ireland** Vol 23, No 4 (Winter 1988)

⁷⁴ Ray Stannard Baker characterised House as “a liberal by instinct though not at all a thinker. He is a conciliator and arranger.” Quoted in Inga Floto: **Colonel House in Paris: A Study of American Policy at the Paris Peace Conference 1919**, (Princeton University Press, 1980) p 28. Walter Lippmann described the service House rendered to Wilson: “The things which Colonel House did best, meeting men face to face and listening to them patiently and persuading them gradually, Woodrow Wilson could hardly bear to do at all...Lacking all intellectual pride, having no such intellectual cultivation as Woodrow Wilson, he educated himself in the problems of the day by inducing men of affairs to confide in him.” Quoted in Ronald Steel: **Walter Lippmann and the American Century**, (The Bodley Head, London, 1980) p 108

⁷⁵ Christopher Lasch: **The New Radicalism in America 1889—1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type**, (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1965) p 234

⁷⁶ *Ibid* p 235

ways in which he might make use of Colonel House's analysis of world affairs in his own despatches and plans how he will "carry out Col. House ideas and carry on his work after he leaves Europe..."⁷⁷

Ackerman's reliance on Colonel House was not unconnected to his view of how he should collect news as a journalist; the idea that good journalism was the fruit of being on excellent terms with powerful contacts. In an unpublished magazine article Ackerman outlined his belief that "every correspondent who has had foreign experience seeks to discover 'key men' in 'key positions' – men who know what is being privately discussed by cabinet officers, men who know what governmental policies are and when they are apt to be modified or changed." Ackerman professed more trust for these sources than the views of ministers or heads of departments because "influential statesmen too frequently have axes of their own to grind."⁷⁸ In a letter in March 1920 – ten days after the launch of the news service – Ackerman wrote to his boss in Philadelphia that he had been working assiduously on developing connections. "I think I have the American Embassy with me now. I have a good friend in the Foreign Office and for the moment I am working Downing Street. I find all English officials very reserved toward American correspondents because as my best friends explain they have been 'let down' frequently of late by American newspapermen and they are taking no chances. It may be a long uphill fight but, fortunately, this is not my first encounter with

⁷⁷ Carl Ackerman: "London Notes" op. cit, entry for June 27, 1920

⁷⁸ Carl Ackerman, unpublished version of "Ireland – From My Scotland Yard Notebook", p 2 in Box 1, Ackerman Papers

foreign government indifference, tinged with opposition. My first task, naturally, is to win their confidence even by sacrificing my work.”⁷⁹

As Ackerman intimates in his article, the idea that ‘key men in key positions’ should be the foundation for respectable journalism was a doctrine commonly held by American correspondents in Europe. The first American journalism textbook – referred to already for its dictum that the journalist should reproduce others’ opinions not his own – emphasised the importance of authoritative sources.⁸⁰ By 1906 a new textbook for young journalists advised them to “cultivate the friendship of influential citizens...”⁸¹ And there is evidence that the ability to make prized contacts and passively await the transmission of ‘inside’ information was by then more valued in a reporter than a talent to explore an eclectic range of sources. In 1903 Julian Ralph, a New York *Sun* correspondent, observed that publishing an exclusive news story was “growing to be more and more a product of intimate acquaintance with public men, and less and less a result of agility of mind and body.” Ralph chose a striking simile to illuminate contemporary journalism practice: “No one looks for news anymore. That is an old-fashioned idea which outsiders will persist in retaining. News is now gathered systematically by men stationed at all the outlets of it, like guards at the gate of a walled city, by whom nothing can pass in or out unnoticed.”⁸² For Ackerman the gates of his own walled city were to be found at the

⁷⁹ Carl Ackerman to John J. Spurgeon, editor of Philadelphia **Public Ledger**, March 10th, 1920 in Spurgeon File, Box 131 **Ackerman Papers**

⁸⁰ Stephen J.A. Ward: **The Invention of Journalism Ethics** op. cit. p 210

⁸¹ Quoted in Dan Schiller: **Objectivity and the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism**, (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1981) p 182

⁸² *Ibid* p 183

American Embassy, the Foreign Office and Downing Street. The combination of Ackerman's Wilsonian outlook – in which Ireland became a problem on the chessboard of international relations, to be solved by liberal pragmatism – and his belief that his credibility depended on his proximity to powerful sources is to be seen in how he set out his credentials in an article in the *New York Times* explaining how the British Government and the IRA came to agree a truce in 1921. “For nearly two years”, Ackerman wrote, “I have been in intimate contact with both British and Irish leaders. I have travelled frequently in Ireland and between that country and England. As a result of first-hand observations I propose to relate, for the first time, the inside story of the event which led to the truce and to the present conferences in London and Dublin.”⁸³ A year later in a remarkable series of long articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* Ackerman spelled out his role in even more detail. It was only partly a behind-the-scenes account of negotiations between the British government and the Irish rebels; it also explained how Ackerman himself became a participant in the negotiations as a mediator.

One of Ackerman's most reliable sources was Sir Basil Thomson, Director of Intelligence at Scotland Yard. Shortly after he started to work as a correspondent in London, Ackerman went to tea at the Foreign Office where he was advised by the Under-Secretary of State, William Tyrell to call on Thomson “because everything of a confidential nature relating to Ireland and from Ireland passed through his hands

⁸³ The New York Times, August 7, 1921

before it reached the Prime Minister.”⁸⁴ Soon Ackerman was calling at Scotland House every day. At their first meeting in May 1920 Thomson passed to the correspondent documents relating to Michael Collins, commander-in-chief of the IRA and Richard Mulcahy, the IRA Chief of Staff seized during a raid in Dublin, as well as a copy of the constitution of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the secret revolutionary organisation of which Collins was a member. Ackerman wrote an article about the documents for publication which he sent to Thomson for revision.⁸⁵

From Ackerman’s account Thomson intended the leak would prepare the ground for negotiation with the IRA leaders, weakening the movement’s appeal as the expressed will of the Irish people by disclosing its secret and sinister puppeteers. Ackerman writes that Thomson believed it “necessary for all parties to realize...that the real leaders of Sinn Fein were not the men then in the public eye.”⁸⁶ But Ackerman writes also that Thomson was “doubtful of the possibilities of suppressing the Sinn Fein movement by military means.” As their relationship progressed, Thomson briefed Ackerman to carry messages to Sinn Fein and IRA leaders in Ireland, using Ackerman’s journalistic missions as a cover for advancing an Irish settlement by negotiation.

⁸⁴ Carl Ackerman, typescript of “The House of a Thousand Mysteries” p 5 in Box 1, **Ackerman Papers**

⁸⁵ Thomson wrote back: “I have made one or two slight alterations which I have no doubt you will accede to, otherwise I think your cable is excellent.” Carl Ackerman: “Ireland From a Scotland Yard Notebook”, **The Atlantic Monthly**, April 1922, p 434—435

⁸⁶ Ibid p 434

After meeting Basil Thomson in London, Ackerman often went to Dublin to see General Nevil Macready, the Commander of British Forces in Ireland. Ackerman met Macready on his first visit to Dublin at the beginning of April 1920.⁸⁷ He decided that Macready, like Thomson, was blessed with “the traditional poise of the British people.”⁸⁸ Thomson gave Ackerman letters of introduction and it was Macready who facilitated his contacts with the underground leadership of the IRA.⁸⁹ On the afternoon of June 30th, 1920, Ackerman took tea with Sir Nevil Macready at his headquarters in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham in Dublin “[a] most beautiful old place with veterans of [the] Crimean war in their faded red, blue costumes hanging about everywhere.”⁹⁰ Macready said he would welcome some kind of mediation because “something ought to be done...before [the] troops [got] out of hand.”⁹¹ Thus, Macready gave Ackerman permission to make contact with IRA figures who would be captured if they appeared in public. This licence was granted at the behest of Thomson who had chosen Ackerman as the conduit for “a confidential exchange of views between representatives of the two peoples.”⁹² The idea was that if Sinn Fein were agreeable to the idea, Colonel House could take on a formal mediation role.

In the days after his tea with Macready, Ackerman met Arthur Griffith the leader of Sinn Fein and the man considered by the British to be the

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ackerman: “Ireland From a Scotland Yard Notebook” op cit p 436

⁸⁹ Entry for June 28, “London Notes” op. cit.

⁹⁰ Entry for June 30, “London Notes”.

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² “Ireland From a Scotland Yard Notebook” op cit p 435

leading moderate. Griffith told him he would accept mediation if Ireland could be recognised as the “Switzerland of the seas.”⁹³ Ackerman returned to London to brief Basil Thomson at Scotland Yard, bearing news that Sinn Fein was interested in a settlement. On the basis of this briefing, according to Ackerman, “it was decided that steps should be taken to persuade the British Cabinet and the Dail to invite Colonel House [to be mediator.]” This involved Basil Thomson speaking directly with Lloyd George and others enlisting support of civil servants and leading politicians.⁹⁴ Thus, Ackerman’s sources mounted a concerted effort to argue for negotiations rather than a military solution based on the information Ackerman had gathered on his reporting trip to Dublin. Eventually, according to Ackerman, this remarkable campaign of persuasion was successful and Philip Kerr, Lloyd George’s secretary, asked Colonel House to become a mediator. The scheme foundered when Sinn Fein decided “that there could be no negotiations except between accredited representatives of the ‘Irish Nation’ and official representatives of the British Government.”⁹⁵

The collapse of the attempt at mediation did not mean that Ackerman’s role as a go-between was over. In mid-August FitzGerald sent a telegram to Ackerman saying he had arranged an interview with Michael Collins and that he should come to Dublin at once.⁹⁶ Ackerman delayed his journey for four days so that he could have more consultations with Special Branch. “Sir Basil was extremely anxious to

⁹³ Ibid p 437

⁹⁴ Ibid p 437

⁹⁵ Ibid p 438

⁹⁶ Entry for August 18, 1920 in “London Notes” op. cit., Ackerman Papers

know what kind of man [Collins] was; why he would not agree to independence within the British Commonwealth of Nations wherein lay his strength with the Irish army and people.”⁹⁷

Shortly after his arrival in Dublin Ackerman met Desmond FitzGerald, Dail Eireann’s Director of Propaganda at the Shelbourne Hotel in the centre of the city and they went on a walk, ending up in front of the door of a Georgian house in nearby Fitzwilliam Square. After an elaborate series of coded knocks, Ackerman was taken to a back room on the third floor and after a short while Collins “boldly entered” and shook hands. “I noticed that [he] was quite young”, Ackerman later wrote, “and expressed my surprise that a man who was supposed to have all [the] power he had in Ireland should still be in his thirties.”⁹⁸ Collins then indulged in a further piece of theatre, producing cuttings of articles Ackerman had written on the basis of his briefings from the Special Branch. “I see you are publishing my private correspondence before it arrives”, Collins said.⁹⁹ Then he added: “You see I know you better than you know me.”¹⁰⁰ For two hours Collins and FitzGerald discussed Sinn Fein demands with Ackerman. Collins said there would be no compromise until the British government recognised Ireland as a republic. But later he said Sinn Fein’s fundamental demands were that Ireland controlled finance, the courts, the police and the army.¹⁰¹ When Ackerman returned to London he had several conversations with Thomson trying to interpret which of Collins’ statements was the best

⁹⁷ “Ireland From a Scotland Yard Notebook” p 439

⁹⁸ Entry for August 23—25, “London Notes” op. cit.

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ “Ireland From a Scotland Yard Notebook” p 440

¹⁰¹ Ibid

reflection of the real position; in other words whether the Irish rebels should be regarded as absolutists or compromisers. Thomson asked Ackerman for a memorandum which could be shown to the Irish Secretary, Hamar Greenwood. Ackerman discounted the demand for the Republic and favoured Thomson's assessment that Collins could deliver a settlement acceptable to the British government. But Ackerman wrote that the final decision rested with Lloyd George and the Prime Minister chose to interpret Collins' remarks as a renewed challenge. Ackerman blamed Lloyd George for the failure of these negotiations. In his *Atlantic Monthly* articles, Thomson and Macready on the British side and Collins and Griffith on the Irish side are portrayed as peacemakers. Lloyd George wanted a "truce of surrender" and "was not yet in favour of a 'peace without victory.'"¹⁰²

The Irish historian Paul Bew, who has used Ackerman's *Atlantic Monthly* articles to re-consider British policy in Ireland, argues that Ackerman was co-opted by a network of British officials in Dublin Castle, the Foreign Office and Downing Street who "had a clear picture of the [eventual] settlement...and a confidence in their ability to deliver, in the end, the prime minister."¹⁰³ Ackerman's job was to ascertain if the IRA leadership was ready for a compromise. On his visit to the Foreign Office as he was starting out in London, Ackerman had been told by C.J. Philips, Lord Curzon's chief assistant on Irish affairs, that "within three years Ireland will be a republic in everything but name. Within less

¹⁰² Ackerman, "The Irish Education of Mr Lloyd George", *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1922, p 606

¹⁰³ Paul Bew: "Moderate Nationalism and the Irish Revolution, 1916—1923" in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (1999) p 743

time than that all the British troops will be out of Ireland.”¹⁰⁴ Bew notes that Curzon told his cabinet colleagues in July 1920 that they had to negotiate with Sinn Fein since “[we] shall be driven to dominion home rule sooner or later.” To this Balfour replied: ‘That won’t solve the question. They will ask for a republic.’¹⁰⁵ Bew suggests that the Curzon and the officials pushing for negotiation used Ackerman “to find out, in effect, if Balfour’s contention had substance.”¹⁰⁶ There is no sign that Ackerman’s employers were aware of the secret work he had undertaken. In August 1920 Ackerman’s editor, John J. Spurgeon, wrote to him expressing relief that Colonel House had abandoned the idea of becoming a mediator in Ireland. The editor felt that for House “in his present capacity as a member of the Editorial staff of an American newspaper, such a role would be absolutely out of the question.”¹⁰⁷ If it was out of bounds for House to become a mediator on grounds of preserving editorial independence – even though he was an advisor to the *Public Ledger* and not a journalist – it must have been an equally forbidden path for Ackerman.

In Ackerman’s account of his adventures the one character who stands out is Basil Thomson of Scotland Yard. Thomson had taken over the Special Branch in 1913 after spending ten years in the Colonial Service in Fiji, New Guinea and Tonga and several years as a prison governor. He was a qualified barrister and had published novels and popular

¹⁰⁴ Carl Ackerman: “Janus-Headed Ireland”, *Atlantic Monthly*, June, 1922 p 812

¹⁰⁵ Paul Bew: “Moderate Nationalism” op. cit. p 743

¹⁰⁶ Ibid p 744

¹⁰⁷ Letter from John J. Spurgeon to Carl Ackerman, August 6, 1920, Spurgeon File, Box 131, Ackerman Papers

histories.¹⁰⁸ By the time he met Ackerman, Thomson was skilled at using journalists in his detective work. After journalists objected to Special Branch officers posing as reporters to get into syndicalist and suffragette meetings, Thomson won approval from the Home Secretary for paying a press agency to provide regular reports of the meetings.¹⁰⁹ And after the Easter Rebellion in 1916 Thomson persuaded the American journalist, Arthur Bullard, that the Irish rebels had merely been the dupes of a cynical German plot to divert British troops from Flanders to Dublin.¹¹⁰ There is no evidence that Ackerman was aware of Thomson's previous manipulations of journalists or that it caused him any concern if he was aware of it. Ackerman's veneration for Thomson is expressed at length in an unpublished article entitled "The House of a Thousand Mysteries." Ackerman found Thomson to be "the most painstaking, patient, persistent person I ever met...the embodiment of British poise, that national characteristic which keeps the ship of state always on an even keel."¹¹¹ This impression of imperturbability is at odds with the assessment of Thomson by a historian of the Special Branch who remarked on the "exaggerated view of the subvertability of society" held by its detectives, a paranoia exemplified by "the ludicrously extravagant accounts of their exploits" published by

¹⁰⁸ Rupert Allason: **The Branch: A History of the Metropolitan Police Special Branch 1883—1983**, (Secker and Warburg, London, 1983) p 34

¹⁰⁹ Bernard Porter: **The Origins of the Vigilant State: The London Metropolitan Police Special Branch Before the First World War** (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1987) p 175

¹¹⁰ F.M. Carroll: **American Opinion and the Irish Question** op.cit. p 60

¹¹¹ Carl Ackerman, typescript of "The House of a Thousand Mysteries" p 5 in Box 1, **Ackerman Papers**.

Thomson himself.¹¹² There is no sense in which any of this side of Thomson's character appears in Ackerman's appraisal.

Even more impressive for Ackerman than Thomson's poise was the omniscience of the Special Branch; he portrays it as both a panoptic gatherer of information and the essential intelligence storehouse of the state. "Without Scotland House", Ackerman wrote, "the government of the day would be blind and deaf."¹¹³ Images of omniscience recur in his descriptions of the work of the Special Branch. The agency is "the tower of observation" of strikes, rebellions and revolutionary plots, expert in "mass psychology."¹¹⁴ The detectives who protect the prime minister are gifted with the ability to gaze into men's souls: "Like eagle's eyes they penetrate beyond the mask of a facial expression. They sense men's motives and thoughts."¹¹⁵ Above all, Thomson makes his decisions on facts which "can be fitted into the Chinese puzzles of politics or conspiracies with which he has to deal every day."¹¹⁶ Ackerman lists the plots that have been broken by Thomson's investigators: "Bolshevist plots" in Ireland and India, the attempted assassination of Lloyd George by anarchists in Paris, the financing of uprisings in Mesopotamia and Egypt.¹¹⁷ All of these schemes were allowed to proceed until the moment was right to cut them down.

¹¹² Bernard Porter: **The Origins of the Vigilant State** op.cit. p 147. Poise was hardly in evidence either in the incident which ended Thomson's public career when he was arrested in Hyde Park in December 1925 on charges of 'fondling' a prostitute. He said he had been researching a newspaper article but was found guilty and fined. Rupert Allason: **The Branch** op.cit. p 87

¹¹³ Ibid p 1

¹¹⁴ Ibid p 6

¹¹⁵ Ibid p 3

¹¹⁶ Ibid p 5

¹¹⁷ Ibid p 2, p 4, p 5

For Ackerman, the secret of the Special Branch's success was tolerance. "It is this fact which those who predict revolution in England overlook. Liberty within the British Isles is more elastic than rubber. Is there any place in the world outside of Trafalgar Square, Hyde Park and the Marble Arch where anarchists, dreamers, religious fanatics, politicians, Communists, Scientists, Ministers and Whatnots may rant against the government, society, religion and the press without being molested?"¹¹⁸

It is possible to attribute Ackerman's fascination with Thomson to the reporter's desire to be "close to and conversant with the 'inside story' of political and economic life."¹¹⁹ In his discussion of the emergence of the interview as a form, Michael Schudson has also identified a complementary desire among reporters to be seen not, as the journalistic myth would have it, to speak truth to power but to speak "close to power."¹²⁰ And in the relationship revealed in Ackerman's notes and articles there is also another dynamic at work, one identified by Christopher Lasch in describing Colonel House's delight in watching his words being taken down by admiring reporters. This was the interviewee's self-conscious sense of being a figure in a big news story: "In a world which manifests itself through the mass media, ambition is more likely to take the form of a kind of voyeurism directed in upon oneself, a longing to see oneself as one appears to the world, immortalised in the glare of publicity."¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid p 6

¹¹⁹ Michael Schudson: Origins of the Ideal of Objectivity op. cit. p 257

¹²⁰ Michael Schudson: The Power of News (Harvard University Press, 1995) p 92

¹²¹ Christopher Lasch: The New Radicalism in America op.cit. p 244

But there was a wider influence at work as well, situated, as was Ackerman's professionalism, in the widespread popularity of scientific solutions to America's problems. In the time of Wilson's presidency "many were increasingly emphasising the need for scientific expertise and administrative efficiency as the essential means to bring about ordered, benevolent change."¹²² This was as true in journalism as in other fields. In 1920 Walter Lippmann was arguing that journalists should choose as models "the patient and fearless men of science who have laboured to see what the world really is" and that "good reporting requires the exercise of the highest of the scientific virtues."¹²³ Louis Menand has suggested that this respect for professionalism, expertise and the efficiency of institutions had its origins in the attraction of these qualities for the generation which had been through the American civil war.¹²⁴ "[Pragmatists] spoke to a generation of academics, journalists, jurists, and policy makers eager to find scientific solutions to social problems, and happy to be given good reasons to ignore the claims of finished cosmologies."¹²⁵ For Ackerman, Basil Thomson's composed and masterful manipulation of the facts allowed him to control fanatics and revolutionaries through the application of psychology rather than brute force; in the same scientific spirit, the director of intelligence at Scotland Yard was engineering peace and restoring order in Ireland (with the assistance of the correspondent from the *Public Ledger*).

¹²² Edward A. Purcell: **The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism & the Problem of Value**, (The University Press of Kentucky, 1973) p 24—25

¹²³ Walter Lippmann: **Liberty in the News** op.cit. p 82

¹²⁴ Louis Menand: **The Metaphysical Club**, (Flamingo, London, 2002) p 59

¹²⁵ Ibid p 372

Comparing the work of Francis Hackett and Carl Ackerman has revealed not just two different approaches to coverage of the Irish revolution but two different conceptions of journalism. Both men were proud to define themselves as Americans, both were politically committed to liberalism and both shared a respect for fact and observation. However, one had an exalted sense of the importance of journalism as a profession whereas the other saw it as a way of advancing an argument. In a speech delivered after he had become dean of the Journalism School at Columbia University, Ackerman described the modern newspaper as “a laboratory where man is portrayed as he is so that he may learn how to improve himself.”¹²⁶ Contrast this with Hackett’s deeply sceptical notion that “we pick up a paper without any suspicion that we are about to commit intellectual felony. We do not know that the news editor is in a conspiracy to play on our minds.”¹²⁷ Behind those two views lay widely divergent ideas of the relationship between journalism and power. In Hackett’s articles his political argument in favour of the Irish cause is overt and his reportage is naturalistic and first-hand, refusing to give any special authority on powerful sources. Ackerman’s despatches, by contrast, strive for an apparent neutrality and their validity, by his own measure, rests on how conversant he has been with sources close to power. In Ackerman’s view of journalism the newspaper is an adjunct to the institutions of state: “When...the leaders of two belligerent peoples are unable to meet personally they frequently accept the press...as a forum before which

¹²⁶ Carl Ackerman: Remarks at a conference on “The Press and Crime Prevention”, Albany, Wednesday, October 2, 1935, Ackerman Papers, Box 160

¹²⁷ Francis Hackett: The Invisible Censor, (Books for Libraries Press Inc., New York, 1968) p 48—49

they can present their views...This is the great service that the modern newspaper renders to the public...It is more influential than parliaments and its verdict is as decisive as any recorded vote of elected representatives of the people.” Hence his view of his mission in Ireland: “[Michael] Collins did not speak *to* me but *through* me to the citizens of his own country, England and the United States...”¹²⁸

I would argue that the different ways in which Hackett and Ackerman positioned themselves in relation to power in covering Ireland provides a snapshot of a key moment of transition in American journalism, from what Stephen Ward has characterised as “active empiricism” to “passive empiricism”.¹²⁹ The era of the muckrakers – with which Hackett was temperamentally aligned – was giving way to an age of professionalism, exemplified by Ackerman. Or as Ward has put it: “Journalism turned from ‘robust empiricism’ in the nineteenth century into ‘careful, rule-bound method of objectivity in the twentieth.’”¹³⁰ The ideal of the journalist “crusading against the ‘powers that be’” persisted in American journalism but the professional model became predominant.¹³¹ Ackerman’s methods of reporting gradually became the norm for correspondents in the United States. The procedures of American reporters covering foreign affairs examined by Bernard Cohen in the early 1960s were the same as those Ackerman had practised in Ireland in the 1920s: “The reporter’s formal ideology of the press as the neutral link between the active participants in the policy-making process finds

¹²⁸ “Ireland From a Scotland Yard Notebook” op. cit. p 441a

¹²⁹ Stephen J.A. Ward: The Invention of Journalism Ethics p 197

¹³⁰ Ibid p 219

¹³¹ Daniel C. Hallin: The ‘Uncensored War’ op. cit. p 68

expression in a set of roles that have as their aim the more effective performance of the linkage function. In other words, these images of the reporter's role are designed to make the formal process work better, by improving the capacity of the political participants to act constructively..."¹³² Daniel Hallin has identified the incorporation of the American press as "an integral part of the governing process" as a phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century.¹³³ But I would argue that my account of Ackerman's reporting from Ireland shows that this incorporation was well underway at the time when Ackerman was reporting from Ireland. Ackerman and the elite group of foreign correspondents who were his contemporaries were distinguished by their belief in Wilsonian ideology and their ties to the administration itself.¹³⁴ This is the beginning of a process by which the correspondents become "deeply intertwined in the actual operation of government."¹³⁵ As we have seen in Ackerman's case, elite correspondents won the confidence of government officials who regarded them as a conduit to the public and other political actors; for their part, the correspondents regarded them as the most important source for information and often shared their 'inside' view of the political problems to hand.

¹³² Bernard C. Cohen: **The Press and Foreign Policy**, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1963) p 22

¹³³ Daniel C. Hallin: **The 'Uncensored War'** op. cit. p 69

¹³⁴ American reporters who acted as emissaries included Raymond Swing – sent to Europe by Colonel House in 1917 to explore a negotiated peace – and Ray Stannard Baker, sent to Ireland by the State Department in 1918. Morrell Heald: **Transatlantic Vistas: American Journalists in Europe, 1900—1940** (Kent State University Press, Ohio, 1988) p 137 and Robert C. Bannister Jr.: **Ray Stannard Baker: he Mind and Thought of a Progressive**, Yale University Press, New Haven (1966) p 177—179

¹³⁵ Daniel C. Hallin: **The 'Uncensored War'** op. cit. p 8

What of the implications for the Irish revolution of Hackett and Ackerman's coverage? As with the reporting of the British correspondents and those from Europe, Hackett's focus on the morality of coercion and the rights of the Irish nation were entirely in accord with the message that Sinn Fein sought to project to the world. It was a message the Irish revolutionaries hoped would sway President Wilson to their cause. The message of Ackerman's coverage reflected Wilson's admission in March 1919 that, despite the appearance he had given of making the Irish question a matter of disagreement between Britain and the United States, in reality it was "a domestic affair of the British Empire and...neither he nor any other foreign leader [had] any right to interfere..."¹³⁶ In June 1919 when an Irish-American delegation in Paris asked Wilson about the application of self-determination to Ireland he replied: "You have touched on the great metaphysical tragedy of today."¹³⁷ Ackerman himself recalled how Michael Collins had resented his efforts during his secret mediation "to show Collins why and how the American people would not go to war over Ireland..."¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Michael Hopkinson: "President Woodrow Wilson and the Irish Question" in **Studia Hibernica** No. 27 (1993) p 96

¹³⁷ F.M. Carroll: **American Opinion and the Irish Question** op.cit. p 136

¹³⁸ Carl Ackerman: Unpublished version of "When Ireland's Freedom Hung by a Thread" in **Ackerman Papers**, Speech, Article and Book File 1922.

CHAPTER 6

Literary Travellers: G.K. Chesterton, Wilfred Ewart and V.S. Pritchett as reporters.

In the previous chapters we have examined the work of professional newspaper correspondents engaged in filing daily reports from the war in Ireland. This chapter will look at three exponents of British literary journalism who went to Ireland at different stages in the period covered by this thesis. G.K. Chesterton published an account of a visit to Ireland just before Sinn Fein's sweeping victory in the 1918 election. Wilfred Ewart travelled through the country in the months before the signing of a truce in the summer of 1921. Both published their work in books, although Ewart's account of his journey was originally commissioned as a series of newspaper articles and Chesterton, of course, was a legendary newspaperman, a prolific columnist and "one of the great exponents of the Fleet Street myth."¹ Finally, we will look at the work published by V.S. Pritchett in the *Christian Science Monitor* when he was the paper's correspondent in Ireland during the Civil War in 1923. The pieces Pritchett published in the *Monitor* at the beginning of his career as a writer are in many respects the precursor of his later travel books.² All of the work published by these three writers is journalism, written to the moment but free of many of the routine occupational constraints on the regular newspaper correspondents. They share some of the practices of their less exalted colleagues (particularly, as we shall see, in their reliance on some of the same sources) but they

¹ John Gross: *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: Aspects of English Literary Life Since 1800* (Penguin Books, London, 1991) p 237

² His biographer has described Pritchett's journalism as "serial autobiography". Jeremy Treglown: *V.S. Pritchett: A Working Life*, (Chatto & Windus, London, 2004) p 11

are freed from the tyranny of news production and thus open up a wider angle of observation of the events of the Irish revolution.³

Indeed, it is arguably best to look on this kind of journalism as a form of travel writing and place it in the context of almost a century of attempts by British writers to describe Ireland for the general reader in London. There is a long line of English literary travellers who regarded Ireland as unexplored territory. In 1818 J. C. Curwen described Ireland as a country “which, although almost within our view, and daily in our contemplation, is as little known to me, comparatively speaking, as if it were an island on the remotest part of the globe.” A contemporary of his, John Alexander Staples, who also published a travel book on Ireland, described it as “a country that Englishmen in general know less about, than they do of Russia, Siberia or the Country of the Hottentots.”⁴ This sense of the neighbouring island as alien territory for the British writer has already surfaced in the newspaper reporting and we will see this theme emerge again in Chesterton, Ewart and Pritchett.

A sense of bizarre unfamiliarity possessed by a writer crossing the Irish Sea was usually accompanied by the prospect of excitement. The political turbulence that made Ireland a central issue for British politics in Edwardian and Victorian times promised rich material and a more attentive audience for literary travellers. Glenn Hooper notes that “if travellers to the Orient went in search of exoticism or to

³ “Essentially, daily publication cuts things out of a larger reality in order to dispose of them and clear the decks for tomorrow’s edition. There can be little historical or philosophical scale in such reports, because every day’s events must be presented as deserving of equal attention.” C. John Somerville: **The News Revolution in England** (Oxford University Press, 1996) p 4

⁴ Both quoted in **The Tourist's Gaze: Travellers to Ireland 1800--2000** Glen Hooper (ed) (Cork University Press 2001) p xx

Africa for adventure, then many came to Ireland for the simple pleasure of politics as an unfolding, almost theatrical experience. Everything, it would appear, was on offer; everything they had heard, especially how intractable the place was, seemed true. If travel writers journeying in other countries needed occasionally to enliven their narratives, travellers to Ireland had only to write up their experiences, like anthropologists on a field-trip.”⁵

In placing Ireland for an audience back home, calculating the desires of its inhabitants and interpreting the claims of the separatists in the context of an otherwise entirely familiar Anglicised culture, British correspondents and writers would have been dealing with the currency of Anglo-Irish relations for centuries. Terry Eagleton has defined the question of Irish identity for Britons as “a matter of some unthinkable conundrum of difference and identity in which the British can never decide if the Irish are their antithesis or mirror image, partner or parasite, abortive offspring or sympathetic sibling.”⁶ This was a problem for Irish nationalists as well. In their efforts to forge a pure national identity they came up against the pervasive influence of the bigger island across the Irish Sea. Often these dilemmas have intruded on something as given as the physical relationship between the two islands. The thinking of Conor Cruise O' Brien, a persistent critic of Irish nationalism, is encapsulated by his use of a geographical metaphor: “The sea which we think of separating the two islands actually joins them.”⁷ In his dense examination of British and Irish identity across two centuries, Oliver

⁵ Ibid p 115

⁶ Terry Eagleton, **Heathcliff and the Great Hunger** (Verso, London, 1995) p 127

⁷ Conor Cruise O' Brien, **Neighbours: The Ewart-Biggs Memorial Lectures** (Faber, London 1980) p 33

MacDonagh shows how maritime reasoning was similarly deployed in London. “Seen in one geographic light Ireland could appear as the largest severed part of a single broken land mass, ‘the British Isles’ which themselves took on the form of an occidental Japan or an eastern-Atlantic New Zealand. In another geographic light however, Ireland could look to be a distinct and independent entity with the Irish Sea as wide and deep a separating stretch as the North Sea or the English Channel.”⁸ As we shall see, the task of placing Ireland in relation to Britain is fundamental in the work published by Chesterton, Ewart and Pritchett during the Irish revolution. But at a time when the whole world order was being overturned by the settlement at Versailles and issues of democracy, nationalism and the struggle between capital and labour had become vital issues across Europe, other themes intrude on their preoccupation with the relationship between the two islands.

G.K. Chesterton’s book, *Irish Impressions*, was published in 1919 in the months after Sinn Fein’s sweeping victory in the General Election and the establishment of Dail Eireann. It was based on a speech-making visit Chesterton made to Ireland in late 1918 to recruit volunteers for the final push on the western front (as well as delivering a lecture at the Abbey Theatre at the behest of W.B. Yeats).⁹ More than once, Chesterton apologises for the speed with which he has set down his thoughts for publication. He laments that his notes suffer “all the stale scurry of my journalistic trade”¹⁰ but his

⁸ Oliver MacDonagh, *States of Mind: A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict 1780-1980* (e Allen & Unwin, London 1983) p. 31

⁹ For Yeats invitation see R.F. Foster: *W.B. Yeats: A Life – Vol II: The Arch-Poet 1915–1939* (Oxford University Press, 2003) p 131

¹⁰ G.K. Chesterton: *Irish Impressions* (W Collins, London, 1919) p 25

notetaking was not the only sign that in Ireland Chesterton played the journalist as much as the recruiting sergeant.

One of his key interlocutors in Dublin was George Russell, the poet, intellectual and controversialist known by his pen-name, “AE”, who published a weekly newspaper dedicated to promoting the material and intellectual development of rural Ireland and who was an active sponsor of the agricultural co-operative movement. Russell’s office in Merion Square in the centre of Dublin was an essential stopping-off point for any writer or journalist looking for background on events in Ireland. Russell was not a member of Sinn Fein but his commitment to Irish self-determination made him a valuable ally of the movement and an articulate explainer of the cause. The English writer, Douglas Goldring (who lived in Dublin at the time and met Chesterton during his visit) recalled how Russell “could...be relied upon to fire off a succession of quotable sayings for the benefit of any respectful caller at the Plunkett House in Merrion Square.”¹¹ And Russell as a literary figure was instantly appealing to visiting British writers; Nicholas Allen has noted how Russell’s “sense of mission was common to British intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries...his compound interests in poetry, the occult and social organisation identify Russell as an Edwardian intellectual, albeit of Irish provenance.”¹² It would be Russell that Chesterton had in mind when he wrote of “the stimulating society of the intellectuals of the Irish capital” and their opinions “which moved both my

¹¹ Douglas Goldring: **The Nineteen Twenties: A General Survey and some Personal Memories**

(Nicholson & Watson, London, 1945) p 117

¹² Nicholas Allen: **George Russell and the New Ireland 1905—30** (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2003) p 20—21

admiration and amusement.”¹³ As we shall see, Russell’s championing of rural self-sufficiency would strike a chord with Chesterton’s own political views.

For Chesterton, one of the most shocking features of Dublin was the extent of the British military presence. “My first general and visual impression of the green island was that it was not green but brown; that it was positively brown with khaki...I knew, of course, that we had a garrison in Dublin but I had no notion that it was so obvious all over Dublin. I had no notion that it had been considered necessary to occupy the country in such force, or with so much parade of force.”¹⁴ Alongside this visible British presence Chesterton was struck by *difference*: “a stream of ten thousand things all pouring one way, labels, titles, monuments, metaphors, modes of address...that make an Englishman in Ireland know that he is in a strange land...”¹⁵ This quotidian distinctiveness stimulated his thinking about Irish nationality. He wrote that he had “come to appreciate more imaginatively the importance of daily symbols like street names and pillar-boxes”¹⁶ and argued that a sense of nationality was an eminently practical experience, inviting his English readers to imagine their irritation if such normal things like signs in railway carriages were written in German.¹⁷

In this context Chesterton decried British recruiting efforts in Ireland. He repeated a story he was told of the display of a poster of the

¹³ Chesterton: **Irish Impressions** op. cit. p 8—9

¹⁴ Ibid p 69

¹⁵ Ibid p 204

¹⁶ Ibid p 193—194

¹⁷ Ibid p 196—197

Union Jack bearing the legend “Is not this your flag? Come and fight for it” and recalls Latin grammar lessons “about questions that expect the answer no...”¹⁸ Similarly he cited a controversy over the prohibition of Irish children wearing green rosettes in schools: the effect, according to Chesterton, was to remind an Irish audience of past occasions when Britain was in the wrong and to occlude the circumstances of a war for civilisation in which Britain was in the right.¹⁹ Chesterton’s own version of a recruitment speech was to acknowledge that Britain had been guilty of cruelty towards Ireland in the past and to try to convince his audience that the mass of English people were aware of wrongs done to Ireland. “We stand here in the valley of our humiliation, where the flag we love has done very little that was not evil, and where its victories have been far more disastrous than its defeats.”²⁰ Chesterton then tried to pull a quick rhetorical move: the past behaviour of England towards Ireland was tyrannical, analogous to Prussianism. Therefore for the Irish to challenge tyranny they had to confront the real Prussians in the European war; to uphold the integrity of their fight against the British they were obliged to join Britain in war against Germany.

For Chesterton, Irish nationalism had, by its very nature, to put Ireland on the side of Germany’s opponents in the European war. Nationalism “appeals to a law of nations”; it was naturally part of “Christendom”.²¹ It was also, he argued, an antidote to imperialism: “It was exactly because Germany was not a nation that it desired more and more to be an empire...A group of Teutonic tribes will not

¹⁸ Ibid p 119–120

¹⁹ Ibid p 122

²⁰ Ibid p 110

²¹ Ibid p 147

care how many other tribes they destroy or absorb...”²² By contrast, Irish nationalism would be too aware of the need to preserve its own boundaries to indulge any desire to draw new ones. In a rhetoric suspiciously like flattery, Chesterton praised the restraint of “the civilised Irish nation, a part and product of Christendom [which] has certainly no desire to be entangled with other tribes or have its outlines blurred with great blots like Liverpool and Glasgow, as well as Belfast.”²³

This then was the basis of the recruitment appeal that Chesterton sought to put across on his journey to Ireland (although what hope recruitment had by 1918 is debatable.)²⁴ But what he saw and heard in Ireland filled him with despair. It was not simply an issue of making the wrong arguments for fighting the war against Germany; it was also the behaviour of the British forces themselves. Chesterton retold a story of a military plane dropping flares on a crowd of people attending an Irish music festival in Co. Cork.²⁵ From the context he appeared to have picked up this story from the newspapers or from friends in Dublin. The incident became, in Chesterton’s eyes, a perfect metaphor for English Prussianism. The use of a plane to frighten a crowd of men, women and children with flares “reproduced all the artificial accessories of the most notorious crimes of Germany” without any obvious point. “It was as if the whole British army in Ireland had dressed up in spiked helmets and

²² Ibid p 150

²³ Ibid p 150–151

²⁴ By the time that Chesterton made his journey to Ireland the horror of the war and the scale of its casualties may have been a bigger obstacle to recruiting than Irish nationalism per se. Ben Novick notes that by 1918 Sinn Fein was attracting voters because Ireland was “increasingly war weary.” See Ben Novick: Conceiving Revolution op.cit. p 67—71

²⁵ Chesterton: Irish Impressions op cit p 128

spectacles, merely that they might *look* like Prussians... These Christian peasants have seen coming westward out of England what we saw coming westward out of Germany. They saw science in arms; which turns the very heavens into hells.”²⁶ Here Chesterton was acknowledging – albeit with horror – the institutionalisation of air warfare and its deployment as a new form of policing in Ireland. At the outbreak of the First World War attacks on civilians from the air were regarded as beyond the rules of civilised combat. But by the time Chesterton was writing – and in the years afterwards – air power became an indispensable tool in colonial control.²⁷ Thus the use of a military plane in Cork was for him not only an act of stupidity which inflamed nationalist resentment but also a demonstration of how modern values had come to sanction tactics of warfare previously regarded as barbaric, Teutonic departures from the civilised norm. In Ireland, Chesterton was noticing – and resisting – the triumph of ‘total war’ as a military doctrine.

This was just one instance of how Chesterton made use of Ireland as the site of a continuous argument with the modern world. It was the key theme of his account of his journey to Ireland. The condition of the country was appropriated to his larger argument by a critique of the traditional view of ‘the Irish Question.’ Chesterton asserted that an Englishman entering Ireland had to discard his prejudices and pretend, if possible that he was on an exotic island of which he knew nothing: “the best thing a stranger can do is to forget the Irish

²⁶ Ibid p 130—131

²⁷ In October 1914 the Entente powers regarded a German air raid on Paris in which three civilians died as “an...unacceptable broadening of the forms of warfare.” Modris Eksteins: **Rites of Spring** op.cit. p 158—159. By 1921 Britain ruled Iraq through the RAF; see Toby Dodge: **Inventing Iraq** op. cit. p 132

Question and look at the Irish.”²⁸ Chesterton pleaded that the traveller appraise Ireland as a man in a fairytale would observe a fantastic and strange land of talking cows or walking haystacks; only then would the visitor be able to truly ‘see’ Ireland. In terms of politics his argument was directed as much at English liberals who professed the greatest sympathy for Ireland as towards those hostile to Irish nationalism. “What has been the matter with their Irish politics was simply that they were English politics. They discussed the Irish question; but they never seriously contemplated the Irish Answer.”²⁹ The Liberal declared that the Irish should not be prevented from having whatever law they liked but he rarely contemplated what kind of society the Irish would choose because “the law the Irish would like is as remote from what is called Liberal as from what is called Unionist.”³⁰ Ireland outside the union, Chesterton argued, would be neither lawless (as the naysayers warned) or free (in the sense understood by English Liberals and Radicals); “it would be an orderly and even conservative civilisation like the Chinese.”³¹ Later he came up with another geographical analogy: Ireland as Serbia, a nation of peasants set alongside an industrial power. For Chesterton Ireland was a key actor in a larger political drama “the real question... [is] what is going to happen to the peasantries of Europe, or for that matter, the whole world?”³² From this starting point Chesterton painted a picture of Ireland as an alternative to modern industrial society and thus it became for him a critique of his own society. In this sense, he appropriated Ireland to his own sense of

²⁸ Chesterton: **Irish Impressions** op cit p 22—23

²⁹ Ibid p 24

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid p 25

³² Ibid p 33

Englishness which Patrick Wright has defined as “a defensive stance adopted against the power of the state and transformations that follow in the wake of modernisation and change...”³³

It was on a drive through the countryside in the north-west (“slowed down to a solemn procession by crowds of families with their cattle and livestock going to market”) that Chesterton observed a scene that would illustrate his vision of Ireland as a prototype of a more desirable social organisation. He noted that on one side of the road the harvest had been gathered in “neatly and safely” while on the other side “it was rotting in the rain.”³⁴ The saved harvest was on land farmed by peasant proprietors; the wasted hay lay on the grounds of a large estate. This Chesterton took as a sign of the superiority of peasant values over those of the landowner and he projected it back towards the growing conflicts of industrial England and its competing ideologies. “England may seem to be rent by an irreconcilable rivalry between Capital and Labour; but the peasant across the road is both a capitalist and a labourer. He is several other curious things; including the man who got his crops in first; who was literally first in the field.”³⁵ The struggle between capital and labour was producing stalemate; in contrast the land of small-scale proprietors was vital and dynamic. What Chesterton saw in the north-west of Ireland he regarded as “the flattest possible contradiction to all that is said in England, both by Collectivists and Capitalists about the efficiency of the great organisation.”³⁶

³³ Patrick Wright: “Last Orders”, **The Guardian Review**, April 4, 2005 p 4—6

³⁴ Ibid p 29

³⁵ Ibid p 29

³⁶ Ibid p 30

Chesterton also saluted other features of Irish society, notably how, as he saw it, the family retained a “corporate conception” connecting individuals to their communal past.³⁷ A peasant in a mud cabin in Co. Clare, Chesterton argued, possessed a superior knowledge of Christian history to a clerk in Clapham Common who was likely to be oblivious to the theological foundations of his own society. “In the face of that simple fact, I have no doubt about which is the more educated man; and even a knowledge of the *Daily Mail* does not redress the balance.”³⁸ During the Dublin lockout in 1913 English socialists had proposed taking the children of strikers to England to be looked after. This was furiously resisted by priests and families in Ireland despite assurances that care would be taken not to undermine the children’s faith. Chesterton found this protectiveness entirely understandable; English socialists, he argued, did not understand religion as “the world a man inhabits” and would have no idea therefore whether they were tampering with it or not.³⁹ Chesterton believed the Irish wanted to be free of both liberalism and socialism: the series of Liberal reforms in the previous decade had been enacted “at the expense of the independence of the family” and Ireland’s demand for Home Rule was at least partly an expression of a desire “to be emancipated from this emancipation.”⁴⁰ Thus the exemptions applied to Ireland exposed the supreme irony of British rule:

that a man stands up holding a charter of charity and peace for all mankind; that he lays down a law of enlightened justice for all the nations of the earth; that he claims to behold man from the beginnings of his evolution equal, without any difference between the most distant creeds and colours; that he stands as the orator of the human race, whose statute only declares all humanity

³⁷ Ibid p 51

³⁸ Ibid p 52—53

³⁹ Ibid p 79

⁴⁰ Ibid p 64—65

must be human; and then slightly drops his voice and says, 'This Act shall not apply to Ireland.'⁴¹

Here Chesterton reached the nub of his argument that "the real case against the Union [is] a case against the Universalists."⁴² When *Irish Impressions* was published in 1919 the terms of the debate over Ireland were being swiftly transformed. The guerrilla campaign of the IRA had not begun when Chesterton left Ireland to write up his book. In the years that followed, Ireland was to be the centre of a different debate in Britain about the morality of British statesmanship.

By the time that Wilfred Ewart wrote his book, *Journey in Ireland*, the war of reprisals had become notorious and, as we have seen in previous chapters, was cast by prominent English journalists as a stain on the British character. In the summer of 1921 Ewart was commissioned by *The Sunday Times* to write a series of articles about the war in Ireland. He had just submitted the final draft of his Great War novel *Ways of Revelation* which became a bestseller when it was published in the autumn of 1921 and was described by reviewers as 'the English *War and Peace*.'⁴³ The book is a melodramatic story of two friends who went to fight in France: one dies, the wife of the other is seduced by a draft resister, becomes addicted to cocaine and dies. But in a satisfying resolution, her former husband marries his dead friend's fiancée. The historian Hugh Cecil has noted that the ending signified that "the sacrifice of good men and women had not been in vain... This was a message that people wanted to hear just

⁴¹ Ibid p 65—66

⁴² Ibid p 65

⁴³ Hugh Cecil: ***The Flower of Battle: How Britain Wrote the Great War*** (Steerforth Press, Vermont, 1996) p 168

after the war; it was comforting but did not trivialise the calamity.”⁴⁴ Ewart himself had endured plenty of experience of the war. He was wounded in 1915 and sent back to battle after six months recuperation in England. He took part in the Battle of the Somme, developed gastroenteritis and was sent home again. In July 1917 he was sent back to the frontline in Flanders and was lucky to escape when his company was decimated in an attempt to take the town of Cambrai. He lay behind a tree under fire from a German machine-gun and watched German soldiers burning the British dead and wounded with phosphorus bombs.⁴⁵ Ewart also had some knowledge of Ireland. His father came from a well known military family⁴⁶ and one of Ewart’s closest friends as he grew up was the nephew of George Wyndham who, as Chief Secretary for Ireland, had authored the act that ended the Irish Land War in 1903 by committing government money to the purchase of landlord’s estates.⁴⁷

Ewart spent three weeks in Ireland, from mid April to early May 1921. In the preface to his book *Journey to Ireland 1921* (published the following year) Ewart wrote that he had gone to assess “the state of feeling in the country, as to which...propaganda and partisanship persistently vied...For my part I offer no conclusions, nor deliberately sought any.”⁴⁸ Ewart spent time in Dublin, Cork and Belfast. But he also traversed the countryside, undertaking a few twenty-mile walks along roads in the south and the midlands. Cecil

⁴⁴ Ibid p 139

⁴⁵ Ibid p 153—166

⁴⁶ Ibid p 140

⁴⁷ Ibid p 145. Despite this, Wyndham nearly suffered a nervous breakdown dealing with Ireland and ended up being “driven from office into lasting and ignominious obscurity.” F.S.L. Lyons: **John Dillon** op. cit. p 273

⁴⁸ Wilfred Ewart: **A Journey in Ireland 1921** (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, London, 1922) p ix

suggests that Ewart was, like many other English literary figures of the time, a pantheist, whose writing came alive in his depictions of rural life.⁴⁹ Indeed, many pages in Ewart's book are devoted to lyrical descriptions of landscapes and nature, as he made his way, pilgrim-like, through the Irish countryside. But secreted within these passages of pastoral ecstasy are physical reminders of the troubles:

"After a while the sun came out and set the gorse aflame. Patches of barley and potatoes alternated with gorse and heather. Larks sang... There was a complete dearth of traffic. Every two or three miles occurred loose places in the road's surface, as though it had been dug up and replaced. A definite reminder of the realities of the countryside came beyond the village of Blackpool. Where a grey stone bridge crosses a stream which sings and ripples down a narrow ravine, a neat trench four feet deep by three broad had been dug across the road.⁵⁰

This dissonance between normality and disturbance, gaiety and menace runs through Ewart's whole portrait of Ireland at war. Unlike the trenches in France, war in Ireland is fought on a terrain which is at first glance appealing and soothing. "On fine afternoons the white-flannelled students play cricket on the grassy lawns of Trinity College, a stone's throw from Nassau Street. And as you stood, one of a group, watching them through the railings, through an opening in the foliage, you could not foresee that from here a fortnight hence revolver-shots would be fired or that the daisy-sprinkled bank would be stained by a girl's blood."⁵¹ In the Phoenix Park in Dublin on a hot April afternoon "one saw old men dozing on seats and nurserymaids reading novelettes, and the children shouting and playing on grassy slopes for all the world as if Dublin herself were a playground. One passed out of the gates into the North

⁴⁹ Hugh Cecil: **The Flower of Battle** op. cit. p 142—143. By the age of 18 Ewart was an expert on poultry.

⁵⁰ Ewart: **A Journey in Ireland** p 55

⁵¹ Ibid p 7

Circular Road and lorries came tearing along at twenty-five miles an hour, their dark green or khaki loads bristling with rifles.”⁵²

In Ewart’s prose, the Black and Tans regularly intrude as aliens on an otherwise tranquil landscape. At curfew hour in Dublin “black motor-cars containing mysterious-looking men rushed out of College Green at breakneck speed like bats or night-insects.”⁵³ While Ewart is discussing horse racing with a priest over breakfast on the train to Cork “four big Black and Tans with revolvers strapped to their thighs tramped in, sat down at the next table, and leant their rifles against the backs of their chairs. A prosperous-looking country fled by. The greenness of everything, the grazing cattle, the snug appearance of the white cottages and farmsteads against the sunlit landscape, protested against the presence of a spectre that stalked through the counties of the South.”⁵⁴

If the Black and Tans encroach suddenly on otherwise gentle surroundings, the IRA is an even more spectral presence in Ewart’s account of his travels; a phantom army usually detectable by traces of its activities. Walking from Birr to Tullamore in the otherwise undisturbed Midlands, Ewart came upon a barrier across the road as it curved around a hill at a point where it was shaded with trees; an excellent spot for an ambush. “Four heavy beech-trunks interlaced with boughs had been thrown across it, forming a twelve-foot high obstacle not dissimilar to, though far more substantial than, a fence at Aintree.”⁵⁵ Further along the road he noticed “a figure [standing] on

⁵² Ibid p 6

⁵³ Ibid p 2

⁵⁴ Ibid p 26

⁵⁵ Ibid p 125

the skyline at some distance from the road, watching me intently.”⁵⁶ After an encounter with half-a-dozen youths outside a pub at a crossroads he was joined for a while by a middle aged farmer who “turned into a field and left me with, as I thought, a rather sinister grin.”⁵⁷ Shortly afterwards five young men on bicycles caught up with him shouting ‘Stop! Hands Up!’. He was searched and ordered to sit by the roadside until they decided he was unthreatening and allowed him to continue. The half-hour had not been pleasant for Ewart. “Innocuous tourist though I was, friend of Ireland though I believed myself to be...my eyes repeatedly wandered to the bog and my thoughts to the number of people who had lately been found in bogs with brief notes attached to them.”⁵⁸

The mystery of the Irish rebellion was not confined to menacing incidents on lonely country roads. Ewart confessed his difficulty in getting to grips with the idea of the IRA and its leadership. Even as he set out on his journey to Ireland it had seemed to him curious that “while our ‘governing classes’ had been stirred to the depths by the war in Ireland, the leaders of that war on the opposing side were all but unknown even by name.”⁵⁹ In Dublin he followed the path of Chesterton and other writers and journalists to the house of George Russell in Merrion Square. Russell told Ewart that the rank and file members of the IRA were ‘inspired by a mystical passion of nationality’ and that they considered themselves as fighting for their country’s integrity as Ewart did while fighting the Germans. ‘As to murders’, Russell advised Ewart, ‘you must have seen Germans shot

⁵⁶ Ibid p 126

⁵⁷ Ibid p 127

⁵⁸ Ibid p 128

⁵⁹ Ibid p 34

in cold blood – prisoners for instance? Such things happen in war and always will.’⁶⁰ In Cork, Ewart met the Lord Mayor, Barry Egan, a Sinn Feiner who “reminds one of certain symbolists of the French Revolution [with] the thin precise lips of – a doctrinaire?”⁶¹ Egan argued for the morality of guerrilla strategy, telling Ewart that an ambush – the signature tactic of the IRA – was a legitimate act of war and comparing the Irish rebels to the Boers, who had also refused to fight in uniform.

Ewart never really comes to a conclusion about these arguments. He is genuinely bewildered by the type of warfare being practised in Ireland. Unlike Chesterton, Ewart brought no ideological scheme to help him interpret the upheaval in Ireland. His template was the Great War, the clash of states and armies. He was genuinely puzzled by stateless nationalism and guerrilla tactics – a puzzlement I would argue that was borne of the novelty of this form of struggle, with its combination of the familiar and the new and its intertwining loyalties (Ewart repeatedly met people who were Unionists but opposed to the Black and Tans or who managed to be pro-Sinn Fein as well as being landowners and imperialists). The shape of the war in Ireland – reprisals and counter-reprisals between the Black and Tans and the IRA – was opaque compared the fixed identities of the epic war in which he had served. After attempting to investigate the deaths of two Sinn Fein politicians in Co. Limerick (Sinn Fein said they had been killed by the Black and Tans, the British military that they had been killed by Sinn Feiners) Ewart concluded that what had happened during the war in Ireland was only “half known” and that

⁶⁰ Ibid p 20

⁶¹ Ibid p 35

“much of it probably never will be known, that a man has to dig out and unearth the truth for himself, that, in short, the condition of the country during the insurrection was a ‘history within a history.’”⁶²

The fascination of Ireland’s war for literary travels outlasted the truce agreed shortly after Ewart finished his journey. In July 1923 V.S. Pritchett, the Ireland correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor*, published an article looking back at his first three months reporting from the newly independent country. “Three months ago I landed at Kingstown, or, more correctly, Dun Laogaire [sic], wondering how exciting life would be in a country engaged in civil war. My luggage had been searched for arms at Holyhead; my person was searched on landing in Ireland. By the time I had arrived in Dublin itself, I was prepared for the wildest thrills, accompanied by a goodly share of what we Sassenachs call ‘Irish humour.’”⁶³

How had Ireland matched up to his high expectations? His confession is a clue to two things: how Ireland since the Easter Rising of 1916 had become a country where things happened, a place of intense interest to newspaper readers and, secondly, how remote it could seem to a visitor from England, even someone with Pritchett's literary sensibility. Pritchett describes in his memoirs how in 1922 he had gone about Fleet Street seeking commissions to begin his life as a writer. Finally a Mr Bassellthorpe, the London editor of The *Christian Science Monitor*, returned his call. “What, he said, did I know about Ireland? Almost nothing I said. All I knew was that the Irish Treaty had been signed and that, as was foreseen, the Irish were

⁶² Ibid p 102

⁶³ V.S. Pritchett: “Three Months in Ireland” in *Christian Science Monitor* July 23, 1923

fighting one another...The war was dragging on. Why, I did not know."⁶⁴ Mr Bassellthorpe reassured him that the readership of the *Monitor* was mostly Protestant and that they would be sure to be interested in Ireland.

The *Monitor* had been established by the founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy in 1908. In a manifesto published on the anniversary of its first issue in November 1909 the paper said its mission was “not only to keep its readers informed of events all over the world, but to interpret those events in a way to show their relation to the great movements that are of significance to the human race.”⁶⁵ Despite the intimation that the *Monitor* might align itself with movements of social change, one historian concluded that, on the contrary, its editorial philosophy exuded “contentment with the established order of political and economic arrangements.”⁶⁶ But Pritchett's sardonic observation that in those days the *Monitor* “was really more of a daily magazine than a daily newspaper” reveals how this woolly commitment to explain world events did mean that the paper offered its contributors freedom to write.⁶⁷ Pritchett himself confessed that he was “untrained and innocent”, an unlikely candidate for the role of roving reporter at a time of civil disturbance. “I had never been in a newspaper office. I did not know how one

⁶⁴ V.S. Pritchett: Midnight Oil (Chatto and Windus, London, 1971) p 108

⁶⁵ Quoted in Lawrence N. Strout : Covering McCarthyism: How the Christian Science Monitor Handled Joseph R. McCarthy 1950—1954 (Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1999) p xiv

⁶⁶ Bryan R. Wilson: Sects and Society: A Sociological Study of Three Religious Groups in Britain (William Heinemann, London, 1961) p 125. Quoted in Jeremy Treglown: V.S. Pritchett op. cit. p 21

⁶⁷ Pritchett Midnight Oil op. cit. p 109

gathered news. I did not know that one could actually call on a government office or a politician. I knew no one in Ireland." ⁶⁸

When Pritchett went to Ireland its intractability – from a British point of view – was on full display. Under the treaty signed in London in December 1921 to end the Anglo-Irish War, the Irish Free State – covering twenty-six of the thirty-two counties of Ireland – was granted Dominion status within the British Empire and a Provisional Government established in Dublin. However, within days of the treaty being signed, a significant minority of the nationalist movement rejected it because of the failure to achieve the thirty-two county republic the rebels had fought for. It was a bitter but reluctant split. For several months in 1922 leaders from both sides tried to find an accommodation that would avoid all out conflict. The most charismatic IRA figure during the War of Independence, Michael Collins – who had signed the Treaty – tried to devise a constitution that would be acceptable to those who opposed the treaty. But “British opposition, oblivious of the human cost to Ireland, and at least in some quarters, relishing the prospect of civil war among the wretched natives, compelled him to modify the constitution in accordance with the Treaty.”⁶⁹ The opponents of the Treaty regarded the Free State government as “a military junta set up and armed by England” to crush the true army of the Republic established in 1919 by Dail Eireann.⁷⁰ *The Times* judged that with “the passing of British responsibility... Irishmen are shown at death grips with the monster their own folly has begotten.” The conflict developing between the

⁶⁸ Ibid p 109

⁶⁹ J J Lee: *Ireland 1912—1985* op. cit. p 59

⁷⁰ Bill Kissane: *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 2005) p 30

pro and anti-treaty factions was “none other than that between human progress and the resurgent powers of a darker age.”⁷¹

In June 1922 the civil war began when government troops assaulted the Four Courts building in Dublin to dislodge a group of rebels who had taken it over. The British government demanded of the new leadership in Dublin that they put an end to the rebellion or face re-occupation for being in breach of the Treaty. “This was virtually an ultimatum requesting one set of Irishmen to fire on another set of Irishmen at the behest of the British cabinet.”⁷² By the time Pritchett arrived in Dublin in early 1923 the dissidents, known as “Irregulars”, had been pushed out of the main towns and cities; their numbers had dwindled and their campaign was heading towards defeat. But the cost in lives and property over the previous nine months exceeded that incurred during the War of Independence that lasted two years. Historians have not agreed a figure for civilian and military deaths although four thousand is the accepted (though probably exaggerated) estimate.⁷³ The methods used by the Provisional Government to suppress the threat to its authority represented an even more vicious version of the reprisal tactics that had been used on its leaders by Lloyd George and the Black and Tans. The “Irregulars” assassinated members of the new Free State parliament; in response the government began executing prisoners: seventy-seven were killed before the war ended. “The sad irony by which the new state was instantly reduced to the same political bankruptcy as the former British state in countering violent political challenge left an

⁷¹ **The Times**, April 21, 1922

⁷² F.S.L. Lyons: **Ireland Since the Famine** op. cit. p 461

⁷³ See Lee op. cit. p 69

indelible mark on Irish history.”⁷⁴ It was an irony not lost on those who had supported the Irish nationalist cause in Britain. C.P. Scott remarked to Asquith's wife: “Who would have believed that, having got rid of us, the Irish would start a terror of their own?”⁷⁵

From his earliest dispatches from Ireland, V.S. Pritchett was keen to show that the terror in Ireland was the responsibility of a minority obsessed by a warped patriotism which was itself fast becoming an anachronism. A little over a month after his arrival in Ireland, full of expectation of adventure, Pritchett published the second of his pieces in the *Christian Science Monitor*. It occupied most of a column on the back page and was signed with his initials, “V.S.P.”. His first piece, an account of a disrupted rail journey from Dublin to Cork in the south west, had been more concerned with scenery and the weather than with politics. But in his second piece he established his point of view by gazing from his window overlooking one of the main streets in Cork city: “My window is one of the little windows of the world, a peephole into southern Irish life.”⁷⁶ In contrast to the wild thrills he had prepared himself for, and the expectations of his readers who associated Ireland with war and revolution, Pritchett’s first snapshot of the disturbed country highlighted a resilient normality and the triumph of commerce over political passion.

Cattle are driven through the streets; lorries turn down the side roads towards the quays where ships are loading and unloading; farmers' carts are coming to town and going away; there are businessmen in the hotels from all parts of the country; there is a pleasant hum of activity

⁷⁴ Charles Townshend: **Political Violence in Ireland** op.cit. p 373

⁷⁵ Michael Hopkinson: **Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War** (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1988) p 276

⁷⁶ V.S. Pritchett: "A Glimpse at a Southern Irish Town" in **Christian Science Monitor** March 6, 1923

everywhere. The pleasure seeker is here as well. There is golf if you want it; and football whether you want it or not. At night the theatres and cinemas are crowded. There has been a two weeks' Shakespeare season, the popularity of which attests a love for the finer things in human thought.⁷⁷

Pritchett argued that the very appearance of normality as he described it was a reliable indicator of the pacific intentions of the majority of Irishmen. This majority retained only a "theoretical" sympathy for Republicanism and none at all for its methods. They were indifferent to "the occasional spell of firing at night" which was all the Irregulars could now manage. If only people had developed self-awareness, Pritchett believed, and had not been inhibited by "a trait of suspicion in Irish character generally" there could already have been peace.⁷⁸ With the possibility of a settlement growing, the Irish people were ready to close ranks behind their government.

However, Pritchett suggested that once peace was established, not only the romantic idealism of the republicans but even the conservative nationalism of the pro-treaty government might become passé: nationalists of all hues would be supplanted by an economic elite. "It is remarkable how closely associated with beautiful poetic expression the movement for Irish self-government has been. The patriots have given a poetical halo to their country's tradition; but with law and order established, the turn of the patriots will have been served."⁷⁹ The fighting poets and patriots would be supplanted by an economic elite. Pritchett reported that he had been told by "responsible men" that in elections over the next decade the entire political class which brought about the retreat of the British

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid

administration would be replaced “by men who have a stake in the country”.⁸⁰ Pritchett was convinced by this prognosis. His summing up at the end of his second dispatch for the *Monitor* is remarkably assured for somebody who only a few months previously confessed to knowing “almost nothing” about Ireland.

There are broadly speaking, two types of Irishman today. The one who will not easily forget old differences, a dweller in a melancholy and ineffectual past, perpetuating the old myth that an Irishman is never happy unless he is fighting; the other, one who sees the apathy and evils to be met and is enthusiastic and practical enough to suggest remedies. I believe that in the new Ireland the word will be to him.⁸¹

In the attempt to trace how Pritchett arrived at his conclusion, it is useful to examine the autobiographical sketches he published decades later. Pritchett's reflections appear in his memoir *Midnight Oil* – published in 1971 – and a book on Dublin published in 1967. Here Pritchett explains that at the time he came to Ireland he still retained the views of his family who were “firm *Manchester Guardian* liberals and Home Rulers.” These views should have made him sympathetic to Irish nationalism. But he suggests that even sympathetic British liberal notions had little resonance in Ireland: his inherited views “condemned me from the start” in a country “which is innately illiberal” – a conclusion similar to Chesterton’s argument.⁸² Writing almost half a century after his time as Ireland correspondent for the *Monitor*, Pritchett reflects on his personal identification with Irish rebellion. “I had easily rid myself of the common English idea that Ireland was a piece of England that for some reason or other would not settle down and had run to seed...I

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² V.S. Pritchett: **Dublin: A Portrait** (The Bodley Head, London, 1967) p 4

ardently identified Irish freedom with my own personal freedom which had been hard to come by. A revolutionary break? I was for it. Until you are free you do not know who you are.”⁸³ Using Ireland for such a purpose, as an unshaped reality that could allow for experimentation with new identities, is a pattern identified by Roy Foster. “From an early period disaffected British people used Ireland for dreams or ideas or insecurities too uncomfortable for home.”⁸⁴

Pritchett's elation was heightened by the knowledge that he was being paid to observe and write up “the first modern defeat of colonialism.” Watching the debates in Dail Eireann from the press gallery was, he remembers, “like being at school taking a course in the foundation of states.”⁸⁵ But despite his predetermined sympathy for the cause of Irish nationalism and his youthful enthusiasm for upheaval and flux, Pritchett equally confesses to a sense of estrangement. “I realized what a social revolution was, although I was (inevitably as an Englishman and Protestant) much more in the old Anglo-Irish society, the majority of whom reluctantly accepted the new regime, than among the rising Catholic middle class.”⁸⁶ Forty years later, Pritchett appears to be ambivalent about the people towards whom he naturally gravitated socially. He remembers himself become “sensitive, snobbish and fey” as a consequence of “this easy going life in a Victorian lagoon” (an image which conveys a sense of a whole society being lost or marooned.)⁸⁷ But he also claims credit for clear sightedness, for recognizing that “the Irish

⁸³ Pritchett: **Midnight Oil** op.cit. p 118

⁸⁴ R.F. Foster: **Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History** (Allen Lane, London, 1993) p 282

⁸⁵ Pritchett: **Midnight Oil** op. cit. p 119

⁸⁶ Ibid p 119

⁸⁷ Pritchett: **Dublin: A Portrait** op. cit. p 4 and **Midnight Oil** p 120

Troubles were, in an important sense, a continuation of the European revolution caused by the European war.” Both the Irish working class and the Anglo-Irish – whom he considers “more European than they were patriots” – had been bypassed by the nationalists.⁸⁸

The idea of the Anglo-Irish and working classes being “European” is likely to have been Pritchett’s retrospective term to characterise what in 1923 he regarded as a commonsense aversion to republicanism. This theme emerged in his dispatches to the *Monitor* in June. On a visit to the Midlands Pritchett’s driver, Paddy O’ Brien, recounted an exchange with an “Irregular” who had claimed to have played a large role in “pushing the British Empire into the sea.” Mr O’ Brien told Pritchett that after listening patiently to the IRA man’s story he had replied: “So it’s after pushing the British Empire into the sea, you are, is it? Sure, you couldn’t push a little pussy cat into the sea!”⁸⁹ The Anglo-Irish landowners were similarly derisive of the efficacy of the revolutionaries but their crisis was acute; Pritchett noted that the owners of the country estates were losing money and influence. “Many of them are saddled with mansions built for more spacious times when their owners were more prosperous; and when such an idea as the eventual decay of the ‘country gentleman’ as an institution was never entertained...”⁹⁰ These mansions were being burned down and many former Unionists were choosing to leave the Irish Free State. Pritchett understood the despair of an entire class. “It is not altogether unnatural – nor, perhaps, unreasonable – that the

⁸⁸ Pritchett: Dublin: A Portrait p 6-7

⁸⁹ V.S. Pritchett: "In the Queen's County", Christian Science Monitor June 5, 1923

⁹⁰ Ibid

country folk, pestered about their estates, should become pessimistic about the country.”⁹¹

Pritchett himself was struck by the divergence between the national ideals expounded by the revolutionary leaders and the state of social organisation in the Irish countryside. “When one sees the scattered cottages, the tumble-down farms, the strange-eyed unkempt peasantry, the ‘backward’ little towns... the station masters who will keep a train for you half an hour if necessary, the national school with its thirty or forty pupils, who attend when it pleases their parents, one wonders what all this has to do with the ‘national consciousness’ and ‘the splendour of the Gael’ about which so much is written and spoken in Dublin.”⁹² But just as in his earlier dispatch from Cork, Pritchett predicted that a practical Irish mentality was in the ascendant, a spirit in which the local schoolteacher – though apparently surrounded by an apathetic peasantry – would replace the man of action as a hero-figure in a new, enlightened Ireland. “Education will destroy superstitions – religious, pagan and social; and while pessimists with hundreds of acres make despairing epigrams about what is called the Irish temperament, men like the national schoolmaster think that the salvation of the country lies in the educating of its consciousness.”⁹³

Pritchett considered that an obsession amongst the Irish about their history was inhibiting the creation of that new consciousness. He embarked on another train journey from Dublin to Belfast, passing

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

over a bridge that had been blown up during the fighting but repaired and now protected by a special corps of troops whose job was to keep the railways running. An hour out of Dublin the train crossed the River Boyne as it entered the town of Drogheda. The Boyne was the site of the famous battle in which the army of William of Orange defeated James II in 1691, the iconic defeat of Catholics by Protestants. Crossing the Boyne, Pritchett was reminded of one of his "favourite theories about Ireland" that "it is the country of old history books." This is a visual trope for an enduring motif in English writing about Ireland: the fixation with history, an immersion in the wrongs of the past inimical to utilitarian optimism. "I could take you to a second-hand bookshop in Dublin where there are books on Irish history from all possible points of view between bigotry and blarney, piled from floor to ceiling. If the Irish would go back to Cuchulain and the giants of Ulster there might not be any objection; but they stop at Cromwell or William of Orange."⁹⁴

Later, Pritchett discovered a more benign Irish approach to history, more in tune with his vision for a practical future. In early summer he went to Trinity College in Dublin for the annual end-of-term celebrations. Trinity had always been identified as one of the most important institutions of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland; to some nationalist ideologists it was "the chief agent of English culture in Ireland."⁹⁵ Trinity's position in the new state was precarious. This sense of displacement was conveyed by Pritchett's account of the visit of the Governor-General to the college during Trinity Week.

⁹⁴ V.S. Pritchett: "Northward Bound" in Christian Science Monitor June 29, 1923

⁹⁵ Terence Brown: Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-79 (Fontana, London, 1981) p 115

The college authorities were in a quandary as to what tune to play for his arrival: "God Save the King" and "Rule Britannia" were deemed unsuitable (even though the Governor-General was the King's representative in Dublin). In the end "the Governor-General arrived and scarcely anyone knew what the band was playing."⁹⁶ Pritchett noted the irony of how Trinity, though "an emblem of loyalty", had produced nationalist leaders and key figures of the Irish Literary Revival as well as serving as the custodian of some of the prized antiquities of Irish literature. The secret of Trinity's endurance, Pritchett concluded, was that it remained aloof from the events unfolding outside its walls. "The fact is, history may have made Trinity; but Trinity has never made history. Her attitude has been that of the scholar than that of the politician. She has been more concerned with ideas than with agitations."⁹⁷ Now that scholarly detachment, cultivated over the centuries, would be a boon to the new Ireland. Pritchett observed how Trinity, like the English universities, had become less the property of a particular class; farmers' sons and "boys of similar standing" were now being admitted to what had once been the preserve of the gentry. Pritchett exulted at how liberal education might eventually permeate all ranks of society. "There is an urbanity in the history which shelters in Trinity's quadrangles and rests under its academic elms. It has a leavening influence in a country which has too often been on the one hand lulled into ignorance, and on the other sharpened into bigotry. Trinity stands for tolerance."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ V.S. Pritchett: "Trinity – Past and Present" in Christian Science Monitor July 13, 1923

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid

After a few months in Ireland, Pritchett believed that tolerance, level headedness and an interest in the practical were winning out over the romantic visionaries and their violence. The Irregular campaign had badly faltered, reduced to “wordy threats” and Ireland was in transition from civil war to normal life.⁹⁹ Pritchett even regarded the eruption of a series of strikes (particularly those by agricultural labourers seeking better conditions from the big farmers) as a sign of progress. Unlike Chesterton, who, as we have seen, believed that Irish peasant society offered an alternative to industrialism, Pritchett saw Ireland moving towards modern norms – and he approved of it. “Before”, Pritchett held, “the country was governed by what was more or less of a benevolent despotism, which created a state of society in many respects feudal.” In post-independence Ireland “you have democracy with a vengeance.”¹⁰⁰

This last phrase suggests a degree of violence in the imposition of civility on a disordered country, and is probably unwittingly suggestive of the part that score-settling and retaliation played in the restoration of order during and after the civil war. There is no doubt that Pritchett admired the leaders the Free State government in the struggle to assert their authority. In his memoirs he writes of W.T. Cosgrave, the leader of the government, as “the clever and dogged little Cosgrave” who astonished people by his political aptitude. “He was the perfect exemplar...of the ordinary man suddenly elevated to high office, who had the inborn moral character that is required for rule. It was a delight to hear this little fighter with the gay brushed-up

⁹⁹ V.S. Pritchett: "Three Months in Ireland" op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

hair, in debate.”¹⁰¹ This preference for the pro-treaty politicians ran through his despatches to the *Monitor*. There is no sustained analysis of the Free State government’s opponents, no humanising pen portraits of its leaders or followers. Mostly the views of the Republicans are dismissed as visionary rhetoric: wild, irrelevant or – increasingly as 1923 wore on – shopworn. In Pritchett’s despatches, the Republican position is almost always compared unfavourably with the flux of ordinary life and the creative endeavours of state building.

A typical example of Pritchett’s attitude was his account of a visit to Clare in the west of Ireland in the autumn of 1923. A historian of the Irish revolution in Clare has characterised the county at that time as “in some respects...typical of rural Ireland, in some respects a caricature, in some respects unique.”¹⁰² The spectacular electoral success in County Clare in 1917 of the Republican leader, Eamon De Valera, had put Sinn Fein on the political map. In the general election of August 1923 De Valera came out of hiding to stand in Clare and was arrested in dramatic fashion as he tried to address an election meeting in the county’s main town, Ennis. “It was difficult to believe”, Pritchett wrote of his journey to Clare, “as one trotted among these bare green hills, with their patchwork of little fields, and their fierce stone walls, their scraps of bogland, and those misty mountains lying all around, that the inhabitants of each innocent-eyed cottage were violent politicians.”¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Pritchett: **Dublin: A Portrait** op. cit. p 6

¹⁰² David Fitzpatrick: **Politics and Irish Life** p xii

¹⁰³ V.S. Pritchett: "Men of Clare" in **Christian Science Monitor** October 13, 1923

But Pritchett regarded County Clare's reputation for violence exaggerated. He met local people, some of whom he thought were "wild-looking", but found no hostility towards him as an Englishman. Indeed he discovered that the people in Clare were "children" who had lived in a kind of prelapsarian state of anarchy throughout the revolution and were finding it difficult to re-adjust to a new era of civic responsibility. "Lawlessness became the law; revenge was the only form of justice; and the simple men of Clare and of all the counties of Ireland became 'free'. In those days no-one was 'agin the government'; there was no government in authority to be 'agin'. But now that has changed or is changing; law and order are returning and with them has returned the old tradition of being 'agin' the Government – this time an Irish Government."¹⁰⁴ In another report from Clare published two weeks later Pritchett noted the observations of the novelist William Thackeray who visited Ennis in the mid-nineteenth century. Thackeray had remarked that Ennis was "foreign-looking" and Pritchett concurred, adding that parts of Ireland possess qualities of charm that he associated with France. He visited the town's main square where De Valera was arrested in such dramatic circumstances in August and tried to imagine the emotion of that day. But he concluded that the enthusiasm of the locals for De Valera was feckless and misguided, another symptom of their flight from civic duty. "[The] only side the people of Ennis see is that de Valera is a 'grand speaker' who has been carried off by the same tyrannous soldiers who chased the poor young boys up into the hills. Incidentally, de Valera has not tried to make them pay

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

rents, and taxes and rates; but has succeeded in being the most talked-about person in Clare.”¹⁰⁵

V.S. Pritchett’s dispatches from Ireland throughout 1923 consistently returned to one theme: that Republicanism was a political dead end, that the people knew this and that Ireland was about to embrace a liberal future. Thus he attempted to confound a perennial British view of Ireland as politically intractable, forever given to dissension. But at the same time he employed a familiar Victorian conceit about the “childlike” Irish.¹⁰⁶ Pritchett repeatedly cautioned against pessimism and predicted the triumph of distinctly liberal values. However, he was soon disappointed. Years afterwards, recalling his return to Ireland in the late 1920s after two years in Spain, Pritchett confesses to a surprisingly bitter disillusionment: “One could smell the coming reaction and the dullness of growing religious obduracy.”¹⁰⁷

The work of Chesterton, Ewart and Pritchett examined here shares many common themes. One of the most consistent is the difficulty of truly knowing Ireland. Chesterton claims that many people in Britain have misunderstand Ireland; Ewart is constantly surprised by the differences he encounters; Pritchett goes there slightly ashamed at his ignorance. Perhaps because Ireland is exotic to them it becomes, for all three writers a place to imaginatively re-work some personal or political argument which began before they left Britain. For

¹⁰⁵ V.S. Pritchett: “Men of Clare” in **Christian Science Monitor** October 13, 1923

¹⁰⁶ “The equation of the Irishman with the child in Victorian thinking was based on the fear of the inner child within many adult males. It is this that had led to a ferocious disciplining of their offspring.” Declan Kiberd: **Irish Classics** (Granta Books, London, 2000) p 326

¹⁰⁷ Pritchett: **Midnight Oil** op cit p 173

Chesterton the state of Ireland provides evidence for his arguments against industrialism. Ewart too questions the morality of modern warfare. And for Pritchett – aged twenty-three – the revolution in Ireland become synonymous with his own bid for personal freedom. All of them note the paradox of revolution in a society that otherwise appears stable. Both Chesterton and Pritchett characterise Ireland as illiberal; Ewart is struck by the irony of normality and practicality persisting side by side with risk and menace. But most importantly all of them place Ireland outside of the context of the Union. Chesterton highlights how the predominance of the peasantry equates Ireland with Serbia or Slovenia. Pritchett suggests that the Irish uprising is a continuation of the European revolution. Ewart perceives Ireland through the prism of the Great War. Thus, as with the newspaper reports from Britain and the United States, literary travellers to Ireland sought to explain the conflict that convulsed the country between 1919 and 1923 in the context of the forces changing the whole world as “the great edifice of nineteenth century civilisation crumpled in the flames of world war as its pillars collapsed.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Eric Hobsbawm: **The Age of Extremes: A History of the World 1914—1991** (Pantheon Books, New York, 1994) p 22

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to address two lacunae in the historical literature on Ireland and journalism. In the writing of Irish history, the role of the British, American and international press in influencing the outcome of the revolution has been acknowledged in a perfunctory fashion; the professional practice or political thinking of the special correspondents and writers who went to Ireland has rarely been explained or indeed explored in this literature. In classic studies of the media on the other hand, changing historical circumstances are often ignored or – in the case of Anglo-American media history of the period covered here – a narrow topic such as the activities of the press barons dominates the research agenda. I set out to address these deficiencies by examining the work of British and American journalists who came to Ireland as special correspondents and their engagement with the military, political and ideological struggles of the time.

The validity of this approach is based on two arguments. Firstly, that special correspondents and literary journalists enjoy a degree of relative autonomy and that this premise is a fruitful point of departure for appraising their work. In this sense my approach corresponds to a fundamental aspect of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory which regards the journalistic field as both constrained *and* free, where "one has to take note of this relative autonomy in order to understand [its] practices and

works...”¹ Secondly, this thesis has been based on the idea that journalists are influenced by contemporary ideological debates and that a key dimension of making sense of press coverage is to look beyond the journalistic domain itself to the dominant political and cultural issues prevailing in the world at large. As Daniel Hallin pointed out in his important study of the Vietnam war, journalistic decisions which generate news are “guided by the cultural assumptions of the wider society”² Or, as Philip Schlesinger has argued elsewhere, “If we restrict ourselves to what appears in the media this plainly does not tell us much about the process whereby it comes to be there...”³ In examining the work of a selection of individual writers and correspondents who went to Ireland to report on the war I wanted to keep alive the sense in which they were relatively autonomous agents and also political actors, responding to rapidly changing circumstances and scrambling to make sense of the shifting meanings of the conflict. To this end Bourdieu’s idea that the political field and journalistic field “have in common the fact that they...lay claim to the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world...” is especially apt as a description of the struggle described in the previous chapters.⁴

For British correspondents particularly, covering the war in Ireland presented an opportunity to respond to a major assault on their own

¹ Pierre Bourdieu: “The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field” in Rodney Benson and Erik Neveu (eds): **Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field** (Polity Press, London, 2005) p 30—32

² Daniel Hallin: **The ‘Uncensored War’** op.cit. p 69

³ Philip Schlesinger: “Rethinking the Sociology of Journalism: Source Strategies and the Limits of Media-Centrism” in Marjorie Ferguson (ed): **Public Communication: The New Imperatives** (Sage, London, 1990) p 72

⁴ Bourdieu op.cit. p 36

cherished sense of autonomy. From 1914 to 1918 the mainstream press in Britain was co-opted for the war effort. Newspaper proprietors acquiesced in the system of censorship and their journalists followed suit. The correspondents who tried to report independently from northern France in the early days of the war were arrested and expelled. Soon afterwards official war correspondents were sanctioned to send the news back to London. They were carefully escorted to the front and the despatches they wrote in the specially appointed villas situated well behind the lines were only sent out after being scrutinised and passed by military censors; they could hardly be said to have witnessed the war in any real sense. By examining the memoirs of Philip Gibb, Henry Wood Nevinson and Hamilton Fyfe, I have been able to show how influential correspondents were acutely aware that the recognition they achieved for their war coverage was undercut by their collusion with censorship and that they gradually began to feel they had betrayed their calling. This sense of shame was accentuated by the emergence in Britain of a wider post-war critique of the perils of propaganda which assimilated fears that the press had become the political tool of powerful interests seeking political advantage. Hilaire Belloc's complaint that an oligarchy controlling the press had "come to believe that it can suppress any truth and suggest any falsehood"⁵ was not untypical.⁵ The evidence of contemporary journalistic memoirs presented in this thesis suggests that this critical perspective on the role of correspondents during the war was incorporated by many of them into their view of what journalism should aspire to achieve. Barbie Zelizer has written of how journalists continually renew their sense of purpose by judging contemporary

⁵ Hilaire Belloc: The Free Press op.cit. p 37

practices in the light of past events. "Reporters create their own history of journalism by making each critical incident representative of some greater journalistic dilemma or practice."⁶ By analysing the debates among press critics and prominent journalists after the First World War I have demonstrated how a notion that the reputation of the press had been tarnished by collaboration with the government had begun to take hold on the eve of the war in Ireland. Correspondents for major London newspapers, whose professional self-image was based on the idea that they reported what they saw, went to Ireland in the context of complaints that journalists had compromised their integrity and that reporters were frauds because they had not been doing the job which the public had been led to expect of them.

As well as differing in scale to the worldwide conflict that had just ended, the war the correspondents went to cover in Ireland was different in character. It was not just that Lloyd George wished to portray it as a criminal disturbance in part of the United Kingdom; even in the nineteenth century "Ireland was administered in an exceptional way, more like a grand colony than an integral part of the United Kingdom."⁷ More significantly, the unrest in Ireland was of a piece with a series of revolts around the empire which coincided with the Versailles treaty. As well as the troubles in Ireland, Britain was confronted with uprisings in Egypt, Afghanistan, India and the new protectorate of Mesopotamia as "a new and more elaborate set of crises marched indefatigably on

⁶ Barbie Zelizer: "Journalists as Interpretive Communities" in Critical Studies in Mass Communications 10 (September 1993) p 226

⁷ Charles Townshend: Making the Peace: Public Order and Public Security in Modern Britain (Oxford University Press, 1993) p 23

through the body politic of Empire, like gout through the enfeebled frame of a toper.”⁸ By their nature these small wars offered “wider scope for diversity of perception than...genuinely large ones” in which the entire nation was mobilised.⁹ But, as this thesis has demonstrated, in the case of Ireland these doubts and disagreements about the correct course of action were publicly exposed and dissected in a fashion hardly ever equalled in the case of small wars in more distant lands.

In Chapter 2 I traced how, as the conflict in Ireland escalated, correspondents for the *Daily News*, *The Times*, and the *Manchester Guardian* shifted to more adversarial reporting. At first the correspondents were prepared to take on trust the official line that the Sinn Fein MPs, who had inaugurated their own parliament in Dublin rather than cross the Irish Sea to attend the House of Commons, would soon come to their senses. But as the volunteer army that became the IRA stepped up its campaign during 1919, the reporting from Ireland grew more sceptical of official explanations, openly questioning whether the Irish administration had the ability or the means to contain it. When the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries were introduced in 1920 to bolster the disintegrating Irish police force, the challenge of controlling perceptions became even more difficult. In a typical gambit in the House of Commons the Irish Secretary, Hamar Greenwood, tried to portray the sister island as largely serene and loyal. “In two-thirds, or nearly three-fourths of Ireland, there is as great peace as there is in the county of Kent”, Greenwood insisted, dismissing the remaining fraction

⁸ John Gallagher: “Nationalisms and the Crisis of Empire” op. cit. p 355

⁹ Paddy Griffith: “Small Wars and How They Grow in the Telling” in **Small Wars and Insurgencies**, Vol 2, No. 2 (August 1991) p 216—217

of the country (anything from one-third to one quarter according to his lights) as a manageable area of distemper infected by sedition with foreign roots.¹⁰ But as the war of reprisals became the focus of coverage in the London (and international) press, it was hard to convincingly portray Ireland as a peaceful corner of the kingdom beset by bandits; as with Vietnam nearly half a century later, there came a point where “events themselves...could not longer be rationalized or suppressed or distorted by ‘progress reports.’”¹¹ Reporting of the IRA campaign confounded the idea that Ireland was in the grip of a temporary disturbance. And coverage of reprisals for the Crown forces provided evidence that an incompetent administration had become lawless as well. Correspondents such as Hugh Martin travelled the country to interview witnesses to atrocities. As I have shown, the presence of the Black and Tans and the notoriety they attained through their indiscipline opened a new vista for the reporting from Ireland. They were disliked and shunned by the many of the correspondents who regarded them as not proper soldiers or gentlemen.

By contrast, the rebels were regarded as legitimate and honourable sources of news. British correspondents would have been intimately familiar with the Irish nationalism. For one thing, the Irish question had been a staple of metropolitan politics for generations and representatives of the Irish cause enjoyed a status and authority beyond the reach of other contemporary anti-colonial nationalist movements: it should be remembered that the deputies in the first Dail Eireann had been returned

¹⁰ Hansard Fifth Series Vol 135 Col 494 [November 24, 1920]

¹¹ Philip Geyelin: “Vietnam and the Press” op. cit. p 171

to the House of Commons in a British general election. British reporters would also have been personally familiar with Irish concerns because London journalism had been colonised by the Irish. A survey of Irish emigrants in Britain published in 1872 reported that “there is not a newspaper in London without its one, two, three and four Irish writers and Irish reporters on its staff – indeed, Irish reporters are not alone numerous but are the best and ablest who supply the daily papers with the Court and Parliamentary records of the day.”¹² And their activities bore directly on perceptions of Ireland in Britain because “in many cases what they were involved in marketing or publicising concerned views or interpretations of Ireland, contemporary or historical.”¹³ The reporting of Terence McSwiney’s funeral procession through the streets of London, analysed in Chapter 3, can be read in this context.

The ability of the British government to prevent correspondents from reporting the Sinn Fein view of the war was also fatally undermined by emergence of critics of Lloyd George’s strategy within the government itself and in the wider political elite. In Chapter 4 I showed how members of the cabinet and senior officials in London and Dublin combined a sensitivity towards public opinion with distaste for the tactics of reprisals. The reality of powerful dissenting voices at the highest level in London and in the Irish administration in Dublin Castle extended the limits of legitimate political controversy and meant that Sir Hamar Greenwood – whose sole aim according to T.P. O’ Connor was “publicity and more publicity and still more publicity” – lost control of

¹² Fintan Cullen and R.F. Foster: **‘Conquering England’: Ireland in Victorian London** (National Portrait Gallery, London, 2005) p 15

¹³ *Ibid* p 18

the press in Ireland.¹⁴ The British government failed to monopolise the interpretation of the news. As such, the evidence presented in this thesis supports Philip Schlesinger's critique of Stuart Hall's idea that the powerful become "primary definers" of news. Schlesinger argues that Hall "does not take account of contention between official sources in trying to influence the construction of a story."¹⁵ As the war of reprisals in Ireland worsened powerful figures in the political elite – both inside and outside the cabinet – took issue with its conduct. This was also a situation where "the media take the initiative in the definitional process by challenging the so-called primary definers and forcing them to respond"¹⁶, a case in point being Hugh Martin's adversarial reporting which directly contradicted Sir Hamar Greenwood's explanations in parliament. Finally, the evidence presented in this thesis sustains Taylor's argument that the media sometimes has the capacity to "crystallize slogans or themes which are subsequently taken up by the primary definers."¹⁷ As has been shown, the conceits of British, European and American correspondents (such as the idea that British forces were engaged in a policy of Prussian frightfulness in Ireland) were reproduced by prominent figures such as Asquith in political debate in London.

Thus the war in Ireland allowed the journalists who were under attack for their collusion with government propaganda during the First World War to reassert their identity as truth tellers. This return to the ideals

¹⁴ Quoted in 'Periscope' (G.C.Duggan): "The Last Days of Dublin Castle" in **Blackwood's Magazine** (August 1922) p 156

¹⁵ Philip Schlesinger: "Rethinking the Sociology of Journalism" op. cit. p 66

¹⁶ Ibid p 67

¹⁷ Ibid

made famous by *The Times* coverage of the Crimean War was not only proclaimed by the newspapers themselves (in articles such as the *Manchester Guardian* editorial claiming that the only way of knowing the truth of events in Ireland was by reading the correspondents' despatches.) More important was the consecration offered by the repetition of these despatches by the government's critics in the House of Commons. In his study of the political press, Stephen Koss noted how politicians "sedulously fostered newspapermen's self-images" as representatives of the Fourth Estate.¹⁸ This thesis argues that coverage of the war in Ireland was a classic case in point. The persistent quotation in parliament of the reports written by British, American and European correspondents covering the war seemed to vindicate the myth of the vigilant press. Barbie Zelizer has pointed out how the authority of journalists "is assumed to derive from their presence at events, from the ideology of eyewitness authenticity. In producing metaphors like 'eyewitnessing', 'watchdogs', 'being there', practices of discovery, or 'being on the spot', reporters establish markers that not only set up their presence but also uphold its ideological importance."¹⁹ This watchdog role was reinvested with validity during the Anglo-Irish war. In his memoirs Philip Gibbs takes up this theme of valiant crusading for truth by suggesting that there was "a boycott of news" from Ireland and that a few courageous newspapers broke through "this conspiracy of silence."²⁰ At the same time, and with no apparent sense of contradiction, he also manages to argue that it was at least a year after the end of the Anglo-Irish war before admissions were made in the

¹⁸ Stephen Koss: *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press* op.cit. p 445

¹⁹ Barbie Zelizer: "Journalists as Interpretive Communities" op. cit. p 224—225

²⁰ Philip Gibbs: *The Hope of Europe* op.cit. p 73

House of Commons and “facts [published] in papers like *The Times*.”²¹ As well as suiting his thesis that the God fearing Englishman would never have condoned the activities of the Black and Tans had he known about what was going on in Ireland, Gibbs’s torturous argument encompasses the idea of a small band of journalistic heroes redeeming their much traduced profession.

This thesis argues that for once there was a grain of truth in the journalistic legend. In the sense that the conflict in Ireland was a small colonial war it received an inordinate amount of attention in the press, not least because Ireland’s status was associated by British politicians with “the integrity of the British state itself.”²² The campaign in Ireland generated more critical coverage than most of the foreign expeditions which preceded it. In his survey of nineteenth and twentieth century war reporting Joseph Matthews noted that although small imperial wars regularly provoked internal political dissent in Britain, France and Germany “none of this...was reflected in news despatches from the field.”²³ Correspondents might criticise specific tactics or a shortfall in provision for the troops but the essential thrust of their reporting “was one of wholehearted belief in the blessings of civilisation that were being carried to the heathen for the good of the heathen and for the good of the conquerors.” These battles were usually “set in romantic surroundings, far removed from the troublesome controversies at home,

²¹ Ibid p 74

²² Stephen Howe: ***Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*** (Oxford University Press, 2000) p 65

²³ Joseph J. Mathews: ***Reporting the Wars*** (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1957) p 139

and the reporters took care that the two did not meet.”²⁴ I have demonstrated how the war in Ireland changed the terms of that calculus for the British reporters because its proximity and the ambiguity of Ireland’s status combined to make the conflict a highly visible test of some of the most cherished imperial illusions.

Many champions of the imperial adventure “believed that the strength of the Empire lay not in its territorial magnitude but in its liberalism, its moral greatness.”²⁵ Condemnation of German militarism had been at the core of Allied propaganda during the First World War; “Liberal supporters of the war needed a just peace to vindicate their position.”²⁶ In the immediate aftermath of the war Lloyd George’s government advanced legal arguments for prosecuting German war criminals according to British standards of justice.²⁷ This opened the way for any other state to object to British methods of warfare in its colonies.²⁸ I have tried to show how this political climate influenced the reporting from Ireland and argued that it is in this context that we should read the repeated references in correspondent’s despatches to how the methods of the Black and Tans were undermining Britain’s right to be the arbiter of universal morality, its post-war standing, as *The Times* put it, as “the proved champion of civilisation.”²⁹ International press coverage spread the notoriety of the war of reprisals in Ireland around the globe; descriptions of a British *freikorps* who self-consciously modelled

²⁴ Ibid p 140

²⁵ Gary Peatling: **British Public Opinion and Irish Self-Government** op.cit. p 61—62

²⁶ Peter Clarke: **Liberals and Social Democrats** op. cit. p 180

²⁷ Gary Bass: **Stay the Hand of Vengeance** op. cit. p 73

²⁸ Brian A.W. Simpson: **Human Rights and the End of Empire: Britain and the Genesis of the European Convention** (Oxford University Press, 2001) p 322

²⁹ **The Times**, November 3, 1920

themselves on the gunslingers of the Wild West were little aid to the image that the British government was trying to project to the world.³⁰ After a visit to the United States Henry Wood Nevinson wrote that it was “a terrible thing to feel ashamed of the country one loves. It is like coming home and finding one’s mother drunk upon the floor.”³¹

But international reprobation was not the only reason why British correspondents in particular should be so critical of the methods of coercion in Ireland. Running through the correspondents’ despatches was a fear that Ireland might be an experiment in maintaining public order that could eventually be re-imported to Britain itself at a time of deep insecurity. In 1920, at the height of the Irish troubles, W.B. Yeats – an avid imbiber of the zeitgeist – wrote to Lady Gregory of his fear that “everywhere governments & military power are let do much what they like. People speak quite calmly of a large part of Europe sinking back into barbarism & compare it to the break up of civilization at the fall of the Roman Empire. They cling to any authority.”³² The Labour Party was alive to the possibility that repression in Ireland might inspire emulation in Britain. Its leaders “believed that reactionary groups within the government were exploiting unrest in Ireland as an excuse to develop a paramilitary force that could be mobilized against labour militancy at home.”³³ This idea was not new: in his classic tract on imperialism published at the turn of the century J.A. Hobson had warned

³⁰ One former Auxiliary officer recalled how, influenced by Western films, they wore revolvers in holsters “slung low on the thigh.” Quoted in David Leeson: **The Black and Tans: British Police in the First Irish War, 1920—21** (unpublished PhD thesis, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 2003) p 122

³¹ Quoted in Gary Peatling: **British Public Opinion and Irish Self-Government** op.cit. p 93

³² Quoted in R.F. Foster: **W.B. Yeats, A Life Vol II** op. cit. p 184

³³ Jon Lawrence: “Forging a Peaceable Kingdom” op. cit. p 582

that autocratic mentalities fostered among British administrators in the colonies were being introduced to Britain on their return. “It is indeed, a nemesis of Imperialism that the arts and crafts of tyranny, acquired and exercised in our unfree Empire, should be turned against our liberties at home.”³⁴ As I have tried to show, these arguments played a part in how the news from Ireland was framed by British correspondents.

The nature of this sustained press critique and the extent to which, as I have shown, it both reflected and encouraged dissenting opinion within the political elite lends support to the argument that “the actions of liberal states...cannot be explained convincingly without an account of their principled ideas...”³⁵ Indeed, Gary Peatling has argued that the force of these ideas ultimately prevented the deployment of overwhelming military force to crush the rebellion in Ireland. “[The] idea of a self-governing Ireland and resistance to the coercion of nationalist Ireland, obtained substantial, ready and ultimately decisive support from longstanding and self-consciously ‘British’ traditions...[It] must be conceded that without such assistance, Irish nationalists would have found it much harder to establish the Irish Free State, not to mention the Republic.”³⁶ This thesis has shown that the desire of British correspondents to re-invigorate the myth of their independence from the state was one tradition which served to support resistance to coercion in Ireland.

³⁴ J.A. Hobson: **Imperialism: A Study** (James Nisbet & Co. Ltd., London, 1902) p 160

³⁵ Gary Bass: **Stay the Hand of Vengeance** op. cit. p 280

³⁶ Gary Peatling: **British Public Opinion and Irish Self-Government** op.cit. p 175

The Irish revolution coincided with the birth of mass democracy in an age when the press was perceived to be a decisive factor shaping the political world. The newspaper reader – or “audience man” in the words of one historian of the period³⁷ – had become an active figure in history, and debates about the influence of the press, whether pernicious or uplifting, flourished among politicians, intellectuals and journalists. This was as true for Ireland as for the United States, Britain and the rest of Europe. In a contribution to the national debate about how the ancient Irish nation could cope with modernity W.B. Yeats argued that journalese was the most debased form of English and thereby a corrosive component of Anglicization.³⁸ Ironically, he pursued this argument in voluminous contributions to newspapers and journals where controversy raged on the future course of cultural and political nationalism. Newspapers were the lifeblood of agrarian agitation and the movement for Home Rule in the late nineteenth century. J.F. McCarthy, a reporter who covered the Land War for the *Freeman's Journal*, recalled that for the Catholic peasantry the newspapers had become “part of their everyday life, speaking to them in a thrilling, palpitating language [which] enabled them to hear their friends at a distance talking to them in accents of power about the wondrous doings of the Land League.”³⁹ The nationalist press quoted extensively from British newspapers to authenticate their favourable assessment of Charles Stewart Parnell's performance as leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party

³⁷ Charles Maier: **Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany and Italy in the Decade After World War I** (Princeton University Press, New Haven, 1975) p 585

³⁸ Ben Levitas: **The Theatre of Nation** op.cit. p 49

³⁹ Quoted in James Loughlin: “Constructing the political spectacle: Parnell, the press and national leadership, 1879—86” in D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds): **Parnell in Perspective** (Routledge, London, 1991) p 225. According to Charles Townshend the term “Land War” was invented by journalists; Charles Townshend: **Easter 1916** op. cit. p 2

pushing for Home Rule legislation in the House of Commons.⁴⁰ At the end of his career in the 1920s the veteran Irish journalist J.B. Hall came to the conclusion that reporters were deserving of better conditions – because they were “the most important arbiters of the situation in which their profession places them.”⁴¹ Picking up on the growing perception in the political world that publicity was essential to success, Hall urged his colleagues to demand more respect from politicians “who live, move, and have their being” in the columns of coverage printed in the newspapers.⁴²

News was now the chief currency of the commercial press for a mass audience. Becoming newsworthy or receiving favourable treatment in the news was a fundamental aim of political movements. As this thesis has demonstrated, Sinn Fein was no different. The chief representatives of the rebels whom correspondents first encountered when they arrived in Dublin – Desmond FitzGerald and Erskine Childers – were themselves British-born, urbane and well connected to the media world in London. They in turn opened doors to intellectual apologists for the Sinn Fein cause such as George Russell and the popular historian Alice Stopford Green whose outlook was essentially the same as English liberals. An official at Dublin Castle is reputed to have surprised a visiting correspondent by describing in detail the itinerary the journalist had already been taken through by Sinn Fein: “You went to...the home of Sir Horace Plunkett and you had a couple of hours with George

⁴⁰ Ibid p 230

⁴¹ J.B. Hall: Random Records of a Reporter (The Fodhla Printing Company Limited, Dublin, 1928) p 226.

⁴² Ibid

Russell at Plunkett House. Desmond FitzGerald called on you at the Shelbourne Hotel, and with an elaborate show of secrecy arranged an interview with Arthur Griffith. One or two harmless young Catholic priests fell into conversation with you at the Shelbourne. You had invitations to tea from Mrs Erskine Childers, Maud Gonne MacBride and Mrs Stopford Green, who described atrocities they claim to have seen...”⁴³ Sinn Fein’s focus on publicity – analysed in Chapter 4 – was consistent with work carried out by other insurgent groups in the new media age. Prior to the American intervention in Cuba in 1898, Cuban exiles in New York had helped journalists from the major papers there to write about the scorched earth tactics being practised by the Spaniards in the effort to suppress Cuban nationalism.⁴⁴ And during the Mexican revolution Pancho Villa used the press to disseminate “ready-made perceptions of him and his struggle in terms of three fundamental issues – his morality, his and the United States’ mutual self-interest, and American pragmatism.”⁴⁵ He regularly gave interviews to American newspaper correspondents including John Reed and provided a special carriage on his military train for journalists.⁴⁶ One of Villa’s lieutenants, Pablo Lopez, once gave an interview to a correspondent of a Texan newspaper after he discovered that the reporter was Irish by birth. ‘Ah’, said Lopez, ‘you are not then a gringo. Well, that makes a little

⁴³ Richard Bennett: **The Black and Tans** op. cit. p 100

⁴⁴ Richard Gott: **Cuba: A New History** (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004) p 93—95 and p 100

⁴⁵ Mark Cronlund Anderson: **Pancho Villa’s Revolution by Headlines** (University of Oklahoma Press, 2000) p 44

⁴⁶ Friedrich Katz: **The Life and Times of Pancho Villa** (Stanford University Press, 1998) p 322

difference; you have revolutions in your own land. Is it not so? Yes, my friends keep me posted on outside news.”⁴⁷

This story points to a key strategy of the Irish rebels: the attempt to universalise their cause and thus invite visiting journalists to frame their struggle within greater world-historical dimensions. By claiming the right to self-determination the Irish revolutionaries were connecting themselves to the idea being promoted by President Woodrow Wilson as a prophylactic against future imperial wars. This “allowed Sinn Fein to represent itself to the world as more than just a physical force party.”⁴⁸ And it associated the struggle in Ireland with nascent anti-colonial nationalisms around the world. “The concept of Indians as brown Irishmen” had already been promoted by Fenian intellectuals in the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ Now Sinn Fein was attempting to “persuade the English that nationalism was not a vile Irish disease but a natural and irresistible phenomenon.”⁵⁰ In a memorandum written in 1922, Gavin Duffy – the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the new Free State government – argued that Ireland could be a force to be reckoned with in the League of Nations because it was regarded as standing for “democratic principles, against Imperialism and upon the side of liberty throughout the world.”⁵¹ This was the master narrative which Sinn Fein pressed on journalists covering the Anglo-Irish war.

⁴⁷ Ibid p 559—560

⁴⁸ Bill Kissane: **The Politics of the Irish Civil War** op.cit. p 46

⁴⁹ H.V. Brasted: “Irish Nationalism and the British Empire” op. cit. p 89

⁵⁰ Ibid p 97

⁵¹ Quoted in Donal Lowry: “New Ireland, Old Empire and the Outside World” op. cit. p 173—174

Historians who have written about Sinn Fein's propaganda effort have dealt with it in isolation, often regarding it as an ingenious sales pitch. I have argued that it should be looked at in tandem with British efforts to influence journalists as a very modern struggle to define the news. Writing in 1936, the historian and journalist R.C.K. Ensor argued that the relationship between journalism and politics had changed in the previous fifty years: in the nineteenth century "propaganda was made by open argument" whereas in the twentieth century it was achieved by "the doctoring of news."⁵² Ensor's insight appeared to be borne out by the observation by one of Britain's propagandists during the First World War, Sir Gilbert Parker, to the effect that he and his colleagues had been more successful than the Germans because they used the "objective" language of news to mobilise opinion rather than crude propaganda of the Germans.⁵³ During the Anglo-Irish war both sides realised that influencing the news was vital to controlling public perceptions of the conflict. Echoing Parker, the head of the News Bureau at Dublin Castle, Basil Clarke, tried to persuade his political and military masters that news was a more effective propaganda weapon than argument. "Whereas *views* like a quack medicine, must be 'pushed' with influence, with petitions and grovelling only to find a niggardly resting place in a single journal...news travels of its own volition without need of any further expenditure of energy on the part of the original transmitter, and pokes its own way into journals home and foreign, friendly and

⁵² R.C.K. Ensor: **England 1870—1914** (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985 edition) p 144. However, Lucy Brown and others have contended that the 'doctoring of news' was not as absent from the nineteenth century press as Ensor made out. Lucy Brown: **Victorian News and Newspapers** (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985).

⁵³ Mark Hampton: **Visions of the Press** op.cit. p 153

unfriendly, the world over.”⁵⁴ He argued that labelling news as “official” would give it a “hallmark” that would trump whatever opinions were held by the correspondents and guarantee publication.⁵⁵ What he had not accounted for was that Sinn Fein propagandists were also well aware of what journalists needed to write their stories. Describing his day to day encounters with correspondents in a letter to his fiancée, Frank Gallagher wrote that he strived to “give them *news*” (my italics).⁵⁶ To Basil Clarke’s dismay, many correspondents who went to cover the war in Ireland proved reluctant to regard “official” news as the only legitimate news: this thesis is essentially an explanation of why this happened.

Where the British officials *were* able gain influence, in the case of the American correspondent Carl Ackerman, they did so by enlisting him on one side of the debate within the elite, recruiting him to explore the possibilities of a negotiated truce. A crucial reason why Ackerman was drawn to this role was the attraction of dealing behind the scenes with powerful officials and men of influence, not mere spokesmen or press agents. Ackerman’s concept of his own professionalism, his belief that experts and highly placed administrators were the true source of news, and his close affiliation with Wilsonian foreign policy, drew him first to British intelligence officials and diplomats and then into becoming a go-between in one of several failed mediation efforts to end the war in Ireland. In contrast with the British correspondents, Ackerman saw

⁵⁴ Basil Clarke, undated memo, CO/904/168/915

⁵⁵ Basil Clarke CO/904168/843

⁵⁶ Letter from Frank Gallagher to Cecilia Saunders, November 13, 1921, Frank Gallagher Papers, Trinity College Dublin, 132

himself as part of the policy-making process rather than as a critical outsider. And, as I argued in Chapter 5, his coverage of Ireland presages the emergence of a culture among American foreign correspondents which bound them closely to government and to a liberal internationalist view of American foreign policy. This goes to show that while the “Anglo-American model” of journalism does rest on common practices and reciprocal exchanges between the two traditions there are important divergences as well.⁵⁷

What the British and American journalists whose work I have examined in this thesis *do* have in common is an irresistible inclination to place their coverage of the Irish revolution within a context of other issues that they found more pressing. Sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, their interpretations of events in Ireland are interventions in debates about their own societies. In the passage quoted earlier from Hugh Martin’s despatch, written as he returned to London for Armistice Day in 1920, he represents Ireland as a theatre where British morality was being put to the test on a stage visible only to newspaper correspondents who watched the drama unfold as stand-ins for the public.⁵⁸ G.K. Chesterton was able to use the vigorous upsurge of Irish nationalism to make his case against industrialism and collectivism. For V.S. Pritchett, being a correspondent in revolutionary Ireland was a personal liberation from the stultifying horizons of his lower-middle class family. And Carl Ackerman saw Ireland in terms of the anti-revolutionary creed of

⁵⁷ For recent references to the Anglo-American model see Rodney Benson and Erik Neveu: “Introduction: Field Theory as a Work in Progress” in idem **Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field** op. cit. p 8 and Daniel C. Hallin: “Field Theory, Differentiation Theory, and Comparative Media Research” *ibid* p 232

⁵⁸ **Daily News** November 11, 1920 op. cit

Wilsonian democracy. A particularly enduring conceit among the British journalists is the tergiversation from virtuous standards of governance. Thirty years after the Irish revolution the *Daily Mirror* began to carry reports by James Cameron criticising the conduct of the war in Kenya (in which he compared the Mau Mau to Sinn Fein).⁵⁹ Cameron wrote that Britain had to protect “our good name...our reputation” as much as the white settlers.⁶⁰ In an editorial in support of Cameron’s expose, the *Mirror* argued that although Mau Mau was “a vicious organisation” the greater issue was “the ruin of Colonial goodwill and the strange sad corruption of British rule”; the conflict essentially came down to “our own morality as rulers.”⁶¹ It was as if the debate on Ireland had never happened.

This tendency among many liberal British correspondents to view the Irish troubles overwhelmingly in terms of their implications for the ethics of British rule is partly responsible for what some see as a distorted account of the conflict enduringly popularised by Sinn Fein apologists. Robert Kee has argued that the success of Sinn Fein publicity made it appear that the IRA had merely acted in response to the ruthlessness of British mercenaries whereas the reality was that many of the Crown forces killed were Catholic Irishmen, not Black and Tans.⁶² Kee observed that “so much efficient propaganda about reprisals was made on behalf of the Sinn Fein cause that it can now be too easily

⁵⁹ Joanna Lewis: “ ‘Daddy Wouldn’t Buy Me a Mau Mau’: The British Popular Press & the Demoralization of Empire” in E.S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (eds): Mau Mau & Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration (James Currey, Oxford, 2003) p 234—235

⁶⁰ Ibid p 238

⁶¹ Daily Mirror, December 1, 1952, quoted in Ibid p 236

⁶² Robert Kee: The Green Flag op.cit. p 686

forgotten that a strong element of civil war was involved in the events of 1920-21; it accounted for much of the peculiar savagery.”⁶³ It’s true that correspondents from *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily News* were so focussed on documenting reprisals that the IRA’s campaign virtually escaped scrutiny, save for a periodic totting up of “outrages”, a practice which gave the impression that assassinations and ambushes were merely an incidental backdrop to the reprisals themselves. There was hardly any attempt to explain IRA tactics or its practice of kidnapping magistrates and shooting informers. This kind of news usually appeared in the pro-Unionist *Morning Post*, albeit often in the form of the verbatim recycling of press statements from Dublin Castle. But it did at least partially reflect a feature of the war which the other papers deemed unimportant. The same fate mostly befell other specifically local dimensions of the revolution: language, religion and the nature of Irish nationalism itself were rarely explored in their own right. The work of foreign correspondents covering the Irish revolution was mainly about other things besides Ireland.⁶⁴

As I made clear in the introduction, I intended this thesis to make a contribution towards redressing a bias in media scholarship towards ahistorical studies of journalism. By examining work produced by foreign correspondents at a moment of revolutionary change in Ireland I

⁶³ Ibid p 684

⁶⁴ A similar conclusion can be drawn from reading the work of American journalists who covered the Vietnam War: “[they] are much better on how Americans endured despair than on how the Vietnamese inflicted it... [Their work] induces a sense that Vietnam was not a place but an evil state of mind in which all those names of real locations – Hue, Highway 1, Con Thien – were merely poisonous disorders of the American psyche, to be examined with horrid satisfaction.” See Maurice Walsh: “Saigon Stories”, a review of **Reporting Vietnam: American Journalism, 1959—75 (Two Vols)** (Library of America, New York, 1999) in **New Statesman**, August 23, 1999 p 42

have tried to show how embedding an account of professional norms within the wider context of shifting political and cultural struggles will yield a richer and more satisfactory explanation of journalistic practice.

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