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MICHAEL COLLINS AND THE
NATIONALIST RETROSPECTIVE

by

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CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Chapter 1: The fight against the British	7
3.	Chapter 2: The Civil War	51
4.	Chapter 3: Films and their historical accounts	78
5.	Conclusion I	103
6.	Conclusion II	113

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There will be three chapters in this thesis. The first two will compare and contrast how six different biographers treat their subject Michael Collins and the surrounding political context in which he worked. This thesis is not concerned with the quality of the research in the books. It merely focuses on how they vary and compare in their expression.

These biographers can be categorised into three different sections. Firstly those who themselves were active nationalists during the period 1916 - 1922. Piaras Beaslai, Frank O Connor, Leon O Broin and Desmond Ryan fill this category. Secondly, the biography of Margery Forester who is writing from a foreign perspective. Finally, a biography from an Irish historian of a later generation, Tim Pat Coogan.

There are in excess of twenty historians who deal significantly with the life and work of Michael Collins. But due to the size and time constraints imposed on this work it is necessary to focus on just six. These however are probably the most popular and between them it is possible to correlate certain traditionally nationalist trends, as regards history writing on Ireland. It will be shown how all the biographers support the ideals of Irish nationalism, and how they support violence as means to achieving Irish independence. Though in some of them this is expressed, only, tacitly. Regarding the character of Collins, certain books, are more revealing and objective than others.

The study will exclude the biographers treatment of the truce and Treaty period. The primary reason for this is the time restriction. The two main periods to be considered, therefore, will be the War of Independence and the Civil War. In their treatment of the Civil War all the biographers support Michael Collins and the pro-treatyite side. From the nationalist point of view the villain is more obvious in the War of Independence than in the Civil War. With this in mind, an ongoing theme will be the amount of variance that exists over the treatment of de Valera in these biographies.

They are all written in a chronological format. Therefore it is also convenient for the first two chapters to work within a chronological framework. The first and largest of these chapters will cover the commentary on Collins from his childhood to the

truce in 1921. The second will cover the Civil War up to Collins' assination on 22 August, 1922.

Not all the biographies cover all the periods in Collins' life. Therefore there will be more focus on certain biographies, during different phases of the thesis.

The third and final chapter in the thesis will reflect how the dimension of film has expressed itself on the subject of Michael Collins. The two sources to be considered here are the Neil Jordan movie '*Michael Collins*' and the RTE/Thamas production, '*The Treaty*'. Jordan's film is a cinematic experience designed for mass audiences. As such it aroused controversy in the media on several levels. It will be shown, how despite this controversy its basic message is the same as that expressed in the books.

The following section introduces the biographies and films used in this work.

PIARAS BEASLAI

Piaras Beaslai was a close friend of Michael Collins and worked by his side during the War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. His most notable occupation during the period was as editor of '*An tOglach*'. This was the principal publication for the Volunteers. He expresses more ardent nationalism in his writing than any other of the biographers, and is the most resentful of the British administration. He is totally committed to Collins's decision and his disgust with de Valera runs rampant.

He doesn't appear to be as critical of de Valera in his second work which was published while de Valera was in government.

He wrote two biographies on Michael Collins. His first, '*Michael Collins and the making of a new Ireland*' which was first published in 1937, in two volumes as early as 1926. It is a much longer and more scathing work than his second biography '*Michael Collins - soldier and statesman*' which was first published in 1937, in one volume.

The first was written very shortly after the Civil war, when there was still a lot of hostility in the country. It is written as a justification of Collins's life work and of the treatyite side during the Civil War. He says he received co-operation and was complimented for his 'candour and fairness' by men who had fought on the anti-treaty side. The sensitivities of the time, however, are highlighted by his claim that 'my house was raided by armed and massed men and two chapters of the manuscript of my book carried off on the signed founder of the gentlemen who is now one of Mr. de Valera's cabinet minister'. He admits that there are some errors in his first work but that these are trivial and only related to minor details which are mostly of 'personal rather than historic interest'. Regarding his second work, he points out that even after sixteen years it is impossible to discuss the period calmly and candidly with certain politicians. He claims that he is writing from a neutral stand point and that his 'only desire is to record facts truly and to do justice to the memory of a great Irishman who I knew well. I have endeavoured not to obtrude my own view on controversial topics. I am more concerned with recording facts than advocating opinions.'¹ He will be assessed according to this declaration.

FRANK O CONNOR

Frank O Connor is a pseudonym of Michael O Donovan who was born in Cork in 1903. He started writing at a very young age. He became librarian, first in Co. Cork, then in Dublin. His short stories have earned him a worldwide reputation. He says that writing his biography, '*The Big Fellow*' was a 'labour of love', but also, in part an 'act of reparation'. He admits the latter because he himself fought on the anti-treaty side in the Civil War. With such a history it is understandable that his criticism of de Valera is slight. He claims that he has 'taken no pains whatever to conceal the fact that Collins was a human being, that he took a drink, swore and lost his temper. It is not as though there were anything to conceal'.² He will be tested on this statement. '*The Big Fellow*' was first published in 1937.

LEON O' BROIN

Leon O' Broin was a writer, broadcaster, historian and public servant. He was active in the national movement prior to the Treaty and served in various government department before becoming Secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs.

O'Broin didn't write his work, '*Michael Collins*' until 1980, a date much later than any of the other biographers who were Collins' contemporaries. While he supports Collins and his actions he is perhaps the most willing of all the biographers to show his darker side without striving to justify it.

DESMOND RYAN

Desmond Ryan, the literary executor of Padraig Pearse, was a pupil of his in St., Enda's College, Rathfarnham, and fought with him in the G.P.O. in 1916. To him Collins is a hero of great proportion. His style is typical of old Irish poetry with a fascination for the physical appearance of those whom he attempts to depict. Like the biographies of Beaslai and O Connor, Ryan's was written in the 1930's, in an environment subjected to the sensitivities of post Civil War Ireland. It was first published in 1932 as '*The Invisible Army*,' and was later renamed '*Michael Collins*'. This book is written from the perspective of various people involved in Collins' network. The validity of the way he represents and quotes these people and the value of his work as history has to be called into question, but he certainly creates a raw atmosphere which contributes immensely to an understanding of the time. He is unfair in his generalisation of women in this book but at least he weights their political significance which is more than can be said for most of the biographers and the two films under discussion. In an attempt to detect a common nationalist psyche that might exist among these biographers, their appraisal of women will be analysed. Ryan is interested in activities on the ground level and describes them as if they were part of a novel. He is more interested in recreating the atmosphere at this level than in factually tracing events or in penetrating the higher political sphere.

MARGERY FORESTER

Margery Forester was born in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1936. She moved to Britain in 1957, but didn't visit Ireland until 1961. Her great-grandmother had emigrated from the country in 1841. It was this visit to Ireland that made her aware of Michael Collins. She became interested in his life and soon this interest becomes passionate. Her biography '*Michael Collins - The lost leader*' was first published in 1971.

T.P. COOGAN

T.P. Coogan, historian and journalist, was editor of the Irish Press for twenty years. It may seem peculiar therefore that he is so strongly critical of de Valera not only in this biography but also in another biography on de Valera himself. Of the six biographers he is the most revealing on de Valera and apart from Beaslai the most vicious towards him. While Coogan was not a contemporary of Collins', he is linked to him through his father. When he was a child Collins' named 'crackled in the background'.³ His father had been a close friend of David Neligan, who was one of the most important double agents assisting Collins during the War of Independence.

Coogan is an ardent nationalist who prefers to consider Collins a 'freedom fighter' rather than an 'urban terrorist'.⁴ While he directs the reader according to his own well established bias, his book is the best researched of all the biographers and it is the most informative. As a result of this he manages to provide the reader with enough information to make up his/her own mind. This will be highlighted throughout the course of the thesis. Of all the biographers he is the only one who significantly praises the contributions of women to Irish nationalism. His biography is titled '*Michael Collins*'.

THE NEIL JORDAN MOVIE

Jordan released his film in 1996. To accompany the film, Jordan also realised the final draft of his screenplay and a film diary. It is beneficial to have the screenplay as it verbally depicts the images he wants to display. As well as this, during the course of the film production Jordan made various day-to-day changes, with scenes been left out or altered. This can broaden to a certain degree our impressions of his intention for the movie.

The film diary allows us to penetrate his opinion of Michael Collins and the perspective from which he makes his movie. The film and screenplay glorify Collins as a freedom fighter, encapsulating his work and contributions to the country from 1916-1922, the year of his death in approximately two hours of celluloid. Jordan accompanies Coogan and Beaslai in his less than complimentary portrayal of

de Valera. The British are seen in a completely negative light. There is not one sympathetic British character in the entire film. Due to its running time and the fact that it has to sell as an entertainment piece, his historical account has to be altered and condensed. This is inevitable.

Naturally however, this approach can be manipulated to suit and benefit the director's vision of history. All cinema is to some degree fiction. Even in a scene which attempts to recreate an event that actually occurred the visual display is inevitably different to the actual event. In reality we all perceive independently. On the screen we see through the director's eye. The historian also possesses this power but he is obliged to back his vision up with fact. Jordan who has the licence to alter and condense fact should do so without gravely contradicting history, as his film claims to represent history. It is on this footing, that the film and screenplay should be analysed.

THE TREATY

The screenplay for this RTE/Thames production was written by Brian Phelan. The historical consultants were Tim Pat Coogan, Prof. R.F. Forester, John Greek, Lord Longford and Prof. T.P. O Neil. This is interesting because both Coogan and Forester have voiced discontent to certain aspects of the Jordan film. This production was released on television in 1991. It is very unbiased in its sympathies which is reflected as much in the collaboration of its production as it is in anything else.

CHAPTER 1

CHILDHOOD

Frank O Connor remarks that from the point of view of a novelist Collins' youth would be the most intriguing period of his life: 'In this we see the first threshings of his genius in a world which did not recognise it.'⁵

Beaslai, O Broin, Forester and Coogan all outline an historical overview of the environment into which Collins was born, complimented by a history of his family or clan, the O Coileain. The political background of the Land Question, the Home Rule campaign and the effect of these on Cork and the country as a whole are analysed. The British administration is highly criticised in these areas. Beaslai is the most nationalistic in this regard. He creates a strict dichotomy between the good and the bad players. The Irish perspective is totally glorified from where there '.....proved to be an unextinguishable spark in Irish nationality'.⁶

Forester proves to be somewhat objective when she accepts that Gladstone who worked 'selflessly and honourably', achieved some good developments in the Irish interest. George Wyndam is seen to have his 'whole heart for Ireland'. She even manages to comment favourably on Balfour.⁷

Frank O Connor approaches the political history of Ireland through the more colourful use of analogy. In strong contrast to Beaslai's description a hassle-free Ireland and its mentality is cynically referred to as Jonathan Swift's fictional creation of Lilliput. This counter acted the Intellectuals stance. It was overpowered at the end of the nineteenth century by the activities of Parnell and his Party but had managed to regain its influence through such 'vague causes' as the neutrality of Belgium and other such safe dilemmas created by the first World War. 'Give such a cause, involving no searching of the heart, no tragedy, it can almost believe itself human.' Accordingly the Intellectuals now saw revolution as being their last chance to overthrow Lilliput and British rule.

All the biographers who cover this initial period of his life place the effect of the

close net community spirit and patriotism of his surrounding environment as being an integral part of the future man. According to Margery Forester it was to be the '.....key to all he was later to become'.⁹

The same childhood traits of generosity, empathy, athletic acumen, physical strength, kindheartedness, fearlessness and a respect for firm discipline are expressed by the biographers. The books generally attest to his immense capacity for reading, even as a child, particularly though not completely nationalist in its content. Therefore we get an almost set picture of the positive attributes of the child. This is seen to be the unmolded potential of the future leader.

Coogan and Forester propose a sense of destiny or an aura of protection when they connect a near death escape on his childhood with a series of close escapes from the British in his adulthood. This childhood incident occurred when he fell through an open trapdoor disguised by a covering of flowers, only to be cushioned in his landing.

The general picture therefore is of a pleasant and gifted child living in an environment that would justify his later action.

LONDON

Away from the innocence of childhood and the country community Collins's reaction to the vices of London and early adulthood are treated at variance if dealt with.

According to Beaslai, London presented little appeal to Collins' curiosity.¹⁰ While O'Connor admits that the city provided Collins with the opportunity to escape from the straight-jacket of the conservative lifestyle that had been forced onto him at home, he claims in the old puritan outlook to which Beaslai was also accustomed, that he never in his new found freedom drank to excess.¹¹ O Broin again a contemporary of Collins, though a more objective biographer, accepts that Collins was susceptible to the 'wildness' of London but that this experience was more or less a superficial one and was merely a reflection of his passage through adolescence.

Coogan goes as far as to admit a temporary association with a hard drinking crowd.¹²

By enlarge, though, we see the same young adult developing in London. His loyalty in friendship, his willingness to tease but inability to be teased, his strong grasp on reality, his flash temper, his lack of prejudice, his likability, his inability to bear a grudge, his lust for education and the learning of Irish, his wholehearted approach to everything he does, his vast energy and restlessness and the necessity of getting things his own way are the main developing traits described by most of the biographers.

It is also generally admitted that his confidence, cockiness and desire for leadership did not appeal to everyone. Beaslai proves to be the least willing to illuminate what could be considered his less desirable traits.

While his attractiveness to women is usually mentioned it is only significantly elaborated on by Coogan who himself notes the neglect of this area in previous biographies. He is the only one for example to mention Collins's relationship with Ms. Kileen. This contrasts with Beaslai's - 'The society of girls had apparently no attraction for him.' Sexuality, perhaps, is too daring a venture for the conservative biographers to detail.¹³

Collins is generally portrayed at this stage as being the raw material for leadership rather than the developed form but the importance of his London experience is put down to being the place where he developed the clerical and financial parts of his brain and where he developed his nationalism and his nationalist connections in an incredibly short space of time. In other words it is where he developed the mechanisms for future leadership.

Collins's bout of anti-clericism, while in London, is expressed in slightly different ways. Forester claims that it lacked the 'complication of atheism'.¹⁴ Coogan states that he always enjoyed a strong faith and that he was only going through the usual Republican period of anti-clericism while O Connor reasons that it was due to his desire to lead.¹⁵

There is certain ambiguity relating to Collins' return to Ireland just before the Rising in 1916. Forester, and O' Connor make out that he was not yet significantly involved enough in the Republican movement so as to be personally notified as to the revolutionary plans but that through his own speculation returned to Ireland to verify rumours that abounded in London at the time.¹⁶

Beaslai however, can't resist the opportunity to exaggerate the importance of Collins, in relation to this historically significant insurrection. 'The fact was that Collins like other members of the I.R.B. had received a summons from Sean MacDiarmada to return to Ireland.'¹⁷

The more reliable research of Coogan, does however, suggest Collins' possible involvement in the Volunteer gun running. He has also unearthed loose evidence to suggest that perhaps he intended on going to Germany with Roger Casement though he concludes that he never actually took part in this journey. Coogan also claims that it was possible that Collins was in direct contact with Devoy before the 1916 Rising.¹⁸

THE RISING

At this time when Collins was involved with Joseph Plunkett and his father Count Plunkett he was sharing accommodation with some of his own relatives. These, according to Forester, represent the opposite world from which Michael was engaged in, the world of the vast majority of Irish people. Her impression of this world equates very much with Frank O' Connors Lilliput, which has been described earlier. Forester describes these relatives as being - '....part of the predominantly complacent Irish life which, if it grumbled at the rising cost of living, found the living itself well enough to its liking..... It cheered its sons as they went of in British uniforms to France and turned from the window when the Irish Volunteers swung past on a weekend route march.'¹⁹ This shows that Forester as well as O' Connor is at least willing to allow a cynicism of the Irish culture enter his nationalist outlook.

Collins' contribution during the 1916 Rising isn't so well documented because of his relative anonymity at the time. O Broin accepts that Collins' part in the Rising was

small, though a '.....part which he played with conspicuous successes of ability and efficiency.'²⁰ Both he and Coogan quote Desmond Fitzgerald describing Collins as - '....the most active and efficient officer in the place.'²¹ Forester compliments this view by saying that the- '.....impression left by him on those who did notice him is one of efficiency : the organiser at work.'²² Beaslai in his typical mode of hero worship doesn't suggest any lack of information regarding Collins's activities during the Easter week. He merely stresses that Collins-'....was one of the hardest workers throughout the strenuous week.'²³ Desmond Ryan, of all the biographers, is the most personally related to the episode in Collins's life as he too fought in the G.P.O. during the Rising, though they didn't meet. His observations on Collins' role during the revolt reflects a hyperbolic old Irish poetic style in which his persona develops a folklorish and mythological dimension.' An awesome Spectra..... 't'was MANANNAN MAC LIR, Fir Phantom of Rathcroghan, who had come to save them in the dire strait in which they were.'²⁴

In many respects and in many areas it is O' Broin who proves to be the most objective observer of Collins. He doesn't always feel the necessity to justify Collins's flaws. He tells the reader how he failed to impress some of the Volunteers at Kimmage on Easter Monday in his attempts to instruct them. 'They thought "he was throwing his weight about a bit"'²⁵

We are introduced at this stage to one of the more striking of the on running themes in the thesis. That is, how the biographers portray de Valera. Forester and Coogan introduce him into their works at this point. Forester refer to his '.....reckless unconcern for personal safety..' and his leadership qualities and responsibilities.²⁶ In contrast to this Coogan's introduction of de Valera is in line with how he wishes to continue with his assessment of him. His dislike for the man is adamantly expressed in his separate biography on him and he loses none of his venom in this Michael Collins tribute. He unveils a cover up concerning a nervous breakdown that de Valera endured during the Rising. The degree of this cover up is signified by a story in which a Captain Michael Cullen was worried that de Valera might have suffered another breakdown whilst quarrelling with John Devoy. He- '...approached...Dr. Tom O' Higgins warning him first that he would shoot him if he ever mentioned the story to anyone, told him what had happened and asked him

for a medical opinion on de Valera's condition'. Coogan also claims that in his own official biography de Valera exaggerates his own role in the Rising. According to Coogan, de Valera's real power stemmed from the reputation he achieved as a result of the Rising. Coogan's de Valera does not possess the leadership qualities and bravery of Forester's description.²⁷ As Collins' and de Valera's relationship develops the other biographers make contributions regarding de Valera's character. As will be shown later, Beaslai's dislike for de Valera and his politics is as strong as Coogan's, if not stronger.

The way the Volunteers were treated after the rebellion is divided between those biographers who view the whole picture and those who take a more on-sided approach.

Forester accepts that the British soldiers generally treated their prisoners with respect and gives several examples of this good behaviour. She points out however that Collins- '...watched as a private from among their guards was prevented from giving water to his thirsty prisoners', and how '...nearby Sean MacDiarmada had his stick stuck from his with a taunt and a rough jostle.' It is the higher administration she condemns. John Maxwell the newly appointed Commander-in-Chief who 'needed neither prayer nor pronouncement' and who had his prisoners enclosed 'by a ring of bayonets, under drenching cold rain and an intense sun..' The majority of detectives, whose job it was to round up the main instigators are seen to be vulture like. They 'prowled round' trying to 'unearth their pray..... pouncing here and there amongst the men', and sometimes seizing the wrong man.²⁸

Desmond Ryan recreates a scene between two detectives and two prisoners which shines a different light on the situation. "I knew you well, Mr. Macken!" the second detective was saying. "Didn't you wire my sister-in-laws house, and a damn fine job you made of it. Let the pair of you say you were caught in the row by accident and we'll get you out. A tradesman and a journalist, nothing easier."²⁹

Coogan focuses on the actual atrocities caused by the British and on the behaviour of Lee Wilson, he doesn't condemn the British here, without good reason.³⁰

It is in the writings of O'Connor and Beaslai that we get the ultimate form of condemnation. O'Connor gloats about the subsequent assassination of Wilson. 'There would be a day of reckoning for that, and then there would be no more romantic outbursts which left them to the mercy of sadistic savages. It was the savages who would go in fear, and one fine spring morning that gallant officer would meet a most unromantic end up in a quiet road in County Wexford.'³¹

Beaslai is equally vengeful when he comments on the detectives picking out men for the firing squad. 'Anybody who had seen that sight may be pardoned if he felt little compunction at the subsequent shooting of those same "G" men.'³²

All the biographers agree that the initial reception by the civilian population towards the rebels was hostile.

INTERNMENT

The biographers tend to draw pretty much a similar picture of Collins' internment in Stafford and Frongoch regarding his mentality, development and the situation that surrounded him there. His adaptability, incredible energy for sport and study, the growing recognition of his leadership qualities, how he used his sojourn productively, how his experience with smuggling which appealed to his nature helped start his intelligence network, how his flash tempers resulted in coaxing from the other prisoners and often resulted in wrestling matches, how Frongoch 'University' helped to further enrich his nationalistic tendencies, how he maintained his boyishness and lightheartedness and how this enabled him to switch suddenly from seriousness to good humour, are the traits commonly referred to by the biographers in this section. This is, by and large, put in a way that compliments Collins' character. His failure to tolerate the moderates in the prison is mentioned by most of the biographers but it is Coogan who proves to be the most critical of this intolerance. This inability to show to his peers in speech the restraint he displayed to the young and the oldwas to make a dangerous enemy for Collins'.³³ However this perceived flaw is seen to be detrimental to his own person rather than to any one else.

On Collins's release from prison Coogan is the only one who mentions that he was as 'drunk as a lord' when he left Dublin on the Cork train.³⁴ According to O' Broin Collins went straight to Cork.³⁵ Beaslai also skips the episode. 'After a few hours in the capital he proceeded to Clonkilty'³⁶ Those who deal with his stay in Cork, after his release, comment on the general hostility he experienced there as a result of the Rising, except for Beaslai though he does mention the general level of hostility in the country.³⁷ Forester condemns them for this claiming that the- '....little bit of material prosperity has ruined them'.³⁸

COLLINS'S RISE TO POWER

After returning to Dublin, Collins is already portrayed as carrying significant weight amongst the released internees. But Collins's first position of real power, and the one which allowed him national influence, was as Secretary to the National Aid Association.

The biographers testify to his abundant energy and activity by describing his rapid incline in importance and consequently his vast and diverse responsibilities. He quickly became prominent in the I.R.B., the Volunteers, and made immense contributions towards the organisation of these bodies. He was also one of the main engineers of the under ground Irish nationalist networks that were developing in England at this time as well as strengthening links with Clan na nGael in America.

The comments made by the biographers about Collins' character during this stage are generally complimentary, though all are unreserved in the workplace. This however is a criticism within the personal sphere rather than the political one.

O'Connor, Forester and Coogan describe Collins as weeping bitterly on hearing of the death of Thomas Ashe through hunger-striking. Collins' letters to Stack are utilised by most of the biographers. They are used in a way that shows his warmth towards the man in particular (considering the later treatment of Collins later on) and of the imprisoned in general. It is interesting to note that from this period, we get from Beaslai a sense of intimacy both when concerning the atmosphere of the nationalist movement at the time and in his description of Collins's character. His book is similar to Ryan's in that it tends to focus more on the areas to which he is more personally associated. For example, Beaslai, in the second volume of his first work provides very little insight into the Treaty debates and that which is provided tends to come more from the Dublin perspective. He amends this to a certain extent in his later biography. On the other hand he spends a lot of time describing his own experience with prison escapes. In particular, he gives a lengthy description of the mass escape from Mountjoy prison in which he was involved, referring to it as 'the famous daylight escape.'³⁸ Beaslai through his work in propaganda and especially as editor of '*An tOglach*' enjoyed a close working relationship with Collins who made any contributions to the paper and describes him as the most energetic and efficient

member of the outfit. 'Of all the Directors none was so regular and punctual in his contributions as Collins who hardly ever missed an issue up to April, 1919, when the publication of the paper was temporally suspended owing to my imprisonment.'⁴⁰ In this working environment, Collins' face was 'intensely mobile' and could change instantly from a 'broad grin' to an expression of 'scorn' and just as suddenly would return to the 'sunniest' of expressions.⁴¹ Beaslai points out that he was one of Collins' most frequent companions at this time.⁴² Beaslai's own importance and significance at the time should not be overlooked. There are hints of this throughout his biographies on Collins. In his second biography the first hint we get of this concerns his notable position in the 1916 Rising and his position of power while interned. 'All this time, most of the actual leaders of the 1916 Insurrection who had survived were still in prison. The senior surviving officers of the Dublin Brigade among the prisoners were in order of seniority, Eamon de Valera, Tom Ashe, Tom Hunter and myself'.⁴³

Therefore, his personal relationship with Collins and his own significant contributions to the same "cause" puts him in a position where he would be unlikely to blemish the character of Collins by describing what could be considered, to be certain negative traits.

Of all the biographers Beaslai and Coogan are the only two who express direct hostility towards de Valera. Coogan discusses the first recorded disagreement between Collins and de Valera not wanting Mc Guinness to run for the bye-election.

De Valera's two reasons for this were that, firstly, the nationalists should refuse to acknowledge the British Parliament and secondly, for fear of a reduction in the morale of the men of 1916 if the candidate was defeated. This gives Coogan an opportunity to invest de Valera's character with hypocrisy by pointing out that he- '..... promptly forgot such argument later when a candidate himself.' To this Coogan responds that one of the '..... enduring traits' of de Valera's career was his '.... ability to wrestle with his conscience and win.'⁴⁴ From this point onwards, Coogan traces a growing divide between the two. This is highlighted by Collins not canvassing for de Valera's bye-election, which according to Coogan merits at least suspicion. De Valera sought control over Sinn Fein on the grounds that he had the support of both the Volunteers and I.R.B. Griffith the founder of the movement

graciously stepped down to facilitate de Valera's wish. To this Coogan bitingly explains how- 'Griffith wanted influence', whilst 'de Valera wanted power.'⁴⁵ De Valera's intransigence is expressed later on, when he refused to acknowledge Collins warning that the leaders of Sinn Fein 'be arrested that night if they returned to familiar ground. He '...vacillated for a time but eventually did go home and was arrested in Greystones.' In fact most of Sinn Fein were picked up.⁴⁶ Coogan gets very controversial when it comes to de Valera and his Lincoln prison escape. 'Curiously in his official biography, compiled at a time when, of course, both Collins and Boland were long dead, de Valera plays up the role of Boland and Brugha in organising it, and says it was Boland who broke the key in the lock. He does not refer at all to a far more important detail - the controversy over his decision to go to America immediately after his escape.'⁴⁷

Coogan quotes Beaslai's second biography in saying that Cathal Brugha went to England and persuaded de Valera not to go straight to America but to return to Ireland and his people for a short visit. Coogan states that this conflicts with de Valera's own version whereby the purpose of Brugha's journey was to bring him up to date with the progress in establishing an Irish legislature. 'De Valera would have us believe that it was subsequent to Brugha's visit and his weighing up of the chances of getting a hearing at the Peace Conference in Paris that he began to think that the place in which he could best work for Ireland was the U.S.A. where he could bring pressure to bear on President Wilson.'⁴⁸

Coogan points out how a few months earlier de Valera was supposedly lost without the company of his family. He is all the time suggesting a superficiality to de Valera's truths and politics. He goes on to describe de Valera's envy over Collins' or the "Big Fella's" increasing popularity.⁴⁹

His portrait of de Valera so far is one of a megalomaniac whose superficial morality and politics tow the line with the furtherance of his own personal prestige. There has to be a motive behind the depth of his negative analysis.

Beaslai is equally bitter towards de Valera's character, if not more so. It is worth noting that Beaslai always refers to de Valera as Mr. He seems to reserve this

formality for those whom he disapproves of. He introduces him in his second work by saying that when he returned to Ireland after his release from prison he was a political novice with no fixed views, and that it was only in Lewees jail that he first began to study the Irish political situation. Accordingly his initial standpoint was that an Independent Republic was an unattainable ideal and consequently tended to focus more on "Dominion Home Rule" as a satisfactory compromise. Considering his later ardent Republicanism, Beaslai is underlying an ambiguity and looseness in his politics. Collins's non-participation in de Valera's East-Clare bye-election is put down to him having his 'hands full.'⁵⁰

A lack of clarity in de Valera's thinking is suggested at when Beaslai refers to his refusal to heed Collins' warning over the possible raid of the Sinn Fein leaders. 'De Valera was reluctant to agree to this but in view of the strong representation made to him by other members he seemed inclined to consent to stay. At the conclusion of the meeting, however, he again announced his intention of returning home to Greystones.'⁵¹

It is in his earlier biography, however, that Beaslai is particularly cutting. Indeed a quite considerable portion of this "*Michael Collins*" biography is dedicated to reducing de Valera's character. At the start of the second volume of this work, Beaslai claims that de Valera was the cause of the divide with Clan na nGael in America, and that twelve months after his return to Ireland he was again the cause of the split amongst the Irish nationalist ranks which resulted in Civil War. He points out that when de Valera arrived in America in June 1919- '..... he found there a widespread, active and united organisation.' but he 'failed to "pull" with either John Devoy or Judge Cohalan'. He explains that some people complained that de Valera regarded public receptions in America as acknowledgements of his own personal worthiness rather than a platform from which to pursue the Irish nationalist cause. We learn that Collins and Griffith were told that there existed amongst the American ranks a conspiracy motivated by jealousy to drive him back to Ireland. Trusting this, their loyalty for their leader didn't swagger 'to their cost'.

Beaslai goes on to say that only for de Valera's obstinacy the Republican party under the Presidency of Harding would have in effect proclaimed the American recognition

of Irish independence. But prior to the election de Valera wanted nothing from the Republicans unless they would campaign under a plank for full recognition of the Irish Republic and consequently received the former. Beaslai points out that, unfortunately the nationalists back in Ireland was detached from all this activity.

Though not selecting all the same activities from which to condemn de Valera, his portrayal of the man so far, is more or less the same as Coogan's.⁵²

O' Broin, O'Connor and Forester are far less antagonistic in their appraisal of de Valera, at this stage.

O'Broin and O'Connor seem to deal with de Valera in the slightest possible way.

O' Broin makes no critical commentary on his efforts in America. The one contribution he does make here, can be interpreted as a compliment. 'The amount to be raised in the United States had been increased earlier from one and a quarter to five million dollars, a measure of the great success of one item of de Valera's American programme.'⁵³ His only other input regarding de Valera concerns a conflict of opinion between himself and Collins. Collins' approved of the Soleheadbeg shootings - the incident which is commonly considered to be the starting point of the Civil War - and the continuation of such violent means in order to achieve Irish Independence. O' Broin comments that de Valera- '... on the other hand, spoke of subjecting the police forces to a policy of special ostracism'.⁵⁴

O' Connor proves to be equally scanty on de Valera in this section. He says that after the rebellion the country was seeking a new leader. Eamon de Valera was the choice and in him they- '..... had chosen unaware an extraordinary character, perhaps the most extraordinary the revolution threw up.'⁵⁵ Again no criticism, but this is quite understandable considering O' Connors anti-treaty stance during the Civil War. This is the only significant references made to de Valera in the section, and not an uncomplimentary one. He obviously proves to be a very delicate topic of conversation, indeed.

Forester is slightly more substantial in her observation of the Irish leader. She begins by paying credit to his ability in unifying the various factions of Irish

nationalism in Ireland after the rebellion. 'He was not yet an elected leader; but it is significant that it was de Valera who was now able to draw the opposing factions together.'⁵⁶ She states that de Valera's plan was, firstly, to achieve Irish recognition of Irish Independence and then for a referendum to choose the type of government that would exist in the country. She points out that the inherent weakness in his formula, was that Britain was one of the leading country's that had won the great war, and consequently she was on favourable terms in the international sphere.⁵⁷

She makes no mention of de Valera personally rejecting Collins's warning not to return home on the night in which the leaders of Sinn Fein were arrested. She merely says that on- '...the night of Friday 17 May, Collins attended a meeting of the Sinn Fein Executive and gave warning of impending arrest to those on the list.'⁵⁸ Forester's understanding of the rift in America is in stark contrast to that of Beaslai's. She argues that he was in no way responsible for the rift. He is seen to be a passive entity caught up in the turbulent surroundings of a factioned Irish-American political scene.

'There was thus, when de Valera came upon the American scene, an established, though as yet unrevealed rift in Irish-American ranks. It was a rift into which de Valera was unfortunately to be drawn. It had been remarked that this manifest ability to unite the different focus of Sinn Fein was entirely lacking in his American visit. The answer can only be that the American issues are resolved by Americans alone. De Valera was powerless to erase the dividing lines between Irish and American fields of interests, and his reliance on advisers partisan in what was, after all, an American quarrel aggravated differences which were not his to solve. His position, indeed, despite his protests was translated by his American public from that of President of Dail Eireann to President of the Irish Republic. De Valera's own view was that he was in America solely to advance Irish interest. The resulting clashes undoubtedly arose largely through the failure of de Valera's advisers to guide him on matters of American procedure of which they themselves may well have been ignorant.'⁵⁹

Her lack of hostility towards de Valera is further expressed when she says that the bond-certificate drive initiated by him in the states was an overwhelming success.⁶⁰

Her comparison between him and Collins was that they're individual efforts towards Irish nationalism provided in a sense an essential partnership, for the country to pursue its ambitions. 'De Valera was the necessary personification of the tricolour, Easter week, and the declaration of the Republic. Collins, was the more down to earth figure, the man who expounded no vision, devised no formula, but got to work and saw that others did the same.There are two kinds of leader: one appeals to a nations idealism, the other to the individual's everyday necessities.'⁶¹

Forester's de Valera, in this section, is a very different man to the de Valera of Beaslai's and Coogan's telling. Here he is seen to be a unifying force, a man innocent of corrupt personal interests and considered a positive force for the betterment of Ireland's situation.

The role of women in Irish nationalism is treated very scantily by the majority of biographers. Worst than this is the efforts made by Desmond Ryan, one of only three biographers who contribute one the issue. He places them in a negative light where they are seen to be detrimental to the cause of Irish freedom. His portrayal of women will be dealt with in a later section of the thesis, as he doesn't comment on them, under the time period, presently under discussion.

Forester applauds the women as well as the men who worked diligently and bravely in Collins' underground intelligence networks. She only really manages to refer to them in passing by, however.⁶² It is Coogan, who aware of its absence previously, stresses an acknowledgement of their involvement. Nancy O' Brien, Collins' cousin, was- '... one of the unsung heroes of the time'. 'Another vitally important agent.' was Lily Merin. He goes on to emphasis that one 'must take note of the Trojan work done by women' and mentions several other key contributors. Coogan is perhaps helping to dispel on ideal of macho-heroism inate in early-twentieth century Irish nationalism.⁶³

The conservative sensibilities prevent all but one of the biographers, Coogan, from discussing Collins' relationships with women. Indeed Margery Forester goes as far as to say that he had little time for women. She does mention the Kiernan family

though she makes no particular reference to Kitty Kiernan in this section.⁶⁴ Coogan mentions Collins's initial interest in Helen Kiernan and how this was transferred to her sister Kitty. He suggests that Michael's developing relationship with Kitty may have had a bearing on the subsequent decline in his friendship with Harry Boland, his best friend, who himself intended to marry her.⁶⁵ He also unveils that Collins's friendship with the Lewelyn Davis's started a controversy based not only on politics but also on sex.⁶⁶

Collins's capacity for being impatient, cruel and ruthless with his fellow workers and with those whom he was fighting against is avoided here in this section by Beaslai and O' Connor. Forester, is willing to highlight his darker side. She tells us that not all were impressed by him. Robert Brennan, for example, considered him to be both ruthless with friend and foe and incapable of accepting criticism or opposition. However, he goes on to say that while he drove everyone hard he drove no one harder than himself. Again, W.T. Cosgrave initially disapproved of his "brusqueness of manner" but later came to be impressed by his personality and ability. She also argues that his reputation for interfering in other peoples work should not be overemphasised.⁶⁷ She justifies the fact that he bullied and hectorated those under his control because they- '... also learnt that he had asked nothing of them that he would not do himself. If Collins gave no vicarious thanks he wasted no time in blame.'⁶⁸ Coogans treatment of Collins' darker side is similar to Foresters: He highlights Collins's cruelty, impatience and ruthlessness but then tries to justify them. For example he provides anecdotes concerning his behaviour towards his cousin Nancy O' Brien and his close confidant, Joe O' Reilly. He manages to balance Collins' harshness with a more amenable quality in all of these anecdotes.⁶⁹

O' Broin and Ryan on the other hand, don't find it necessary to justify every flaw they find in Collins.

An example of this comes from O' Broin when discussing a riot that resulted from victory celebrations of the Great War. 'Collins displayed a callous streak when he told Stack of 125 wounded soldiers who had been treated in the hospitals.

"Before morning three soldiers and an officer had ceased to need any attention and one died the following day. A policeman, too, was in a very precarious condition

to a few days ago when I ceased to take any further interest in him. He was unlikely to recover.” Ryan quotes Collins giving out to one of his commandants for being late. ‘ “Ten minutes late, you louser! Go away and come back in six hours and ten minutes. Don’t think because you are a commandant you can walk over me and time. Get out, and quick!” Grinning pathetically, the Commandant withdrew. Mick spluttered and muttered to himself.’⁷¹ Ryan claims that Collins knew himself that he was a hard and exacting taskmaster and that he was a difficult man to work with in some moods.⁷²

During this section, Beaslai, Coogan, and Forester comment on the rights and wrongs of Collins and his pursuit of independence through violent means.

Beaslai claims that the Volunteers held out from committing violence for as long as possible, against all types of provocation from the British system.⁷³ He praises Collins’s hit “squad” with callous disregard for its victims- ‘To the courage, loyalty and secrecy of the members of this small body was due the success of many of the operations in Dublin, which wrought such damage on the English machinery of coercion and oppression.’⁷⁴ He reminds us that citizens were subjected to ‘daily outrages’ both in their house and on the streets.⁷⁵ He goes on to say that even the meetings of a ‘non-political’ commission of Inquiry into Irish Industries were prohibited.⁷⁶ It is a flexible interpretation to consider such a commission as being totally ‘non-political’, especially considering the political context of the time. He justifies violence by going on to say that :- ‘The reader must bear these facts in mind in order to visualise the atmosphere in which a constructive national movement was transferred into a guerrilla warfare, and energies that should have been devoted to the industrial, social and cultural advancement of the country were diverted into the destructive work of the bomb and the bullet.’⁷⁷

Forester rests the responsibility for all the bloodshed in Ireland at the time, at the feet of the British administration. ‘Britain’s inability to accept that though the Act of Union remained unrepealed this separation was a fact and not merely a threat, accounts for the period of bloodshed and bitterness that followed. The vast majority of Irish people were by no means dedicated Republicans, but because it was the party of resolute opposition to British domination.’⁷⁸ She goes on to make a

hyperbolic comparison between Collins's fighting force and the "Wild Geese" whose military accomplishments she elevates to an almost mythological degree. She says that Collins' I.R.A. were the stock of these wild geese who were amongst the finest mercenaries the world had ever known. She points out that this fighting race had not been diluted through time. It had prevailed more recently at Flanders and Suvla Bay. It is, therefore, no surprise that this wonderful military 'heritage', once adapted to the methods of guerrilla warfare, should destroy Britain's grip over Ireland.⁷⁹

She avoids going into detail of the squad's assassination. Instead she stresses how meticulously Collins treats the whole area of assassination, despite the provocation.

'There was no elation for Collins in his killing, though the "G" man had been a particularly injurious thorn in the nationalist flesh for years. No member of the squad was ever under any circumstance, permitted to shoot even a known spy without authority, except in self-defence.'⁸⁰

While Coogan applauds the work of Collins' military forces, he is willing to provide a more realistic and over-all impression of why Collins was successful. Unlike Forester, with her island of formidable warriors theory, Coogan's less dramatic explanation is that Collins and his network were able to destroy the British system in Ireland because it was far less secure than it seemed.⁸¹

Unlike Forester, Coogan does manage to go into the detail of the assassinations. The first man assassinated by Collins' squad was the "G" man the "Dog" Smith, whom Coogan goes as far as to call a courageous man. Another of the "G" men assassinated was Hoey, whom Coogan refers to as a deeply religious man. He manages to accept the obvious ruthlessness of the killings but balances this by stressing that the assassinations were carried out under strict instructions whereby no one was to be shot except under orders or in cases of self-defence. He justifies this with several examples.⁸²

We are given quite a few glimpses into Desmond Ryan's Hogan in his pursuit of Collins, before he comes to be shot. Overall he is painted as an unsavoury character

and therefore, his assassination is somewhat justified. "A bad egg, that fellow! He would give his own father and mother up. Hadn't he pointed out Sean MacDermott and many another since? Blackguarding decent folk. Called himself an Irishman."⁸³

All of the above biographers approve of the Squad and its method but some are more willing to discuss their activities than others. This is where Coogan, in particular stands out. Though Coogan maybe a very biased biographer, he provides a wealth of information from divergent sources which allow for a more authentic impression, despite his use of these sources to make an argument which supports his views.

THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The assignation of informers or “touts”, a secret service men and spies, by Collins and his network, is justified as being deemed necessary by most of the biographers.

Beaslai begins by reducing the character of these so called “touts”. They are the unsavoury element of society, the- ‘local beggars, loafers and petty criminals.’ But while this ‘ignorant and degraded type’ were the informers, some of the secret service men were men of energy and great skill. Collins was able to battle this well-funded secret service because of the efficiency of his network, the loyalty of the people and the solidarity of Sinn Fein.⁸⁴ The assassination of spies is justified because they- ‘.....were not only spies, subject to the penalties of spies of war, but had all directly or indirectly been concerned in the murder of Irish Citizens.’⁸⁵

Beaslai refers to the assassination of a female informer. This assassination was not sanctioned by G.H.Q. but according to Beaslai it was fully justified. He manages to regret however that ‘..... the action was taken under circumstances that savoured of irregularity and that the full facts were not made public at the time.’⁸⁶ Of course, this was, by far, not the only unsanctioned assassination of the time, nor the only one highlighted by Beaslai, but because of a certain conservative and by-the-book morality, the killing of a woman is more of a crime than the killing of a man. Yet at least Beaslai manages to show regret at this instance. Even more regrettable, from Beaslai’s point of view, was the execution of Major Campton-Smith who was a - ‘..... man of amiable and estimable character, who had done nothing unworthy against us’. However, his death is seen not to be the responsibility of the Volunteers but of the British forces. He had to- ‘..... suffer for the atrocities of “the forces of the crown”’. He was held as a hostage for the ‘Clonmult prisoners’. To further create the balance, Beaslai goes on to discuss the foul treatment of these Clonmult Volunteers. We also learn that Collins tried to intervene into the case of Major Compton-Smith but was too late. Beaslai refers to another ‘amiable victim’ of the ‘times’, District Inspector Potter. His life was offered for Thomas Traynor, a Dublin Volunteer, but this offer was ignored. Therefore, he too was executed and the responsibility is again shifted. It was not the responsibility of the Volunteers but rather a consequence of the ‘times’.⁸⁷ A general Lucas was kept a captivity by the Volunteers for a while. Beaslai highlights how he gave a ‘very favourable account’

of his captors, and how one volunteer officer, in particular, was “.. one of the most perfect gentlemen he had ever met”.⁸⁸ Beaslai’s Volunteer is more of a perfect host than an assassin or executioner.

Like Beaslai, O’Connor justifies the assassination of spies by reducing their character. The spy, Quinslick is a ‘vain man’. His behaviour is seen to be an interesting example of ‘the informer’s type of mind, a mind which ultimately deceives only itself’. O’ Connor goes as far as to say that ‘the analogy of insanity is so close that it cannot be overlooked’. It is a mind ‘entirely obscured by its own capacity for self-deception’. O’ Connor is promoting a sense of apathy towards this character. By the time the reader learns of his assassination he is a ‘pathetic figure’ with ‘his grievance, his treachery, his furk, his loquacity and his conceit’. The book implies that Collins could have dealt with him much earlier.⁸⁹

Jameson, another spy, is seen to have been given excessive chances by Collins. However the same spy mentality probed Jameson to continue his pursuits against those who would rather not harm him. ‘Anyone but a thorough going spy would have been glad to get out of trouble as easily as this, and thanked heaven for a group of soft-hearthed young men with no great taste for bloodshed. But your spy is a conceited fellow.’⁹⁰

Fergus Brian Molloy, another spy, is again depersonified to fit into O’ Connor’s categorisation. He ‘suffered from the usual weakness of spies’, and pressed for genuine information. O’ Connor points out that Molloy wasn’t going to get the same chance as those spies previous to him, as Jameson had made Collins more cautious. Collins decided in a short space of time that Molloy must be gotten rid of. Cullen, one of Collins’ right hand men objected to this on the grounds that Jameson had received too many chances. This shows Collins’ darker side and how ‘..... the shadow of the terror hadfallen on [him]’. However, this is put down to ‘realistic spirit’. In Molloy’s assassination, the squad had to fight off crowds of people in their escape. Here, he compares the realistic spirit of the Volunteers with the spirit of the people or the Lilliputians as he may well perceive them. ‘How far the realistic spirit of the Volunteers outraced that of the people was shown by a massed attack upon the Squad, who had to beat their way out with drawn guns.’⁹¹

He goes into quite considerable detail of the assassination of spies. I believe he goes into such detail, because he feels he must convince the reader, that these people, who were not military men, deserved to die as if they were and that the calibre of their character justifies this. He concludes by stressing that the- '...shooting of spies occupied much less of Collins's time than [his account] might suggest'.⁹²

The National Loan funds were being traced by an Inspector Bell. It is here, that O' Connor shows Collins' ruthless sense of reality at its most extreme. 'It was now only a question of time until he laid hands upon the National Loan. Collins had collected that money; and it was not in the least likely that he would allow even the most excellent father of a family to get away with it. With less compunction than he had ever shown, he sent the intelligence officers to get Mr. Bell.' Beaslai could never be expected to reveal so much information in such a manner.⁹³

Coogan is less harsh in his appraisal of the spy. For example, he tells the reader that Jameson died bravely for his King. His main angle on the Jameson incident is that it gives '.....another glimpse of Collins' extraordinary network of agents. The story shows that Collins had penetrated right into the heart of the British Secret Service.'⁹⁴

He stresses that Collins took no pleasure in killing and states that there are well-documented stories that convey the 'tension and horror' that gripped him prior to an assassination. Again, it is the realities of the situation that justifies his actions. '.....with his knowledge of the castle regime he realised that one spy was more dangerous to him than a regiment of soldiers.'⁹⁵

Coogan points out, that in theory, the shooting of spies was supposed to be authorised by G.H.Q. In particular, it was Cathal Brugha, who wanted this rule to be stringently followed, so as to be able to please a possible international commission, at a future date. But Coogan says that in Cork the Volunteers were being 'hunted from pillar to post'.

Coogan uses a source here that claims Collins' response to a query regarding the unauthorised shooting of spies in the Cork area was '.....shoot... and say nothing about it'.⁹⁶

Coogan is similar to Beaslai and O' Connor in the way he justifies by condemnation

the assassination of informers. 'The calibre of these wretches may be gauged from the fact that one was a man found drunk in a ditch by Volunteers. Befuddled by the spoils of his blood money he babbled on to them after being woken up, in the belief that they were British soldiers, until he realised too late, that he was talking himself into another, longer, sleep.'⁹⁷

Coogan admits that one of the 'most tragic aspects' of the War of Independence was the executions of good men from both sides. By using Compton-Smith as an example of this, he also manages to show the chivalry of the Irish Volunteers compared with that of the British forces. He quotes him in his last letter to his wife, saying that their treatment of him was- '.....far better than Englishmen would treat an Irishman in the same circumstances'.

Again, it was the reality of the situation that 'militated against kindly feeling'.⁹⁸

He is more revealing than Beaslai, when he comments on Collins' supposed opposition to the shooting of women. In the example which he uses below, he also shows his close family ties to the nationalist movement at the time. 'This does not appear to have been his attitude always, to judge from a story concerning my father. According to this, he and another Volunteer were sent out by Collins to shoot two young women who had been consorting with British soldiers and had apparently given away information.' However, his father realised that the girls were 'very young and beautiful' and couldn't go ahead with the shooting. Coogan says that for once Collins wasn't disappointed with the poor result'.⁹⁹ This is a good example of how Coogan despite his strong views, is willing to provide a more wholesome picture of what's going on, than are most of the biographers under discussion.

Ryan, in his almost Joycian style, throws all classes of spy and informer into the same bracket, and disparages them equally. 'Spies everywhere, from the semi-derelict hawker to the jolly commercial traveller spouting treason and revolution to Michael Collins' own agents.....'¹⁰⁰ Hemp is his example of a spy and he regrets that there were 'derelicts' like him in the world.¹⁰¹ He reflects on the more admirable members of the British forces and regrets their executions, but manages to show how the Irish method of justice was better than the British system. He regrets that Captain Bradford was dead, he who '.....sent the IRA to his Majesty's prisons without heat or venom, who thought trial by court martial a fairer tribunal than his Majesty's courts.....'¹⁰² He is also willing to admit that Collins

‘..... and the small band behind the guerrilla war hadn’t much sentiment.... As little sentiment as their foes..... Blow for blow.....’¹⁰³

O’ Broin discusses several of the spies and their activities but never slant their character. He merely says that neither Quinslick nor Molloy were top quality agents but that Jameson deserved to be regarded as one. His only criticism of Jameson is through the words and impressions of others. Tom Cullen considered him to be a ‘crooked English bastard’ and Mrs. Batt O’Connor was alarmed when she saw his physical appearance.¹⁰⁴

Forester doesn’t provide much analysis when it comes to this area. According to Forester Mr. Bell’s assassination is deemed necessary, the reality being that the National Loan was at stake. ‘..... Collins scowled. This was money, most of it, from the poor of the land, entrusted to him so that he could carry out the promise of a better deal for them in the future..... His scowl boded ill for Mr. Bell.’¹⁰⁵

In reference to an informer who frequented Vaughans Hotel, Forester quotes Collins as saying- ‘We’ll do nothing. We know about him. We don’t want anything messy.’¹⁰⁶ This suggests awareness of negative publicity but also a sense of fairplay.

The amount of information provided on the assassinations of the British Secret Service that occurred on the morning of what is commonly referred to as Bloody Sunday varies from biography to biography. Forester is willing to point out that there were ‘three or four tragic errors of identity’ and that several of the intended targets escaped. But she immediately balances this by stating that some of the Volunteers who took part in this ‘nerve-shattering work’ would never fully recover, mentally from the ordeal, and by claiming that the assassinations were a noble affair. What motivate such a grave undertaking? The simple answer was ‘Irish freedom’. Somewhat predictably she concludes that Collins ‘was no less shaken than those who had acted on his orders.’¹⁰² She goes on to describe the retributive and barbaric incident in Croke Park - where the Auxiliaries fired into the gathered crowd killing indiscriminately - in a much less reserved fashion.¹⁰⁸

Mc Kee, Clancy and Clune who had been picked up and interned the previous evening also lost their lives due to the retributive reactions of the British forces.

To make matters worse Clune was innocent of nationalist activities. A report claimed that the three were killed in an escape attempt. To this Margary Forester says 'It is not inconceivable that the three had made a desperate bid for freedom, or at least for a swift death. From what they had attempted to escape will probably never be known.' We learn that Collins 'overrode all protests' and helped dress the dead bodies in Volunteers uniform and helped carry their coffins. For days 'he appeared to care nothing for anything at all, but moved recklessly about Dublin'. True humanity is seen to exist only on the Irish side of the fence.¹⁰⁹

Forester is never more determined to justify extreme nationalism than is Piaras Beaslai. His detail on the Bloody Sunday assassinations is slight. The errors of identify are not referred to nor is the atmosphere of the occasion expressed. He merely describes the event as a concrete fact. 'On the morning of November 21st, parties of Volunteers raided houses in various parts of Dublin and fourteen English officers were shot dead.'¹¹⁰ The idea that Mc Kee, Clancy and Clune were shot whilst attempting to escape is seen to be a 'romantic account' stemming from the 'provider of Castle fairy [sic] tails.' Beaslai had been in the company of the three men, the night that they were arrested, which again gives an auto-biographical sense to this work. He focuses more on this episode than on the Croke Park massacre. When referring to 'poor Clune' he says that - 'Of course [he] would not mention having been in the company of Sean O'Connell or me.'¹¹¹

O'Connor justifies the Bloody Sunday assassinations as being a logical necessity. 'It was becoming obvious if Ireland did not have her Bloody Sunday, England would have hers.'¹¹² However O'Connor is not afraid to be visually graphic in his description and manages to provide one of the assassinated British officers with a sentimental association- '...a young head fell back upon the pillow and a red streak spread about it. The portrait of a girl continued to smile from the dressing table'. He goes into very little detail over the Croke Park incident, but instead, focuses on the murders of Mc Kee, Clancy and Clune and on Collins' reaction to this.¹¹³

Coogan's justification for the assassinations is the same as O'Connors; the 'Cairo Gang' were getting closer to Collins. Coogan shows that it was a difficult

undertaking for Collins to pursue. In the evening prior to Bloody Sunday he 'happened to speculate as to what sort of men they were whom he had consigned to doom the next day'.

Coogan doesn't conceal the reality of what happened that morning. He point out that some of the agents shot were in the presence of their wives. He admits that some of the assassins didn't hesitate in their duty. 'O Hanlon recalled that one of the victims, an old major, had a meal prepared. "Mick White ate the breakfast." Joe Boland was so disgusted at finding that one prime target, Major King, a colleague of Hardy, was missing when he burst into his room, that he took revenge by giving his half-naked mistress "a right scourging with a sword scabbard", and setting fire to the room afterwards.' However, in classical Coogan fashion, while he manages to be objective in his use of the facts, he directs these facts towards a conclusion that justifies the progression of nationalism through a medium of violence. As a prequel to the above quotation he claims that the '..... killers were all young men, generally of religious sensibility, and most of them didn't find their work easy'. Just after the quotation he uses the words of Charles Dalton to sum up the general spirit of the morning - '..... I thought over our mornings work and offered up a prayer for the fallen.' Collins was 'white and defiant with no expression of pleasure' as O' Reilly reported the results to him.¹¹⁴ Coogan goes on to describe the horrors of Croke Park, and the shooting of Mc Kee, Clancy and Clune. Coogan points out that even 'the bravest of men thought [Collins] was mad' to attend the dead bodies. In response to the British behaviour and propaganda that surrounded Bloody Sunday, Coogan wondered how much the British government were kept informed by the military.¹¹⁵

Leon O' Broin is the most critical of Collins' and his network participation in the events of Bloody Sunday. He doesn't try to humanise their undertaking by commenting on how it affected the assassins or Collins personally Nor does he personally justify it as being necessary, but rather states that Collins considered it necessary. It was Collins who 'excused' it, 'cold-blooded though it was'.

'..... fifteen British officers were shot dead in their Dublin bedroom, some of them in the presence of their wives. The operation was intended to dispose of secret service personal only, but names were added by the Dublin Brigade to the list prepared by Collins's intelligence group, and these turned out to be ordinary

officers of the regular army. This suggested that the functioning of Collins's intelligence system was far from faultless; but the bulk of those put to death were members of a "Cairo Gang" and Collins excused the whole operation, cold-blooded though it was, by saying that he had to get his blow in first, otherwise he and his men would have been put on the spot.'¹¹⁶ He describes Croke Park and the killing of Mc Kee, Clancy and Clune in a candid fashion.¹¹⁷

Beaslai goes into greater detail than any of the other biographers, when it comes to describing the atrocities committed by the British forces in Ireland during the War of Independence. He also takes great delight in discussing the consequent cover-ups that were administered by the higher echelons of the Military and by the general Government policy regarding Ireland at the time.

He describes the horrors committed by the Black and Tans (or alternatively the 'drink-maddened savages') and only partially classes them apart from the supposedly more professional Auxiliary forces.¹¹⁸ He accepts that a considerable portion of the Auxiliary forces were 'ex-officers' but claims that 'the criminal element was also found amongst them'. Whilst there were 'as fine types' there were also a 'great many very low scoundrels'.¹¹⁹ He attacks the character of these men where ever possible. For example, he claims that during the daily hold-ups and searches in Dublin 'the military usually behaved with courtesy and forbearance' but the Auxiliaries 'often insulted or struck civilians' and that sometimes 'these "ex-officers" robbed men of money and other property'. He adds to this that thefts 'both by Auxiliaries and soldiers were also a common feature of the nightly raids on house'.¹²⁰

Beaslai personifies his detestation of the British Government in the form of Sir Hamer Greenwood, whom accordingly tended to lie 'with airy imperturbability'.¹²¹ With 'characteristic audacity' Greenwood suggested that the British reprisals were not the work of the Crown Forces. He discusses in great detail the implausibility of Greenwood's statement which claimed that there was no evidence that the burning of Cork city was started by the Crown Forces.¹²² He finishes here, by broadening his attack, so as to include the general level of thinking behind the British parliaments. '...any lie was good enough for Greenwood's hearers.' He also shows Macready in a negative light when it came to the burning of Cork city'.¹²³

The British Government's decision to form the Orangemen into an armed force

called the 'Special Constabulary' was according to Beaslai even more atrocious than the creation of the Black and Tans. Beaslai's denigration of the Orangemen could hardly be called subtle. 'Men inspired with a bigoted hatred of their catholic neighbours, men who had continually used violence against them, were now officially armed and placed in a position of authority over them, with unlimited power of persecution.'¹²⁴ Here Beaslai is extending his style of justifying the nationalist cause through reduction of the enemy's character, by categorising all Orangemen with the same brush, and lumping their negative traits together with those of the British administration.

Leon O' Broin is able to show the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries up, and yet refrains from being excessive and manages to maintain his objectivity. For example, he is willing to condemn them from the British perspective. 'Their function was to provide a counter to terrorism, but Macready saw them from the very beginning as a pack of cut-throats who were as much an obstacle to the pacification of the country as the Volunteers were. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson agreed...'¹²⁵ Unlike Beaslai who merely condemns British savagery, O' Broin attempts to give an insight into the rationale of British government. For example, he offers a profile of Lloyd George's mentality, whom according to O' Broin '..was unwilling ever to admit that a rebellion existed which had to be countered by military methods.'¹²⁶

Margery Forester shows a certain degree of sympathy to some of the prominent members of the the British administration at the time. From a military point of view, she says that from the appointment of General Sir Neval Macready as Commander-in-chief of the British forces in Ireland it was- '..... to his credit that,, the military forces earned a reputation among the Irish for strict soldierly conduct, despite the disheartenment of what the troops themselves felt to be lack of Government support.'¹²⁷ As can be seen, she is able to do this while still managing to rebuke the Government. She even makes an effort to defend Sir Hamar Greenwood. 'Sir Hamar was to become probably the most hated man on the Irish scene. It was clear that Sir Hamar, a Canadian, had no personal vindictiveness for the Southern Irish. He had accepted his job and did it without fear, or favour if with a certain self-righteousness.'¹²⁸

Forester dismisses the old myth that the Black and Tans were of the convict classes but does so without elevating their position. 'The Irish belief that the prisons had been opened to provide recruits to the Black and Tansis undoubtedly unfounded; it is also undoubtedly true that large numbers of those accepted lost little time, once in Ireland, in qualifying for prison terms.'¹²⁹ She says that the British Army, by and large behaved in a 'civilized fashion'. But she balances this view with further criticism of the Black and Tans- '.....whose awfulness fully compensated the Army's restraint in the scales upon which nations weigh each other'. She claims that the I.R.A. by contrast were a highly disciplined force.¹³⁰ Her feelings towards the Auxiliaries are mixed ones. She says that they were generally better behaved than the Black and Tans but that this depended on the local commanders. She points out that they were a tougher force and consequently capable of a higher degree of 'organised hell-making'.¹³¹ Like O' Broin she claims that the British Government refused to admit that a state of war existed in Ireland.¹³²

Coogan views the situation differently. He doesn't see the country as having been in a complete state of war at the time. 'What in fact happened was that the British position was so untenable morally that they could not use their Army properly and were never able to put forth their full military might.'¹³³ Coogan goes into quite considerable detail, in discussing the police and military atrocities of the time. But like Forester, he dismisses the old view that the Black and Tans came from the British prisons but claims that they were encouraged to behave as if they did, and thereby making the country- 'a most inappropriate hell for an entire population'.¹³⁴ To describe the Auxiliaries he quotes Frank O' Connor (This description can be found earlier in this text)¹³⁵ Coogan resorts to a long critique of both the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries.

Coogan is panoramic in his scope of detail. He provides the British perspective and how the Government's reprisal policy spread outrage across England resulting in debate in the House of Commons where a censure motion was put down. The reprisals continued and a policy of attacking and destroying local industry ensued. He uses this background to fuel his argument that British behaviour in Ireland at the time was barbaric and psychotic.¹³⁶

He strongly criticises Hamar Greenwood and is less than amicable in his description of Lloyd George who '.... made speeches at Caernarvon, 9th October [1920] and at the Guildhall Banquet, 9th November [1920] which clearly backed the policy of reprisal and hanging'.¹³⁷ He blames the leading members of Government of being aware of the reprisals in Ireland and of being personally involved in covering them up and allocating the blame on the extreme nationalists. When referring to the authorised burning of creameries, bacon factories and mills by the British forces he says that policy- '.....calmly formulated in public school accents behind closed doors can manifest itself in very raucous and savage proceedings when translated into action.'¹³⁸

Frank O' Connor gives a balanced account of the Auxiliaries. 'In a curious way the Irish, who like a good fighter respected them.the Volunteers testified to their bravery, but too often the mangled corpses of a woman or an old man did as much for their savagery.'¹³⁹

O' Connor expresses a strong dislike for Lloyd George and associates him directly with a lot of the evils of the War of Independence. The English were losing their barracks in Ireland, and according to O' Connor, Lloyd George's remedy for this was to draw- '.....upon the bravo's, the bullies, ex-convicts and ne'er do-wells to maintain the peace.....'¹⁴⁰ He is referring here, to the Black and Tans. He highlights Lloyd George's capacity for deception. An example of this being that he declared the murder of MacCurtain to have been the work of the Sinn Fein extremists. Earlier on in the biography, he points out that Lloyd George had instructed Lord French to give the rebels hell in his attempt to impose conscription. Lloyd George appears to be O' Connor's primary target, just as Sir Hamar Greenwood was central to Beaslai's criticism.¹⁴¹

Like Coogan, O' Connor admits that a full state of war did not exist in the country and that it was more a fight between two secret services.

As the British are condemned for their violence the Irish are often, conversely, applauded for theirs. Beaslai glorifies the Volunteers in their fight against the Crown Forces and criticises the more passive members of the Irish population. He points out that the counties which were more active in the War of Independence didn't

suffer as much as those influenced by the 'timid counsels of pacifists', and that it was a 'remarkable phenomenon' how some of the more peaceful areas became aggressively warlike after the Treaty was signed.¹⁴³ He says that Kevin Barry met his execution 'with a bravery worthy of the records of the Volunteers'.¹⁴⁶ In typically hyperbolic style he says of the flying columns:- 'Surely in all the history of warfare there was never a more prolonged and successful struggle by a handful of men against such odds.' He tells us that they were received everywhere and this was evidence of popular support.¹⁴⁷

Beaslai, generally tries to avoid commenting on the more brutal behaviour of the Irish side. However, it would be impossible for him to always avoid it, and when it is dealt with it is always justified out of necessity and the responsibility is focused on the British. When it came to whether Collins' men should attack lorries carrying British forces through the streets of Dublin, a dilemma arose, because the civilian population would be endangered. According to Beaslai, however, the intensified pressure of the British forces in Dublin, 'forced' the decision to commence with the attacks.

In the following extract Beaslai shifts the responsibility when he says that the Crown Forces were operating 'under the cover of the civilian population'. 'It had to be recognised that the enemy was operating against us daily under the cover of the civilian population, and, as long as they could operate against us in armed parties with entire impunity in Dublin, our situation would grow more and more difficult. Attacks on lorries of soldiers, and Black and Tans, with bombs and revolvers, was now resorted to and became a daily occurrence.'¹⁴⁸

The real Volunteers enjoyed moral purity - at least in Beaslai's mind where truth wasn't a primary concern - unlike the British forces or later the anti-treatyites in the Civil War. 'I may remark in passing that all our messengers were men or youths. I wish to emphasis this point, in view of the use of women and little girls in later warfare against the Free State Army.'¹⁴⁹

Beaslai argues throughout this section of his biography that the harsh conditions enforced by the British in this country made the 'virile' element of the Irish mind inevitably violent in its nature whereby- '.....none could think save in terms of destruction, of bullets, bombs and burning'.¹⁵⁰ Not only the virile were affected but also persons- 'who a year ago were not Sinn Feiners, persons who a year ago had

depreciated “acts of violence”, were now delighted to hear of fresh attacks on the Black and Tans.’¹⁵¹

Beaslai is unintentionally revealing in certain places in this section. An example of this is when he states that the home addresses of a number of Black and Tans were ascertained, raided and burned.¹⁵² It is obvious that he is saying this to satisfy the reader’s desire for revenge. He takes great pains to stress how barbaric it was for the Black and Tans to attack Irish families and yet fails to apply the same logic here— This is an example of how the nationalist writings in these biographies can lose their strand of logic.

O’ Connor is less willing to praise the Irish people as an entity than is Beaslai. He says that the threat of conscription was the main catalyst in turning the Volunteers from a political minority into what he termed a ‘national army’.¹⁵³ He goes on to say that once the threat of conscription lapsed, thousands of the ‘raw recruits’ who had ‘no intense desire’ to fight the English went back to civilian life. Of the Dail government, he was willing to admit that many of the departments never functionised. He reflects negatively on the Ireland that the War of Independence was leaving behind, the- ‘.....Holy Ireland with its flamboyant romanticism and query conscience was rapidly going under.’¹⁵⁴

He admits that Collins’ forces became increasingly violent. This is again seen as being necessary to deal with the increase in savagery on the British side. Regarding the battle between Collins’ intelligence system and the British secret service he is willing to admit that both sides ‘..... fought without mercy in the darkness’.¹⁵⁵

Again unlike Coogan or O’ Connor, Forester veers towards the old view that the country was truly at war during the War of Independence.¹⁵⁶

Like Beaslai, Forester claims that the violent reaction of certain members of the Irish population to British behaviour in this country was an inevitable response. They don’t elaborate to consider that a certain percentage of people out of any population are less resistant to the call of violence than the rest. However, Forester is quite honest in her description of the behaviour of those who resorted to violence. ‘Most of them were chivalrous and high-minded. A few showed a callous indifference to life that was almost mediaeval in its peasant fatalism † Violence begets violence and

undoubtedly, by the end, deeds were done in cold blood that would scarcely have been contemplated in the hot anger of personal conscience in the first days of taking up arms.’¹⁵⁷ She is also willing to admit that civilians often got caught up, helplessly between the two sides.

Forester’s committed respect for the Irish fighter is blatantly expressed throughout the course of her biography. An example of this can be found in her comments on Treacy, whom she considers to personify the ‘ideal volunteer’. ‘Swift upon the trigger, indifferent to danger, untouched by hatred, he neither romanticised war nor treated it cynically, but fought a clean, hard fight.’ This respect for the Irish fighter, is a common trait amongst all the biographers and tends to motivate their arguments though to different extents. For example, Forester in her referring to the Kilmichael ambush - whereby eighteen Auxiliaries were killed - says that Collins ‘rejoiced, gay as a schoolboy’. The Volunteers who carried out the ambush were from Cork, his home county- ‘proving to Britain that Ireland was not beaten yet, not by a long chalk’.¹⁵⁸ She doesn’t find it disturbing that Collins rejoiced at this. In fact she herself seems to be rejoicing with him.

O’ Broin is the least hot-blooded here, and his arguments are the most open-minded. He analyzes the War of Independence technically and his honest style is almost beyond reproach. He refrains from glorifying the Irish as he does from discrediting the British. Whereby the explanations of volunteer success coming from certain of the other biographers rely on their emotive quality, his, depend only on rationale. ‘On the Sinn Fein side the exponents of physical force worked as a team under single direction, whereas on the government side there was little evidence of co-operation between the civil authorities, the police and the military.’¹⁵⁹

While he admires the efficiency of Collins’ intelligence network, he is also willing to criticise it where necessary.

‘..... it is evident from a scathing criticism from G.H.Q. in March 1921 that the I.R.A. in rural areas, had, generally speaking, a very faulty grasp of the nature and techniques of intelligence work. On the other hand, under Brigadier - General Ormonde Winter, British Intelligence, long defective, had improved significantly.’¹⁶⁰ He doesn’t provide a broad, detailed account like Coogan, though nor does he have the latter’s constant need for justification.

Of all the biographers, Coogan is most informative when it comes to detailing the Irish side of the fight during the War of Independence. But as always everything is justified. He tells the reader that Oscar Traynor told Ernie O' Malley that he became particularly upset when a woman, the mother of three children, was accidentally killed in crossfire while she was shopping. However, we are told that this was a rarity and, indeed, that it was- '..... a miracle of either luck or markmanship on both sides that civilian casualties were not far higher'. Coogan, therefore, manages to turn it around from a negative into an almost positive comment.¹⁶¹

He quotes Mary Collins-Powell saying that she heard one afternoon, that six British soldiers had been shot in various parts of Cork city and that some of them were 'mere children'. However immediately after providing this information he personalises it with the difficulties that Collins was enduring. 'While these tragedies were occurring in the foreground of Collins' life, in the background he had to contend with a vendetta that Brugha conducted against him and which de Valera literally presided over. It was so intense that it caused him to think seriously about quitting his highly successful underground war in Dublin and taking to the hills with the Cork I.R.A.'¹⁶² He is therefore associating the fatal situation of these British soldiers with the personal situation of Michael Collins, rather than accepting it as a tragedy in its own right.

Like Beaslai, Coogan is sometimes unintentionally revealing. He too mentions the burning of some of the home addresses of the Black and Tans and elaborates to say that much larger scale operations would have taken place in Liverpool and Manchester, had not certain papers been lost in a raid. This behaviour would seem to be on a par with that of the Black and Tans and yet Coogan fails to provide any criticism.

In my opinion the most startling revelation to be found in any of those biographies, concerns Coogan's telling of Vincent Fourvargve's faith. He was a volunteer who, under duress, gave away the names of some of his unit. We learn that he fled to England in fear. Coogan tells us in a cavalier manner that - 'Collins wasn't fooled and had him shot in London, on 3rd April 1921.'¹⁶³ The fact that Coogan doesn't condemn this action is disturbing. Equally disturbing is the fact that most of the biographers would refrain from discussing such activity.

END NOTES (INTRODUCTION & CHAPTER 1)

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3. T.P. Coogan, Michael Collins, (London, 1990), p. xi.
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6. Beaslai, (1937), p. 1.
7. Margery Forester, Michael Collins : The lost leader, (London, 1972), pp 3 - 6.
8. O' Connor, (1965), p. 17.
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10. Beaslai, (1937), p. 14.
11. *ibid*, p. 21.
12. Coogan, (1990) p. 7.
13. Beaslai, (1937), p. 27.
14. Forester, (1972), p. 19.
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17. Beaslai, (1937), p. 22.
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19. Forester, (1972), p. 35.
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25. O' Broin, (1980), p. 16.
26. Forester, (1972), p. 44.
27. Coogan, (1990), pp 42-46.
28. Forester, (1972), pp 46-47.
29. Ryan, (1932), p. 31.
30. Coogan, (1990), p. 28.
31. O' Connor, (1965), p.33.
32. Beaslai, (1937), pp. 56.

33. Coogan, (1990), p. 56.
34. ibid, p. 57.
35. O' Broin, (1980), p. 25.
36. Beaslai, (1937), p. 41.
37. ibid, p. 42.
38. Forester, (1972), pp 40 - 45.
39. Beaslai, (1937), pp 80 -100.
40. ibid, p. 70.
41. ibid, pp 68 - 71.
42. ibid, p. 52.
43. ibid, p. 47.
44. Coogan, (1990), pp 67 - 71.
45. ibid, pp 71 - 75.
46. ibid, p. 90.
47. ibid, pp 97 - 102.
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58. *ibid*, p. 88.
59. *ibid*, p. 106.
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61. *ibid*, p. 120.
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64. Forester, (1972), pp 121 - 122.
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70. O' Broin, (1980), pp 35 - 36.
71. Ryan, (1932) p. 84.
72. ibid, pp 70 - 90.
73. Beaslai, (1926), p. 89.
74. ibid, p. 108.
75. ibid, p. 112.
76. ibid, p.112.
77. ibid, p. 112.
78. Forester, (1972), p. 96.
79. ibid, p. 125.
80. ibid, p. 128.
81. Coogan, (1990), pp 71 - 76.
82. ibid, pp 116 - 127.
83. Ryan, (1932), p. 67.

84. Beaslai, (1926), pp 34 - 35.
85. ibid, p. 82.
86. ibid, p. 191.
87. ibid, p. 191 - 184.
88. ibid, p. 196.
89. O' Connor, (1965), pp 81 - 84.
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91. ibid, pp 92 - 95.
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93. ibid, pp 100 - 103.
94. Coogan, (1990), p. 128.
95. ibid, p. 141.
96. ibid, pp 141 - 150.
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98. ibid, p. 173.
99. ibid, pp 172 - 173.
100. Ryan, (1932), p. 92.

101. ibid, pp 92 - 95.
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104. O' Broin (1980), pp 54 - 55.
105. Forester, (1972), p. 135.
106. ibid, pp 135 - 140.
107. ibid, pp 170 - 171.
108. ibid, p. 172.
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113. ibid, pp 126 - 127.
114. Coogan, (1990), pp 158 - 163.
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119. *ibid*, (1926), p. 27.
120. *ibid*, p. 100.
121. *ibid*, pp 38 - 40.
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123. *ibid*, p. 104.
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125. O' Brolin, p. 59.
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131. *ibid*, p.147.
132. *ibid*, p. 145.
133. Coogan, (1990), p. 121.
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135. Frank O' Connor on Auxiliaries, p.
136. Coogan, (1990), p.
137. *ibid*, pp 154 - 160.
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139. O' Connor, (1965), p. 103.
140. *ibid*, p. 103.
141. *ibid*, refer to Lloyd George in biography's index.
142. *ibid*, p. 119.
143. Beaslai, (1926), p. 57 and p. 170.
144. *ibid*, p. 65.
147. *ibid*, pp 96 - 97.
148. *ibid*, p. 157.
149. *ibid*, p. 235.
150. *ibid*, p. 227.
151. *ibid*, p. 159.
152. *ibid*, p. 98.
153. O' Connor, (1965), p. 48.

154. *ibid*, p. 102.
155. *ibid*, p. 150.
156. Forester, (1972), p. 138.
157. *ibid*, p. 146.
158. O' Connor, p. 175.
159. O' Broin, (1980), p. 70.
160. *ibid*, p. 74.
161. Coogan, (1990), p.
162. *ibid*, pp 174 - 175.
163. *ibid*, pp 49, 147 - 148.

CHAPTER 2

In the first chapter the biographers have argued as nationalists who accept the use of violence as a means to achieving national independence. This chapter which deals with the Civil War places the biographers' nationalism into a more complex perspective. All the biographers have supported Collins in his violent struggle with the British because they viewed the British position regarding Ireland to be intrinsically wrong.

Nationalism can be moderately defined as 'a sentiment based on common cultural characteristics that binds a population and often produces a policy of national independence'. However it can also be defined more extremely as an 'exaggerated' or fanatical devotion to a national community'.¹

This latter definition could encompass the use of violence to achieve a 'national community'. I assume the biographers subscribe to this definition. They are however stuck for a completely new justification when it comes to Collins inflicting violence on certain non-conformist members of this 'nationalist community'. Nationalism has now entered into two separate divisions. Firstly, the more realistic nationalism that accepts the twenty-six county Free State as a working block for further nationalist development, through means constitutional and perhaps otherwise'. Secondly, that which wants to renew war with the British in a desperately idealistic attempt to achieve a thirty-two county Republic. All the biographers favour and support the pro-treaty side in the Civil War. Their critical appraisal of the Republican side does vary to a considerable extent, however.

Coogan claims that most of the Republicans were 'young', 'brave' and 'fiery' and some of these felt that they had forced the British to concede Dominion status and that the next phase of fighting would bring the Republic. The truce was, therefore, merely purposeful as a 'breathing space'. Many were fighting for tradition's sake and for others it had become 'a way of life'.² He refers to the 'unhealthy mushroom growth' in Republican membership after the Truce. The character of these 'Trucileers' is denigrated when he describes them as being 'poorly disciplined and (a great source of suspicion and tension to men who had fought all through the Black and Tan war) were former British Army men'.³ He does point out their reluctance to

start fighting and killing members of the pro-treaty side.⁴ When the fighting did begin, however, he further slants their character by dismissing politics as a motivation for their stance. Instead, their motivation was reduced to the personal and local arena, where the irregulars- ‘.....joined in the shooting merely because the “Free starters” had fired on their comrades, or because of some friends urgings or example’. Coogan does not entirely strip them of their decency. For example, he portrays the regret that existed in certain members of the Republican company that assassinated Collins- ‘Tom Hales who “cried his eyes out over the killing”, took the initiative in making his peace with Johnny and Nancy and then, through him, other members of the party did likewise. One of them, Jim Hurley, broke down and cried in their home when he first visited them in Dublin in 1923. “How could we do it?” he sobbed “We were too young- I was only nineteen.”Anyone of his assailants could have fired the fatal shot. None of them would have been proud to do so.’⁵

Like Coogan, Forester attributes a lot of Republican animosity towards ‘personal animosity’.⁶ She derides the ‘Trucileers’ whose ‘bellicosity was in proportion to their lack of fighting experience’.⁷ She sympathises with those youths who were caught up in the ‘glamour’ of 1916 Republicanism. These youths who hadn’t been harnessed by pre-Treaty I.R.A. discipline and comradeship suffered from ‘trigger-happiness.’ Yet Forester is objective enough to point out that their- ‘fellows of the Government forces many of them as raw as themselves, responded to their impetus fusillades with equal nervous energy’.⁸ Forester also describes the heartache suffered by the other Republicans after hearing of Collins’ assassination. She points out, however, that a lot of the younger Republicans saw the death of Collins in terms of victory and ‘rejoiced’. Interestingly, she describes an anecdote which not only summates the divided atmosphere amongst Republicans on hearing this news, but also concerns one of the other biographers under discussion. ‘Frank O’ Connor destined to make his own reparation of love to Collins’s memory, was one of the youngest in arms who rejoiced then to hear of his death. He was with Erskine Childers and was to recall in later years “how Childers slunk away to his table silently, lit a cigarette and wrote an article in praise of Collins”.’⁹

Leon O’ Broin doesn’t go into too much detail when it comes to Republican character. In his typical fashion, he refrains from excessive condemnation and his summary of

them is economical and yet critical. 'There were fanatical irregulars who were pure in motive though violent in method; behind them had gathered all the desperate elements of the population who pursued rapine for private gain. But it was impossible to draw distinctions between types of extremists : over all of them was the glamour of the Republic.'

In Desmond Ryan's microcosm of Civil War characters, the Republicans are represented directly by dialogue spoken by the Republican characters and are perceived by those on the side of the Free State through their dialogue. Like Forester, he in a sense, justifies their stance on account of the 1916 rhetoric that has propelled extreme Republicanism. "Why shouldn't they sing to their dream Republic? Hasn't it been drilled into them for the past five years?" "Yes, reason is out of it!" admitted Macken.¹¹ Through his use of conversation, Ryan achieves a sort of impartial appreciation of the fanatical idealist. For example, one character, a pro-Treaty sympathiser (Harding) claims there is a touch of greatness to these people, and that- ".....if they did not exist, we should have to invent them!" As a balancing factor, the other character (Macken) rejects this suggestion. "I would rather have Michael Collins little finger!"¹² The three main irregular characters in Ryan's work are all seen to praise Michael Collins. The respect which the Republican characters had for the pro-Treaty characters is summed up in the words of one of the main advocates in the text (Tiger Doyle)- ".....lets hope that none of us meet during this little scrap and that nothing happens to Mick....."¹³ In another of the three main characters we see a regretful yet ultimately illusioned mind at work. "If we only had time to think," murmured Considine "This tragedy might have been averted time to allow for each others opinions but, no, each in his little corner ... No still those were the times. And nothing will be as black as we fear And the Republic will be worth it all."¹⁴

Tiger Doyle is seen to admit that the bulk of his side, as well as the other side, were far from reputable in character, but the fight is justified for the sake of ideal and tradition.

"I know that three quarters of our supporters are trash, as much trash as the majority behind your precious Free state. I am going to ram the Republic down their throats as it was rammed down mine Ten years of the Free State and we'll be a British province."¹⁵

Ryan sums up the factions of the fanatical Republican thinking process with a certain degree of pathos. ‘“You are not much use for anything but fighting, Tiger Doyle!” said Macken. And they departed leaving Terence O’ Donovan with a gun falon in his eyes, considine with his dream and the Tiger Doyle ready to fight till he dropped.’¹⁶

Ryan holds his most biting criticism for the women behind the Republican stance, and perhaps for women as a gender generally. He portrays them as fickle. ‘A week later, Agnes Mac Gowan changed her mind. “..... I was mistaken about that written Treaty. Up the Republic!”’¹⁶⁺¹ They are also seen to be instigators of violence. His character Bolger is heard to say- “And them bloody women setting the menfolk by the ears!”¹⁶⁺² When discussing the scenes after Collins’ death, women are seen as vulture-like creatures in a broken, promiscuous society, ‘..... everywhere property, everywhere a remittent and feverish squealer, everywhere women crouching, loitering and offering themselves for sale, disappearing down alley-ways or into house with their prey.’

O’ Connor, who fought as a youth on the Republican side manages to show a lot of sympathy for the young fighters on both sides. ‘All the officers and men were young. were not brigands, not murderers; there was nothing base or dishonourable about them, despite the propagandists on both sides.’¹⁷

He does manage to cut down those from the upper echelons of the Republican side however. He is even satirical in his put downs. He describes how the anti-Treaty representatives were indignant at the suggestion that the Civil War had ‘..... anything whatever to do with....’ the country’s slump in the level of trade.

‘“Really” cried one of their number, “the economic life of the nation should not be mixed up with politics”.’¹⁸ He discusses the intransigence of the Republicans and says that the reason that the Peace Conference kept breaking down was because they could not see why Collins wished to implement the Treaty at all’.¹⁹ He compares the integrity of Collins with those from the Republican side who were primarily concerned with selfish interests.

‘Collins, with his elasticity and brilliance, often forgot that those whom he looked on as heroes were sometimes vain, simple, uneducated men..... He was asking them to rise above Lilliput; they were concerned with petty jealousies, with rank and precedence.’²⁰

In short, he forgives the young soldiers but places responsibility for the Civil War with the more mature Republican who were motivated by either selfishness or an illogical grasp on politics.

Despite his claim that his biographies on Michael Collins were unbiased in their nature, Piaras Beaslai portrays the Civil War in a very black and white fashion, the anti-Treatyites being the enemy. he points out that the '..... fact remains (and many people forget it) that the first blood in the fratricidal strife was shed, not in June, but in April, and that the first shots fired in that strife were fired against Dail troops by Irregulars. The former were the greater sufferers, as the great majority of the encounters originated in attacks on them, and their attitude was simply defensive.'²¹ Not only were the Republicans the aggressors and culprits but '...in the name of Republicanism it was proposed to inflict upon the people a military tyranny more drastic and more inexpensable than any inflicted by the British Government.'²²

Their concern was less political than materialistic. They wanted to place themselves in a position of dictatorship and when their position had become a less optimistic one they began to seek a united Army '..... in which their own positions would be secured'.²³ He does point out, however, that most though not all of the leaders of the Republican side retained their respect for Michael Collins. Nonetheless, this is a comment more favourable to Collins than to the Republican side.

Beaslai's final tribute to Collins is one that fully justifies and appreciates his actions and decisions, whilst at the same time is critical of those who opposed the Treaty. It is written in a time when the south was still very much affected by the Civil War. 'Today we have an Ireland of great possibilities with the most serious obstacle to her national progress removed by the work of Michael Collins ; but we have also a cynical discouraged Ireland, her fine enthusiasm quenched by the worse brutalities of an unnecessary Civil War and by the material in its train. But this is only a passing phase.'²³⁺¹

Beaslai the patriot, can't stomach, an in-depth discussion of the Civil War. 'It was an ugly and painful episode in the history of Ireland which none but an enemy of our

country can record with any feeling of satisfaction. It is a story of a contest in which neither side benefited to much advantage, which gleams of courage chivalry, humanity were rare on both sides.'²³⁺² He could never allow himself to make such an impartial comment regarding any aspect of the War of Independence.

During this Civil War period, de Valera was- in the context of political history - an inactive entity. He is either more or less ignored by the biographers in this section or is portrayed as the character responsible for the existence of the Civil War in Irish history.

Forester, who is not a critic of de Valera, doesn't involve him significantly in this section of her biography and the small references she does make of his character are generally complimentary.

O' Connor too, is understandably almost vacant on de Valera in this section though he does made one or two condemnatory comments. Probably the most significant of these is where he portrays de Valera as being one of the main instigators for the Republicans to start fighting. 'It was clear that they were out to hinder the election, and the next day made it clear that de Valera was supporting them. He made the famous speech about "marching over the bodies of our fellow countrymen" ; he had denied that it bore the meaning which most people attached to it, but a few days later the banned Volunteer convention was held at de Valera's own headquarters.precipitated mischief everywhere. Local officers now had an authority.'²⁴

Leon O' Broin is discrete, the only potential criticism being a reference to '.....the restless, sometimes effeminate emotionalism of de Valera'.²⁵

Ryan's platform is a very localised one, and therefore doesn't confront the personality of de Valera.

It was Coogan and Beaslai - who criticise de Valera throughout their biographies - that tend to use this tragic episode in Irish history, as his epitaph. Whilst Collins is allowed to represent all that is good in nationalism, de Valera is, too conveniently

used to represent everything that is bad in the ideology.

Coogan shows de Valera 'angling/ for extremist support by promoting the idea of a civil war, with speeches that- '..... raised the spectacle of drowning the shamrock in blood'.²⁶ He quotes Griffith claiming that de Valera had deliberately incited the assassination of the plenipotentiaries who had signed the Treaty. He summarises his own feelings by quoting Yeats in acid-spitting form.

"Had de Valera eaten Parnell's heart.
No loose-lipped demagogue had won the day
No civil rancour torn the land apart."²⁷

His lack of political conviction is portrayed when after failing to capture extremist support, he fails to reject Collins' proposed constitution before its publication as it would be an electoral disadvantage to do so.²⁸ There were rumours that de Valera had a hand in Collins' death. Coogan however - in his dedication to being informative and yet persuasive rather than merely persuasive through a totally selective use of history - allows himself to dismiss this conjecture. 'This is true only in the sense that he was the principal architect of the overall civil war situation. My information is that he actively tried to prevent the actual ambush. It comes from the account, given by Jimmy Flynn....'²⁹ He even points out that when de Valera heard the news of Collins' death he was angry and upset.³⁰ It is interesting that he ends this biography with a critical commentary on de Valera, such is the importance of revealing the true nature of this demagogue. He criticises de Valera's lack of innovative thinking when in government and 'his lack of an economic philosophy which Collins did have the ability to provide'.³¹ He criticises his 'pettiness' and vindictiveness in preventing a marble cross from being erected in memory of Michael Collins. He describes how this pettiness transcended into a policy of erasing Collins from Irish history. Is perhaps one of Coogan's main intentions in the writing of this work to breath life into the book's concluding comment. ' "It's my considered opinion that in the fullness of time history will record the greatness of Collins and it will be recorded at my expense." He could be right.'³² Even the compliment which he allows de Valera in this closing section is quickly turned around into a biting criticism.

'His sheer durability has to be acknowledged. His courage in controlling a nervous

temperament and in fighting the blindness that affected him increasingly from the start of the Second World War, his successful struggle to maintain Irish neutrality, all speak of a man who contained within himself elements of greatness. In one area, however, his attitude to Michael Collins, he consistently showed the small-mindedness of a guilty conscience.’³³

Beaslai has no hesitation in pointing out bluntly, that de Valera in his rejection of the Treaty was responsible for the Civil war. ‘If Mr. De Valera had adhered and had been able to make his followers adhere, to the spirit of this declaration, the country would have been saved many evils and much bloodshed’³⁴ He says that de Valera either consciously incited civil war or otherwise was completely stupid. ‘De Valera declared that it might be necessary “to wade through the blood of their fellow - countrymen to freedom”. Whether he meant this as an incitement to civil war or not I do not pretend to know; but if he did not realise the effect of his contribution to a menacing situation, he must have been incapable of realising anything.’³⁵ Throughout this section in his biographies de Valera’s self-indulgence is referred to.

As always, the biographers in this section try to justify Collins’ decisions and actions. Coogan describes the ‘terrible tensions’ that existed in Collins during the period just prior to the Civil War in his attempts to ‘bridge the unbridgeable.’ He was reluctant to fight those opposed to the Treaty, he had to maintain a relationship with the British government, he had to control the army and was involved in fuelling the I.R.A. in the North while denying this to all but those involved. He outlines the many responsibilities Collins had to deal with during this phase. Collins drafted a constitution for the twenty-six counties which left out the oath to the British King, made no mention of the Governor General and claimed equality of status with all the nations of the world. Rather than suggesting a level of naivety on Collins’ behalf, Coogan claims that the constitution ‘... shows the nobler aspects of Collins’ vision, the constructive thought for the future of a man who hoped it would be one of Independence, democracy and peace.’³⁶ As well as this, Coogan points out that Collins’ legal advisor told him that the constitution was legal.³⁷ Collins’ loyalty to

the irregulars who were once his comrades is emphasised by Coogan. 'Collins hesitated to assert his authority, even though he was personally involved in several potentially deadly incidents.'³⁸ Coogan says that it must be conceded that Collins' pact with De Valera and 'its attendant manoeuvrings' show him to be more of a 'conspirator' than a 'statesman'. To balance this, he says that though it might appear merely weak on Collins' behalf or simply an attempt to dress his I.R.A. activity in a cloak or constitutionality 'his vision of what he sought remained clear'.³⁹ When Collins, out of necessity, had to attack the Four Courts his decision to do so was an 'agonised' one.⁴⁰ Once this decision was made, Coogan portrays Collins as being fully committed to the task of defeating the irregular forces. He had found a new lease of life, doing what he done best, soldering, though he was still clearly heartbroken. He is described weeping after the death in Brugha. 'Collins' magnanimity towards a man who had caused him so much trouble was entirely in character.'

And again, he weeps at the death of Harry Boland. But Coogan is willing to admit that that '.....was the soft man, Michael Collins, the warm-hearted human being. The Hard man, the soldier, was functioning efficiently, relentlessly.'⁴² Collins' weeping at these deaths emphasised is in all the biographies to balance his newly-found soldiering edge.

Forester describes the factors attributing to Collins' 'impossible position' during the period immediately prior to the Civil war in exactly the same way as Coogan.⁴³ She also describes the many responsibilities Collins was responsible for during this phase.⁴⁴ She points out that it wasn't for 'personal ambition' or 'acclaim' that Collins wanted power, but for 'his own and Ireland's destinies'.⁴⁵ She defends his loyalty to old comrades. 'It would be a mistake to over-emphasise his tendency to secret consultation in controversial quarters. None of his colleagues could complain that his loyalties were only for those who opposed him',⁴⁶ Forester defends the Collins - De Valera pact. '.....in signing the pact, Collins had achieved more than the national unity which was its primary aim. He had ensured an election ; and by his insistence that every interest other than Sinn Fein was to be free to contest it with the panel candidates he had salvaged something of its democratic character. Without the pact it is difficult to see how the election required under the Treaty could have been held. Collins could justifiably argue that by the Pact he had give the

opposition a last chance to assume a responsible and constitutional part in restoring the country without losing face by having to accept the Treaty; and that the economic chaos, which obsessed him, and the grave situation in the North-East had now made unity the supreme consideration.’⁴⁷ She does admit however that his public declaration that he regarded the Pact as more important than the Treaty was ‘certainly imprudent : since he saw no reason why Pact and Treaty should not be co-existent.’⁴⁸ But again, she points out that this was ‘notevidence of any readiness to dishonour his signature’: She admits that the repercussion of this declaration was that Craig refused to have any dealings with the Dail and refused to have a boundary commission.⁴⁹

Regarding the constitution she is critical enough to admit that - ‘Too many loyalties had led him so unwisely to seek to solve Irelands problems by embracing every method employed by those from poles apart.....’⁵⁰ Forester stresses that when it became essential for Collins to attack the Four Courts, it was an incredibly difficult decision for him to take.

‘ “It had to come” was Collins’s comment. But was no more reconciled to it than if he had spoken of a loved one’s death.’⁵¹

Ryan puts Collins’ reluctance to fight his old comrades in a context of him, a great man, being destroyed by a personified collective Irish mentality- ‘....Mackena savage bitterness in his tone. “Talk to them straight and tell them you won’t have any damned nonsense, and tell the country their plans. Fight them now or quit! And don’t try either soft-soap or underground intrigue. A war party always wins with time and secrecy on its side. Don’t you know that?” “I would rather go back to the guerrilla war than that !” said Michael Collins, striding out, vital and confident. Macken mused on human capacity to believe what it wanted to believe. Here was Michael Collins gambling on human reasonableness, he usually so clear-headed. No, the revolutionary tide would submerge him ere it ebbed. Ireland was behind him, because Ireland knew instinctively that he was her bulwark against chaos. But she would break him as she had always broken her greatest.’⁵²

O’Broin too, portrays Collins reluctance to fight his old comrades and how when it was necessary to do so it was ‘.....abhorrent to him’.⁵³

O' Connor tells how Collins - who had lost his practicality and had compromised the Treaty and his party's position - '..... would not hear fo war'.⁵⁴

His new zeal of life in the Civil War is attributed to his trust in the nobility of democracy. 'Always a man of the people the people's judgment gave him new heart.'⁵⁵ With the Civil war came a return to Collins' soldiering ruthlessness. 'But Collins, having once set his face to the hard road, was having no more truces'.⁵⁶ Like in the other biographies this is balanced by his weeping humanity.

Beaslai describes Collins' impossible task of having to oppose his old comrades while at the same time having to face up to the British. He describes his vast responsibilities.⁵⁷ Power had not gone to his head. '.....unlike so many other who had risen suddenly to powerhe assumed no air of aloofness.'⁵⁸

He points out that because of Collins' vast responsibilities he was unable to give attention to the I.R.A. which had become the most '..... serious problem of all'.⁵⁹

Beaslai argues that it would have been better if the problem divisions in the I.R.A. had been faced up to initially. A meeting was held which postponed any such action. However Collins is, of course, excused from this as he '.....was not present at the meeting above referred to and knew nothing of the agreement until afterwards'.⁶⁰

Beaslai disapproved of the Pact 'on principal'. However his love of Collins allows him to provide some justification for it. 'Perhaps all that can be said in its favour was that it was an attempt to make the best of a bad job, a last desperate effort to find an answer in face of the threat of civil war. Without it, it would have been impossible to hold a free election, the country would be kept in the same state of chaos and anarchy indefinitely, and the Treaty would have been destroyed by the impossibility of carrying out its provisions. It also resulted in giving the supporters of the Treaty a working majority.'⁶¹ Finally, when Collins had done his 'utmost' to prevent civil war, and when it had become an inevitability it was his 'duty to Ireland' to commit himself.⁶² He describes the magnitude of the task, Collins was faced with in fighting the irregulars. Beaslai of course, emphasises his humanity during the Civil war. 'It grieved him deeply to be fighting against old comrades.'⁶³

Basically, the biographers describe Collins decisions and actions as being noble ones forced on him by his humanity.

Coogan is not afraid to go into great detail about Collins' activities and policy in and regarding the North of Ireland, since the signing of the Treaty. In fact he provides a whole detailed and lengthy chapter on the topic. He discusses his two-faced approach of officially denying keeping the fight going in the North to the British and Northern governments, and to his more moderate colleagues in the Free state government whilst at the same time supervising war like action in the six counties. In Collins' defence Coogan stresses that he was in an extraordinarily delicate situation. He dismisses the argument from certain of his contemporaries that Collins' Northern policy was merely activated to keep the Republicans in line. He says that Collins was not only the head of the Irish Free State but was also head of the I.R.B. and in this capacity was fully committed to seeking a thirty-two county Irish Republic. He points out that Collins had some faith in ending partition in an economic way. Yet in 'a nutshell Collins' vision was of a united Ireland which if necessary would have to be fought for'.⁶⁴ Coogan balances Collins' relaunch into violent means by giving detailed accounts of atrocities and forms of institutional prejudice that were carried out on and affected Catholics. Collins is again humanised to evoke the readers' sympathy. Hearing the reports of these atrocities '.....had a marked influence on Collins who obviously felt for the Northern Nationalists very profoundly'.⁶⁵ He points out that the persecution of Catholics was carried out on a governmental level and describes the Specials as he did the Black and Tans. To balance this, Coogan does describe atrocities committed by the nationalist side (against both Southern loyalists and Northern Protestants) and in fairness to him he doesn't hold back in this regard. However he begins and ends his commentary on these, by stressing that they were much less horrific and regular and that their significance was exaggerated by propagandist newspapers. As well as this he impresses on the reader that Southern authorities were against attacks on Southern loyalists and took preventative acting. He describes graphically violent RUC behaviour to balance his telling of IRA atrocities in the North which are told in a less graphic fashion. 'The 4th Northern Division of the I.R.A., seeking a "law abiding and united Ireland" by means of the unacknowledged Collins - assisted offensive, carried out one of the worst atrocities of the period in June 1922. It occurred at a time of RUC activity in the area such as the murder of two Catholics whose bodies were subsequently found on a road deposited in holes which were originally dug by the I.R.A. to plant mines.'

He goes on to quote a newspaper saying that “seven or eight farm houses belonging to unionists were attacked with bomb and rifle fire and five of the inhabitants slain, two others dangerously wounded and the residence of some burned.”⁶⁶ This detailed rather than descriptive account lacks the imagery of its prequel. Michael Collins I.R.A. campaign in the North turned out to be disastrous and consequently was quickly brought to a close. Coogan outlines this failure in a very detailed and blunt manner. ‘.....the reaction fell heaviest on Catholics. For example, May saw sixty-three deaths in Belfast alone. Of these, forty were Catholics. In an effort to balance the sectarian scales the I.R.A. made things worse.’⁶⁷ Yet he does refrain from criticising Michael Collins personally for this. Collins decisions are as always seen to be noble ones, made in defence of the maltreated.⁶⁸

Forester is either less honest or less informed than Coogan regarding Collins’ activities in the North.

She argues that he would have preferred a co-operative rather than obstructive and secretive policy in the North. ‘Collins knew that any I.R.A. action in the North to protect the nationalist minority must aggravate the attacks upon them. He also saw that a more effective course was to invoke the co-operation of Britain, whose troops continued to garrison the six counties, and who he felt should shoulder her share of the responsibility for its inhabitants which she retained under the Treaty.’⁶⁹ Forester is totally under estimating Collins’ intentions here. It was Collins fully intention to carry out I.R.A. activity in the North. She even goes on to say that Collins, desired the unity of Ireland to be based on ‘good will’.⁷⁰ This hardly complies with his two-faced approach in dealing with the issue. She does admit that the- ‘....South’s unity lay in the common concerns of brothers, and as long as the Northerners actions threatened that deep natural bond, Collins would pawn the Treaty itself to protect it.’⁷¹ Yet she never captures his deep-seated desire that the achievement of a politically unified Ireland whether through violent means or otherwise was an utmost priority in Collins’ thinking.

She discusses Catholic persecution and claims that the ‘....B - Specials, inspired by a far more intense loathing of Sinn Fein than the mercenary infusions of the Black and Tans had ever known, used their armed power to restore order by eradicating the nationalist minority to the best of their ability’.⁷² Without going into the same detail, she admits that there was negative activity from both sides of the fence. ‘The

reaction of extreme groups on both sides had become a problem of immediate concern.’⁷³

O’ Connor doesn’t make any significant contributions in the area other than to link Catholic persecution with British policy, a criticism that he fails to counter-balance. ‘It probably began as an outbreak of religious fanaticism, but after a little while it became obvious that it was being maintained from higher quarters, in the hope that if it were carried out with sufficient savagery it might goad on the South to civil war and a fresh round with England. In the later stages it was likely that even British Army officers were involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the Treaty and Lloyd George’s government.’⁷⁴

Beaslai doesn’t go into the Northern situation significantly, but what he does say is very one-sided. ‘Belfast was the scene of the terrible religious war which lasted some months, causing much bloodshed and destruction and involving some shocking murders of Catholics.’⁷⁵

Leon O’ Broin doesn’t go in depth into the Northern situation. He merely outlines Collins’ activity in the North as a justifiable reaction to anti-Catholic pogroms.

‘In relation to an anti-Catholic pogrom in which men were driven from their employment, homes burned down, and women and children subjected to terrorism, and in one instance five members of a Belfast family murdered, I.R.A. columns, with directions and arms surreptitiously supplied by Collins in collaboration with Liam Lynch, an uncompromising anti-Treaty I.R.A. commandant, proceeded to make cross-border raids, to disarm police, to take hostages, to black or blow up roads and bridges and seize military material.’⁷⁶ There is no mention of I.R.A. atrocities committed in the North.

Ryan doesn’t go into the Northern issues. It is really only Coogan, therefore, who makes an attempt to seriously depict the situation in the North.

The biographers are all willing to admit that the same degree of ruthlessness existed on both sides during the Civil war. However unlike with the War of Independence they don’t go in to detail regarding this ruthlessness. This is somewhat unbalanced

considering that more Irish were killed during the Civil war than in the War of Independence.

It is interesting to look at the biographers views on the leading British characters and their policy towards Ireland during the Civil War.

Churchill was probably the most prominent British figure in the Irish political scene during this period.

Coogan pays him the following tribute. 'Whether one agrees or disagrees with the terms of the Treaty, it has to be conceded that Churchill's prowess in steering the ratification through his own constitutional and political mine fields made a significant contribution to the creation of modern Ireland.'³⁷ However later on, he accuses Churchill of showing favouritism towards the unionists in the North in the important matters of financial and military aid. 'In these circumstances Churchill, though he claimed to believe in long-term Irish unity, decided like his father before him that Ulster would fight and Ulster would be right. After some quibbling Craig got almost everything he asked for plus By contrast it may be noted that less than two weeks earlier Wilson had observed with satisfaction that Churchill had vetoed a request from Cope to supply Collins with arms, lest they be used in the North.'⁷⁸ Coogan goes on to provide a lot more negative commentary on Churchill during this final section of his biography. Coogan points out that certain, 'high-ranking British decision-makers' were involved in creating anarchy in Ireland and supporting the 'irregular' side.⁸⁰ He also shows how a report revealing Collins' illegal activity in the North was not published by the British government for fear of revealing negative activity funded by the British tax-payer. '..... if a critical report had been published, the resultant spotlight would have shone not only on Michael Collins, but on the behaviour of the forces of law and order in the state he was trying to overthrow. Forces for which the British tax-payer had been committed unwittingly to writing a blank cheque, politically as well as economically.'⁸¹ Talents who compiled the report was also- '.....deeply critical of the manner in which Sally-Flood and Craig had been allowed to run up an establishment of 48,250 paramilitaries costing nearly 25 million a year'.⁸² Coogan claims to be almost certain that it was Collins' orders that had Wilson killed.⁸³ The assassination of Field Marshall, Sir Henry Wilson by two of Collins' men is seen to be justified. Coogan discusses

Wilson at great length, perhaps to give a full impression of his despicable character. Through his affinity with Craig, he had become a very powerful figure in the Northern government, whose plans were oppressive to say the least, especially regarding the catholic population. 'Wilson was addressing Die hard meetings and more and more "Tudors" were beginning to see him as the "fine leader".'⁸⁴ His history is summarised to support the action of the assassins. 'Wilson's involvement with every prominent anti-Nationalist and pro-Unionist cause from the Curragh mutiny to the foundation of the Specials would have been damning enough without his frequent attacks on Collins personally and the Treaty settlement in general.'⁸⁵

Unlike Coogan, Forester views Churchills behaviour during the Civil War as being unbiased, dedicated and honest. 'Churchill, however, unlike the Northern Prime Minister had signed the Treaty and believing that its provisions offered a real basis for a future of trust and co-operation, refused to trim them to favour either, political interest in Ireland at the expense of the other.'⁸⁶ She defends Churchills ultimatum to Collins to deal with the irregulars as being based on a decision coming from a man who had already 'staked his political fortunes' on the Treaty and who had remained loyal to it. He had already given Collins space to deal with the problem. He was now obliged to act as if dealing with any dominion incompetent of self-government. As well as all this she points out that he could hardly be expected to sacrifice his future' for a country he didn't even like.⁸⁷ According to Forester Ireland is indebted to Churchill. 'Few of the Irish men who accepted the Treaty can have realised how much they had so far owed to Churchill. He had staked his political fortunes upon it and had upheld the actions of its Irish signatories in the lack of bitter attacks at home which had been fomented by Irishmen both North and South, who were not part of it. A resolute believer, in nipping trouble in the bud, he had reluctantly accepted Collins's arguments for 'delaying tactics that might dissipate a crisis. But now Collins's most cogent reason for compromise, the lack of any mandate from the people, was gone Churchill undoubtedly felt that unless the provisional governmental asserted itself quickly he must consider the colonial offices responsibility for upholding law and order in any Dominion whose administration had shown itself incompetent to do so. Nor can he have felt bound to sacrifice his own future for Ireland a country to which he owed no loyalty beyond that vested in the Treaty, and for which it must be added, he had small affection.'⁸⁸

She even goes as far as to compare the bravery Collins showed during the ambush with Churchill's show of bravery during the Normandy landings.

'A Commander-in-Chief does not fling himself on his stomach behind a ditch with a rifle to take pot shots at the enemy. Nor for that matter do heads of Government Churchill, was to show the same precipitate desire to be in the thick of the fight when year afterwards he was prevented from viewing the Normandy landing only by the personal plea of his King.'⁸⁹

Wilson, the other British personality who deserves reference at this point is described by Forester as a horrible person, who nevertheless possessed certain qualities that could be appreciated by the English but not the Irish.⁹⁰ Forester claims, that it is more likely that Collins renewed the order for Wilson's assassination, when the Belfast pogroms were at their height. Forester, is to an extent critical of Collins for presumably making this decision. '..... cannot be justified..... He should have foreseen - he was presumably blind to it - that the assassination of Wilson must further weaken the authority of the Provisional Government.'⁹¹ However, she does stand in his defence. The irregulars provided the perfect cover and there was little chance of Dunne getting caught. In theory at least, these were viable safety catches. Collins's final redeeming action regarding the incident was that whatever- '.....his involvement in Wilson's death Collins took full responsibility for the lives of Dunne and O' Sullivan. It was Mc Kee and Clancy all over again.'⁹²

O' Broin most significant contribution to this area involves Wilson's assassination. He says that it was not 'inconceivable' and that he does not 'deny the possibility' that Collins was responsible for the assassination but that (at the time of his writing this biography) 'no evidence has so far been produced, apart from the statement given to a newspaper in 1853 by Joe Dolan of Collins' old intelligence group.'⁹³ However if he did do it, it would be somewhat justified in Collins '..... seeing it as a blow worth striking in the campaign hitherto waged unsuccessfully across the border in defence of the people in the North who were suffering at the hands of Wilson's Specials.'⁹⁴ He finishes in a way that not only pays tribute to Collins character but also increases the possibility that he didn't do it. 'Collins could well have wanted to rescue Dunne and O' Sullivan regardless of whether or not he had any prior responsibility for the act for which they had been found guilty.'⁹⁵

O' Connor like Forester expresses a degree of sympathy towards Churchill. When discussing the murder of a catholic family by the Specials, O' Connor says the

following : ‘ “Cannibal vengeance” was how Churchill described the murder of the Mac Mahons, and Collins, knowing his essential humanity, had tossed upon the council table the photograph of the murdered family. Churchill had wept.....’⁹⁶ O’ Connor is perhaps the most critical of Collins when it comes to the assassination of Wilson. First of all, he seems to be convinced that Collins was more than likely involved. He describes this act on his behalf as ‘inexplicable’. He says that not only was he being dishonest with the English cabinet but that he was also being dishonest with his own side. He says that for the first time he ‘..... had no conceivable earthly authority to justify it, and allowed men under his command to run the risk of perishing without even that poor gleam of honour that has lit so many a “lonely scaffold”, to use his own moving words.’⁹⁷ However he appeases the above respites by saying that Collins was by nature a ‘conventional man’, but that he was in an environment deprived of his conventions. He didn’t have the temperament to stand alone like Griffith and Brugha.⁹⁸ It seems to be the case of righting Collins’ wrongs through the use of a convenient concept.

He finishes on a complimentary comment- ‘Collins’ immediate concern was to save the lives of two brave men.’¹⁰⁰

Beaslai points out that certain events during the Civil War ‘.....suggested a desire on the part of the English authorities that the enemies of the Free State should be well armed.’¹⁰¹ Infact Beaslai seems to be convinced, or at least is trying to convince, that the British government or the ‘English’ wanted to re-conquer the whole of Ireland. ‘.....the intervention of the English Army in Ulster against the Free State brought about a very grave situation indeed. It was quite clear that the Irish Government, or by its abdication, afford the English an excuse for re-invading the country, and thus acquiesce in the defeat of all hopes of Irish freedom.’¹⁰²

Ryan doesn’t contribute to this area significantly.

Collin’s assassination will be looked at, only in so far as it reveals something about the biographers nationalist mentality, honesty and determination to reveal the truth. Coogan disregards conspiracy theories (some of which included the involvement of the British Secret Service) and the opportunity to blacken the Republican character. He began by saying that ‘..... it appears that there was a lot less to the tragedy

than met the eye of many a theorist.’¹⁰³ Up until the writing of his book a lot of people with an insight into the assassination, alleged that Mac Peake a machine-gunner in Collins’ convoy (who afterwards deserted to the Republican side) participated in his killing. Some of the biographers under discussion make this allegation. Coogan, however, is perceptive enough in his research and honest enough in his portrayal of the converted Republican to elevate him from this insinuation. ‘Those were harsh times and it can be taken for granted that he had anything to do with Collins’ deaths, he would hardly have survived his arrest, never mind his imprisonment.’¹⁰⁴ He also points out that the ‘unfortunate’ Emmett Dalton was the ‘.....target for the most sustained allegations’ and that he would rather have ‘..... shot himself sooner than have injured Collins’.¹⁰⁵

Coogan is willing to say that Collins and his convey were drinking and enjoying themselves on the day of the assassination, and is even quite critical of this. ‘Forget the war, relax, and take a drink, have a chat and a joke. It was human but it was not wartime behaviour.’¹⁰⁶

Like Coogan, Forester defends Mc Peake though not to the same extent. ‘Mc Peake had started off with a burst of machine - gun fire, but after a short time the gun no longer opened properly but fired single shots, like a rifle. Only later when Mc Peake deserted to the Republicans taking the Slievenamon with him, would this failure take a sinister significance. The shot that found him was almost certainly a ricochet, possibly off the armoured car.’¹⁰⁷ Forester doesn’t go into any detail regarding the controversy surrounding Collins death.

It is interesting that in paying Collins his final tributes she makes a slight reference to his relationship with women by referring to him as ‘the laughing Boy of the Dublin women’.¹⁰⁸

O’ Broin tribute to Collins can also be seen as a criticism of those who lacked reality in opposing him during the Civil War.

‘A quarter-century of uneasy dominionship was succeeded by a republic as free as any in the world, a republic accepted by Irishmen whether they originally followed

Collins' lead or not. That is all to the good, and yet it is now apparent that the most tragic element in Collins' death was that it occurred at all, for it was as unnecessary as the bitter Civil War which the compassionate realist strove so hard and risked so much to avoid.'¹⁰⁹

Beaslai is hostile enough to accuse Mc Peake, without significant evidence, of being involved in the assassination of Collins.

'It may be mentioned here that the machine gun in the armoured car "jammed" after the short time. The machine gunner Mac Peake, not long after this occurrence, deserted to the irregulars bringing an armoured car with him.'

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CHAPTER 3

PART ONE: SCREENPLAY

The Neil Jordan movie attempts to condense the main events in Michael Collins' life into just over two hours of celluloid drama. His artistic licence allows him to tally with facts and merge characters for coherency and dramatic effect. This is relevant to the thesis, only insofar as it effects his nationalist message.

Before beginning a discussion through the films content, it should be noted that there are some slight differences between the final screenplay and the film. These will be pointed out where required.

The film introduces Collins and the rebels fighting, bravely outnumbered, in the G.P.O. After their defeat, they are rounded up and seen to be maltreated. Collins is standing in line beside de Valera. Collins is portrayed as fiery, de Valera as courteous. Next comes the executions of the 1916 leaders. They are seen to bravely confront the firing squad. This is accompanied by a voice over from de Valera. 'The fact that I was born in America might save me hind, Either way I am ready for what comes.'¹ These introductory scenes demand our respect for the ultimate commitments of nationalism. The rest of the action takes places between 1918 and 1922. Collins' relationship with Kitty O' Shea and Harry Boland are introduced. These characters are utilised as channels for Collins' humanity. Jordan depicts the effect Kitty's singing voice has on Collins. 'When the song finishes, his eyes are moist.'² When making ruthless decisions Collins is - in several cases throughout the film - seen to be conscientious as regards involving others in his folly. This it has to be said is uncharacteristic of Collins. Whilst he was very worried and concerned for those involved in such life-threatening activities he nonetheless saw their involvement as essential for the cause. 'Collins: Could you bear it? Boland: You know I could. It's you I'm worried about.'³

This shows identification with Collins and his approach and also places the element of danger more on Collins personally. Historians have recorded Collins' drilling instructions to his 'squad' quite differently to Jordans:

'Collins: Don't expect it to be pleasant

[Pause]

Collins: And anyone who has qualms better leave now.

[Pause. No one moves. Vinny Byrne pipes up]

Byrne: Would they have got past the door?

[The tension in the air is dispersed by laughter. And we see how young the MEN really are. Collins shakes his head.]

Collins: They would have, Vinny. I won't force this on anyone.'⁴

Desmond Ryan's Collins doesn't come across as sympathetic with the squad as in the film:

"...not playing at soldiers..... any bloody coward present could go home now at a gallop and snow to the heels of lousers like that a test tonight....."⁵

Collins' own words and outlook in the film are never challenged in any significant way. He is the undisputed hero of the piece and despite Jordan's argument, his perspective is the only one that is really considered. He defends his activities as being essential. He hates violence and hates himself for utilising it but what he has become is a product of the British administration rather than a product of free choice. He is, therefore, ultimately a victim, whose actions were determined not from personal decision but from outside forces separate from himself. The viewer can therefore alienate the violence from Collins.

'Collins: Yeah, I want peace and quiet, I want it so much I'd die for it.

Boland: You'd kill for it first.

Collins: No not first, last. After centuries of trying to talk reason. After years of parliamentary chicanery. After every other road has been exhausted. After they've made it clearer than the daylight that you've no alternative.....

Collins: I hate them. Not for their race. Not for their brutality. I hate them because they've left us no way out. I hate whoever put a gun in young Nad Tannin's hand. I know its me, and I hate myself for it. And I hate them so much that I have to do that. I hate

them for making hate necessary. And I'll do what I have to to end it.'⁶

With the Bloody Sunday assassinations Collins is seen not to force the hand of his Squad when it comes to participating in the event.

'Collins:so if anyone's not up to it, they have to say so now.
[Collins waits for some of them to step down. No one moves, however.]

Collins: Come on, lads. I know what some of you have been through.
There's no shame in pulling out.....
[Again, there is no response. Collins seems about to cry]'⁷

This is a collective decision rather than a dictated instruction which would have been more in character with Collins. The assassinations themselves are intricate with scenes of Collins being comforted by Kitty Kiernan. The scene is, therefore, turned around to display Collins' angst at having to partake in what he considered to be necessary action rather than dealing with an uninterrupted vision of the assassinations, whereby their brutality could be more clearly captured.

Another factor which takes the attention away from the actual assassinations are prequealing scenes of Ned Broy (whom Stephen Rea portrays as a very soft, likable man and who was one of the principal players in the film up to this stage) being hanged matter-of-factly by bored Black and Tans.⁸ When Collins finds out about Broy he is devastated. In one of the assassinations a Secret Service man uses a woman to shield him from the assassins.⁹ This, in effect, detracts sympathy from the victim. In another of the assassinations a young volunteer, shaking uncontrollably, is told by the Secret Service man to

'..... shoot straight this time.

[Cut to: The SS man, standing by the window. On a bed beside him, we see his companion, already dead. The young Volunteer steadies his hand and shoots.]'¹⁰

This shows a lack of maliciousness in the youth. Only one of the assassinations is depicted as ruthless and as will be seen in the comments in the film diary, Jordan had difficulty in including it. Whilst not exactly historically accurate, Jordan's scene on the Croke Park massacre is a fair representation of the carnage inflicted on civilians by the British forces on that evening. The Bloody Sunday assassinations are discussed again in the following section on Jordan's film diary.

Collins' humanity towards his fellow man and friends is again emphasised when he dramatically witnesses his friend Cullen being hanged in a warehouse by the British forces. He is in the company of Boland who has to restrain him from attacking the British officers.

'[Collins' face, struggling against Boland's hand - We hear the sickening screams of Cullen as he is being roughed up below. Every scream is echoed in the mute pain and fury on Collins's face. But for once, Boland's grip is immovable. We see a rope strung over the strut of the skylight. We hear the scraping of a chair. We hear the sound of Cullen praying, then the chair is kicked. Silence, Collins's face. Blood is flowing from Boland's hand. Sounds of the door opening, footsteps retreating, once more Boland removes his grip].

Boland:

I'm sorry, Mick. Can't let them take you.

[Collins turns his head, rises, looks down through the skylight. We see Cullen swinging from the rope below.]¹¹

Again the focus is on Collins's emotional hardship as result of his humanity and actions outside of his control. Collins is again the victim of ruthlessness rather than the instigator of it.

When things start to look like Civil War the audience is made sympathise further with Collins when they hear Kitty O' Shea utter to him with the greatest insincerity : 'I hate you'.¹² Collins's reluctance to fight his old comrades is well emphasised. He is seen desperately trying to persuade members of the Four Courts Blockade to stop their foolishness and tells members of the cabinet that he would rather anarchy than Civil War. He is met with hostility whilst giving pro-Treaty speeches. These scenes

are mixed with Collins proposing to Kitty and an emotional last meeting with Harry Boland.

The attack on the Four Courts depicts the harrowing effect that the initiation into Civil War had on Collins.

'Collins: How would you like a new boss?
 [The gun fires again and again. Collins turns and walk away.
 The sound of the gun firing seems to reverberate through him.
 He keeps walking, as if he cannot stand to see what is
 happening. Each successive explosion is etched on his face.]'¹³

By his walking away from the carnage, he is in effect disassociated from it. On hearing the death of Cathal Brugha Collins refers to him with informal warmth.

'Officer: They got Brugha, Mike.
Collins: You mean Cathal.
Officer: Yes
Collins: Then say so.'¹⁴

As a further emphasis on Collins's humanity this scene is followed by Collins trying to get to Boland before the Free Staters kill him. The scenes of Boland trying to escape are mixed with scenes of Collins and O' Reilly driving frantically towards the docklands where he is being pursued. Harry Boland is swimming in the Liffey when a young Free Stater shoots him. In the screenplay the youth is seen to smile before he shoots him. This is erased from the film. Perhaps this would portray Collins's side in too menacing a light. The main focus of the films depiction of this fatality is on Collins's extreme emotional reaction. This is the only scene in the film where Free Stater ruthlessness is portrayed and it is covered up by its focus on Collins.

'Collins: (Softly) What happened? Who closed your eyes?
 [The young Free stater steps forward.]
Free Stater: He was trying to make it across the river, Sir. I saw him and

plugged him from above.

Collins: I didn't ask you.

Free Stater: Who did you ask?

[Collins rises in sudden fury and drags him towards the edge.]

Collins: I asked him -

Free Stater: But he's dead, Sir -

Collins: And you killed him, you little uninformed git -

[Collins dangles him over the water edge]

Collins: You plugged him, you little Free state shit - you were meant to protect him -

Free Stater: He was one of them, Sir -

[Collins suddenly drops him in the water twenty feet below. He watches him splash and struggle.]

Collins: No, sonny. You don't understand. He was one of us.'

In the film Collins doesn't actually throw him into the water. Perhaps this was considered to be too violent an action for Collins to personally undertake. This whole episode - being a fictitious vehicle to yet again portray Collins' humanity within the Civil War - is perhaps taking artistic liberty to far. Boland is the only anti-treatyite who is seen to be killed during the Civil War. The Civil War is used by Jordan to show the pathos and tragedy of the time. It's ruthlessness and Collins's capacity to be ruthless is never properly portrayed.

During his final journey to West Cork he passes the remains of his house which was burnt by the British forces during the War of Independence. This allows him further respect from the audience. Just before the ambush Collins is heard to make a characteristic joke about his forthcoming wedding. This portrays his last moment of humanity. Kitty Kiernan is seen going into a shop to fit on a wedding dress. This scene is intercut with Collins' ambush. The episode is played with an ominously soft and sentimental song growing in the background. This technique of playing on the emotions comes to a climax when Collins's body is seen to be no more than a corpse, and when Kitty's joy is transformed into terror on hearing the news. The film ends in the words of Joe O' Reilly. 'No regrets, Kit, That's what he'd say.'¹⁶ This sums up the film's mentality towards Collins and his activities. Most scenes in

the film are used in some way either to compliment Collins' character or justify his cause. It is by no means as objective a piece as it could be or as it should be, considering that it claims to represent history. Jordan makes the following comment in his diary but never manages to justify it in the finished film.

'What Collins is best at is appalling. And in some ways he appals himself.'¹⁷ The fact that a lot of emphasis is placed on Collins's monogamous relationship with Kitty Kiernan in the film is perhaps another means of creating the unblemished hero. It can be argued that the relationship was used for coherency and dramatic effect. Yet it has to be admitted that, irrelevant of the intentions, the focus on this encapsulated romance does have the effect of deepening the tragedy of Michael Collins's faith, and also deepens the viewers appreciation of Collins's caring nature. Jordan says that by excluding the Treaty negotiations in London it was impossible for him to show Collins in the company of Lady Lavery and to present '..... the popular romantic image of Collins as an Irish Don Juan among the English upper classes I don't say it didn't happen. But since we don't take him to London, we don't see it.'¹⁸ This however doesn't justify him not showing Collins liaising, even subtly, with other women.

The assassination of detectives by the Squad are almost invariably justified. This is done by showing a scene in close proximity with an assassination that alienates the detective from any possible sympathy. The first detective to be assassinated in the film is Hoey. The previous scene shows a tortured Tom Cullen, one of Collins's men, being dumped on the streets. He reveals Hoey as the man responsible for his torture. This is seen to devastate Collins. The scene prior to this shows Smith, Kavanagh and Hoey goading Cullen before this assault in the Castle, and Hoey is seen to initiate the torture. Incidentally both Smith and Kavanagh are also seen to be assassinated in the film.

'Int. Hoey's Room. Day.

Smith, Kavanagh and Hoey stand there as Cullen is pulled in. Hoey grabs Cullen and throws him against a filing cabinet.

Hoey: You don't threaten us, you Fenian swine.
 [Cullen stands, Hoey comes towards him and hits him again.]

Hoey: We're the ones that threaten you -
 [Smith grabs the letter from the table, and holds it up to Cullen's
 face.]

Smith: What does this mean -

Cullen: It means you can get out now -
 [Hoey hits him with a chair. Cullen falls to the floor, spitting
 blood.]

Hoey: What? Give up my jobs? Miss out on all the fun?

Cullen: Or face the music, Hoey -
 [Smith kicks him on the floor.]

Smith: You're the only one'll make music here, boy -]'¹⁹

This scene is contrasted with the young assassin Vinny Byrne, praying in church before the assassination.²⁰ The assassination scene is a short and fast-paced one with the focus on the assassin's escape rather than a lingering scene with a focus on the target.

A few scenes later Kavanagh is shot, the memory of his involvement in Cullen's torture still fresh in the viewers mind. This is even put to comic effect, when we see Collins complains about the amount of bullets used on Kavanagh.

'Collins: Riddled! What're you going round riddling people for? Ten or
 twenty bullets when the one would do!

Youth: We just wanted to be sure he wouldn't get up but -

Collins: Lads - just try to remember they don't grow on trees, all right?'

This has the effect of elevating the seriousness of the assassination. Detective Smith is assassinated on his return from a raid on a Collins safe house. During the raid he is seen to slap a woman to the ground in front of her children. The twinning of this scene with a less graphically disturbing depiction of his assassination justifies the latter action to some extent, in the eyes of the viewer.

'93. Int. Hallway, Dawn.

A woman screaming on the stairway, a broad of kids behind her. The door gives way and Smith and his men pile in. Smith backhands the woman, sending her tumbling to the floor.

Smith: Someone shut her up -
 [The children wail. The R.I.C. men begin to take the place
 apart.]

.....

95. Ext. Dame Street, Dawn

Smith, returning from the raid, in foul humour.....

A goggled motorcyclist roaring towards him. From the side-car another goggled youth pulls a mauser pistol and shoots him many times.²¹

In the film several Belfast detectives are brought down from Dublin to replace the dead G - men. They are led by Mac Bride who gives a speech to Broy on how he and his men are going to solve the Michael Collins problem. This is put to comic effect when he and his men enter a car after the completion of this speech and are anachronistically blown up. Their attempt to capture Collins lasted literally minutes. Their assassination, is therefore once more undermined by the humorous content of the scene.

'Int. Castle Day.

Mac Bride: Since you Dublin boys can't sort out this Collins, I suppose it's
 up to us. You got his file?

Broy: Yes, Sir

.....

Mac Bride: I want a list. Of anyone with a remote connection with this
 geezer. And I want them lifted - tonight.

Broy: You'll find it's not that simple, sir.

Mac Bride: But it is simple, Mr. Broy. We'll make it that simple.

98. Ext. Castle Courtyard. Day

.....

Mac Bride: There's a new regime in here and it's starting now.
 [He walks to the car, followed by his team. Gets inside.]

Mac Bride: A bit of Belfast efficiency is what they need.
 [The driver starts the motor. The car blows up.]

The Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries are portrayed in a very disturbing manner whereas the excesses on the nationalist side during the War of Independence is never emphasised. That said, outside of newsreel footage, they are only portrayed in two scenes, the Croke Park massacre and an attack on a tenement. The attack on the tenement from their truck is visually shocking. They are blown up when a kid lobs a petrol-bomb at them. The fact that it is a child who throws the bomb dissuades the viewer from considering this a violent reaction. Therefore, the sympathy for the tenement dwellers is in no way jeopardised. It is worth noting that the scene in the film is a slightly less shocking display of barbarity than the one in the final draft of the screenplay. In the screenplay the Black and Tans aren't provided any source of motivation. In the film they are given the feeble motivation of the crowd throwing vegetables at them.

'Dublin Tenant. Night.

A crossly tender full of Black and Tans is shooting up a tenement street. Again, the peacemakers are having a ball. Then from a street above a kid lobs a petrol-bomb into the back of the lorry. The lorry explodes in flame.'²³

From early in the film de Valera is built up as the villain responsible for the Civil War. On hearing Ned Broy's warning about a midnight raid on the leaders of Sinn Fein Collins warns de Valera. This gives Jordan a chance to show de Valera's dominating stubbornness. He refuses to act on the warning and decides to put it to the vote as to whether or not the rest of the leaders should return home that evening. In rejection de Valera '..... raises his hand. As does the rest of the gathering, but for Collins and Boland.'²⁴

De Valera shares a comical scene with Collins and Harry Boland during his Lincoln

Jail escape in which he assumes the role of a woman. However even here de Valera is denied any warmth of character, as the scene ends with an ice-cold undertone.

'Boland: Oh fun and games all the way, chief.

De Valera: I know, I read the papers

[De Valera isn't laughing now. But no one seems to notice.]²⁵

As the film progresses de Valera's egocentricity is more and more emphasised. When Collins pleads with de Valera to allow Boland to stay in Ireland with him de Valera says that he can't run his campaign without him. De Valera replies sharply : 'You could run it without me.'²⁶

De Valera is portrayed as being less concerned about achieving a Republic than maintaining his own person.

'Boland: Why does he want me?

Collins: He's afraid to leave the two of us together. We might achieve that republic he wants to talk to the world about.'²⁷

De Valera's jealousy of Collins is portrayed when we hear him say softly, 'We'll see who's the big fella.'²⁸

We see him to be out of tune with what is going on in the country when he makes a militarily suicidal request for large scale engagements so as to appease the allegations that Collins' guerrilla methods were murderous. Collins rebukes him for his lack of practicality and his lack of presence in the county.

'Collins: War is murder. Sheer bloody murder. If you'd been here for the last year, you'd know that.'²⁸

Collins however is still seen to show loyalty and obedience to de Valera, and gives in to de Valera's request.

'Collins: You're right. I should do what I'm told.

[He eyes the Squad.]

Collins: I suppose we have to do it then.

[They begin to arm up.]³⁰

De Valera is seen to be more concerned with his political future than with achieving as much political freedom as possible for his country when he refuses to join the delegation to debate a treaty with the British government. Collins, the centre of the viewers trust in the film, is heard to say to Harry Boland- 'They can't give us the Republic. It's not within their comprehension. And thats why Dev sent me Harry.
.....

Collins: He wanted someone else to bring back the bad news.'³¹

Evidence of this is even given in de Valera's expression when confronted by Collins.

'Collins: It's the truth. Otherwise you would have gone yourself.
[De Valera says nothing, but his silence says it all. He avoids Collins' eyes.]³²

Jordan himself says that his 'conclusion in the screenplay is that de Valera didn't go [to London] because in the course of his prior negotiations to see whether there was any basis for talks, he learned that they were not willing to go far enough. He sent Collins, first in the hope that he could get a better deal and , secondly, because he didn't want to be associated with any compromise that might result.'³³ In reality however it is only the latter conclusion that receives any precedence in the screenplay. Jordan asks Alan Rickman to portray a lack of political consistency in De Valera's behaviour in the Treaty Debates in the Dail.

'I ask him to deliver it as if he doesn't know, until the words come out, what he is about to say. And he does it. How, I don't know, but one has the impression of an earth-shattering decision being taken in mid-speech, that is made almost before he is aware of it.'³⁴

Certain newspaper critics have attacked the Michael Collins film for implying that de Valera was somehow implicated in the assassination of Collins. In his diary Jordan list three assumptions he made in the film regarding Collins' presence in West Cork:

1. That some meeting was planned with certain members of the Republicans side;
2. De Valera was powerless at the time;
3. That Collins was shot by the West Cork I.R.A.³⁵

These assumptions do not implicate de Valera's involvement in the assassination, and it is my opinion that he did not exceed on these assumptions in the finished film. A manipulative youth is seen to be the messenger between Collins and de Valera. In his first scene with de Valera, he is seen to be an instigator while de Valera is seen to be a nerve-shattered submissive. 'De Valera, sitting by a fire alone. He is shivering, his eyes burning. The Youth enters.

De Valera: Is it him?
 Youth: Looks like it. Looks like he wants to meet -
 De Valera: Doesn't he know it's out of my hands?
 Youth: Whose hands is it in then, chief?
 [De Valera mutters to himself.]
 De Valera: You should have listened to me, Michael. You heard but you didn't listen.....
 Youth: Listened to what?
 De Valera: So can I trust him?
 Youth: Can you trust anyone these days, Chief?
 [De Valera looks up like a hunted animal. The Youth smiles. There is no knowing what his smile means.]³⁶

This de Valera is reminiscent of Coogan's temporarily insane de Valera of the 1916 rising. He is seen here to have lost control both of himself and of his political power. The youth with the ominous smile is the focus of potential devilment in the scene. Even in this state however he is seen to be only capable of an idiosyncratic outlook. 'You should have listened to me Michael. You heard but you didn't listen.....'
 When Collins meets the youth he is frustrated by him. He arranges to meet de Valera through the Youth. The screenplay describes the youth here, as essentially a bad character. '[The youth smiles A killer smile, with no remorse.]³⁷' The youth tells de Valera of Collins desire to meet. De Valera's nervous condition has

worsened and gives the youth no reply. In this scene de Valera is seen to be a broken man. He is even seen to go as far in his nervous ramblings as to ask Harry Boland for forgiveness.

'The smiling Youth walks over to de Valera. De Valera is shaking uncontrollably.

De Valera: Oh God help us.....

Youth: So I take it you heard?

De Valera: Oh Jesus, Mick, God forgive us, Harry-

[The Youth smiles. He seems to be enjoying de Valera's nervous breakdown.]

Youth: Have you any reply?

[De Valera walks off into the night like a lost soul.]

Youth: He's come all this way. Be kind of rude not to give him an answer.....

[The Youth stands until de Valera has vanished into the night.

Then he turns and walks slowly back to the pub.]'³⁸

The Youth returns to Collins and tells him that de Valera will meet him at Beal na mBlaith. This, despite the fact that de Valera had given the youth no reply on whether he would see Collins or not. There is therefore no implication in the screenplay to suggest that he was involved in the assassination. It is the Youth who takes over the role of villain at this critical stage. The youth who kills Collins is the same one, that is seen to delegate between de Valera and Collins in the previous scenes. He is portrayed demonically both in the screenplay and film. It is another instance where Jordan needs an identifiable villain.

CHAPTER 3

PART TWO: THE FILM DIARY

Ironically, Jordan's early film *'Angel'* (1982) has been criticised from certain quarters for the opposite reasons that *'Michael Collins'* has faced criticism. One of the contributors to the most authoritative book on the history of Irish cinema to date, John Hill, claims that Jordan's *'Angel'* represents the I.R.A. and the Irish in general as irrational beings.³⁹ Jordan himself admits that - 'In Ireland I was accused of misusing public fund, portraying the Irish as irrational and prone to atavistic violence, reinforcing colonial stereotypes, etc.'⁴⁰ Personally, I don't consider this criticism to have any bearing.

In his Film Diary, Jordan mentions how an associate criticised his first draft because it '..... lacked an identifiable villain. Now this villain can only be the British government, Empire, security forces, or a combination of all three. For Irish writers, struggling with the complexity of their history, this is always a problem. For us the division within the island are as fascinating as those across the Irish sea. The wider world, though, want to see it in more simplistic terms.'⁴¹ This passage introduces some of the difficulties Jordan will be faced with in trying to maintain an objective and morally acceptable piece. First of all, because his first draft lacked an 'identifiable villain' he deemed it to be necessary - so to sustain a dramatic cinematic structure - to enhance the presence of an identifiable villain in the second draft. He is therefore being pressured by drama rather than reality to create a blatantly simplistic enemy. He identifies this villain as being some component of the British administration. The good guy bad guy scenario is further enhanced by his elimination of the internal strife between unionists and nationalist so as to satisfy 'wider world' consumerism.

He admits that the Mansion house split was centred on the oath rather than partition though the reverse seems to be the case in the movie. His arguments for this and leaving out the Treaty debates, the activities of the Northern Irish government and the ambiguity regarding de Valera's instructions to the Treaty delegates is that '..... all of these are so complex that they would need another movie all to themselves.'⁴² Such simplifiers make the decisions and actions of the Irish delegates more straight cut and noble, and the taking away of de Valera's ambiguity of character makes him a more 'identifiable villain'. He says that the Mansion House

scenes are 'history but dead wood'.⁴³ Again the primary concern is dramatic effect. Jordan says that this film intends to show '..... the choices the British Empire made that led to an irresistible drift towards violent situations, the exhilaration of violence, the grotesque conclusions of its outcome'.⁴⁴ This seems to place the full responsibility for the violence with the British. It must be remembered that not all people treat violence with violence.

Jordan says that if '..... one were to argue the historical point one would have to mention so many things.'⁴⁵ If Jordan therefore is not as he puts it arguing the 'historical point' it is infeasible that his film should claim to represent history, as it does.

Jordan's intentions for the film are questioned when it comes to the Bloody Sunday assassinations. Let it be noted that the scene described below is reduced to a small component of the film's coverage of the assassinations, whereby, in the overall context, as much sympathy is placed on the assassins as on the targets. One of the other target's is portrayed in a villainous role and the whole episode is intercut with a romantic image of Collins despairing in the company of Kitty O' Shea. It reveals something of Jordan's mindset and intentions for the film that he had to actually question putting in such a scene as described below. It must be remembered that the finished scene is a very short one, and the only one of its type in the entire film. 'Brendan Gleeson told me how they would ask their victims did they want to say a prayer, and before the prayer had concluded would pull the trigger. One of the most bizarre concepts of mercy I've ever come across. We devise a track round the officers face, a series of handguns pointed to his head as he prays. Then the camera tracks past the officers, isolates Brendan's face and he pull the trigger. For the first time I wonder about the moral perspectives of what we're doing. The scene is so brutal and pitiless. The prayer gives the officer an inescapable dignity. Then I realise it has to be that way. The only way to make it less disturbing would be to cast the officer in a villainous light, the ultimate dishonesty. It must have been that brutal. And the presentations of it should make an audience question their moral parameters.'

Jordan says that he realises '.....that there is something about either the character of Michael Collins or Liams portrayal of him that makes him impossible to dislike,

whatever the horror of the events he set in motion. In fact the reverse could rather alarmingly be true. You admire him for his ruthlessness.'⁴⁷ If so much emphasis wasn't placed on Collins as the romantic and the loyal friend and if the ruthlessness was more attached to his persona than it is in the film, then perhaps the admiration for him would have been slightly reduced.

THE TREATY

This production, unlike the Neil Jordan film, manages to portray the dilemmas and mentalities of the British side as well as of the Irish side. The characters as presented in the film, by and large do justice to their historical accuracy, though unfortunately certain members of the cast may have depended too much on caricatures. The film spans from de Valera's negotiations during the truce period to the Treaty debates between the Irish and British delegations and ends with the signing of the Treaty.

De Valera is given a more sympathetic portrayal here than in Jordan's movie. Just before his release from prison in Dublin he is brought into the office of a British official. He is told by him that a young British officer had recently been shot in the Dublin mountains in front of two lady friends and that his funeral was taking place below. The official goes on to rebuke the Irish side for hiding behind 'hedges and stone walls'. The conversation ends with the sharp quip from de Valera: 'Do you call hiding behind that [armoured vehicle down below] any better.' This confrontation refers to the ruthless methods carried out by both sides in the War of Independence. This objective honesty is maintained throughout the film. De Valera in winning this confrontation achieves a certain respect from the viewer. As well as this the Irish side in the War of Independence receives a certain justification. The divide between de Valera and Collins is explored in the film. De Valera tells Brugha and Childers, early in the piece that:

"Michael and I are not seeing eye to eye of late." Collins is seen to criticise him for attacking the Four Courts. Collins expresses anger towards de Valera that he was not invited to the original peace talks with Lloyd George:

"Do as you will, you always do."

De Valera is given advice to justify this decision.

"You will be of more value as the spectra back in Dublin."

Lady Lavery compliments him by saying he has a "fine head, an intellectual head".

After his return from London, a crowd is seen to enter the Mansion House and one fellow amongst them is heard to compliment de Valera:

"You have to hand it to Dev, he achieved a conference with no preconditions."

When the Treaty negotiations are arranged de Valera, Brugha and stack refuse to go.

De Valera argues that he “must never be seen to compromise as head of state”. Collins is requested but not ordered to go. This is seen to infuriate him as he is their only unknown quantity. He says to Batt O’Connor: “They don’t have the courage to go.” He points out that de Valera deliberately used his own casting vote to decide not to go, and that he deliberately sent a divided team so that he could keep the “reign in his hand”. However Collins’ perspective isn’t used to outweigh de Valera’s. One scene shows de Valera praying to a painting of the Virgin Mary, to an overvoice of de Valera reading the conditions of his letter to the Treaty plenipotentiaries before they begin the negotiations. This gives de Valera’s instructions a sense of sincerity.

De Valera religious association is again emphasised when he questions a bishop on the morality of renewing a war with the British by rejecting a compulsory oath of allegiance to the British King. De Valera asks the Bishop: “Will I burn in hell.”

The bishop replies: “You of all men I know abhors violence - Given certain circumstances war can be just.”

This de Valera is far more three-dimensional and conscientious than Jordan. De Valera is seen to be pre-occupied with the oath of allegiance. He instructs Griffith to tell the British delegations that the Irish side would be willing to “accept even war” as an alternative to a refusal to negate the oath clause. Griffith is seen to vehemently reject this instruction and suggests that De Valera returns to the negotiations. To this de Valera says it won’t be necessary if the delegations try to blame the North and partition for the breakdown of negotiations. When Griffith leaves the scene, Childers asks de Valera whether or not this also meant a rejection of the dominion status clauses. De Valera’s reply is: “Yes it does”. This scene suggests political intransigence and naivety on de Valera’s part.

Early on in the film, de Valera is heard to say that the “oath to the Republic never meant more to me than to do the best for my county”. The last scene with de Valera in it shows him being hypocritical in his politics. He is seen giving an open-air speech in Dublin advocating the pursuit of a 32 county Republic. “You are either all free or not free. Continue to struggle until you’ve got the whole of it.”

At the start of the film Lloyd George and F.M. Wilson are seen to argue about the government of Ireland. After his departure Lloyd George says to his beloved

secretary that Wilson is not objective about Ireland and that his sympathies rest with the unionists in the North. The fact that this comment was made within an intimate zone gives evidence to its sincerity. If he thinks this of Wilson he himself obviously intends to approach the Irish situation without bias. His human side is played out in his relationship with his secretary. One scene shows them romancing under a tree with soft music in the background. In another scene, he dances ecstatically with his secretary after receiving Griffith's guarantee that he would not break on the oath. Attention is given to the difficulties of his political dilemma. He tells his secretary, who is also used as his sounding board in the film, that the country was not united on Ireland and that he had to endure a weak coalition government. Throughout the film Lloyd George is portrayed as a ruthless political manipulator and strategist. Yet there are enough references to his humanity in the film to prevent his political behaviour detracting from the viewers attraction towards him. There is even a scene where de Valera and he are seen to chuckle at his political shrewdness. During their introductory talk, Lloyd George is unable to concede the name Republic as a title for the 26 counties in the South of Ireland for fear of Tory panic. Instead he comes up with the Irish name 'Saorstat' which when translated means 'Free State'. There is a scene with him on a holiday break singing an Irish song. In another scene Birkenhead says to Collins privately that "more than anyone Lloyd George wants these talks to succeed".

Churchill however is portrayed in a less redeeming light. The film introduces Churchill as an imperialist. Birkenhead says to him in conversation that he doesn't believe that with a hostile Turkey, it would be possible to keep the peace in Egypt, Mesopotamia and India. Churchill replies ruthlessly- "My dear Birkenhead, such is the price of Empire."

When Lloyd George asks him should Ireland be coerced Churchill responds "I would not only coerce them. I would drive them into the ground." He does say, however, that if Free Trade sanctions were the only problem he would not be prepared to go on with the repression. Though this can be put down to tactical rather than moral thinking. When Collins is introduced to Churchill, his facial expression is less than hospitable.

A snippet of George V.s famous speech is heard where he says- "The future lies in

the hands of the Irish themselves.....”

The film paints Birkenhead in very attractive colours. His political trilemma is explained, whereby he is torn between his responsibilities to the coalition government to the unionists and to the Irish people, and how he can't force the unionists by arms to comply with the party's decisions because the British people wouldn't stand for it. The mutual affinity between Collins and Birkenhead is given attention. Birkenhead addresses Collins informally by calling him "Mick". In one of their informal conversations Birkenhead's humanity is highlighted. He says to Collins that the killing must stop. When Collins quizzes him as to what changed his mind Birkenhead replies- "You did, you made me realise that you can't keep Ireland in a permanent state of subjugation. We must not fail for that sake of both countries."

The focus of Collins' sexual interest in this film is Lady Lavery. Though they are never seen to be physically intimate the scenes which they share have romantic connotations in their language and in the soft background music which compliments their conversation. Unlike Jordan's film, this production refrains from depicting Collins as a monogamous Catholic. When he is first invited to John Lavery's to get his portrait painted he says to a young woman- "I hear Lady Lavery is a bit of a stunner". The young woman tells him that she thought he was taken for, to which he replies "Don't believe all you hear." The likes of this subtle insight proved to be too much for Jordan to include. Collins is seen as negotiator rather than guerrilla leader in this film. This is inevitable considering its focus is the Treaty negotiations. Yet the film doesn't avail of this as an excuse to conceal Collins's potential ruthlessness. The film begins with one of Collins' men arranging an assassination. This is, however, more than balanced by the following scene which show Black and Tans entering a house by force and shooting someone. Collins himself is seen with a gun in his hand going through a roadblock though he didn't have cause to use it. Frustrated at being requested to go to London for the negotiations, Collins on entering an I.R.B. meeting is told by one of his men that a bike will be in its usual place. A menacing Collins turns to his associates and shouts glaringly. "I am no longer man on a bike. Have a car ready!!!" This is more in the bones of the rough and ready and potentially ruthless Collins than is Jordan's creation. During the meeting Collins wrestles Boland. This scene is accompanied by strong and

menacing music. Boland, half-seriously calls him a “mad bastard”. Collins just laughs. Within a few seconds Collins has turned his mind back to business again. A wrestling scene between Collins and Boland occurs in the Jordan film, but it is a lot more playful than this one.

At a dinner party hosted by Lady Lavery, Collins terrifies an old British official who had held a prominent position in Ireland during the War of Independence, by saying- “We had you surrounded [he points his fingers at him in the shape of the gun], but I called them off. It seemed such a brave thing to do.”

The film suggests Collins’s intention to continue illegitimate activity in the North after any treaty that excluded it from Irish control, when he says at an I.R.B. meeting that it is “..... up to us not the British to remove [the Border]”.

END NOTES - CHAPTER 3

1. Neil Jordan, Michael Collins: Screenplay and Film Diary. (London, 1996), p. 74.
2. *ibid*, p. 80.
3. *ibid*, p. 95.
4. *ibid*, pp 96 - 97.
5. Desmond Ryan, The Big Fellow. (London, 1932), p. 74.
6. Neil Jordan, (1996), p. 104.
7. *ibid*, p. 116.
8. *ibid*, P. 121.
9. *ibid*, pp 123 - 125.
10. *ibid*, p. 124.
11. *ibid*, p. 131.
12. *ibid*, p. 139.
13. *ibid*, p. 149.
14. *ibid*, p. 150.
15. *ibid*, pp 153 - 154.
16. *ibid*, pp 161 - 165

17. ibid, p. 33.
18. ibid, p. 9.
19. ibid, pp 98 - 99.
20. ibid, p. 100.
21. ibid, pp 109 - 110.
22. ibid, p. 112.
23. ibid, p. 113.
24. ibid, p. 86.
25. ibid, p. 107.
26. ibid, p. 108.
27. ibid, p. 110.
28. ibid, p. 128.
29. ibid, p. 129.
30. ibid, p. 129.
31. ibid, p. 137.
32. ibid, pp 138 - 139.
33. ibid, p. 51.

34. ibid, p. 57.
35. ibid, p. 12.
36. ibid, pp 158 - 159.
37. ibid, p. 159.
38. ibid, p. 160.
39. John Hill, 'Images of Violence', Cinema and Ireland, pp 147 - 193.
40. Neil Jordan (1996), p.1
41. ibid, p. 4.
42. ibid, p. 9.
43. ibid, p. 26.
44. ibid, p. 31.
45. ibid, p. 42.
46. ibid, pp 49 - 50.
47. ibid, pp. 60 - 62.

CONCLUSION

Though they are expressed in various degrees of dilution, all of the biographers impose the same basic ideals in their history writing. These ideals see violence justified when it can realistically benefit their progression. It is my opinion that all biographies are written in part as a justification of this stance. The biographers generally spend a lot more time discussing the War of Independence than the Civil War. This is probably because the former is a lot more straight - forward to their stance than is the latter. Beaslai is the ultimate example of how straight forward the War of Independence was. The British are the evil enemy whilst the Irish are glorified. The Irish delayed as long as they possibly could before violence became necessary. The suppression of their country made the use of violence inevitable from a realistic nationalist perspective. The Volunteers are described almost homogeneously as gentlemen. Their ruthlessness is almost completely avoided. On those very rare occasions when it is portrayed it is never described graphically and is always accompanied by a balancing factor. Collins is the focus of Beaslai's nationalist aspirations. His character is complimented to the point of hero-worship with particular emphasis on his humanity and nobility. Consequently his capacity for ruthlessness is almost denied.

His association with drink and women are left out of the equation. His political importance at certain stages throughout his life is often exaggerated. He is the least willing of the biographers to discuss Collins' negative traits. The close personal and professional bond that he had with Collins probably contributed to the creation of these distortions and selective descriptions. In contrast to his treatment of the Irish guerrilla networks and their architect, his assessment of the British is, of all the biographers, the most condemnatory and vengeful in its perspective. Illogically the British are condemned uniformly for their violence whilst the Irish are applauded uniformly for their brave fighting spirit and ability. An awful lot of his biographies consist of descriptions of atrocities and brutalities committed by the British. Though in expressing his believe that violent behaviour can be justified, he is sometimes unintentionally revealing. He spends a lot less time discussing the Civil War and what he does say is slightly more candid. Ye he still needs a villain so as to justify Collins' counter-attack on the Republicans. He says that the illusioned behaviour of the Republicans necessitated the counter-attack. Again it is seen to be

an essential reaction for a realist to take. Even his final tribute to Collins plays as a criticism of the Republicans. However he does portray them in a more sympathetic way than the British. They are allowed to respect and adore Collins for example.

De Valera is of course Beaslai's particular villain, when it comes to the instigation of the Civil War.

Collins' humanity and heartache is described in detail when it comes to having to fight and bury his old comrades. While Beaslai admits that the Free Staters's behaviour was not immaculate, he erases Collins from being anyway personally responsible for this. Nor does he comment significantly on Collins and the Northern situation. Collins' personality is the personification of Beaslai's beliefs.

He even inflates the British as still being very relevant enemies who wanted to reconquer Ireland. Rather than accept the Civil War as an inevitable implosion of a nationalism that indoctrinated as its only unifying force a policy of violence, Beaslai is still pressing to identify good forces from bad forces even though this time it is within nationalism.

O' Connor is similar to Beaslai in his glorification of Collins at the expense of certain character truths, yet his Lilliputian analogy provides for a more critical commentary on the country as a whole. He doesn't praise the Irish as an entity as Beaslai tends to do. He accepts that the British administration was varied in its components. His criticism of the British is, however, nearly as strong as Beaslai's, but he is more liberal in providing information about the Irish activities during the War of Independence. Yet the idea of violence being made necessary is again emphasised. His targets when it comes to the Civil War are the upper echelons of the Republican movement and whilst he is very reserved on de Valera he does say that he was one of the main instigators of the Civil War. Outside of this he shows a lot of sympathy for both factions in the Civil War. So again there is a definite group of people responsible for the Civil War. Collins and his work is allowed to remain totally above repute. Even though O' Connor proves to be critical of certain decisions they are nonetheless justified. When Collins finally decided to attack the Republicans it is put down to a noble trust in democracy. His only references to the North deal with conspiracies concocted by high up British officials to create anarchy there.

O' Connor's final tribute to Collins sees violence as an integral part of the genius he applauds. This says a lot about O' Connor and the motivations for this type of history writing in general.

Forester is different from the other biographers in that she is sympathetic to most of the leading British figures to whom she refers. Yet somewhat paradoxically it is still Britain's higher administration that she holds totally responsible for the violent situation in Ireland at the time. She says that the British army were by and large civilised and she had mixed feelings about the Auxiliaries. This however is balanced by her long criticisms of the Black and Tans. The I.R.A. were by contrast a highly disciplined force. Their reaction to the British is seen to be a necessary one. All bloodshed was the responsibility of the British in the sense that violence begets violence. She is much more discrete in her descriptions of violence coming from the Irish side, but still manages to be both intentionally and unintentionally revealing in the area. She totally glorifies the Irish fighter and tends to attack those Irish whom she considered to be non-nationalists or moderates. In this aspect, she like O' Connor is willing to condemn certain aspects of Irish society.

Like Beaslai and O' Connor, she resorts to an outright glorification of Collins' character to represent the ideal of her own type of nationalism. Forester doesn't deal with de Valera significantly in her work and what she does say to him can be taken as complimentary. Therefore he is not seen to be Collins' foil when it comes to the cause of the Civil War.

The main forces behind the Republican side are seen to lack political conviction, their motivations stemming from youthful nervous energies and personal animosities. It is these factors which she seems to hold mainly responsible for the Civil War. Her accounts of the violence on both sides, though limited is balanced. She doesn't go into much detail about the North but what she does say under-estimates Collins' activity there.

Ryan admits that the ruthlessness was mutual between both sides during the War of Independence even if his descriptions insult the British side more than the Irish one. He is however still willing to sympathise with certain British characters. Ryan who was personally acquainted with Collins glorifies him to a hyperbolic extent but at the same time gives an honest earthiness to his character, which a lot of the other biographers have failed to do. In this depiction of the Civil War he represents the Republican side mainly through the view of three Republican characters. These are portrayed as being sincere but ultimately illusioned. They are allowed human qualities and a degree of pathos however. Rather than being committed or a form of

violent nationalism based on a realistic perspective they were merely committed to a nationalism based on idealism and tradition. This is the case with all the biographers. The influence of women and a certain collective Irish mentality based on mediocrity are the two other main negative forces he attributes to the instigation of Civil War. The notable absence of women in the other biographies (excluding Coogan's) and Ryan's extreme rebuke of them tends to say something about a kind of combined form of nationalist psyche. It is expressed through dialogue that the Free Staters were as badly behaved as the Republicans during the Civil War. Collins however is still the forces of glorification as all of the three main Republican representatives have good things to say about him. Because this work is based on the ground level neither de Valera or the North are dealt with.

O' Broin is different from the other biographers in that he will criticise Collins and his network without feeling the necessity of justifying these criticisms all the time (In many respects he is the most critical of Collins and his network). Nor does he attempt to humanise every violent act coming from the Irish side. He is critical of the British without ever being excessive. However he is still stuck in the others tradition when it comes to excluding women and drink from the equation. When it comes to the Civil War he refrains from excessive condemnation and is yet subtly but effectively critical of the Republicans. This subtle form of criticism is even expressed in his final tribute to Collins. Collins' dilemmas at having to fight his old comrades is again emphasised as is his humanity throughout the Civil War. He refrains from going into too much detail about the North but does say that the actions taken by the nationalists up there were justified. He is discrete on de Valera. O' Broin is the most reserved in expressing his nationalists agenda. He frees himself from a lot though not all of the reservations the others tend to abide by. The objectivity he applies into his nationalist argument is perhaps even more disturbing in its acceptance of ruthlessness than are the others in their subjective attempts at justifying ruthlessness.

Whilst Coogan's research is reliable, he spends a lot more time describing atrocities committed by the British side than by the Irish side. However his wealth of information provides a more wholesome picture of the British administration than other biographies even if this information is expressed in a biased direction. Therefore British policy and activity is seen to be generally barbaric yet it is not portrayed as

stemming from a cohesive entity. On the other hand, when negative behaviour from the Irish is described it is nearly always balanced with additional material that puts the British in a worse light. Therefore, while Coogan is willing to be honest in his provisions of information he tries to direct this information into a context that camouflages Irish violence. Collins again is the zenith of Coogan's nationalist stance. He doesn't suffer from the same restraints as the others when it comes to discussing Collins and the vices of Irish Catholic nationalism such as alcohol and sexuality. (he is also the only one of the biographers to go into detail about the active participation of women in nationalist pursuits). He is willing to be critical of Collins but his criticisms are nearly always balanced. When discussing Collins' ruthlessness he provides anecdotes which balance this harshness with a more amenable side to his personality. Consequently the accounts of this ruthlessness are transformed from becoming negative to almost positive comments. The ruthless actions of Collins and the Irish side are balanced by the realities of the situation. A lot of the biography is spent outlying Collins' qualities and humanity. Like several of the other biographers Coogan's sometimes shocking without it being his intention.

When it comes to the Civil War de Valera is the arch-villain. As in Beaslai's works, by the time the Civil War is discussed de Valera's character has already been built up to this position. The other Republican leadership is described as being fanatical without possessing a firm grasp on political reality. Coogan doesn't really blame the Republican recruits for the Civil War. They are described as young and insincere in their convictions. Collins is seen to be tortured with the idea of having to fight his old comrades. This again overrides the descriptions of negative behaviour coming from the Free Staters. He is not afraid to spend a whole chapter discussing the controversial area of Collins' actions in the North after the signing of the Treaty. However his form of nationalist thinking allows him to justify these actions despite the resultant further loss of life on both sides in the six counties.

The type of nationalism discussed in this thesis is not merely one based on culture and identity. With a lot of provocation coming from outside of this insular island, it has become a lot more sinister in its nature. However it is not the only form of nationalism that existed in Ireland at the time, or that has been subscribed to in later years. There exists a more passive appreciation of culture accompanied with an

inevitable sense of identification with others who belong to this same culture. These assets of heritage and belonging don't have to be considered more important than human life. Ghandi and Martin Luther King fought for the rights of the people they were identified with. Infact they dedicated their lives to this pursuit. Yet they never considered it to be worth the taking of one human life, except of course their own. The Republicans who broke away from Collins after the signing of the Treaty are blamed in different ways by the biographers for starting the Civil War. Whereas they claim that the War of Independence was started because violence begets violence, I would claim that the Civil War was a continuation of this violent cycle, and I rebuke all contributors to it. Excluding their strategies I would not decipher the Free Staters from the Republicans. The I.R.A. activity and mentality of today stems from Collins' guerrilla networks and way of thinking. Even back then Cathal Brugha had intended bombing British Civilians.' This cancerous way of thinking has effected the biographers, though some more than others. Their writings are moulded and directed. Their accounts of history are not as they should be - free and unlimited by protocol.

'History, if learned properly, can develop those qualities of critical judgment, of detachment of intellectual and emotional self-control, of seeing oneself and one's community in perspective, that are essential to good citizenship. At its best, it is one of the great learning experiences.'

CONCLUSION II

Jordan has used his artistic licence to simplify a period in Irish history. His argument for simplifying this history is that its actual complexity would otherwise drown the cinematic experience. This is used to the nationalist advantage however by creating a very black and white scenario. The calls of drama demand an identifiable villain. The end result of Jordan's work is that the British are seen to be totally responsible for the activities during the War of Independence. They are portrayed as an homogeneous menace. The assassination of British officials is nearly always justified and sometimes trivialised through the use of humour. There is not one sympathetic British character in the entire film. Jordan shows a reticence to portray the Irish side as being capable of ruthlessness. Collins is the personification of the nationalist pursuit. The film is spend describing him as an unblemished romantic, and loyal friend whilst replacing his ruthlessness and his capacity to be forceful with his own associates with an over-abundance of humanity.

The film is made identify with him as the film comes totally from his perspective. Through his trustworthy conversations the viewer learns that war with the British was inevitable. Again, it is the reality of the situation that forces him and his network towards violent means.

De Valera is the identifiable villain responsible for the Civil War. All his screen time is spent highlighting his negative traits. These are expressed in a very blatant and uncharacteristically unambiguous fashion. He is not held directly responsible for Collins' assassination however. Indeed, I have felt obliged to spend time in the thesis dismissing allegations to the contrary. A new villain is required for this. He comes in the form of a youthful assassin whose one-dimensional character is portrayed as the very essence of evil. The prospect of violent nationalism gone wrong is detoured by the presence of these two villainous entities. The irregulars as a whole are not attacked. Their only other significant representative in the film is Harry Boland who epitomises the sympathetic character.

Like with the biographers, the form of violent nationalism based on realistic calculation to which Collins subscribed is never tarnished, not even by the Civil War. There is, like in the biographies, a convenient target like a cancer that can be

cut out, leaving behind and unblemished nationalist anatomy. The only scene of Free Stater ruthlessness portrayed in the film is eclipsed by one of Collins' emotional breakdowns. Infact the whole of the Ciyil War seems to be used in the film to express Collins' pain at having to fight his old comrades. Somewhat predictably, there is no reference to Collins' underhanded activities in the North. Instead it is assumed he has totally accepted peaceful methods for the further progression of nationalism beyond the boarder.

Eoghan Harris of *'The Irish Times'*, has launched an attack on the Irish media for what he considers to be an inexcusable expression of appreciation and support for Jordan's film. Indeed, his attacks have turned into a campaign of almost epical proportions. He has been accused of masterminding the controversy and debate that has battled on the pages of both the Irish and British press for weeks around the release of the film. He sees the film as being a catalyst for Anglophobia which he considers to have suffered exponential growth since the bombing of Canary Warf.¹ The main momentous of his argument goes behind the allegation that the film has an 'unbending political subtext' that 'want to send messages to Sinn Fein.'² To say that it was Jordan's intention to entice I.R.A. membership when making the film is ridiculous. His arguments are desperately excessive, to the point where it is obvious that he himself has a hidden agenda. I partially agree with Sam Smyth of *'The Sunday Tribune'* who said that it was the priority of certain members of the British establishment along with some 'Irish Volunteers' including Harris to defend the reputation of the British administration's involvement in Irish history when reviewing the film's qualities from on historical perspective. However I would be less willing to include as many culprits into this damnation. Sam Smyth seems to include those whom without going as far as to consider it a recruitment film, claim that it misrepresents Irish history I would not.³ True excessiveness rests with the likes of Kevin Myers who expresses 'a concern for susceptible school children viewing the film, and John Cole of *'The New Statesman'* who asked people to refuse to see it, as it would have the direct result of causing more murder.⁴ Harris acquaints his argument with Paul Bew and his contributions to *The Sunday Times* of London. Bew compares *'Michael Collins'* with Riefenstahl's propaganda film for the Nazis- *'Triumph of the will'*. He spends most of an article defending British rule over Ireland during the period, to the extent of making the British look like guardian angels.⁵

It is somewhat ironic that he ends his argument by saying that historical accounts must be truthful. The above arguments are blatant attempts to defend Britain's past. Harris's main target in the media is '*The Tribune*,' and there is some justification to his criticism. The likes of Ciaran Carty, David Hanley and Sam Smyth should be criticised for their completely supportive appraisals. However the renowned historian J.J. Lee has contributed a very mature piece to the same paper. He is critical of certain areas in the film which misrepresent the reality of Irish history. Rather than see the film as a threat he sees it as an accessible device from which to learn the art of critical analysis and so such suggests that it should be implemented into the Leaving Cert. history course. This sober criticism is lacking in those who suffer the pride ridden extremities of excessive nationalism, whether it be British or Irish.⁶ The historian John A. Murphy makes the same sober arguments about the realities of Irish history as Lee, and yet is one of the people singled out by Harris and attacked for being too lenient. Coogan makes some criticism about the absence of certain events (these are criticised because they limit the importance of Michael Collins) and is even dissatisfied with the scenes associated with Collins' assassination because they apparently, directly implicate de Valera.⁸ This is a concern that has been raised by many contributors to the debates about the film (from Michael Collins' nephew to members of the Fianna Fail party) and surprisingly Jordan has been left undefended on this issue. As I have said already in the conclusion, I have felt it necessary to argue this point in the thesis. Not surprisingly Coogan sees the portrayal of Collins in the film as being almost perfect and is, excluding the assassinations scenes, very happy with the portrayal of de Valera. The majority of the Irish press cannot be held up to too much criticism for their leniency on the Jordan film, when the majority of the British press reviewed it with the same degree of hospitality. This could be to do with the fact that they are ignorant of Irish history, at least more ignorant of it than the Irish press. The Irish press are not so much ignorant of Michael Collins. Rather their learning about him seems to have been directed. If the books glorify Collins why can't the film? If historical accounts could be expressed and taught without the infringements of nationalistic or imperialistic objectives perhaps the polar arguments in the '*Michael Collins*' controversy could have become a lot more centralised.

Whilst *'The Treaty'* is not a biopic like Jordan's film, its main protagonist is nonetheless Michael Collins. Of all the works under discussion in the thesis it is the only one that totally escapes being formulaic to suit a nationalist's justification. It is basically an audio-visual documentation of events, well - rounded in its detailing. The only prerogative of each scene is an attempt to capture the reality of a situation. The British and Irish perspective are depicted with historical accuracy. The only sign of artistic licence taken is in the creation of certain conversations. Their purpose however is to create a fuller picture rather than to direct the viewers sympathies. Phelan provides a sympathetic portrayal of de Valera in this work even though the Treaty period was the time when his behaviour was most detrimental to Collins' form of nationalism.

His perspective is accounted for and he is seen in a positive light several times throughout the film. When he is criticised it is for the reality of his actions rather than an attempt to depict him as Collins' foil. This film, therefore, manages to capture the complexity of historical reality rather than the simplicity of emotional drama. Nor is the British administration utilised in any way for its villainous propensity. The viewer learns their perspective and dilemmas. These characters are individualised whereby the film is critical of certain personalities and more complimentary to others. Even the portrayal of Collins is balanced. His bravery and charm are highlighted but so is his ruthlessness. His intentions for the North are also referred to. Finally, Phelan doesn't find it necessary to subscribe to the virtuous myth of monogamy.

CONCLUSION II - END NOTES

1. The Sunday Times, (Dublin), 17 November 1996, p. 17: Prime Time, (R.T.E., Dublin, November 1996)
2. Prime Time, (R.T.E.)
3. The Sunday Tribune, 10 November 1996, p. 13.
4. The New Statesman, 3 November 1996.
5. The Sunday Times, (London), 10 November 1996; Prime Time, (R.T.E.).
6. The Sunday Tribune, 3 November 1996.
7. Prime Time, (R.T.E.)
8. *ibid.*

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