

Because the bulk of the films examined originate outside the island of Ireland (and comparatively few were indigenously produced anyway), the perspective on Irish history presented by these newsreels is one tending towards a dramatic simplification of the struggle for national identity. Chambers recounts this with close readings of the images and audio content, noting the editorial slant that the latter frequently put upon the former. As such the ever-more obvious thematic and narrative role played by partition and 'The Irish Question' (and the 'characters' that represented the sides) is clearly a structuring convention to make the story digestible for an international audience. As such these films did not on the whole contribute to meaningful political discourse or even public engagement with Irish events even in their time, a question that makes the historical project of the book itself slightly problematic.

Chambers notes that the issue of how the public responded to or viewed such newsreels is a difficult one to overcome. In Film Studies the field of reception studies is fraught with ethical and practical difficulties, and in the end a great deal of supposition supported by astute theoretical framing is required to make very tentative arguments. The reason this matters is that in examining the content of newsreels, the greatest value in terms of history is not in their 'record' of what they saw, but how we can place these representations within emerging media-based discourse in the postmodern age. Though this book acknowledges this problem, it does not overcome it. The author does not have the time to delve into theoretical and methodological questions informing the analysis of newsreels as media objects, and is therefore forced to remain at quite a descriptive level in reading their content.

It is actually difficult to see what the ideal readership for the book might be. It seems to fall short of disciplinary specificity. Its heavy emphasis on descriptive detail is of some reference value but its lack of deeper and more comprehensive historical sources leave it a bit undernourished as an historical work. Though it references academic history, it does not engage in developed debate with an historiographic frame. Meanwhile the absence of an evolved and nuanced academic perspective on the representational boundary lines between 'genre', 'form', and 'medium' in terms of documentary studies make its aesthetic arguments more rhetorical than intellectual, which weakens its value as a Film Studies text.

Credit is certainly due and acknowledgement given to the level and depth of primary research involved, but in many ways the book seems a missed opportunity to rigorously interrogate this immensely complex form of representation and its relationship with negotiated images of political and social identity in historical (and historiographic) context. Readers will nonetheless find in its pages a very thorough description of newsreels on a variety of topics pertaining to early to mid twentieth-century Ireland, which is in itself a significant contribution to research in Irish studies.

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POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN IRELAND 1922–2010: A CROOKED HARP? By Elaine Byrne. Pp xiii, 273. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2012. £15.99.

'Corruption has played no small part in determining the course of Irish history. ... The consequence of the blatant bribery by agents of the British King which procured the Act of Union, 1801, was the robbery of native Irish legislative independence until 1922. The quid pro quo of the £10,000 political donation by ... Cecil Rhodes to ... Charles Stewart Parnell in 1888, ultimately found expression in the settlement of the Irish question in 1920 with the retention of Irish MPs at the Northern Ireland Parliament' [p. 3].

Despite a title that refers to the years 1922–2010, and some references to Irish history pre-1922, the primary focus of this book is on contemporary Ireland. Byrne draws an

explicit link between the 'decline in standards' and the 'loss of Irish economic sovereignty'; she suggests with the 2010 bailout 'The narrative now had a beginning, a middle and end' (p. xi). Her central argument is that the Cosgrave government in the 1920s set high standards of personal probity, but since that time Ireland has slipped further and further into corruption, a process culminating in the collapse of the economy in recent years.

This book raises important questions about the Irish state and Irish politics but the treatment presents some significant difficulties. The first relates to the definition of corruption. Dr Byrne states (p.1) that 'the definition of corruption is an evolving one. As the nature of the state changed, so did the type of corruption'; the definition of corruption has 'evolved from a narrow interpretation of legal statutes to a greater awareness of the ethical dimensions of improper political behaviour' (p. 4). Clientelism is central to her definition(s), and there is an underlying assumption that clientelism has expanded substantially in recent decades. 'A significant public sector and large welfare state offer the means to mobilise votes and support in exchange for targeted material benefits, as well as providing a state-funded salary for key party workers' (p. 211). She highlights the fact that pensions and public sector salaries accounted for the largest sources of increased public spending from 1995 to 2009 and suggests that: 'In this new form of clientelism the political party systematically infiltrates the machinery of the state in order to allocate state jobs, pensions, subsidies, and collective benefits such as roads, housing ... in exchange for electoral backing' (p. 218). Yet the overwhelming majority of state jobs are filled by open competition – not patronage; most pensions are statutory entitlements, and the establishment of the National Roads Authority has removed much of the discretion over major road programmes from the political sphere, especially from local authorities. Such details do not feature in the discussion; there is an underlying inference that all public spending is motivated by clientelism, and consequently that any politician who supports increased expenditure on social welfare, or makes a case for a new school in his/her constituency has a case to answer. This lack of a precise and workable definition of corruption blurs the line between cases where politicians used their influence for significant personal gain, and those who campaign for improved services, whether in their constituency or nationally, and carries the risk of condemning the entire political system. There is a serious need to evaluate the extent of corruption in contemporary public life and its origins, but to do so demands a more nuanced and specific analysis than we are given here.

Byrne suggests that the roots of the contemporary malaise can be found in history. She sees the downward spiral from the high standards of the 1920s – when ministers were billed for the cost of meals while holed up in Government Buildings during the civil war – to the present failed and corrupt state, not through a systematic chronological study, but through 'case studies' – described as 'representative cases of corruption'. These case studies include three tribunals held during the 1940s – a decade 'distinguished by a marked acceleration of corruption' (p. 214): The Great Southern Railways tribunal, 1943; the Ward tribunal, 1946 and the 1947 Locke's Distillery tribunal. Chapters are devoted to the Kenny report into the price of building land and physical planning in the 1960s and 1970s, the Beef tribunal, the McCracken tribunal and the Moriarty tribunal. The case histories are detailed and rather anecdotal; much of the content – especially in the latter chapters – would be familiar to Irish readers, but non-Irish readers might find them confusing.

A much more detailed and systematic historical analysis of Irish government and state organisations is needed before any conclusive statement about trends in political corruption can be made. A workable definition of corruption that can be applied across the decades is also required. During the 1920s for example, a government T.D., Darrell Figgis, received cash payments from a businessman who sought to secure Ireland's radio broadcasting licence, and it was widely rumoured, though not proved, that the government minister responsible, J. J. Walsh and his wife held shares in the company concerned;

indeed the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the first Irish radio station offer scope for comparison with the allocation of broadcasting licences in 1989, which is discussed in this book. In 1929 the Irish Trust Company – a venture capital company designed to help Irish businesses – which was funded by the Irish government and Irish-American investors went bankrupt, having misused its capital to speculate on the London stock exchange; the government representative on the board took no action to prevent this, and Ernest Blythe, minister for Finance, ignored the warnings from Irish-American directors about the speculation. These examples are not designed to suggest that the first government of the Irish Free State was corrupt – indeed Cosgrave took some important steps to raise standards in public life, such as the establishment of the Local Appointments Commission. Nevertheless the use of ‘case studies’ suggests the lack of sufficient evidence to make pronouncements about long-term trends, not least in the absence of a clear definition of corruption. The presence or absence of tribunals, or a head count of references to corruption in the *Irish Times* database (p. 230) do not constitute robust evidence of trends.

Byrne correctly identifies the fact that the introduction of extensive protection in 1932 provided new opportunities for political influence and corruption, and this is a topic that merits further research. How, for example were the import quotas for high-fashion items such as shoes allocated? Or the licences to ship imported goods during the Second World War? Import licenses are common sources of political corruption in developing economies. Yet in Ireland these potential sources of political influence had vanished by the mid-1970s because as a member of G.A.T.T. (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, forerunner to the World Trade Organisation) and the E.E.C., Ireland no longer had the authority to award quotas or licences. Likewise, while Byrne refers to ‘the public contracting system of procurement’ offering opportunities for ‘undue influence by private interests’ (p. 218) she fails to take account of the fact that stringent and transparent rules enforced by the E.U. have long removed any discretion in that regard, though it might be helpful to examine the earlier history of public contracts. There is evidence, for example, that Dublin public housing contracts in the 1930s were controlled by three firms, and that prices were rigged. While the links between politicians and the construction industry in recent decades have been well documented, it would be naïve to assume that a similarly close relationship did not exist in earlier decades. The case study approach does not lend itself to comparisons over time: it would be much more effective to focus on opportunities for political patronage, such as appointments, contracts or planning and construction – and how state practices varied over time.

The closing chapter tries to account for Ireland’s proclivity for clientelism and corruption, and once again history is invoked. ‘The Act of Union 1801 alienated native decision-making to a Dublin Castle administration’... A significant casualty of the Union was that of trust’ (pp 209–10); ‘the prodigious influence of the Catholic church’ was a contributory factor to Irish corruption – a cue for the inevitable reference to clerical child abuse. It is suggested that such tendencies were less marked in Protestant states. Yet political patronage and corruption was deeply entrenched when politics was controlled by the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. Theo Hoppen noted that ‘the parish pump’ was true symbol of the ‘hidden Ireland’ in the mid-nineteenth century; he remarked on its deep and constant importance. A comparison with Northern Ireland might prove enlightening, given that it shares a common legacy of political institutions, as would some effort to determine whether Ireland’s experience is similar or different to other modern western democracies.

This book highlights issues that are important both in historical and contemporary terms. Political corruption is an important topic and a cause for concern in Ireland and all contemporary states, but the analysis in this instance is marred by the absence of a robust definition, the limited and selective evidence presented, and some confusion about Irish history.

The text contains a number of factual errors: the 1921 Anglo–Irish Agreement (p. 20); *Cogadh na gCarad* is generally translated as the War between Friends, not the *War of*

*Brothers* (p. 23); Patrick McGilligan's father was a Westminster M.P. from 1892 to 1895, not 1892 to 1995 (p. 23); the Control of Manufacturing Acts (p. 36) should read Control of Manufactures Acts, and the legislation was not initiated by Patrick McGilligan.

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THE END OF ULSTER LOYALISM? By Peter Shirlow. Pp xii, 230. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2012. £16.99.

Peter Shirlow's valuable book has a clear purpose, a purpose pursued with passionate intensity. It is to challenge the stereotype of the Ulster loyalist as incorrigibly and homogeneously sectarian, the brutal example of a brutalising culture, morally degenerate as well as socially and politically dysfunctional. What the book succeeds in portraying is a much more complex truth, which the author presents as a struggle between regressive and progressive elements. On the one side, the 'tattooed and muscular men with a dog in a T-shirt' and Johnny Adair is frequently invoked as the iconic expression of this regressive tendency; on the other side, those committed to 'social justice-driven principles' and the late, ex-Ulster Volunteer Force member, Billy Mitchell, is often the referent in this case (p. 199). A distinguishing feature of the book is its use of personal, mainly anonymous, testimonies by members of paramilitary organisations. These are generally frank and provide the reader with authentic insights into the mood of those who were either directly involved in political violence or closely associated with those who were. The sceptic, of course, may say that to convey the authentic mood of individuals is not necessarily to convey an accurate report of either historical events or political reality. That is a general problem of interview-based social science and there are always doubts about the reliability of the memoirs and confessions of justified sinners. However, Shirlow is familiar enough with the history, sensitive enough to the evidence and critical enough of the claims to be a useful interpreter of their recollections and opinions. Testimony is usually correlated with statistical data.

In particular, the collective witness regarding the limits of collusion is compelling. Allegations of systematic collusion between loyalists and the security forces reflect two related strands in the republican narrative of the Troubles. The first may be called the common front, or pro-state, proposition. It argues that the loyalist murder of innocent Catholics – and as Shirlow shows that is what the so-called combatants mainly did, only 5.6 per cent of their victims being active republicans – directly served the repressive strategy of the 'British state'. The interviews recorded in the book, along with the statistics which Shirlow provides about detection and conviction rates, show the fallacy of that proposition. The second republican assertion may be called the marionette theory. It assumes that loyalists were incapable, either intellectually or organisationally, of autonomous military action and therefore had to be consistently manipulated from above by police and army agents. Here loyalists acted as South American-style 'death squads'. Again, the evidence presented here argues firmly against that interpretation. It is not denied that there were instances of collusion, only that agents like Brian Nelson acted mainly to subvert paramilitary activity rather than to assist it and that republican claims of systematic collusion are either paranoid or propagandist. However, if collusion of this type goes out by the front door it actually returns by the back door. The interviewees argue consistently that a hostile unionist establishment as well as an ill-disposed police command used 'wreckers and spoilers' (p. 108) – Johnny Adair is named once more – to frustrate the emergence of a radically alternative form of loyalist politics in the years following the Belfast Agreement of 1998. Or as one respondent put it (p. 83) those loyalists 'who were linked in with the security forces were trouble makers at the end of