

Irish public histories as an historiographical problem

It is now almost impossible to reflect upon the historical reputations of Eamon de Valera and Michael Collins without considering the recent war in Northern Ireland (c. 1969–97) and the challenges to Irish identities it has induced. In the Republic this is evident in the movement away from irredentist nationalism toward official recognition of partition, following a constitutional referendum in 1998.¹ Against a similarly barometric historiography, de Valera and Collins's historical representations have transformed. De Valera, it is clear, long since fell from favour among mainstream nationalists. Conversely, in the last four decades Collins has been the subject of a sometimes astonishing celebrity. Around him has grown a body of popular history, its mainstay an ever-expanding biographical corpus.² While all this is apparent, the shifting contexts wherein reputations rise and fall remain far from well understood.³

What explains these fortunes? In the Republic this deserves consideration in a modernising society where attitudes toward the state, national identities and religious observance have significantly altered. And with reference to new attitudes our concern here is the nationalism associated in the South with the 'winner' nation of the last decades. This is defined by the twenty-six-county state established in 1922 and its successful accommodation of partition. Revision of the irredentist articles in the 1998 constitutional referendum marked this nationalism's triumph over a 'loser' nationalism associated with united-Ireland aspirations. After 1922 irredentism remained a contentious matter in the South, and any push to create an all-Ireland nation state had to be carefully managed. For all parties, but especially for Fianna Fáil – the dominating government party from 1932 – the desire to end partition could be exploited electorally. But the onset of the Northern Ireland crisis transformed irredentism. Increasingly, it became the preserve of militarist

¹ Nineteenth Amendment of the Constitution Bill, 1998.

² M. Forster, *Michael Collins: the lost leader* (London, 1971); P. Jannon, *Michael Collins: la naissance de l'IRA* (Paris, 1978); L. Ó Broin, *Michael Collins* (Dublin, 1980); P. Ó Braoin, *Micheál Ó Coileáin* (Fermoy, 1985); P. Yeates, *Michael Collins: an illustrated life* (Dublin, 1989); M. Ryan, *The day Michael Collins was shot* (Swords, 1989); T. R. Dwyer, *Michael Collins* (Cork & Dublin, 1990); T. P. Coogan, *Michael Collins* (London, 1990); J. M. Feehan, *The shooting of Michael Collins* (Cork, 1991); J. McKay, *Michael Collins: a life* (Edinburgh, 1996); C. Connolly, *Michael Collins* (London, 1996); M. Ryan, *Michael Collins and the women in his life* (Cork & Dublin, 1996); E. O'Mahony, *Michael Collins: his death in the twilight* (Wicklow, 1996); J. Nelson, *Michael Collins: the final days* (Dublin, 1997); G. Doherty and D. Keogh (eds), *Michael Collins and the founding of the Irish state* (Cork, Dublin, 1998); C. Osbourne, *Michael Collins, himself* (Cork, 2003); P. Hart, *Mick: the real Michael Collins* (London, 2005); M. T. Foy, *Michael Collins's intelligence war* (Stroud, 2006).

³ For a recent re-evaluation of historiographical treatments of both Collins and de Valera, see Diarmaid Ferriter's *Judging Dev* (Dublin, 2007).

republicans concentrating in the North, and their challenge to the island's stability called forth a revised history of separatist nationalism emphasising the Irish state's origins in a so-called 'constitutional tradition'. An examination of de Valera and Collins's reputations provides a means for interpreting some of these revisions in the context of 'official histories' sponsored by the state, and what is identified here as a 'new public history' serviced by historians.

Undeniably, governments have a vested interest in influencing perceptions of the past. The meta-narratives favoured often provide consolatory histories propagated through commemorations and parades, schools' curricula, museum exhibitions, newspaper journalism, broadcasting and textbooks. Accounts do not have to rest on academic histories, but in societies where authority is contested, authoritative texts may prove indispensable. The problem is not that research will be summoned to support political arguments but, rather, that history will be written to shore up those arguments. Bernard Lewis provides a useful definition of this practice in *History – remembered, recovered, invented* (Princeton, 1975), where he writes of those who 'would rewrite history not as it was ... but as they would prefer it to have been'. For historians of this 'school', Lewis tells us, 'the purpose of changing the past is not to seek some abstract truth, but to achieve a new vision of the past better suited to their needs in the present and their aspirations in the future. Their aim is to amend, to restate, to replace, or even to recreate the past in a more satisfactory form'.⁴ Students of the Irish 'revisionist debate' will be familiar with an endorsement of present-centred history in Brendan Bradshaw's 1989 critique, 'Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland'.⁵ Here, Bradshaw identified a beneficent legacy in 'the public history moulded by the nationalist movement and promoted at a popular level ever since the days of [Daniel] O'Connell [in the 1820s] and Young Ireland [in the 1840s]'.⁶ Inspired by Herbert Butterfield's *The Whig interpretation of history* (London, 1931), Bradshaw contended that from the 1930s the historical profession in Ireland set about deconstructing nationalist history much as historians following Butterfield had challenged an English constitutional teleology. Defending nationalist historiography, Bradshaw cited Butterfield's *The Englishman and his history* (London, 1944), where Butterfield argued that the Whig's interpretation was not corrupting but, instead, served higher historical purposes by placing liberty 'at the forefront of the community's historical consciousness', thereby 'inculcating a sense of historical continuity'. For Butterfield, the Englishman's libertarian teleology of 1931 became a matter of celebration, not censure. And Bradshaw argued a similar role for a separatist-nationalist history, suggesting that it formed a 'public history through which the historical consciousness of the community was expressed and transmitted'.⁷ A consciously present-centred history even justified, Bradshaw argued, 'Purposeful unhistoricity', and it was this more than anything else that appeared to isolate him.

Bradshaw's appeal was provocative, but what was he referring to when he identified 'public history' dating from the 1820s? The 'movement' described under the 'public history' banner originated in the 1970s with attempts in the U.S. and

⁴ Bernard Lewis, *History – remembered, recovered, invented* (Princeton, 1975), p. 55.

⁵ *I.H.S.*, xxvi, no. 104 (1989), pp 329–51.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁷ See Butterfield's *The Englishman and his history* (Cambridge, 1944).

elsewhere to provide new spaces where historical ideas could be disseminated.⁸ Reportedly, this was ‘democratised history’, where happily, historical, information was made accessible to lots of people. Being concerned with the heritage industry, museums, commissioned histories and genealogy, as well as film-making, this involved the commercialisation of historical knowledge. In these settings, historians were no longer more-or-less autonomous but were employed to ‘do history’. In contemporary usage, ‘public history’ became an umbrella for many practitioners and multiple publics without any agreed meaning. It is therefore useful to examine Bradshaw’s definition: ‘By “public history”’, Bradshaw clarifies, ‘I understand the version of history that gains currency in the public domain and represents the popular understanding of what happened in the past, particularly what happened in the nation’s past’. Bradshaw distinguishes between public history and academic history where he takes the latter to be the history circulating in academia ‘based on research on contemporary records conducted in accordance with the historical discipline’s methodology’.⁹ Alongside his 1989 treatise, Bradshaw’s definition combined elements of the public-history movement, identifying separate academic and public spheres and being concerned to influence popular understanding. What Bradshaw termed ‘public history’ was also nation-building history, which he assumed – incorrectly – ‘revisionism’ had turned against.¹⁰

When Graeme Davison states ‘Public history is the new name for the oldest history’, he, too, identifies present-centred history finding expression through new media.¹¹ An assumption of public-history’s advocates is that the public does not engage with scholarship. In Ireland that proposition is not altogether convincing; historians there appreciate that contemporary Irish history *is* popular history, attracting wide readerships. In Ireland, more particularly in the Republic, there exists a healthy practice of disseminating historical knowledge from the universities to general audiences. And historians sometimes enjoy prominent public profiles broadcasting on radio and television or writing for newspapers. Complementing this, there has been a notable record of historians participating in representative politics, while historical surveys and monographs from time to time feature in the best-sellers’ lists. All of this enriches the Republic’s cultural life, moulding a distinct historical profession there. And while the extent to which academic ideas penetrate the public consciousness may be debated, it should be recognised that the very notion of the Irish historian is rooted in a public-service ethic long drawn upon by the state. Applied to Irish conditions, surely Bradshaw’s definition of public history imposes too rigid a distinction between the ‘ivory tower’ and the public sphere?

Public history has, then, no greater ambition than to engage and, ultimately, to influence its audiences. And, importantly, this demands that public historians abandon any disinterest in the reception of their deliberations. What makes public history ‘public’ is its attempt to mediate the past sometimes for mass, but nearly always for easy, consumption. Unequal though this may be to the finer gradations found between public and academic modes (all historians aspiring to an audience

⁸ G. Davison, ‘Paradigms of public history’ in J. Richard and P. Spearritt (eds), *Packaging the past?* (Melbourne, 1991), pp 4–15.

⁹ Bradshaw to Regan, 9 June 2006.

¹⁰ Cf. J. M. Regan, ‘Southern Irish nationalism as a historiographical problem’ in *Hist. Jn.*, 50 (2007), pp 197–223.

¹¹ Davison, ‘Paradigms’, p. 4.

do write ‘public history’), this is the working definition preferred here. While not necessarily corrosive to academic writing, public history becomes a problem where it privileges the reception of historical information before historical method.

Yet, hitherto, the term ‘public history’, Bradshaw notwithstanding, seldom found its place in Irish debates.¹² Alternatively, it is argued that after 1968 the fabrication of a new public historical consciousness was a more important preoccupation inside the academy and the state than is commonly understood. If this is so, it should also be possible to identify where histories rest not on the most acceptable evidence but, rather, on the interpretation (otherwise ideology) most acceptable to their intended audiences. This, then, is the crux of the problem to be addressed. What follows starts and ends with surveys of biographical trends associated with de Valera and Collins. These explore the influences of Irish nationalisms on histories of the state, and historians’ responses to this. To avoid generalities, our focus is directed towards contentious issues – the role of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.) in the new state, the British use of coercion in 1922, and the relationship between democracy and authoritarianism in 1922 – so as to help us examine the methods and evidence employed by historians.

I

A somewhat tedious compilation of the whole mythological cycle of the Ogre de Valera – cold and austere, incorruptible, pedantic, obstinate, egotistic, the despair of his colleagues, the scourge of a suffering people – the figure familiar to the readers of the English press.¹³

So Dorothy Macardle described Denis Gwynn’s biography of Eamon de Valera in an *Irish Press* review in March 1933. Macardle went on: ‘the biographer is a persecutor, remorseless in his demands on those who may be able to supply him with facts’. Gwynn, it would seem, had been less than diligent in his researches, or at least in not consulting the inner circles of de Valera’s Fianna Fáil party. That said, Macardle was not alone in describing biographical method, but also her own approach to history writing and, moreover, the study of the period c.1911–25, which she published in 1937 as *The Irish republic*.¹⁴ In just over a thousand pages, Macardle vindicated de Valera’s career.

Macardle’s *Irish republic* delivered a public history borne of the struggle for independence. Offering a coherent, scholarly, republican history, the first three editions sold four thousand copies.¹⁵ There is no gainsaying the research remains impressive. A dense narrative is driven forward with enormous documentation marshalled by academic apparatus. Independently, Macardle anticipated many of the up-to-date methodologies associated with the journal *Irish Historical Studies*, launched in 1938. By contrast, the *Irish republic*, despite Macardle’s denials, was unavoidably partisan in its purpose. Macardle’s favoured narrative was the pursuit

¹² An exception is Roy Foster’s *The Irish story* (London, 2001). Foster does not favour the term ‘public history’.

¹³ *Irish Press*, 22 Mar. 1933.

¹⁴ D. Macardle, *The Irish republic* (London, 1937).

¹⁵ Dorothy Macardle, Bureau of Military History statement 457 (N.A.I.), p. 3; Macardle, *Irish republic*, p. 23.

of the revolutionary republic's nation state, and whatever about shared faith in empiricism, this legitimisation of an overtly political objective arguably set it apart from *Irish Historical Studies*' new departure.

In Macardle's history, de Valera personified the revolutionary republic and the ongoing search for its fulfilment. For most of his political life, de Valera appeared to foment a discontented nationalism by employing what John Bowman has called the rhetoric of 'inevitable unification'.¹⁶ This sometimes raised partition as an electoral issue¹⁷ but did not at any time form constructive policies intent upon remedying it. Rather, de Valera's irredentism is best understood as an attempt to monopolise the issue, forestalling extra-constitutional ambitions in that quarter. Understanding the importance of the border's stability for the mutual security of Irish polities North and South, quietly de Valera conceded the need for its existence – until, that is, the right circumstances would somehow arise to end it.¹⁸ Like many of his generation, for practical purposes de Valera was 'a twenty-six-counties man' dedicated to the existing state before all else.¹⁹ For some, this remains contentious, but in 1921 de Valera secretly²⁰ – and in 1925 the Free State government publicly – argued that partition, while not ideal, had to be accepted.²¹

Anti-partitionism reinforced the border by exacerbating unionist Ulster's paranoia, while the institutionalisation of Roman Catholic theology and the Gaelic language in the Southern state widened the gulf between North and South.²² De Valera cannot have failed to notice this. But by uniting separatists in the belief of the border's injustice, de Valera manipulated partition as an issue transcending divisions existing between separatist-nationalists. Before 1969 the rhetoric of reunification, together with studied prevarication, helped neutralise partition as a mobilising cause, whilst at the same time establishing partition as a nation-building grievance. 'The state', judged John A. Murphy in 1976, 'was much more real and substantial than irredentism'; this nicely sums up Southerners' priorities as against what is understood here as their reunification fallacy.²³

For generations of Fianna Fáilers, Macardle's *Irish republic* became a kind of bible, portraying de Valera, without fear of exaggeration to the faithful, as a political Messiah. And her book's influence on Irish imaginations was further enhanced by an embargo instituted by *Irish Historical Studies* on research articles addressing contemporary history, which decision exerted an influence on research agendas across the historical profession.²⁴ As late as the 1980s, Macardle remained the major account of the revolutionary period, and in some respects has yet to be surpassed.

In the Southerners' imaginations, then, de Valera was remembered as the embodiment of united-Ireland aspirations rather than for any partitionist realpolitik.

¹⁶ J. Bowman, *De Valera and the Ulster question* (Oxford, 1983), pp 313–14.

¹⁷ See C. O'Halloran, *Partition and the limits of Irish nationalism* (Dublin, 1987), p. 158.

¹⁸ Bowman, *De Valera*, p. 312.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; O'Halloran, *Partition*, pp 165–7; see also Regan, 'Southern Irish nationalism', pp 197–223.

²⁰ *Dáil Éireann private sessions, 1921–2* (23 Aug. 1921), pp 59–60.

²¹ See William T. Cosgrave, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xiii (7 Dec. 1925), cols 1306–7.

²² See D. Kennedy, *The widening gulf* (Belfast, 1988).

²³ J. A. Murphy, 'Identity change in the Republic of Ireland' in *Études-Irlandaises*, 5 (1976), p. 151.

²⁴ See J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985* (Cambridge, 1989), pp 586–96.

And this is important because with the advent of the Northern crisis, ideas about ‘struggle’ and the pursuit of unification fell from favour south of the border, and this wore heavily on de Valera’s reputation. It is also true that disenchantment with these and other separatist ‘values’ may be traced in historical writing to the 1960s.²⁵ Nevertheless, what hastened the challenge to de Valera’s reputation, and the narrative Macardle’s *Irish republic* embodied, was the onset of Northern Ireland’s violence. In 1970 suddenly the state required a new history equal to the radically altered circumstances. One thing was certain: any history legitimising renewal of ‘the struggle’ was unthinkable. But following fifty years of irredentist rhetoric, what could replace the ‘old’ story?

II

After 1966 the opening of the official archives provided rich resources for an historiography focused on the state. Early examples were provided by Ronan Fanning’s *The Irish Department of Finance*,²⁶ published in 1978, and Joseph Curran’s *The birth of the Irish Free State*,²⁷ published two years later. With much work following in a similar vein, institutional history soon became a central focus for contemporary historians. Mary Daly worked on economic policy and produced lengthy studies on the departments of local government and agriculture.²⁸ Tom Garvin’s *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* incorporated studies of local government.²⁹ Eunan O’Halpin generated an extensive body of work on the state’s security, later developed in his 1999 monograph *Defending Ireland: the Irish state and its enemies*.³⁰ Published in 1999, Regan’s *The Irish counter-revolution, 1921–36*³¹ fits into this corpus, although its greatest archival debt is owed to collections not controlled by the state.

Nevertheless, the state held mesmerising attractions for historians and their graduate students. It was, of course, wholly understandable that scholars should avail of sources long denied them by a sometimes neurotically secretive public service. That said, any uncritical embrace of state papers contrasted with earlier more-sceptical attitudes.³² And a growing dependency on the official record held consequences, not all of which were healthy. The state provided a convenient (Southern nationalists might say ‘natural’) unit for analysis. But as with any attempt to understand the past through a fixed geographical medium, the resulting approaches were beset with difficulties where ‘Irish’ history abruptly ended at the

²⁵ See M. Wall, ‘Partition and the Ulster question (1916–26)’ in T. D. Williams (ed.), *The Irish struggle* (Dublin, 1966), pp 79–93, and P. Lynch, ‘The social revolution that never was’ in *ibid.*, pp 41–54; G. FitzGerald, ‘The significance of 1916’ in *Studies*, 55 (1966), pp 29–37; C. Cruise O’Brien, ‘The embers of Easter, 1916–66’ in the *Irish Times*, 7 Apr. 1966.

²⁶ R. Fanning, *The Irish Department of Finance, 1922–1958* (Dublin, 1978).

²⁷ J. Curran, *The birth of the Irish Free State, 1921–23* (Alabama, 1980).

²⁸ M. Daly, *Industrial development and Irish national identity* (Syracuse, 1992); eadem, *The buffer state* (Dublin, 1997); eadem, *The first department* (Dublin, 2002).

²⁹ T. Garvin, *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* (Dublin, 1996).

³⁰ E. O’Halpin, *Defending Ireland* (Oxford, 1999).

³¹ J. M. Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution, 1921–36* (Dublin, 1989).

³² See E. Gkotsaris, *The trials of Irish history* (London, 2006), ch. 5.

border. What was the relationship between an evolving Southern nationalism and the state? What were the limitations of the state's archive exploring phenomena commonly described as 'Irish'? There were other approaches, identifying wider contexts over centuries or attempting – as with Roy Foster and J. J. Lee, and, later, David Fitzpatrick and Alvin Jackson, and most recently Diarmaid Ferriter – island-wide studies.³³ But in the new state-centred, partitionist history, 'Ireland' and 'Irish' increasingly came to be understood as pertaining exclusively to the South, and this indicated important shifts in Irish-nationalist orientations as well as historical conceptualisation.

Whether or not the reconciliation of national consciousness with the state in the South was the *grand projet* of governments there, after 1970 all had a heightened interest in that outcome. Consequently, the role of public records facilitating a state-centred history, alongside a state-centred national identity, unavoidably became considerations. Inside the bureaucracy, there were intense sensitivities about archival access. When, in 1966, the British government indicated that it would publish the 1925 Boundary Commission report, this prompted discussions within the senior ranks of the Irish civil service, leading to consultations with the garda commissioner (who recommended against release).³⁴ Arguably, the border's history provided a special case, but similar sensitivities existed across the civil service.³⁵

Tentative moves towards the opening of archives can be traced to the 1960s.³⁶ From within the civil service there was pressure to modernise policy, and this was accompanied by lobbying from historians demanding access.³⁷ Publication in 1972 of the hitherto secret *Dáil Éireann private sessions, 1921–2* purportedly came in response to requests dating from the 1950s.³⁸ It is likely, however, that consideration was given to their disclosure that in 1921 de Valera had advocated partition.³⁹ No document did more to debunk de Valera's anti-partitionist rhetoric, although this took time to sink in.⁴⁰ In this instance, the release seems informed by strategic concerns to demythologise the very recently 'old' official history. And following these initiatives, a civil service interdepartmental committee on archives was established in December 1972.

Subsequent manifestations of the state's revised official history quickly began to emerge. In 1972 Jack Lynch's Fianna Fáil government agreed the Republic's army would be present at the annual commemoration for Collins in County Cork to mark the fiftieth anniversary of his death. Hitherto, Church and state normally

³³ R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland* (London, 1988); Lee, *Ireland*; David Fitzpatrick, *The two Irelands* (Oxford, 1998); Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798–1998* (Oxford, 1998); Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland* (London, 2005).

³⁴ P. Berry to N. S. Ó Nuallain, 17 Aug. 1966 (N.A.I., DT/98/6/28).

³⁵ G. O'Brien, *Irish governments and the guardianship of historical records, 1922–72* (Dublin, 2004), pp 108, 154–72.

³⁶ 'Inter-departmental committee on national archives final report', Dec. 1974 (N.A.I., Department of the Taoiseach, 2000/01/75), pp 34–7.

³⁷ Interview with Breandan Mac Giolla Choile, former keeper of state papers (1971–85), 27 Sep. 2005.

³⁸ *Dáil Éireann private sessions, 1921–2*.

³⁹ *Ibid.* (23 Aug. 1921), pp 57–9.

⁴⁰ See T. R. Dwyer, *Eamon de Valera* (Dublin, 1980), pp 44–3; Bowman, *De Valera*; M. Laffan, *The partition of Ireland* (Dundalk, 1983).

commemorated (on Easter Sunday) only those who had fallen in the separatist struggle between 1916 and 1921. It was highly significant that Collins's was among the first officially endorsed Civil War commemorations under any Fianna Fáil government; this contrasted with the same government's cancellation of the military parade at the Easter 1916 commemoration five months earlier.⁴¹ In 1973 a new Taoiseach, Fine Gael's Liam Cosgrave, penned a brief eulogy for guerrilla leader and late defence minister, Seán MacEoin; in it he wrote: '[MacEoin] recognized that the will of the people should be supreme and ensured that in order to give effect to the will of the people the ballot and not the bullet must decide national policy'.⁴² As with other revolutionaries, MacEoin's relationship with both ballots and bullets was more complicated than Cosgrave conceded.⁴³ Breaking with protocol, the Taoiseach's eulogy alluded to a partisan interpretation of the Civil War's causation, and without elucidation entitled the piece '*L'état*'.

After 1971 official focus began to shift away from physical-force nationalism towards constitutional nationalism, and from the unfulfilled revolutionary republic towards the established state. Emblematic was the nation-building narrative's move away from Easter 1916 toward the state's establishment in 1922. Simultaneous with the revision of the state's official history, elements of the new narrative began to manifest inside the academy. Broadcasting a radio lecture in the 1971 Thomas Davis series, T. Desmond Williams made a remarkable statement: 'It was only after the [December 1921] Treaty that he [Collins] clearly became a constitutionalist'.⁴⁴ But in 1971 there was nothing clear about this at all. Contradictorily, in the same lecture Williams identified that in early 1922 Collins had not informed fellow government ministers about his involvement in a covert military campaign against Northern Ireland.

In 1968 political scientist Brian Farrell wrote an ambitious article: 'The new state and Irish political culture'.⁴⁵ Farrell's bold revision accorded less importance to the physical-force tradition in Irish history, and rightly argued for continuities between the old 'colonial regime' and its successor. Emphasising the institutional legacy British rule bequeathed the independent state, this inheritance, argued Farrell, proved defining. Founding the 1922 state, the Sinn Féin movement 'was bound by a set of political values, attitudes and beliefs derived ... from British liberalism and these were far more powerful than its immediate "revolutionary" inheritance'.⁴⁶ 'Ireland had a parliamentary tradition ... going back even to medieval times', he noted, explaining further that underpinning the South's political stability was an inherent constitutionalism, which indicated 'the prior existence of political culture ... [that] absorbed the revolutionary rhetoric of 1916'.⁴⁷ The article, once revised, became the 'Introduction' to Farrell's influential textbook, *The founding of Dáil Éireann* (Dublin, 1971), and its interpretation informed the

⁴¹ A. Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 113; *Irish Times*, 3 Apr. 1972.

⁴² L. Cosgrave, '*L'état*' in *Teabhá: Longford Hist. Soc. Jn.*, 1, no. 3 (1973), p. 171.

⁴³ MacEoin was a member of the 1922 I.R.B. supreme council.

⁴⁴ T. D. Williams, 'The Irish Republican Brotherhood' in idem (ed.), *Secret societies in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), p. 148.

⁴⁵ B. Farrell, 'The new state and Irish political culture' in *Administration*, 16 (1968), pp 238–46.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 242, 246.

new public history adopted by the state. Farrell had not simply retold the ‘story’ of struggle but, instead, offered another way of thinking about separatist nationalism. Directly and indirectly, Farrell’s thesis influenced the way students of state formation conceptualised their subject, and this process requires elaboration here.

In 1962 philosopher-historian Thomas Kuhn famously identified the ‘paradigm’ as critical to understanding what he called ‘scientific revolutions’.⁴⁸ Kuhn’s thesis purported to explain how scientific discoveries are made, and this provides a useful, if knowingly inexact, analogy for discussing here developments in Irish historiography. Scientific research, Kuhn argues, can be understood as a cultural activity conditioned by the practices and preconceptions of scientific communities. During training, scholars are socialised into an existing research culture by studying established problems and their solutions from the relevant field’s textbooks and research. Consequently, existing practices and assumptions are reinforced through socialisation and mechanisms of control, such as career advancement and patronage. Accordingly, this culturally conditioned research extends established scientific knowledge, but only within the confines of the established paradigm. Existing knowledge and understanding, therefore, is constantly revalidated through what is in effect a ‘mopping up’ exercise inside this paradigm. This is what Kuhn terms the application of ‘normal science’, with new research broadly conforming to the paradigm’s expectations. This modifies the paradigm but is never intended to challenge it. By this process, the scientist or historian finds out lots of new things, adding to our knowledge inside the paradigm, thereby reinvesting its authority. However, this is not always satisfactory. A ‘crisis’ is induced when the existing paradigm is confronted with anomalies (new information or theories) that it cannot accommodate or easily explain. But Kuhn’s celebrated ‘paradigm shift’ does not occur when the anomalies identify themselves but, rather, only when the research community moves to a new paradigm more capable of resolving the anomalies.

Historical narratives are not quite the same as Kuhn’s scientific paradigms, but in telling their ‘stories’ historical narratives draw on received knowledge from within something analogous to a paradigm. What Farrell challenged separatist nationalism with in 1968 was a revised narrative existing inside something approximate to a constitutional paradigm. That constitutionalism rather than revolutionism accounted for Southern Irish political stability confronted the established physical-force narrative/paradigm with its Kuhnian ‘crisis’. This was not as wholly original as it might at first seem. It echoed earlier Treatyite revisionism dating from the 1920s, with one notable exception.⁴⁹ Farrell abandoned the idea there had been a fully fledged revolution (although he conceded a ‘palace revolution’ might have occurred in 1916): ‘The new state of the 1920s’, he wrote, ‘seems such an obvious consequence of that armed revolt that we are mesmerised into the belief that inherent in the Easter rebellion was a revolution; that 1916 marked a new beginning’.⁵⁰ That after 1916 no ‘terrible beauty’ was born was, in 1968, intended to deliver a shattering culture shock to the physical-force paradigm.

⁴⁸ T. Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions* (Chicago, 1962; 3rd ed., London, 1996).

⁴⁹ For early examples of partisan Treatyite histories, see J. M. O’Sullivan, *Phases of revolution* (Dublin, 1924), and generally P. S. O’Hegarty, *The victory of Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1924).

⁵⁰ Farrell, ‘New state’, p. 238.

III

In its normal course, Farrell's thesis would have done its job, provoking reflection among those who cared to notice it. In the extraordinary environment into which it was released, his argument took on significance far beyond anything anyone could have anticipated. Usefully, Farrell provided the corrective to the dominant separatist interpretation, but it was when this was mobilised as a crude antidote to the physical-force 'tradition' that insight turned to distortion. He made one such error in 1971: 'The new state may have been inspired by the actions of the Easter Week leaders; it never set out to adopt their example', Farrell wrote before stating: 'Those who have opted to pursue that policy of resort to arms rather than political persuasion have, ever since, found themselves on the periphery of Irish political life'.⁵¹ This was sloganising, not historical interpretation. The same de Valera who joined the anti-Treatyite I.R.A. on the Civil War's outbreak in 1922 was in 1971 president of Ireland. Similar observations could be extended to many forming Fianna Fáil in 1926, and to a ragbag of 'comrades' moving from physical-force into mainstream politics. A roll-call might include Blueshirts in the 1930s such as John L. O'Sullivan, later long-serving senator and Dáil deputy, and opponents in the I.R.A. such as its 1936 chief-of-staff, later Cabinet minister, Seán MacBride. Others apparently moved in the opposite direction: before Farrell's book went to press, two Cabinet ministers were sacked from government for allegedly conspiring to import arms for Northern nationalists. In the subsequent trials, some defendants claimed they had been implementing government policy. Farrell's interpretation resembled a decision on the past, and this approach presaged a public history insisting on the fidelity of the state's constitutionalism from 1922.

Farrell's work on Dáil Éireann had to suggest to the state the possibility of a history of its own creation better suited to the times. Most of the first Dáil's papers dating to 1920 were made available by 1972.⁵² It was Liam Cosgrave's Fine Gael-Labour coalition government (1973-7) that agreed wholesale release of the official papers relating to the early governments. There were personal and party considerations in this.⁵³ Cosgrave's father, William T., had been president of the Free State's executive council for a decade following 1922. The state, it was claimed, was the monumental achievement of Cosgrave senior and the Treatyite parties, but republican history scarcely credited this. The most publicised of the early releases came in February 1976 when Cabinet papers from 1922 to 1944 were simultaneously opened to public viewing in Belfast and Dublin. The *Irish Times* marked the occasion with an impressive supplement on 21 April 1976.⁵⁴ Coinciding with this, and contrasting with the 1966 Easter jubilee, no official public ceremony was planned for the Rising's sixtieth anniversary in April 1976, and the government, on 21 April, banned Provisional Sinn Féin's alternative commemoration. The communication regarding the ban included the following: 'in order to reduce the tension with our northern neighbours, St Patrick's Day would become the chief

⁵¹ B. Farrell, *The founding of Dáil Éireann* (Dublin, 1971), p. 84.

⁵² 'Inter-departmental committee on national archives final report', p. 35.

⁵³ Mac Giolla Choile interview.

⁵⁴ O. D. Edwards and D. W. Harkness, 'Cabinet papers, North and South' in *Irish Times*, 21 Apr. 1976.

public holiday of celebration in the south'.⁵⁵ The revising of national symbols and the release of state papers gave the appearance of a related policy.

While the natural course of archival reform might have borne results in time, the 1970s witnessed an urgency to release documents nowhere apparent before. It surely follows that critical thought must be given to the role of archives in nation-building. Attention could, for example, be profitably applied to the 1986 National Archives Act, and this in turn might prompt some to ponder the question: what nation is being archived in Dublin's Bishop Street?

IV

The geographical contexts through which contemporary Irish history was interpreted unavoidably became of heightened importance after 1968.⁵⁶ Until then, it was the all-Ireland context, overlaying the same map as the revolutionary republic, that provided the dominant framework for the conceptualisation of 'Ireland' and of 'Irish' histories. And hitherto, an organising theme of separatist history had been, in P. S. O'Hegarty's phrase, 'the story of a people coming out of captivity'.⁵⁷ Favoured narratives led to different termini depending on taste and affiliation: 1922 (the state's foundation), 1937 (de Valera's Constitution) or, indeed, at some undetermined future date when 'Ireland would be free'.⁵⁸

'The Northern troubles have given the final quietus to irredentism', Murphy adroitly observed in 1976, '[and] there is now a widespread Southern desire for non-involvement'. He continued: 'in this century ... Irish identity has moved from a complacent assumption of one-nation Ireland, through a waning irredentism to something like [its] outright rejection'.⁵⁹ Aided by vox pop polls, Murphy anticipated Southern nationalism's direction, and with this in view two new textbooks appeared. Ronan Fanning's *Independent Ireland*, published in 1983 in the Helicon Irish history series, was 'aimed at a general readership'.⁶⁰ Fanning provided another state-centred interpretation: the book's narrative began with the Southern state's democratic origins in 1922 – defined in contrast to the anti-democratic political culture of its republican opponents in the Civil War – and alluded to the existence of an exclusivist Southern identity.⁶¹ Its chronology, commencing in 1922, post-dated the 1916 Rising and the 1919–21 War of Independence, and thereby avoided awkward questions about the use of violence by non-mandated minorities pursuing self-determination.

Fanning's *Independent Ireland* was followed in 1994 by Dermot Keogh's *Twentieth-century Ireland: nation and state*, volume 6 in the New Gill History

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 Apr. 1976.

⁵⁶ What follows is developed from Regan, 'Southern Irish nationalism'; see also P. Bew, *Ideology and the Irish question* (Oxford, 1994), pp ix–xix.

⁵⁷ P. S. O'Hegarty, *A history of Ireland under the Union* (London, 1952), p. vii.

⁵⁸ See S. MacManus, *The story of the Irish race* (New York, 1922); Macardle, *Irish republic*; E. Curtis, *A history of Ireland from the earliest times to 1922* (London, 1937); O'Hegarty, *Ireland under the Union*; F. Gallagher, *The invisible island* (London, 1957); R. Kee, *The green flag* (London, 1972).

⁵⁹ Murphy, 'Identity', p. 152.

⁶⁰ R. Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1983), p. viii.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp 6, 14, 43, 212.

of Ireland.⁶² The original Gill History appeared between 1972 and 1975, and the publisher's foreword to the new series stated: 'the intention is ... to offer the general reader an accessible and up-to-date survey'. The focus of Keogh's work was also the state from 1922, wherein he explored Southern society through government policy. Keogh's eponymous 'nation' was confined in the text to the Southern state alone, and this is significant. In the three historical series published in Dublin after 1970 and aimed at the general reader, approaches to the twentieth century evolved from Murphy's 1975 all-Ireland treatment to Fanning and David Harkness's partitionist studies of 1983 to Northern Ireland's omission from the New Gill History.⁶³

Keogh's assumption that the 1922 'state' defined the Irish 'nation' marked Southern nationalism's growing confidence. But a public history equating nation with state manifested problems that earlier republican-nationalist histories exhibited: common was a reordering of the past in support of a favoured nation state, and much as Macardle had done with hers, the new public history set about constructing heroes to exemplify its cause. Keogh's treatment of de Valera and Collins hinted at this: Collins's death, Keogh argued, removed the 'ballast from the ship of state ... some would have said, the country ... had been orphaned'.⁶⁴ The context for this was the positing of the Civil War as a struggle between government authority and republicans whose intimidatory practices in 1922 Keogh likened to 'what was to happen in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany'.⁶⁵ Though this was not without some foundation, the analogy with the Nazis was an unwarranted distortion. The description of de Valera as a republican 'purist' also misrepresented an avowedly non-doctrinaire position in 1922, while attempting to place him with the proto-fascists.

Nevertheless, Keogh's rigorously empirical method still allowed licence in the construction of its constitutional narrative when he posed the query: 'Were extra judicial killings condoned or tolerated by the [1922 pro-Treatyite] Provisional Government? The answer to that question is emphatically in the negative'.⁶⁶ Here, the state's first government is exonerated from illegally killing its prisoners during the Civil War, and this is instructive. What was well understood is that government ministers not alone knew about such killings but on 7 December endorsed the proposed execution of four republican leaders who had been in military custody since July. Following the I.R.A.'s assassination of a Dáil deputy, and with further attacks promised, the Treatyites justifiably feared the state's collapse. The decision to execute, it should be carefully noted, was taken independently by the army, and only afterwards did the army seek support from the government for this measure.⁶⁷ As with other summary executions in the field, no constitutional or legal authority was involved. It may be reasoned that these events are well known and that the confusion introduced by Keogh is unimportant. Contradicting this view, Paul Bew recently wrote: 'On 8 December Rory O'Connor, Liam Mellows, and two other

⁶² D. Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland: nation and state* (Dublin, 1994).

⁶³ J. A. Murphy, *Ireland in the twentieth century* (Dublin, 1975); Fanning, *Independent Ire.*; D. W. Harkness, *Northern Ireland since 1920* (Dublin, 1983); Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ire.*

⁶⁴ Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ire.*, pp 10–11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Regan, *Counter-revolution*, pp 114–18.

Irregulars [anti-Treatyite I.R.A.] were executed after their trial as a reprisal for the assassination of pro-Treaty deputy Sean Hales'.⁶⁸ Bew's contradictory use of the words 'trial' followed by 'reprisal' would require elaboration if any such trial had taken place; as it is, this amounts to an attempt to fit clearly extra-constitutional events into the constitutional narrative. Nonetheless, Keogh's original assertion is historical but, as presented, remains confusing. The Provisional government did not tolerate or condone extra-judicial killings during its lifetime, ending as it did on 6 December 1922. But a new entity – the executive council of the Irish Free State, consisting of the same ministers sitting around the same Cabinet table – on 7 December did indeed agree to execute the four men for crimes they did not commit.⁶⁹ Keogh makes a highly questionable distinction that, in his narrative, serves to distance the state from war crimes committed under its aegis.

Another subtle endorsement of the constitutional narrative was offered by Fanning where he addressed the deeply problematic role of the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1922. Logically, the I.R.B. had to be acknowledged because its 'Supreme Council, headed by Collins, still claimed to be the government of the republic'.⁷⁰ This statement's implications were far-reaching for a narrative setting in opposition Free State government authority on one side in the Civil War and anti-democratic republicanism on the other. Could the Treatyites be fairly described as constitutionalists when a clandestine I.R.B. government existed inside their institutions? 'It may be, as ... has [been] recently suggested, that the influence of the I.R.B. after 1916 has been exaggerated by historians', F. S. L. Lyons was moved to comment in 1971. 'Yet even if this was so', he continued, 'any organisation with which Collins was intimately involved derived a measure of importance from the very fact of his involvement; in reality not only between 1919 and 1922, but even up to 1924 the I.R.B. was a complicating factor'.⁷¹ Owing to the I.R.B.'s secrecy, we may never know its full importance, but enough evidence had accumulated by 1983 to dispel notions about its insignificance.⁷² Fanning's response to the problem of the I.R.B. inside the regime was to open a discussion on civil–military relations, thereby avoiding any consideration of the Brotherhood.⁷³ Significantly in this respect, Fanning identified that the Free State army (the Treatyite I.R.A. in all but name) retained its autonomy throughout most of the Civil War, and once this was recognised the balance of power between the civilian ministers, the military and the I.R.B. should have become of vital interest.⁷⁴

The I.R.B.'s supreme council, to which Fanning alluded, divided over the Treaty, with the majority supporting it. In an article published in 1976, John O'Beirne-Ranelagh identified the members of the I.R.B.'s executive (which exercised the powers of the supreme council when it was not sitting) as Collins (president), Seán Ó Murthuile (secretary) and Eoin O'Duffy (treasurer);⁷⁵ not surprisingly, all held important positions inside the Treatyite regime, with Collins heading the

⁶⁸ P. Bew, *Ireland the politics of enmity* (Oxford, 2007), p. 440.

⁶⁹ Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ire.*, p. 15.

⁷⁰ Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, p. 43.

⁷¹ F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland since the famine* (London, 1971), p. 438.

⁷² L. Ó Broin, *Revolutionary underground* (Dublin, 1976), pp 200–5, *passim*.

⁷³ Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, pp 43–60.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 45–7.

⁷⁵ J. O'Beirne-Ranelagh, 'The I.R.B.: from the Treaty to 1924' in *I.H.S.*, xx, no. 77 (1976), p. 27.

Provisional government and army, wherein O'Duffy held a fighting command.⁷⁶ On 18 August 1922, following Collins's instruction, Ó Murthuile was appointed Civic Guard commissioner.⁷⁷ Ignoring for the moment the powerful positions other brothers held in the regime, by mid-August the I.R.B. executive was positioned to control the Treatyites' defence forces, and this could not be assumed incidental or insignificant.⁷⁸ In the 1970s the I.R.B. became an historiographical problem because it threatened to dull distinctions being made between the state and anti-democratic republicanism.⁷⁹ In the new public history, state formation belonged to a much-vaunted Irish constitutionalism whereas the Provisional I.R.A. (exclusively, it once seemed) belonged to a tradition of violence increasingly de-legitimised by histories emphasising militarist-republicanism's deep-rooted opposition to democracy. The political implications of these meta-narratives were easy to see: if Southern nationalists were guided towards statehood by a secret elite, surely the Provisional I.R.A. could be excused from seeking an electoral mandate when it, too, could claim to be carrying on the 'old struggle'. Whilst the evidence pointed towards ambiguity, the new public history required a purer narrative, making clear the division between the Irish state and its enemies.

To preserve the constitutional tradition's fidelity inside the Free State, the I.R.B. needed to be marginalised. Keogh makes no mention of the I.R.B. until 1924 when rival factions provoked a mutiny within the Treatyite army.⁸⁰ This approach might again be defended on the grounds that the I.R.B. left too few clues about its activities, but this was not the whole story. Written in the late 1920s, Seán Ó Murthuile's memoir remains an important source for Collins's I.R.B.⁸¹ Ó Murthuile identified Collins's plans for the Brotherhood's continuation in a diarchy made up of public Free State and secret I.R.B. governments.⁸² Citing Ó Murthuile, Leon Ó Broin outlined some of this in his 1976 monograph.⁸³ The I.R.B.'s executive raised uncomfortable questions about sources of authority. Did authority ultimately reside with the soldiers as soldiers, with Collins alone, or possibly with the brothers' secret government? Ó Murthuile's answer partly lay with the I.R.B.'s new constitution, 'which was drafted by Collins after a duly elected Government had been established'. And here Ó Murthuile referenced the Treatyite government formed after the 'pact' general election of June 1922.⁸⁴ Collins's I.R.B. constitution was not implemented before his death, but it nevertheless further demonstrated that he remained committed to conspiratorial modes. Although available to them, neither Fanning nor Keogh referenced Ó Murthuile's memoir.

The British threat of reconquest should the Treaty be compromised was of

⁷⁶ J. Regan, 'Michael Collins, general commanding-in-chief, as a historiographical problem' in *History*, 92/307 (July 2007), pp 318–46.

⁷⁷ Seán Ó Murthuile memoir (U.C.D.A.D., Mulcahy papers, P7a/209); Provisional government minutes, 18 Aug. 1922 (N.A.I., Provisional government minutes, G 1/3).

⁷⁸ See Regan, 'Collins', pp 330–46.

⁷⁹ See Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Ireland will not have peace' in *Harper's Bazaar* (Dec. 1976), pp 36–7.

⁸⁰ Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ire.*, p. 19.

⁸¹ J. O'Beirne-Ranelagh, bibliographical note in D. G. Boyce (ed.), *The revolution in Ireland, 1879–1923* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 241.

⁸² Ó Murthuile memoir.

⁸³ Ó Broin, *Revolutionary*, p. 203.

⁸⁴ Ó Murthuile memoir.

critical importance prior to the outbreak of the Civil War in June 1922.⁸⁵ Whilst logically the threat could not be completely ignored, no attempt was made by Fanning or Keogh to evaluate it as a factor conditioning electoral decisions; to do as much would weaken irrevocably the argument that the Free State achieved a free mandate in 1922. Whereas primary sources relating to the Treatyite I.R.B. might conceivably be overlooked, it is difficult to make similar claims for sources identifying British coercion.⁸⁶ Published in 1996, Garvin's *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* stated that the British threat in 1922 was a fiction invented by the anti-Treatyites. Further, Garvin also states that the anti-Treatyite I.R.A. 'decided to prevent an election taking place as long as an alleged threat of war was being made by the British'. 'In parenthesis', he continued, 'it should be noted that Collins emphatically denied that the British ever made such a threat', but Garvin offered no reference for any of this.⁸⁷ What Collins did say was that the threat of 'terrible and immediate war' in December 1921 'did not matter overmuch to me'.⁸⁸ Garvin's representation of the British position is a fundamental error but, as such, is essential to his argument that Irish democracy was born in 1922. Published a decade apart, Fanning and Keogh's textbooks chart the advance of a consensus around the state's constitutional origins, and it was this increasingly simplified analysis that appealed to some historians, including Garvin.

In the new millennium, historians moderated the interpretation of state formation that pitted democratic Treatyites against anti-democratic republicans.⁸⁹ Referencing Bill Kissane's conclusions on Civil War politics, Richard English recognised republican claims to legitimacy when he wrote of the Treatyites: 'it is now fairly clear that theirs was the more democratic of the rival positions in 1922–3'.⁹⁰ But democracy remains an unconvincing competitive category for historians measuring chaos, and its invocation as an interpretative tool identifies a paradox in recent historiography. As the archives opened and research accumulated, historical interpretations shrunk from relative sophistication and turned to a consolatory history of the state's 'unbroken democracy'.⁹¹ Charles Townshend demonstrates this retreat, beginning with his 1983 review of Curran wherein he wrote:

Curran is an unequivocal 'Stater' in his overall perspective ... in his view the Republicans continually displayed 'contempt for civil liberty' and 'contempt for civil authority'; and he suggests, surely too intellectually, that the fundamental struggle [in the Civil War] was not over symbols of the republic and the Free State ... but over the issue of democracy versus messianic elitism boarding on dictatorship.

⁸⁵ Regan, *Counter-revolution*, p. 69.

⁸⁶ Macardle, *Irish republic*, pp 740–1, 746–7; F. Gallagher, *The Anglo-Irish Treaty* (London, 1965), pp 179–80 (see also pp 64–5); the earl of Longford and T. P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (London, 1970), p. 186; D. H. Akenson and J. F. Fallin, 'The Irish Civil War and the drafting of the Irish Free State Constitution: part iv, capitulation to the British' in *Éire-Ireland*, 5, no. 4 (winter 1970), pp 53–70; F. S. L. Lyons, 'The great debate' in B. Farrell (ed.), *The Irish parliamentary tradition* (Dublin, 1973), pp 251–3; E. O'Malley, *The singing flame* (Dublin, 1978), p. 90; cf. E. O'Halpin, 'Politics and the state, 1922–32' in J. R. Hill (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vii: Ireland, 1921–84* (Oxford, 2003), pp 86–92.

⁸⁷ Garvin, *1922*, p. 48.

⁸⁸ M. Collins, *The path to Irish freedom* (Dublin, 1995 ed.), p. 31.

⁸⁹ Regan, 'Southern Irish nationalism', pp 211–12.

⁹⁰ R. English, *Irish freedom* (London, 2006), p. 310, citing Kissane, *Politics*, p. 237.

⁹¹ O'Halpin, *Defending Ire.*, p. 350.

In a lecture delivered in 1998 Townshend claimed Collins for ‘a deep-dyed constitutionalist’, and by 1999 concluded that the Civil War was indeed ‘a struggle of democracy against militarism’.⁹² Michael Laffan in 1999 concluded Sinn Féin up to 1923 was ‘the principal means whereby Ireland’s constitutional tradition was transmitted through years of turbulence’. But for Laffan’s Sinn Féin party to become ‘the democratic face of the Irish revolution’, he had to dismiss the anti-Treatyite party, which carried within it other inherent values of Sinn Féin.⁹³ Beneath the various democratic teleologies, Farrell’s paradigm is always to be found. Manifesting first in the textbooks, historians imported this simplified meta-narrative into their research. In 1991 an *Irish Times* profile of Farrell affectionately titled him ‘Swingometer of the nation’. Fairly, the sobriquet might have referenced Farrell’s response to Southern consciousness as much as his work as a television psephologist. ‘[Before 1971] I had not seen a single government minute or any government documentation’, Farrell told his interviewer; ‘I had to leap in the dark, to hazard judgements which flew in the face of Oakshott’s injunction that history is what the evidence obliges you to believe’.⁹⁴

V

Shifts in interpretations did not go unnoticed, and here we will examine some early responses to Farrell’s thesis and its application in historical writing. In December 1971 Lyons delivered a radio lecture marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.⁹⁵ Lyons cautioned against reductive readings of Irish history sometimes expressed through the idea that separatist protest could be understood as the ‘oscillation between peaceful methods of agitation and methods of physical-force’. ‘It is dangerously simple’, he warned, ‘because it assumes that peaceful and violent agitation are two opposing poles with no resting-place in between’. He concluded: ‘A theory of society which depends upon the members of that society recognising no middle ground between extremes seems to me excessively naive’.⁹⁶ Lyons’s thinking provided the foundations for a paper delivered by Fanning in 1975 to the International Congress of Historical Sciences.⁹⁷ Fanning

⁹² Charles Townshend review of Curran’s *The birth of the Irish Free State* in *E.H.R.*, 98/386 (Jan. 1983), pp 228–9; idem, ‘The meaning of Irish freedom: constitutionalism in the Free State’ in *R. Hist. Soc. Trans.*, sixth series, viii (Cambridge, 1998), p. 57; idem, *Ireland: the 20th century* (London, 1999), p. 115.

⁹³ Michael Laffan, *The resurrection of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 465; cf. Regan, *Counter-revolution*, pp 53–60.

⁹⁴ *Irish Times*, 7 Sept. 1991.

⁹⁵ F. S. L. Lyons, ‘The meaning of independence’ in Farrell (ed.), *Irish parliamentary tradition*, pp 223–33.

⁹⁶ Lyons, ‘Meaning of independence’, p. 224.

⁹⁷ The paper was delivered on 27 August 1975 at the International Congress of Historical Sciences (I.C.S.H.) in San Francisco: it ‘marked the first occasion, since Ireland became affiliated to the I.C.S.H. in 1938, when a paper on Irish history has been presented’. The paper has been cited or referenced on few occasions. Garvin and Lee do so without referencing its historiographical critique. Jeffrey Prager quotes an extract relating to the ‘new’ history’s affirmation of the democratic tradition in Irish politics. R. Fanning, ‘Leadership and transition from the politics of revolution to the politics of party: the example of Ireland,

responded to recent revisions to the ‘old official history’, among them Farrell’s.⁹⁸ In what is a significant argument, Fanning identified how Northern violence was galvanising a new and ahistorical interpretation.⁹⁹ This was partially true, although Farrell’s original article predated the Northern violence, a point overlooked by Fanning when addressing a revised version of it in Farrell’s 1971 book. In this, Farrell argued that ‘the mainstream of the Irish political tradition ... remained [after 1916], as events were to show, firmly committed to a liberal-democratic, representative and essentially conservative course’.¹⁰⁰ And it was the teleological construction contained in that sentence to which Fanning objected. Fanning’s counterblast stressed that *all* revolutionaries demonstrated ambivalence towards democracy. As late as 1929, he noted, de Valera remained sceptical about majority rule.¹⁰¹ ‘Now, when academic historians question the myths of the old, “official” history’, wrote Fanning, ‘in particular, the “tendency to assert that constitutional agitation failed ... that violence will always hold the key to success” – they find they are no longer crying in the wilderness, but rather they are part of a larger louder chorus – a sort of Irish intellectual establishment’.¹⁰² Fanning cautioned that old myths were being replaced by new ones ‘affirming the strength of the democratic tradition in Irish politics’.¹⁰³

During the decades of Northern violence, many historians contributed to reductive interpretations of state formation by exclusively attributing anti-democratic values to the state’s opponents.¹⁰⁴ In 1983 Fanning revised his early work, and made his contribution to this narrative where he claimed that the 1922 ‘pact’ general election ‘conferred and, in Ireland at least, was perceived as conferring upon the Provisional government a democratic mandate which, however attenuated by the pact, enabled them to claim that a majority of the people supported the treaty’.¹⁰⁵ In identifying claims on majority support for the Treaty, Fanning stated fact, but suggesting that the election ‘conferred’ a ‘democratic mandate’ on the Provisional government embellished the state’s new foundational myth: its possession of democratic legitimacy.¹⁰⁶ It is useful, therefore, to compare Fanning’s 1983

1914–1939’ in *Reports: 14th International Congress of the Historical Sciences* (3 vols, New York, 1977), iii, 1741–68; ‘Thirty-seventh annual report of the Irish Committee of Historical Sciences, November 1974–December 1975’ in *I.H.S.*, xx, no. 77 (Mar. 1976), p. 63; T. Garvin, *The evolution of Irish nationalist politics* (Dublin, 1980), p. 199 n.44; Lee, *Ireland*, p. 87 n.127; J. Prager, *Building democracy in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 15; M. Gallagher, ‘The pact general election of 1922’ in *I.H.S.*, xxi, no. 84 (Sept. 1979), pp 405; John A. Murphy, ‘The Anglo-Irish Treaty and after: the Canadian model and context’ in R. O’Driscoll and L. Reynolds (eds), *The untold story* (Toronto, 1988), p. 891.

⁹⁸ Fanning, ‘Leadership’, p. 1743.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Farrell, *Founding of Dáil Éireann*, p. 7, quoted in Fanning, ‘Leadership’, p. 1743.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1743.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, quote taken from Lyons, ‘Meaning of independence’, p. 224.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 1743.

¹⁰⁴ Curran, *Birth of the Irish Free State*; Prager, *Building democracy*, Lee, *Ireland*; Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ire.*; Garvin, *1922*; Richard English, *Ernie O’Malley: IRA intellectual* (Oxford, 1996); Laffan, *Resurrection of Ire.*; C. Townshend, *Ireland: the 20th century* (London, 1999); O’Halpin, *Defending Ire.*; B. Girvin, *From Union to Union* (Dublin, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Regan, *Counter-revolution*, pp 68–9; idem, ‘Southern Irish nationalism’, pp 213–15.

assessment with his 1975 treatment of the pact framing the same general-election result. In 1975 he had written:

Yet the antipathy to party politics remained among the Treaty's supporters, as Cosgrave's plea that the Dáil 'get away from the page of party politics and the page of party suspicion' testifies. Such antipathy can also be detected in Collins's pact with de Valera in May 1922 ... Collins defended the pact, recently described [by Lyons] as a 'thoroughly undemocratic procedure ... and travesty of the electoral process'.¹⁰⁷

Whilst no contradiction exists between Fanning's two conclusions, the shift in emphasis in 1983 placed new stress on the Treatyites' unambiguous democratic credentials. But the democratic value and legitimacy of any election framed in a 'choice between the treaty and the threat of war'¹⁰⁸ remained doubtful, and not addressing the implications of British threats for Irish electoral choices helped Fanning explain the Civil War as a conflict between 'anti-democratic forces, headed by the I.R.A.' and a democratically mandated Provisional government. In so doing, Fanning imposed historiographical order on the chaotic early state, and this reductive approach deserves careful consideration as we return now to consider treatments of civil–military relations.

VI

'The recent history of many newly emergent nations', wrote Fanning in 1975, 'illustrates how frequently ... soldiers have found it impossible to relinquish the power they wielded during their revolutions after independence'.¹⁰⁹ When the Provisional government minutes were released in the 1970s, they revealed important references that bolstered Fanning's 1975 interpretation, and those of O'Beirne-Ranelagh and Ó Broin of 1976. On 12 July 1922 the minutes recorded that without government sanction Collins 'announced' that he was taking the position of commander-in-chief of the army.¹¹⁰ Later that day, he 'announced' the establishment of a 'War Council of Three' – consisting of Collins, O'Duffy and fellow I.R.B. man, General Richard Mulcahy – as the body to direct the Civil War.¹¹¹ On 2 August the same minutes recorded that government ministers attempted to bring the army under their control. Their failure to do so confirmed the army's autonomy, as identified later by Fanning.

Collins accumulated power through July and August 1922; it is necessary here to briefly outline the sequence of events.¹¹² The Dáil was suspended at the beginning of July, and Collins – first on 18 August and again on 21 August – challenged

¹⁰⁷ Fanning, 'Leadership', p. 1760.

¹⁰⁸ *Idem*, *Independent Ire.*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ *Idem*, 'Leadership', p. 1761.

¹¹⁰ Dáil and Provisional government minutes, 12 July (morning) 1922 (N.A.I., Dáil and Provisional government minutes, G1/3).

¹¹¹ Mulcahy's status within the I.R.B. is contested where David Fitzpatrick writes, 'Regan ... repeat[s] the common but erroneous assertion that Mulcahy was "not a senior" member of the I.R.B. in its decline': see D. Fitzpatrick, 'Review article' in *History Ireland*, 8/2 (2000), p. 49. Dáil and Provisional government minutes, 12 July (evening) 1922 (N.A.I., Dáil and Provisional government minutes, G1/3).

¹¹² For a detailed consideration, see Regan, 'Collins', pp 318–46.

proposals from the civilian ministers to have Parliament convoked. The government's 'decision' on 18 August was for a temporary prorogation, but Collins insisted that Parliament would not meet until 'matters improved'; this he confirmed in a communication (his last) dispatched from Cork on 21 August. Collins's actions at once signalled a reluctance to have Parliament meet whilst arguably identifying him as the regime's supreme authority. At this moment, it is contended, a Treatyite military dictatorship briefly succeeded.¹¹³ On 24 August, two days after Collins's death, the ministers overturned Collins's decisions – including his appointment of Ó Murthuile as Civic Guard commissioner – and summoned the new assembly, which duly met on 9 September. Where historians adopted a constitutional narrative, complications that were discoverable in the newly released archives were overlooked.

Collins's behaviour anticipated the post-colonial soldier-revolutionaries to whom Fanning alluded in 1975. In 1983 Fanning spoke only about 'distrust between "soldier" and "civilian" leaders in emerging nation states'.¹¹⁴ Illustrating this relationship, Fanning quoted at length from a brief by attorney-general Hugh Kennedy, delivered on 3 April 1923, that placed heavy emphasis on constitutional developments in the army. Following Cabinet criticism of the army's conduct of the Civil War, ministers had demanded the separation of the appointments of defence minister and commander-in-chief held concurrently by Richard Mulcahy, Collins's successor. On 28 March Mulcahy informed Cosgrave that the army council's staff officers had resigned in protest.¹¹⁵ Kennedy rose to this crisis, providing Cosgrave with the argument for resuming the *status quo ante* to mend the government–army rupture.

Kennedy's brief was purposefully written to persuade the Cabinet that Mulcahy should continue in both his civil and military roles, bonding the army to the state. In this respect, Kennedy was successful, and Mulcahy retained his dual authority. Kennedy's brief played an important role in the narrative developed by Fanning because it provided the constitutional interpretation of the army's history. In respect of Collins, this was neglectful. Kennedy wrote: 'vesting of the supreme army command in the head of the civil government [Collins] had an enormous political value. It diverted the allegiance of the armed military executive to the civil executive government of the state'.¹¹⁶ But many soldiers remained loyal to Collins's I.R.B. or simply to Collins, and this challenged Kennedy's assertion that Collins initiated the 'first step in the direction of constitutionalising the Army'.¹¹⁷ 'Kennedy saw Collins's creation and assumption of the position of commander-in-chief', Fanning wrote, 'as the next "clear and definite advance"', an act "of signal courage, foresight and statesmanship".¹¹⁸ But this glossed over what was, in fact, a far more fraught relationship between soldiers and civilians. Integral to this was the role of a rival authority (the I.R.B. executive) laying claim to a rival

¹¹³ Ibid., pp 345–6, *passim*.

¹¹⁴ Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, p. 43.

¹¹⁵ Mulcahy to Cosgrave, 28 Mar. 1923 (U.C.D.A.D., Mulcahy papers, P7/C/42).

¹¹⁶ Kennedy to Cosgrave, 3 Apr. 1923, quoted in Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, p. 46.

¹¹⁷ Fanning sourced Collins's appointment as commander-in-chief not in the government minutes but in an extract found in the Cabinet file 'Army appointments 1922'. In this file, the appointments are incorrectly prefaced with 'P.G. Decision 12th July, 1922 (P.G. 57)': see Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, p. 18 n.37.

¹¹⁸ Idem, *Independent Ire.*, p. 46.

legitimacy (the I.R.B.'s republic) inside the state. Any soldier appointing himself supreme military commander is a matter of contention in a constitutional narrative. But the actions of the president of the I.R.B.'s republic surely demanded especially careful consideration.

Fanning's adoption of Kennedy's phrase 'creation and assumption' to explain Collins becoming the commander-in-chief also deserves elaboration – all the more so because, earlier in Fanning's narrative, Collins's military appointment had been relegated to a footnote: 'Collins told the provisional government on 12 July that he was taking up duty as commander-in-chief and would be unable to act in a ministerial capacity until further notice ... SPO S 1318'.¹¹⁹ Placing this information in a footnote avoided a very significant interruption in Fanning's narrative emphasising Treatyite democracy and constitutional development. It is true that Kennedy's memorandum acted as a corrective where it identified the army's autonomy:

the direction and control of its policy, the mode and authority of its appointments, have all been assumed by the army itself – they have never been defined or expressly delegated either by the Provisional Government or by Árd Chomhairle [executive council] or by the Dáil. The idea of an almost independent Army Executive ... has a long life ...¹²⁰

But what was unclear in Fanning's text was the full significance of brothers appointing themselves to the supreme command and Collins's contempt for the civil authority.

Once the I.R.B.'s continued claim to be the government of the republic was acknowledged, the actions of its executive government (Collins, O'Duffy and Ó Murthuile) inside the new state achieved a new sensitivity for any account championing constitutional/democratic development. In 1983 Fanning ignored Ó Murthuile's appointment as commissioner of the Civic Guard; nor did he identify Collins's veto of Parliament's convocation. Lee, Michael Hopkinson, Maryanne Valiulis, Peter Hart, Fearghal McGarry, following Curran and Fanning, also wrote the July appointments into a constitutional teleology, disregarding the anomaly of brothers appointing themselves to the highest ranks.¹²¹ Following a similar democratic narrative, O'Halpin does not discuss the I.R.B.'s role inside the army before 1924; this raises an important interpretative issue.¹²² The historiography following accounts furnished by O'Beirne-Ranelagh and Curran suggests that the I.R.B. became redundant before June 1922; however, Ó Murthuile, among others, contradicts this.¹²³ But acknowledging Collins's redrafting of the I.R.B.'s

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18 n.37 (see also p. 33).

¹²⁰ Kennedy to Cosgrave, 3 Apr. 1923, quoted in Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, p. 45.

¹²¹ Curran, *Birth of the Irish Free State*, pp 239–40; Lee, *Ireland*, pp 61, 68; for a revision, see Lee in *Sunday Tribune* (Dublin), 17 Sept. 2000; Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green* (Dublin, 1988), pp. 113, 117–124; M. Valiulis, *Portrait of a revolutionary* (Dublin, 1992), pp 159, 163; Hart, *Mick*, pp 400–4 (elsewhere, I argue, Hart misinterprets communications between Collins and the government identifying military/I.R.B. dominance over the ministers (Regan, 'Collins', pp 330–3); Hart makes no reference to the contradictory interpretation offered in Regan's *Irish counter-revolution* (or, indeed, to the book); Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy* (Oxford, 2005), pp 106–7.

¹²² O'Halpin, *Defending Ire.*, p. 47.

¹²³ Claims Collins rededicated himself to the I.R.B. are corroborated by senior Treatyite officer Joe Sweeney's testimony: 'After the civil war [began]', Sweeney recalled, 'Collins called a number of us up to Dublin for a meeting the purpose of which was the reorganisation of the IRB in the army'. Joseph Sweeney (O'Malley notebooks, UCDA, P17b/97),

constitution after June 1922 demands that the Treatyite I.R.B. must be considered as an instrument of his power. Ó Murthuile is, therefore, problematic for any refined constitutional narrative. Together with Curran, Fanning and Keogh, democratic-state-formation advocates Garvin,¹²⁴ and O’Halpin, alongside Laffan, do not cite Ó Murthuile’s memoir in their treatments of 1922, so for these historians Collins’s I.R.B. does not present any complicating factor.

Referencing Ó Murthuile in his 2003 biography of Harry Boland, Fitzpatrick commented on Treatyite civil–military relations.¹²⁵ Responding to Boland’s description of the July appointments as a ‘military dictatorship’,¹²⁶ Fitzpatrick cited evidence supporting constitutional authority for ‘the transfer of executive power to a Council of War’, although this, too, is contained only in a footnote: ‘The triumviral Council of War was appointed by the Provisional Government on the evening of 12 July: Rex Taylor, *Michael Collins* (London, 1961: 1st edn. 1958) p. 194 (citing M[ichael] C[ollins] Notebook, 12 July)’.¹²⁷ That the evidence for government sanction rests on this secondary reference is noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, the provenance of this evidence was queried by Deirdre McMahon, who noted that ‘Taylor was the only person who had access to this material’.¹²⁸ (Following Fanning’s 1983 treatment, it was unlikely that authorisation for these appointments came from the Provisional government; nor, indeed, does Taylor’s source claim that it had.¹²⁹) Secondly, the suggestion that the war council was nominated by the Provisional government and that its appointment was followed by the ‘transfer’ of executive powers is a revision. In 1998 Fitzpatrick wrote that the war against the anti-Treatyites was directed by a “‘war council” ... to which the provisional government surrendered many of its functions’.¹³⁰ In dealing with Boland’s accusation of Treatyite dictatorship, in 2003 Fitzpatrick’s explanation of the constitutional ‘transfer’ of executive powers to the generals rests precariously on Taylor’s source.

Fanning wrote in 1983: ‘Collins, having relinquished his post as chairman and with it his iron grip on the day-to-day control of policy, had more pressing preoccupations as commander-in-chief’.¹³¹ But Collins relinquished nothing: rather, he repeatedly asserted his civilian titles of chairman of the Provisional government

quoted in Regan, *Counter-revolution*, p. 189. Curran, ‘The decline and fall of the I.R.B.’ in *Éire-Ireland*, 10/1 (1975), pp 14–23.

¹²⁴ Gavin consulted the memoir when researching his study *The evolution of Irish nationalist politics* (Dublin, 1981), citing it once (p. 230 n.38), but overlooks it in his *Nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858–1928* (Oxford, 1986), and again in his book 1922 (op. cit.)

¹²⁵ D. Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland’s Irish revolution* (Cork, 2003), pp 313–16.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 313 n.44.

¹²⁸ D. McMahon, ‘Michael Collins – his biographers Piaras Béaslaí and Rex Taylor’ in Doherty & Keogh (eds), *Collins*, p. 133.

¹²⁹ Collins’s note quoted by Taylor but omitted by Fitzpatrick reads: ‘At Gov. meeting this evening Council of War appointed M.C[ollins]. C in C; R. J. M[ulcahy]. M[inster of]. D[efence] & C[hief] of S[taff]; G.[sic] O’D[uffy] C[hief] of S[taff (sic)] & G[eneral]. C[(sic) Officer?]. C[ommanding]. South W[est]. Command’ (my expansions). While the appointments were made at a government meeting, there is nothing here to indicate the appointments were made by the government. R. Taylor, *Michael Collins* (Dublin, 1958), p. 237; Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, p. 145.

¹³⁰ Fitzpatrick, *Two Irelands*, p. 130.

¹³¹ Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, p. 33.

and minister for finance whilst commander-in-chief. This arrangement hitherto had been the institutional memory. But what matters more is that the archival evidence demonstrates Collins's tightening grip on all decision-making, great and small.¹³² As information about the Treatyite I.R.B. emerged, it might have become apparent that Collins's accumulation of power had ensured his control of both the civil and military spheres, and that the civilian ministers, however ineffectively, protested against this. Fanning missed this by constitutionalising civil–military relations after the fashion of Kennedy. The wonder of it is that so few specialists acknowledged evidence contradicting their interpretations.¹³³

From interpretations of the July army appointments, we may conclude that the constitutional meta-narrative overrode evidence of extra-constitutional alternatives. This is explicable in terms of Kuhnian theory: 'those [phenomena] that will not normally fit the box [that is, the paradigm] are often not seen at all'.¹³⁴ Arguably, the historicisation of the July appointments is an example of what we might call 'normal history'; this approximates to Kuhnian 'normal science' – effectively, repetition of interpretation, as later historians reinforce views of earlier writers who, having already explained the past, obviate the need to rethink it. In the example offered here, however, this is an unacceptable explanation on its own. Fanning, as we have seen, identified the problem of revolutionaries relinquishing power, but tested against this interpretation, his later analysis endorsed unambiguous, constitutional development. It is true that Fitzpatrick rejects cruder democratic narratives; nevertheless, latterly he endorses an interpretation of Treatyite constitutional evolution that encounters significant evidential problems when explaining the July army appointments as governmental. In both instances, the historians cite not the best evidence (government minutes) but evidence supporting constitutional interpretations.¹³⁵ For these to be plausible, Collins's retrospective instruction to Griffith on 14 July that the government issue 'some sort of Official Instruction to me nominating the War Council of Three' must also be elided. This letter finally belies any notion that the army appointments made two days earlier were ever a government decision at the behest of government, but neither Fanning nor Fitzpatrick make reference to it.¹³⁶ Nor does Lawlor in her

¹³² P. Béaslaí, *Micheal Collins and the making of a new Ireland* (2 vols, London, 1926), ii, 429; M. J. Costello in *Irish Press*, 8 Oct. 1982. On the enforcement of licensing laws, including Collins's chastisement of Cosgrave for non-attention to detail, see Collins to Cosgrave, 31 July, and esp. 3 Aug. 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy papers, P7/B/29); chairman [Collins] to acting chairman on 'Prisoners on hunger strike in Derry jail', 31 July 1922 (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/65); Collins [from 'chairman's office'] to Churchill, 27 July 1922, 'on administration of the diseases of animals acts' (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/65).

¹³³ Cf. M. Ryan, *The day Michael Collins was shot* (Dublin, 1991), pp 24–5; Hopkinson, *Green against green*, p. 136

¹³⁴ Kuhn, *Structure*, p. 24.

¹³⁵ Fanning sourced Collins's appointment not in the copies of government minutes but in an extract found in the Cabinet file 'Army appointments 1922'; in this, 'Collins told the provisional government ...' is prefaced incorrectly with 'P.G. Decision 12th July, 1922 (P.G. 57)'. This contradicts Kennedy's assertion of army autonomy and, indeed, the government minutes: see Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, p. 18 n.37.

¹³⁶ Collins to Griffith, 14 July 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy papers, P7/B/30). A copy is located in 'SPO S'1318', cited above. Inexplicably, Hart postdates this letter to 14 August 1922, which undermines its immediate relevance to the July army appointments. Griffith's

1983 book *Britain and Ireland, 1914–23*, where she paints a picture of military domination: ‘a proclamation proroguing Parliament was drafted and by the 17th [July] the transformation from civil to military was almost complete’.¹³⁷ This is significant because in her 1976 M.A. thesis, ‘Civil–military relations in Ireland, 1921–23’, Collins’s letter of 14 July is cited but – in what is now a familiar pattern – only in Lawlor’s two hundred pages of endnotes.¹³⁸ If the letter’s importance was lost on a student arguing that ‘Collins meticulously supported the principle of civil supremacy’, it should not have been lost on Williams, Lawlor’s supervisor.¹³⁹ It is noteworthy that the account of Collins’s I.R.B. written by a founder of the new state, Ó Murthuile, went unreferenced by Lawlor.¹⁴⁰ This, again, must serve to caution those approaching state–formation historiography, as the democratic narratives advanced by Curran, Fanning, Garvin, O’Halpin and Laffan, among others, would be unsustainable had they referenced the anomalies to be discovered in the memoir deposited at U.C.D. since 1974.¹⁴¹

The closer we examine the evidence, the louder the doubts ring out about the dominance of any one political culture in a state created by complex constitutional and extra-constitutional forces. Despite this, constitutional – later, democratic – interpretations became engrained within historical thinking, and a generation of professional historians has looked askance at the proposition that, at its inception, Cabinet government in independent Ireland cohabited with a short-lived dictatorship.¹⁴² Adapting Kuhn’s theory to normal history, this term can be applied – though not rigidly – to historians socialised after the constitutional paradigm established itself inside the academy. Applied to earlier generations, it is clear that phenomena contradicting the constitutional paradigm were quickly recognised but thereafter went unresolved. This complicates matters greatly, and shows up the limitations of Kuhnian theory when applied in spheres other than those for which it was originally formulated (in the natural sciences).

death on 12 August, properly, should have alerted Hart to the incorrect date he attributes to it. Hart, *Mick*, p. 469.

¹³⁷ Sheila Lawlor, *Britain and Ireland, 1914–23* (Dublin, 1983), p. 197.

¹³⁸ Eadem, ‘Civil-military relations in Ireland 1921–23’ (M.A. thesis, University College, Dublin, 1976), p. 302.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. O’Beirne-Ranelagh, ‘I.R.B.’, p. 27 n. 11.

¹⁴¹ For writers citing the memoir, see Ó Broin, *Revolutionary: Michael Collins* (Dublin, 1980); J. Gaughan, *Austin Stack* (Dublin, 1977); T. Dwyer, *Michael Collins and the Treaty* (Dublin, 1981); Garvin, *Evolution of Irish nationalist politics*; Valiulis, *Almost a mutiny* (Dublin, 1985); Hopkinson, *Green against green*; Coogan, *Collins*; B. P. Murphy, *Patrick Pearse and the lost republican ideal* (Dublin, 1991); A. Mitchell, *Revolutionary government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1995); Regan, *Counter-revolution*; F. J. Costello, *The Irish revolution and its aftermath* (Dublin, 2003); Fitzpatrick, *Harry*; Hart, *Mick*; McGarry, *Eoin O’Duffy*; O. McGee, *The IRB* (Dublin, 2005).

¹⁴² Reviewing Fearghal McGarry’s biography, *Eoin O’Duffy*, Regan commented: ‘the argument that a treatyite dictatorship of some order was in place before Collins’s death, on 22 August 1922, should not be dismissed out of hand. Not, that is, without first addressing the interpretation, and the supporting evidence’. Responding, McGarry made no reference to this. Review no. 583, at: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/regan/jresp.html> (accessed 19 May 2009).

VII

The new public history's authority derived largely from research on new sources. Less obvious was the influence of Southern nationalism, with its lack of interest in recovering *Irlanda irredenta*. In the 1980s this ideological conflict provided the context for Collins's emergence as the pre-eminent national icon of Southerners; a discussion of this follows.

After 1922 Collins retained a following that extended beyond the party faithful, but in the 1980s his celebrity began to transcend lingering Civil War grievances. To his admirers, Collins remains a 'peacemaker', but it is true that he found no peace in his lifetime. In his last months he pursued a belligerent policy against Northern Ireland. In 1990 Tim Pat Coogan argued that these actions were worthy of any I.R.A. chief-of-staff, but none of this detracted from Collins's adulation in a society rejecting the 'Provos'.¹⁴³ About this time, in the satirical sketches of RTÉ television's *Nighthawks*, a frozen 'de Valera' was seen stored in a freezer from where he emerged to remind audiences of the Ireland they had escaped; this satisfied something Southerners wanted but which they were unwilling to identify as a revision of older nationalist identities. After the 1970s Collins became a revitalised national hero in the Republic, where he became acceptable to Southerners in ways that de Valera and Patrick Pearse no longer were. This demanded that a distinction be made between various revolutionaries of the Collins era, and – notwithstanding Coogan – between Collins and the Provisionals.

The adulation of Collins offers an insight into a popular nationalism driven – somewhat contradictorily – by its association with the state more than with any irredentist republicanism. Since 1978 fifteen or more biographies both hastened and endorsed Collins's elevation, and these followed much the same path, being uncritical and often emphasising Collins's conversion to constitutionalism.¹⁴⁴ These interpretations originated partly in a professional historiography binding itself to the constitutional paradigm. In this, ultimately, what distinguished Collins from revolutionaries like Pearse or de Valera – and, still later, from the Provisionals – was his role as defender of electoral democracy and, *in extremis*, as a reluctant revolutionary.¹⁴⁵ This reductive analysis is supported in Neil Jordan's 1996 feature film *Michael Collins*. What first made killing unavoidable is identified in the script: 'COLLINS: ... 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'.¹⁴⁶ Collins fought fellow republicans in 1922 because, as Jordan construed it, he was defending Irish democracy against the republican rejection of the general-election result.¹⁴⁷ 'In his brief lifetime', reads the film's concluding caption, '[Collins] had fought the British Empire to a stalemate, negotiated the first Treaty of independence for Ireland and overseen its transition to democracy'. Jordan told an interviewer in 1996: 'I made this film ... to rescue that period from the shadow thrown over it

¹⁴³ Coogan, *Collins*, p. 333.

¹⁴⁴ M. Hopkinson, 'Biography of the revolutionary period: Michael Collins and Kevin Barry' in *I.H.S.*, xxviii, no. 111 (1993), p. 312.

¹⁴⁵ Williams, 'Irish Republican Brotherhood', p. 148; Garvin, *1922*, p. 129; Lee, *Ireland*, p. 68; see Fanning, *Independent Ire.*, p. 43; Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ire.*, pp 10–11.

¹⁴⁶ N. Jordan, *Michael Collins* (London, 1996), p. 104.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

by the war ... in the north of Ireland'. He continued: 'In the 1918 general election Sinn Féin won 80 per cent of the vote ... whereas the situation of the Provisional IRA in the island of Ireland is that they actually have the antipathy of probably 96 per cent of the people'.¹⁴⁸ Mandated violence became critical to the presentation of the hero: Jordan, a trained historian – as he pointedly noted – spoke with authority.¹⁴⁹

VIII

The argument presented in this article is intended to suggest that there is something intrinsically wrong with the empirical method employed by some Irish historians. A problem is apparent where we notice that important evidence is overlooked by historians who promote a conspicuous constitutional narrative in their writing. Empiricism is vulnerable to elision, and as a method for historical interpretation may become unreliable in the absence of a truly critical historical community. Elision is a difficult practice to address because the positive evidence of its deployment is, in many cases, difficult – sometimes impossible – to discern. When, therefore, we critique what appears to be omitted, we risk imposing impossible demands on earlier historians, where we would unfairly expect them to have looked at everything or to have included everything. Alternatively, we may wrongly attribute importance to evidence that it did not have in an earlier historiography. But against this we have to balance what historians can reasonably be expected to consult and evaluate. Elision can be accidental or reflect a conscious or even subconscious response to historical information, but where patterns of omission occur, and are repeated, explanations not relying wholly on chance must be sought. Kuhn offers partial solutions to this perennial problem by furnishing an explanation (thereby opening the possibility of a discussion) as to why some information goes unrecognised. It also has to be conceded that we are dealing with something that does not conform exactly to Kuhn's idealised typology – if, that is, anything truly conforms to such typologies. What confounds the Kuhnian explanation here is that historians early on identified anomalies and other problems in what Farrell and others wrote about constitutionalism. The historiographical debates of the 1970s highlight the importance of elision because these coincided with the release of new evidence, which ordinarily should have complicated rather than simplified interpretation.

Fanning's 1983 subtle revision is therefore important not just because he changed emphasis but because, in so doing, he embraced the reductive interpretation that he had earlier criticised. It is true that Fanning introduced complexities in what is a sophisticated textbook, but this innovation was constrained by an improbable democratic paradigm superseding even Farrell's teleological vision. The problem remains that no historian has satisfactorily reconciled the best evidence with democratic and constitutional interpretations of Collins's acquisition of power, the I.R.B. inside the state, and the coercions framing 1922. Lyons, it is true, later fell silent about the deficiencies of the constitutional narrative, but the explanation for this may be discerned from a lecture he delivered in November

¹⁴⁸ *Independent* (London), 7 Nov. 1996

¹⁴⁹ *Morning Ireland*, RTÉ Radio 1, 15 Jan. 1996.

1971: ‘professional historians’, Lyons acknowledged, ‘have been affected by the upsurge of violence during the past few years. They have been affected in a way that is at once highly creditable and potentially dangerous’. Continuing, he identified the dilemma confronting the Irish contemporary historian:

Irish historians – or some of them – have begun rather feverishly to examine their consciences ... to see whether by their writing they have given undue prominence to the concept of revolutionary militancy ... To reactivate the study of constitutional history in revulsion from present violence would merely be to commit in a different form the cardinal sin of interpreting the past in the light of the present and would result, as this sin always does result, in a wrong principle of selection and therefore in a distorted interpretation of events.

In the next sentence, Lyons fired a decisive warning shot across the bow of the public historians:

The balanced approach, which I have no doubt the profession will continue to follow now as hitherto, will be to take the past on its own terms, to look the men of action in the face as firmly as the men of peace and to recognise that since violence and non-violence co-exist in each one of us, the theory of history which is most likely to mislead will be the one which exalts either to the exclusion of the other.¹⁵⁰

Few dared challenge Lyons before his death in 1983. At the end of that year, Fanning’s robust affirmation of the state’s democratic origins in *Independent Ireland* identified not the end of the constitutional narrative’s very own ‘Kuhnian crisis’ that Lyons had initiated in 1971 but the temporary suspension of that crisis. What followed may look like a paradigm shift, but where historians knowingly retreated into simplified narratives this was merely the façade of a public history passing itself off as academic research. Since the late 1990s, this historiography increasingly had to accommodate contradictory interpretations – sometimes by ignoring them, sometimes by praising them – in a bid to preserve the appearance of a consensus. Concomitant with this, established historians have not engaged new researchers on matters of fundamental contention because, one can only suspect, meaningful debate risks exposing an unsustainable historiography.

Bradshaw’s distinction between academic and public history may remain useful, except, perhaps, in the Irish example here. Undoubtedly, historical research should filter into the public sphere, but with state-formation historiography the opposite occurred: public history informed research in universities. In this reversal, a nation-building history became confused with what was presented as authoritative academic research repeating the narrative, as Kissane reminds us, that ‘the Free State’s triumph in 1923 was a victory of the people against military despotism, a victory of the ballot box over the bullet’.¹⁵¹ But it is now clear that this kind of rhetoric has always been *reductio ad absurdum*, and should be consigned to a propagandist approach belonging to the Civil War period. As Ireland becomes a more self-confident place in what are more peaceful times, the historical community’s tolerance for this kind of reassessment of orthodox historiographies appears to be increasing. Symptomatic is Ferriter’s re-evaluation of de Valera’s (and, tan-

¹⁵⁰ F. S. L. Lyons, ‘The dilemma of the Irish contemporary historian’ in *Hermathena*, 115 (1973), pp 53–4; cf. C. Brady, “‘Constructive and instrumental’: the dilemma of Ireland’s first “new historians”” in C. Brady (ed.), *Interpreting Irish history* (Dublin, 1994), p. 23.

¹⁵¹ The phrase is, again, O’Hegarty’s (*Victory*, p. 141); Kissane, *Politics*, p. 207.

gentially, Collins's) historical reputation.¹⁵² Using de Valera's archive, Ferriter's empathetic reinterpretation broadly argues that modernisation and the Celtic Tiger prompted changed attitudes toward his main subject. But it is true that this only partly explains why many historians preferred de Valera's fellow-traveller Collins, and this calls forth broader interpretive contexts, not the least of which is nearly thirty years of civil war in Northern Ireland.

It is impossible, then, not to notice that de Valera's recent rehabilitation by Ferriter follows (after decades of official embarrassment) the Irish government's rededication of the Easter 1916 Rising as the state's foundational moment.¹⁵³ On Easter Sunday 2006 the military parade in Dublin was reinstated; a reported 120,000 citizens were present to view a spectacle their governments had denied them for thirty-five years. Surveying the debate surrounding this, Gabriel Doherty wrote: 'as far as the overwhelming majority of the public were concerned, the "valuable, noble, and enduring" elements of that historic [republican] tradition were widely, and passionately, cherished'. He concluded:

It was the revisionists who were found to be guilty of living in the past – the same intellectual crime that had, of course, formed part of their indictment of unreconstructed nationalist historiography. It was they who were shown to be incapable of moving with the times ... They faced a superior enemy on the battlefield of public opinion, and lost without much of a fight.¹⁵⁴

Whilst historians remain sensitive about the reception their work received, an appeal to the public to decide what interpretation should be endorsed makes claims against history as an academic discipline. Doherty's approach would again risk historians becoming something akin to professional nationalists, where they would trace the outlines of nationalism responding to changes in circumstance – not to say administration.

Like Bradshaw, some see the enhancement of national consciousness as part of the historian's vocation, and, indeed, some believe that this is possible without unduly compromising method. As to whether this is desirable, an answer may be found through the scrutiny of scholarship produced under Bradshaw's burden: the histories written in support of constitutional, Southern Irish nationalism argue against his approach. No matter what knotted timber historians are hewn from, their work cannot transcend the ideologies of their age, least of all the bittersweet influence of nationalism. For all those writing Irish history after 1970, issues of identity and loyalty, together with social responsibility and career progression, posed dilemmas of conscience: these, ultimately, were resolved by choosing to preserve historical method or by bending it to the political interpretations Lewis outlines at the beginning of this article, and as described by Lyons at its summation. Recently, Margaret O'Callaghan referenced what she rightly identifies as Ireland's 'history wars': 'They have cost some people their careers', she tells us; 'they have marginalised important intellectuals and ... people have paid career

¹⁵² Ferriter, *Judging Dev.*

¹⁵³ See President Mary McAleese, '1916 – a view from 2006', *Irish Times*, 28 Jan. 2006.

¹⁵⁴ G. Doherty, 'The commemoration of the ninetieth anniversary of the Easter Rising' in idem and D. Keogh (eds), *1916: the long revolution* (Dublin, 2007), p. 407. The volume contains the proceedings relating to a conference held at University College, Cork, 27–28 Jan. 2006.

prices for not going along with a prevailing consensus'.¹⁵⁵ The substance of these observations deserves careful consideration in the context of the historiography described here. Whatever light any of this casts on recent historical writing, there remains the insidious influence of Irish public histories presented as objective historical research on our understanding of the past.¹⁵⁶ As we now face into multiple commemorations marking Irish-state-formation centenaries, it was never more appropriate to make the case for historical method against *panem et circenses*.¹⁵⁷

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¹⁵⁵ *Making history: the Irish historian*, dir. Seán Ó Mordha, RTÉ, 27 Nov. 2007.

¹⁵⁶ For a debate around some of these issues, see the author's review of Richard English's *Irish freedom* (London, 2006), and English's response: *Reviews in history*, <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/regan2.html> (accessed 17 July 2009).

¹⁵⁷ I wish to acknowledge the support of the British Academy and Carnegie Trust while researching this article, and also Deirdre McMahon and Sean Kane for their comments on early drafts.