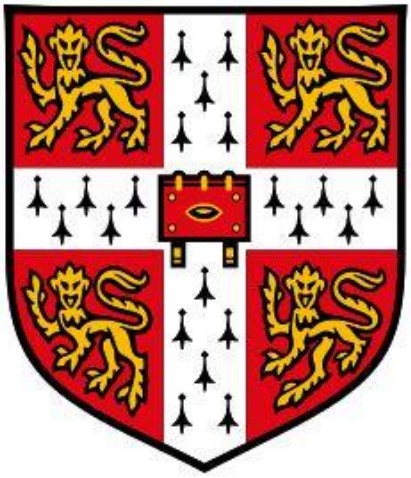
Conor Cruise O'Brien, public intellectuals, and politics in twentieth-century Ireland



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Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Faculty of History Degree Committee.

Abstract

Hugh Hanley

'Conor Cruise O'Brien, public intellectuals, and politics in twentieth-century Ireland'

This thesis is a study on the 'public intellectual' in mid-twentieth century Ireland, where the figure of the intellectual in politics was routinely maligned or altogether rejected by a broad cross-section of civil society for being insufficiently deferential to societal norms and out of touch with the 'real world'. It focuses on a major case study, Conor Cruise O'Brien (1917-2008), who, at the peak of his powers, achieved and maintained a remarkably high public profile. His books had a wide readership, his lectures drew sizeable audiences, and his public performances were widely covered in the Irish and international media. Based on the empirical analysis provided by a wide range of printed and manuscript sources, and by employing concepts and methods drawn from sociology and literary criticism, this thesis analyses Cruise O'Brien's self-making as an intellectual, the construction of his public persona, what he had to say about society, and the media through which he intervened in public debate. The main argument is that his 'positioning' as a 'courageous' figure helped to provide him with opportunities to intervene in public affairs and establish a significant reputation not only in Ireland, but also in Great Britain and the United States. In Ireland, Cruise O'Brien turned himself into the standard bearer of liberalism at a time when the country was on the cusp of deep social and cultural changes. This thesis revises existing accounts of his life and work, substituting a more historically grounded interpretation of his rise to public intellectual status, his ideas about historical objectivity and politics, his thinking about the role of intellectuals in public debate, the relationship between aesthetics and political action, and his use of the rhetoric of disease to construct an image of public intellectuals as doctors to the body politic. The pattern of his activity showed his determination to perform the role of the public intellectual. By opting for passionate engagement with contemporary political events, such as the Cold War and the Northern Irish Troubles, as opposed to the safety of the so-called 'ivory tower', Cruise O'Brien consistently earned the label 'courageous', feeding into his own self-positioning and supplementing his 'brand'.

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Introduction

Conor Cruise O'Brien has been the premier public intellectual … of 20th-century Ireland.[1]

The reason O'Brien had a greater impact on public opinion than other intellectuals then or now was not simply the originality of his thought or the clarity of his expression but his courage in leaving the academic ivory tower and taking the plunge into political life.[2]

… Conor Cruise O'Brien gives every impression of being that rara avis*, an Irish intellectual in the European mode.*[3]

For more than half a century, Conor Cruise O'Brien was the pre-eminent Irish intellectual. He intervened in public debates in Ireland and farther afield in Britain, the United States, and Africa. This thesis studies his performance in his role of public intellectual, arguing that his positioning as a 'courageous' figure helped to provide him with opportunities to intervene in public affairs and establish a significant reputation as a public intellectual. By examining themes that concerned him during his long career writing and speaking in public, it explores the ways in which he engaged with politics and public affairs more broadly and how the effects of these involvements had an impact on his intellectual productions. Cruise O'Brien is most remembered for his searing criticism of Irish republicanism in the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland,

[1] Frank Callanan, 'Birthday tributes to a national icon', *Sunday Independent*, 3 Nov. 2002.
[2] Stephen Collins, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien forced Ireland to reconsider nationalism', *Irish Times*, 2 Nov. 2017.
[3] W.J. McCormack, *The battle of the books: two decades of Irish cultural debate* (Mullingar: The Lilliput Press, 1986), 19.

but during his intellectual career he made important interventions in many other highly charged debates. Drawing on published and unpublished sources, this thesis revises existing accounts of his life and work, substituting a more historically grounded interpretation of his contributions to these debates. It breaks new ground in our understanding of the development of his career as a public intellectual, his thinking about the question of intellectuals and the politics of the Cold War, the relationship between aesthetics and political life, the matter of historical objectivity, and his image of public intellectuals as doctors to the body politic. It is not and does not aspire to be a new biography of Cruise O'Brien. Nor does it aim to offer a normative argument about how public intellectuals *ought* to act. Nearly a decade after Conor Cruise O'Brien's death, his friend, the barrister-cum-historian Frank Callanan, declared that 'We do not have a history of intellectuals in Ireland … but if and when we do it will pivot on [Conor] Cruise O'Brien.'[4] This thesis is intended as a contribution to this burgeoning field of historical enquiry.

In Ireland, the concept of the 'intellectual', later the 'public intellectual', has been politically charged and contested since it first gained prominence during the Dreyfus Affair in France at the end of the nineteenth century.[5] Ireland is not unique in this regard. The concept has been a site of contestation and a focus of disdain in the United States, Great Britain, continental Europe, and even in France, which has frequently been put forward as a paradise for intellectuals.[6] Scholars and critics routinely claim that intellectuals are a rare species in Ireland. For example, in one of the quotations at the head of this chapter, the literary critic W.J. McCormack claimed that as an Irish intellectual Cruise O'Brien was a '*rara avis*'.[7] This is somewhat counterintuitive for although many commentators have lamented the absence of public intellectuals from Irish public and political discourse, the list of figures other than Cruise O'Brien who have attracted the label 'public intellectual' is formidable. A cursory survey

[4] Frank Callanan, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien at 100', Paper read at Trinity College Dublin, Nov. 2017.
[5] For a detailed account on the association between the Dreyfus Affair and the emergence of the concept of the intellectual, see Christoph Charle, *Birth of the intellectuals, 1880-1900*, trans. David Fernbach and G.M. Goshgarian (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).
[6] See Stefan Collini, *Absent minds: intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); on the French case, see Jeremy Jennings, 'The view from Calais', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68 (2007), 381-87.
[7] McCormack, *Battle of the books*, 19.

includes law professor and former President of Ireland Mary Robinson, economist and former Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald, Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney, sociologist and President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins, canon lawyer and former President Mary McAleese, writer Anthony Cronin, philosopher Richard Kearney, literary critics Seamus Deane, Edna Longley, and Declan Kiberd, historians R.F. Foster and Diarmaid Ferriter, Supreme Court Justices Catherine McGuinness and Adrian Hardiman, lawyers like Ivana Bacik and John Kelly, novelists Anne Enright and John Banville, and journalists Fintan O'Toole, Desmond Fennell, and John Horgan. The tag has also been retrospectively applied to Edmund Burke, Oscar Wilde, W.B. Yeats, George Russell, Eoin MacNeill, George Bernard Shaw, Ernie O'Malley, Sean O'Faolain, Hubert Butler, Frank O'Connor, Dorothy Macardle, Kate O'Brien, Myles na Gopaleen (pseudonym of civil servant, Brian O'Nolan, aka Flann O'Brien), T. Desmond Williams, A.T.Q. Stewart, F.X. Martin, his brother Gus Martin, Michael Tierney, Cardinal Cahal Daly and Fr Thomas Finlay.[8] Neither of these lists are anywhere near exhaustive, but illustrate that Ireland has produced a significant number of public intellectuals, drawn from numerous different disciplines and backgrounds with varying degrees of achievement. The variety of their public involvements also signals the myriad options available in Ireland to intellectuals eager to engage with debates outside their specialism, contrary to the claim that the country has not had a public sphere where thinkers could connect with non-specialist publics.[9] Moreover, the strength of this list

[8] For a recent discussion of O'Nolan as a public intellectual, see Maggie Glass, 'Big and learned and far from simple: intellectual narration in "The Plain People of Ireland" and *The third policeman*, *Parish Review* (2021), 1-14; Dorothy Macardle was identified as a public intellectual in Abigail L. Palko, 'Queer seductions of the maternal in Dorothy Macardle's *Earth-bound*', *Irish University Review*, 46 (2016), 287-308; on Shaw and O'Faolain, see Brad Kent, 'Bernard Shaw, Sean O'Faolain, and the Irish public intellectual', *Irish University Review*, 47 (2017), 331-49; Maria Rita Drumond Viana, 'Yeats and Wilde posing as public intellectuals: the letters to the editor and influence on social/political criticism', International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures Conference, July 2019; Jana Fischerova, 'Kate O'Brien as critic and public intellectual', International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures Conference, July 2019; for Russell, see Michael D. Higgins, 'Remembering the 1913 lockout: its sources, impact and some lessons', Address at the 2013 Michael Littleton memorial lecture, 18 Jun. 2013 [https://president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/remembering-the-1913-lockout-its-sources-impact-and-some-lessons, accessed 17 Mar. 2022]; on Williams as a public intellectual, see Michael Laffan, 'Williams, (Thomas) Desmond', in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, online ed. (2009) [https://www.dib.ie/biography/williams-thomas-desmond-a9055, accessed 14 October 2022]; see also, Max Lambert, 'Public intellectuals in Ireland, 1937-1987: the case of Thomas Desmond Williams', Unpublished MPhil thesis, University of Cambridge, 2017; on the labelling of Burke, see Denis O'Donoghue, 'Why Burke's sublime and beautiful ideas still resonate', *Irish Times*, 4 Apr. 2015.

[9] See Eugene O'Brien, 'Intellectual imposters? – We should be so lucky! Towards an Irish public sphere', *Études Irlandaises*, 34 (2009), 101-14.

should prevent readers from mistaking this thesis's focus on Cruise O'Brien as an implicit claim that he was the first or even the most notable intellectual to rise to public prominence in Ireland.

The conceptual framework of this study is underpinned by research in intellectual history and the sociology of intellectuals, specifically 'positioning theory'.[10] Here, this thesis is informed by Patrick Baert, for whom 'positioning theory' helps to conceptualize the 'process by which authors or speakers allocate specific features to themselves and to others, thereby locating themselves within the intellectual arena or within the broader sociopolitical or artistic context in which they operate'.[11] Developing on the philosophical foundations of Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, and Erving Goffman, Baert encourages researchers to focus on the 'performative' aspects of intellectual products, meaning books, lectures, or articles, as well as a variety of other outputs. The key takeaway from this interpretive approach is that intellectual interventions are not mere representations, rather they act on the world. In this thesis Baert's theoretical framework operates as a guiding light for the interpretation of evidence rather than as a rigidly adhered to structure. In relation to Cruise O'Brien, the thesis pays particular attention to his *intellectual positioning* and his *politico-ethical positioning*, exploring how he positioned himself in the intellectual field and in the wider public sphere, and how the words of contemporary critics and scholars effected his positioning. Unsurprisingly, Cruise O'Brien's intellectual and politico-ethical positioning were tightly interwoven, most obviously in relation to the conflict in Northern Ireland. This thesis examines the precise nature of Cruise O'Brien's public interventions, scrutinizing when, through what media, and in what socio-political context they were made. Most importantly, it reconstructs what he said, or was reported to have said, and the effects that these utterances had on the public and on public perceptions of Cruise O'Brien's positioning. Baert notes that individuals do not have total control over their own positioning, as the meaning of their interventions is mediated through the opinions and

[10] For an introduction to this theory, see Patrick Baert, 'Positioning theory and intellectual interventions', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 42 (2012), 304-24; for a debate on the merits of positioning, see Simon Susen and Patrick Baert, *The sociology of intellectuals: after 'The existentialist moment'* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[11] Patrick Baert, 'Reflections on the use of positioning theory in the sociology of intellectuals', in Anders Buch and Theodore Schatzki, eds, *Questions of practice in philosophy and social theory* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 225-35.

observations of a network of critics and other commentators.[12] For instance, it was journalists and reviewers that first attributed to Cruise O'Brien the characteristics of a courageous authoritative public intellectual, although this was a position into which he seemed more than happy to be placed.

Another core concept that requires some explication is the notion of courage, which was a trait attributed to Cruise O'Brien throughout his career and which enhanced his reputation as a public intellectual. Although Cruise O'Brien demonstrated a high degree of physical courage at multiple junctures, such as when his compound was strafed by a fighter jet during his time in Katanga, when he was physically assaulted by police in New York during a protest, or by Protestants in Northern Ireland, it must be noted that the idea of courage with which this thesis is concerned is *civil courage* rather than the physical courage associated with the battlefield. In this regard, the work of Barbara Misztal, who argues that civil courage is a central feature of a public intellectual's authority, is particularly formative. Defined by Otto von Bismarck as 'bravery shown in life outside the military', civil courage is a vital component of public intellectuals' contributions to society.[13] Building on the foundations laid by nineteenth century thinkers like Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, Misztal identifies civil courage with nonconformity or 'nonconformist public behaviour' meant to reformulate societal values or norms.[14] Individuals who are perceived as displaying a high degree of civil courage frequently attract approbation from others (Not infrequently, they also evoke the opposite reaction). In the case of Cruise O'Brien, in some observers he evoked a sense of admiration that bordered on hero-worship, while in others he sparked hostility that frequently manifested itself as hatred.[15]

Although it is informed by the work of social theorists and intellectual historians, this thesis takes an empirical approach to the subject of Cruise O'Brien's career, combining a close inspection of many of his published works with qualitative archival research. The preparation of

[12] Baert, 'Reflections', 229.
[13] Barbara Misztal, 'Civil courage: its role in the contemporary world and its place in social science', *Stanrzeczy*, 2 (2015), 18-42; see also Richard Swedberg, 'Civil courage (*Zivilcourage*): the case of Knut Wicksell', *Theory and Society*, 28 (1999), 501-28.
[14] Barbara Misztal, *Intellectuals and the public good: creativity and civil courage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 80.
[15] See Felix M. Larkin, *Living with history: occasional writings* (Kerry: Kingdom Books, 2021), 371.

this thesis has involved research in multiple archives in Ireland, Great Britain, and the United States of America, tracking Cruise O'Brien's contacts with editors, agents, publishers, producers, university administrators, government colleagues, and other individuals and groups that played a role in the construction of his public intellectual career. Given the public nature of Cruise O'Brien's career, a significant amount of time has also gone into exploring digital archives, such as the British Newspaper Archive, the Irish Newspaper Archive, Internet Archive, and Gale Primary Sources. The thesis also draws on audio and visual sources, such as radio and television interviews, as well as films and recorded lectures.

Conor Cruise O'Brien as a public intellectual

Born in Dublin in 1917, Cruise O'Brien was educated at Sandford Park School before going on to study Irish and French at Trinity College Dublin (commonly known as TCD). These were unusual choices for a child born into a nominally Catholic family, as Sandford Park was non-denominational and TCD was viewed as a bastion of Protestantism in the predominantly Catholic independent Ireland. Cruise O'Brien's father, Francis, was an agnostic journalist and his mother, Kathleen, was a practising Catholic. On his mother's side, Cruise O'Brien was a Sheehy, a nationalist family involved in Home Rule politics. His maternal aunts were Mary Kettle, wife of T.M. Kettle, and the republican, feminist intellectual Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. Cruise O'Brien maintained a close relationship with Sheehy Skeffington's son, Owen, who himself became a prominent public intellectual in later life.

Cruise O'Brien's professional career was incredibly varied. Throughout his multifaceted career, he produced over twenty books, wrote voluminous numbers of essays and reviews, and lectured in all corners of the globe. After he graduated from TCD, he had a brief spell working as a teacher in Northern Ireland before he won a place in the civil service and joined the Department of Finance. Cruise O'Brien then switched to the Department of External Affairs where he rose through the ranks until his diplomatic career came to a crashing end in 1961 with his resignation after his time as a United Nations official in the Congo. While he was progressing in his career as a civil servant, Cruise O'Brien also pursued his intellectual interests, writing for the book pages at several Irish newspapers, producing insightful literary criticism for a variety

of 'little magazines' in Ireland, the United States, and Great Britain, as well as delivering radio broadcasts on Irish and British stations. He also completed his doctorate under the supervision of T.W. Moody, producing a ground-breaking PhD thesis on the Irish Parliamentary Party, and published three books, *Maria Cross*, *Parnell and his party*, and *The shaping of modern Ireland*. Once he had resigned his post in the public service, Cruise O'Brien took up the post of Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana, staying there for three years before moving on to New York University where he held the newly endowed Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities until 1969. During this period, he published a plethora of books, including his widely read memoir, *To Katanga and back* and the acclaimed *Writers and politics*. Cruise O'Brien also wrote several plays, although these were less well-received than his books. He returned to Ireland in 1969 to contest the general election as a Labour Party candidate, winning a seat in the same constituency as future Taoiseach C.J. Haughey. When political violence erupted in Northern Ireland, Cruise O'Brien spoke out prominently against the activities of paramilitaries. Alongside his work as a politician, he published several works on Irish history and politics, the most important of which was *States of Ireland* (1972), and a book of essays on political violence. In 1973, he became Minister for Posts and Telegraphs in the coalition government, comprising Fine Gael and the Labour Party. In 1977, the coalition government fell, and Cruise O'Brien lost his seat. Subsequently, he won a seat in the Seanad but before too long he resigned that position. While he was a senator, Cruise O'Brien was appointed editor-in-chief at *The Observer*. He left the newspaper in 1981 and the rest of his career was spent writing columns for various Irish and British newspapers and a series of short-term appointments at North American universities. In the 1990s, he opposed the peace process and re-joined politics as a leading member of the United Kingdom Unionist Party.[16] In this decade, he also published his noted study of Edmund Burke, a polemical text on one of the United States' founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, and several shorter books, including his controversial tract, *Ancestral voices*.[17]

[16] See Frank Callanan, 'O'Brien, Conor Cruise', *Dictionary of Irish Biography* [https://www.dib.ie/biography/obrien-conor-cruise-a9694, accessed 26 Aug. 2022].

[17] The significance of his book on Burke continues to be debated, see Richard Bourke, *Empire and revolution: the political life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Ian McBride, 'Burke and Ireland', in David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole, eds, *The Cambridge companion to Edmund Burke* (Cambridge: Cambridge

In his lifetime, Cruise O'Brien provoked wildly divergent reactions from those who encountered his work or with whom he came into contact. On one hand, there were those like Helen Yglesias, literary editor of the important New York literary magazine *The Nation*, who admired him to such an extent that she wished he could be made 'president of the world'.[18] On the other hand, people like the medical scientist J.P. Biehl, who heard Cruise O'Brien speak at an event in New York, was driven to write to the Irishman to let him know that his 'erudite mouthings' left him with the feeling that it was 'too bad the pill wasn't discovered before you were conceived'.[19] Since his death in 2009, his legacy has proved to be similarly as controversial. In the 2016 film *The siege of Jadotville,* he was depicted as a spineless, self-serving academic who lacked the skills necessary to handle a delicately poised political conflict. By contrast, others have stressed Cruise O'Brien's 'intellectual fearlessness', especially regarding his position in relation to political violence in Ireland.[20] His positioning regarding political violence led the political scientist Tom Garvin to claim that Cruise O'Brien was the 'most effective Irish public intellectual' of the mid to late twentieth century.[21]

Historiography

The first burst of scholarly interest Cruise O'Brien generated came in 1974 when the philosopher Elisabeth Young-Bruehl and the playwright Robert Hogan published their essay, *Conor Cruise O'Brien: an appraisal*, and the journalist Risteárd Ó Glaisne brought out his Irish-language volume, *Conor Cruise O'Brien agus an liobrálachas* [Conor Cruise O'Brien and Liberalism].[22] Also in 1974, the literary journal *James Joyce Quarterly* ran an issue containing an introductory essay and an interview with Cruise O'Brien. This flurry of activity occurred just

University Press, 2012), 181-94; for a hostile commentary on the foregoing texts, see Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Carlyle, Burke, and biography', *Carlyle Studies Annual*, 31 (2015-2016), 123-44.

[18] Yglesias to Cruise O'Brien, 16 Sept. 1966, University College Dublin Archives (UCDA), Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/162.

[19] Biehl to Cruise O'Brien, May 1967, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/166.

[20] Frank Callanan *et al*, 'The Polariser', *Dublin Review of Books*, July 2019 [https://drb.ie/articles/the-polariser/, accessed 10 August 2022].

[21] Tom Garvin, 'The assault on intellectualism in Irish higher education', in Mary P. Corcoran and Kevin Lalor, eds, *Reflections on crisis: the role of the public intellectual* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2012), 29-37.

[22] Elisabeth Young-Bruehl and Robert Hogan, *Conor Cruise O'Brien: an appraisal* (Newark, Del: Proscenium Press, 1974); Risteárd Ó Glaisne, *Conor Cruise O'Brien agus an liobrálachas* (Dublin: Mount Salus Press, 1974).

after he became a minister in the Irish government. In 1994, Cruise O'Brien received full-length biographical treatment from two writers, the historian D.H. Akenson and Anthony J. Jordan, a prolific biographer of Irish political figures. Jordan's book was a journalistic account that dealt primarily with Cruise O'Brien's career in Irish politics, while Akenson's was a monumental tome accompanied by a second volume consisting of an anthology of some of Cruise O'Brien's essays and an extensive but by no means exhaustive bibliography. Both works follow a strictly chronological pattern and have been criticized for failing to interrogate Cruise O'Brien's intellectual productions.[23] After the biographies came Richard English and Joseph Morrison Skelly's *festschrift*, *Ideas matter*, which contained an introductory essay that glossed some of the major themes – 'sacral nationalism', 'anti-imperialism',[24] 'imagination and politics', 'learning and letters', 'racism and political violence' – of Cruise O'Brien's career and stressed that intellectual courage and consistency were key characteristics of his work. However, given the nature of the genre, the essay is more hagiographic than interrogative.[25]

Diarmuid Whelan has produced the most self-consciously analytical account of Cruise O'Brien's intellectual career in his book, *Violent notions*, and in several journal articles, laying heavy stress on his early intellectual influences as determinants in his intellectual development.[26] Whelan linked Cruise O'Brien's politics to the influence exerted on his mind by his parents, his cousin Owen, and the writers Sean O'Faolain and Albert Camus.[27] According to

[23] D.H. Akenson, *Conor: a biography of Conor Cruise O'Brien*, 2 vols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); A.J. Jordan, *To laugh or to weep: a biography of Conor Cruise O'Brien* (Dublin: Blackwater Press, 1994); see W.J. McCormack, 'The historian as writer or critic? Conor Cruise O'Brien and his biographers', *Irish Historical Studies*, 30 (1996), 111-19.

[24] For more on this theme, see Stephen Howe, 'The Cruiser and the colonist: Conor Cruise O'Brien's writings on colonialism', *Irish Political Studies*, 28 (2013), 487-514.

[25] Richard English and J.M. Skelly, 'Introduction', in Richard English and J.M. Skelly, eds, *Ideas matter: essays in honour of Conor Cruise O'Brien* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1998); likewise, Oliver Kamm's preface to the new Faber Finds editions of Cruise O'Brien's works falls into this category, see Oliver Kamm, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien: an appreciation', in Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Maria Cross: imaginative patterns in a group of Catholic writers* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015).

[26] Diarmuid Whelan, *Conor Cruise O'Brien: violent notions* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009); similarly, in a short article Garvin emphasises the significance of Cruise O'Brien's family inheritance to his becoming a public intellectual, see Tom Garvin, 'Imaginary Cassandra? Conor Cruise O'Brien as public intellectual in Ireland', *Irish University Review*, 37 (Autumn-Winter, 2007), 430-40.

[27] For a critical engagement with Cruise O'Brien's *Camus*, see John Foley, 'A postcolonial fiction: Conor Cruise O'Brien's Camus', *The Irish Review*, 36-37 (Winter, 2007), 1-13.

Whelan, these influences constituted Cruise O'Brien's 'true intellectual foundations'.[28] For Whelan, Cruise O'Brien's intellectual products were expressions of an authentic, deeper self, driven by a 'self-concept', or what Pierre Bourdieu called a 'habitus', derived from his sociological background that remained unchanged throughout his career. As Baert has argued, however, endowing these concepts with the sole power of shaping an intellectual's 'taste, belief, and decisions' makes it difficult to account for an intellectual's change in position due to their static nature.[29] Scholars refer to this phenomenon as 'stability bias'. Whelan's approach also involved the perilous exercise of trying to investigate the inner workings of 'The mind of Conor Cruise O'Brien', as he titled the second section of his book. As Baert and Morgan point out, delving into the murky swamps of another's mind involves a high degree of speculation that tends to produce overly determined results.[30] This is certainly the case with Whelan's work on Cruise O'Brien, as he depicted the intellectual and political choices Cruise O'Brien made during his career as a battle between the intellectual legacies of his mother and father.[31]

One of the major subject areas in which scholars have engaged with Cruise O'Brien's work has been in relation to the Northern Irish 'Troubles' and political violence. Consequently, there is a body of literature dealing with that conflict that places Cruise O'Brien's understanding of political violence in Ireland at centre stage. Chief among these has been the work of Richard Bourke, who has highlighted several problems at the heart of Cruise O'Brien's interpretive approach, which Bourke labels 'primitivism'. Specifically, Bourke takes issue with the idea that

[28] Part of Whelan's project was to undermine the connection between Cruise O'Brien's political positioning and his interest in the 18th century thinker Edmund Burke. Whelan insisted that Cruise O'Brien only started to become familiar with Burke in 1967. However, by 1965 Cruise O'Brien was familiar enough with the Irish thinker to pitch editing his *Reflections on the revolution in France*, having decided that Burke was going to 'be a staple for my New York lectures'. Notably, the introduction published in the resultant edition bears a significant resemblance to that which he outlined in his pitch, indicating that he had already given Burke a great deal of thought, see Greene to Cochrane, 7 Sept. 1965, University of Bristol Special Collections (UBSC), Penguin Archives, DM1107/AC3.

[29] Patrick Baert, 'Jean-Paul Sartre's positioning in *Anti-Semite and Jew*', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 11 (2011), 378-97; idem, 'Positioning theory and intellectual interventions', 309.

[30] Patrick Baert and Marcus Morgan, 'A performative framework for the study of intellectuals', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2 (2018), 322-39.

[31] Whelan's account has proved influential and has been approvingly cited by scholars such as David Dwan, J.M. Regan, and Aidan O'Malley, see David Dwan, 'Romantic nationalism: history and illusion in Ireland', *Modern Intellectual History*, 14 (2017), 717-45; J.M. Regan, *Myth and the Irish state* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2013), 253-88; Aidan O'Malley, 'Irish writers and Europe', in Eve Patten, ed., *Irish literature in transition, 1940-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 66-82.

the driving force of political violence in Ireland was a cocktail of religion and nationalism, supplemented by a shot of tribalism. According to Bourke, the most harmful aspect of Cruise O'Brien's approach has been its reception by later thinkers. The issue was not that Cruise O'Brien's framework was influenced by his political objectives, but that historians in their position as scholars have given too much credence to his belief that the intermingling of religion and politics was the root cause of political violence in Ireland.[32] In a later article on the political thought of the Irish revolution, Bourke fleshed out the problems with Cruise O'Brien's thesis about religion, politics, and violence, pointing out that most of the figures that were centrally important to the political thought of that time do not make such a connection.[33] Despite these questions raised about his interpretive framework, numerous commentators have determined that Cruise O'Brien's response to political violence in Ireland made him 'the most conspicuous Irish public intellectual of his time'.[34]

Although generally attributed to American historian Russell Jacoby, the term 'public intellectual' was first coined in the late 1950s by the sociologist C. Wright Mills in his polemical tract, *The causes of world war three*, in which he encouraged his academic colleagues in the United States to become 'political intellectuals', to 'act as public intellectuals'.[35] The expression cropped up intermittently throughout the succeeding decades, but it did not gain real traction until the 1980s following the publication of Jacoby's jeremiad, *The last intellectuals*, in which he

[32] Richard Bourke, 'Languages of conflict and the Northern Irish Troubles', *The Journal of Modern History*, 83 (Sept. 2011), 544-78; see also Richard Bourke, 'Plague man: the crusader in Conor Cruise O'Brien', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 Mar. 2009; Cruise O'Brien's interpretation of the political situation in Ireland also had a profound impact at an official level, see Margaret O'Callaghan, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien and the Northern Ireland conflict: formulating a revisionist position', *Irish Political Studies*, 33 (2018), 221-31; see also idem, 'Propaganda wars: contexts for understanding the debate on the meanings of the Irish War of Independence', *Journal of the Old Athlone Society*, 2 (2013), 367-72; on Cruise O'Brien's experience in Irish politics, see Stephen Kelly, '"I was altogether out of tune with my colleagues": Conor Cruise O'Brien and Northern Ireland, 1969-77', *Irish Historical Studies*, 45 (2021), 101-21.

[33] Richard Bourke, 'Political and religious ideas during the Irish revolution', *History of European Ideas*, 46 (2020), 997-1008; see also Mark McNally, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien's conservative anti-nationalism: retrieving the postwar European connection', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 7 (2008), 308-30.

[34] Garvin, 'Imaginary Cassandra', 430; see also Frank Callanan, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien', *Sunday Independent*, 21 Dec. 2008.

[35] Russell Jacoby, *The last intellectuals: American culture in the age of academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); C. Wright Mills, *The causes of world war three* (London: Sacker & Warburg, 1959), 135; see also M.J. Brown, 'Experts, eggheads, and elites: debating the role of intellectuals in American political culture, 1952-2008', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Rochester, 2014, 139.

lamented the decline of public intellectuals.[36] In Ireland, the first recorded usage came in 1973 in a letter to the editor of the *Kerryman* newspaper in response to an article on Irish unity. The letter-writer accused 'so many of our public intellectuals' of being too afraid to confront the idea that Ireland's economic and financial difficulties had their roots in the country's colonial past.[37] But, again, it was not until decades later that it came into regular usage.

Frequently, attempts to come to a definition of the intellectual or the public intellectual result in the attribution of personality traits that they must possess or a prescriptive list of activities that they must participate in to be considered intellectuals. For example, in one of the most famous statements on the role of intellectuals in society, Edward Said claimed that an intellectual 'is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public'.[38] Alongside this capacity, Said contended that intellectuals ought to position themselves 'on the same side with the weak and unrepresented'.[39] Others, such as the literary critic Terry Eagleton have argued the word 'intellectual' describes a 'social role' in much the same way as do the terms 'bus driver' or 'hairdresser'. However, there is a slight problem with Eagleton's assertion. Whereas 'bus driver' and 'hairdresser' are occupations, the noun 'intellectual' does not necessarily denote an occupation.[40] Nevertheless, Eagleton hit upon the increasingly popular view that the most analytically useful way of thinking about the intellectual is in terms of their performance in a role.[41]

The historian Stefan Collini argues that there are three main senses in which the noun 'intellectual' has been deployed in English – the sociological sense, the subjective sense, and the cultural sense. In the sociological sense, the term 'intellectuals' designates a large 'socio-professional category'; however, which occupations are encompassed in this category is a matter of contestation. The 'subjective sense' marks out individuals who are seen to

[36] Eliot Fremont-Smith, 'Looking darling, and just looking', *New York Times*, 15 Sept. 1967.
[37] E. Ua Curnain, 'A curse or a solution?', *The Kerryman*, 28 July 1973.
[38] Edward Said, *Representations of the intellectual: the 1993 Reith lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 11.
[39] Said, *Representations*, 22.
[40] Terry Eagleton, *Scholars & rebels in nineteenth century Ireland* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999),1; idem, 'American mastermind', *Irish Times*, 26 Jan. 2002.
[41] Misztal, *Public good*, 19.

demonstrate an unusually high level of interest in ideas and respect for speculative thinking. This sense is often used honorifically. For instance, when the former Fianna Fáil politician Mary O'Rourke described her mother as 'a real intellectual' she was referring to the quality of her mind and her interest in ideas rather than her occupation.[42] On the other side of the coin, it often crops up in a denigratory fashion, such as when Archbishop J.C. McQuaid spoke of 'they who give themselves the title of intellectuals'.[43] The final sense, the 'cultural sense', is the most pertinent for the academic study of intellectuals. It signifies people who possess what Collini terms 'cultural authority', earned through prior achievement in an intellectual occupation or position, and who deploy that authority to address a 'non-specialist public'. Being able to perform the role of the intellectual in this sense requires access to broadcast media or print publications that reach audiences beyond one's own area of expertise and the ability to address subjects that engage the attention of those audiences.[44] In this regard, those who successfully play the role of the intellectual in Collini's cultural sense generally possess a personal charisma that makes them well-fitted to performing a public role. As Baert and Shipman put it, intellectuals in this sense 'know how to write or speak with clarity and conviction, how to shock and how to entice their audience'.[45]

Collini's concept of the intellectual in the cultural sense of the word equates to what has become known as the 'public intellectual'. However, Collini shies away from endorsing this neologism, explaining that the adoption of the qualifying adjective is an expression of 'cultural pessimism', as it represents a concession to those who argue that intellectuals no longer play a public role in the way they once did. The claim that the recent past has seen a significant decline in number and quality of public intellectuals is pervasive in scholarship on public intellectuals. Those who make this argument negatively contrast the current situation as they see it with a putative 'golden age' when public intellectuals supposedly prospered. The principal proponents of this line of thinking include scholars like Russell Jacoby and Richard Posner. Jacoby, whose focus was on the United States, has alleged that the academicization of thinkers

[42] Patricia Deevy, 'Hail Mary', *Sunday Independent*, 8 Jun. 1997.
[43] Michael Viney, 'Intleachtach', *Irish Times*, 15 Feb. 1967.
[44] Collini, *Absent minds*, 45-53.
[45] Patrick Baert and Alan Shipman, 'Transforming the intellectual', in Patrick Baert and F.D. Rubio, eds, *The politics of knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2011), 189.

in the United States precipitated the 'eclipse of public intellectuals'.[46] Through his work, Collini has been at pains to point out that the 'death of the intellectual' has been greatly exaggerated. In Collini's view, the word intellectual, when used in the cultural sense, already connotes publicness. Thus, for him, the term 'public intellectual' is either a pleonasm or an admission that the word intellectual alone no longer carries such connotations. Despite Collini's perfectly valid objection, the term 'public intellectual' has become commonplace in academic literature to describe the type Collini refers to as an intellectual in the cultural sense and is a useful way of distinguishing between intellectuals who engage in public debate and those who do not.

Baert and Shipman define a public intellectual as 'a knowledge creator who addresses issues of social concern, and engages with a broader public'.[47] They sketch out a typology that contains three ideal-types of public intellectual: the authoritative intellectual, the professional intellectual, and the embedded intellectual. Authoritative intellectuals, they argue, possess a set of personality traits that equip them for a public role. They are charismatic, clear communicators whose public interventions are usually 'generalist' and contain a 'strong moral component'. Baert and Shipman's professional intellectuals are those whose authority comes from their association with a scholarly discipline and whose intellectual attainments are legitimated by peer recognition and institutional support. Successful professional intellectuals leverage their prestige to intervene in social or political debates that are not necessarily linked to their academic discipline. Although they draw a division between the three types, Baert and Shipman argue that the lines of demarcation are not fixed, and frequently a single person can display features of all three. They suggest that in the time since the term intellectual was applied to the *Dreyfusards*, there has been a transformation from the authoritative intellectual to the embedded or 'persuasive' intellectual. The combination of the three ideal types resembles something approaching Collini's 'cultural sense' of the intellectual.

Baert and Shipman are not clear on where exactly it is that authoritative intellectuals draw their authority from other than to say that it is not from acknowledged achievement in an academic discipline. However, the archetypal authoritative intellectuals were the 1,200 writers,

[46] Jacoby, *Last intellectuals*, 6.
[47] Baert and Shipman, 'Transforming the intellectual', 180.

teachers, scholars, musicians, and other university graduates who supported Emile Zola's open letter in defence of Dreyfus signed 'Une Protestation', later referred to as the Manifesto of the Intellectuals or '*La protestation des intellectuels*', in such a way as to make it clear that their authority was based on their intellectual qualifications. The signatories' names were divided into subsets according to their qualifications.[48] This would suggest that they felt their authority derived from their intellectual achievement and not simply from high cultural capital attained in a nebulous fashion.

The existing literature on public intellectuals in Ireland has reproduced many of the cliches and misconceptions associated with the topic's discussion in other geographical regions. The notion of a golden age and subsequent decline in the standing of public intellectuals in Ireland has persisted through several generations of commentators. The presumed golden age frequently invoked is the period before the twenty-six counties that make up the modern Republic of Ireland won their independence from the United Kingdom. Almost immediately following the establishment of the independent Irish state, commentators began lamenting this alleged decline from the pre-revolutionary golden age. In the 1940s, the public intellectual Sean O'Faolain wrote,

> Thirty years ago nobody would have denied the importance of a live intelligentsia here. Then those same people who now deride it made use of it day in and day out to disseminate all those doctrines which have resulted in a free Eire.[49]

In the next generation of analysts, the philosopher Richard Kearney, once described as 'the most studiously intellectual intellectual [sic] in Ireland', also interpreted the pre-revolutionary period as

> an age when politicians and intellectuals were actively involved in dialogue. The opening decades of this century was a time when the leaders of our parties were

[48] Collini, *Absent minds*, 21; see also Charle, *Birth of the intellectuals*, 112-7.
[49] Sean O'Faolain, 'The mart of ideas', in Brad Kent, ed., *The selected essays of Sean O'Faolain* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 178.

> not ashamed to *think*; when artists and academics were not afraid to contribute their creative and critical talents to the exploration of different possible ways of forming a new society.

By contrast, Kearney judged that since that time there had been a precipitous deterioration in the intellectual's status in Irish political culture.[50] As one of Kearney's intellectual collaborators, Declan Kiberd, put it, after independence 'intellectuals were routinely frozen out of the public sphere'.[51] Despite claiming that 'the exclusion of intellectuals' derived from 1920s censorship legislation, in a 2016 interview Kiberd contended that the alienation of intellectuals from politics was a new development, stating that contemporary politics had 'become such a specialist activity that it seems no longer to attract … artists or intellectuals, but it did when I was young'.[52]

In his classic text on Irish politics, the political scientist Basil Chubb named 'anti-intellectualism' as one of the principal pillars of Irish political culture.[53] His perspective has been repeatedly endorsed by later scholars. In his important book, *The quest for modern Ireland*, Bryan Fanning echoed this view, stating that 'intellectuals are rarely lionised' in Ireland.[54] It might have been useful for Fanning to qualify that statement given that many of the most 'lionised' figures of Irish history, such as P.H. Pearse, James Connolly, Thomas Davis, or T.W. Tone to name only a small selection, undoubtedly fall into the category of 'intellectual'. Consistently, scholars and commentators have put forward the argument that intellectuals were unwelcome in Irish public life. Richard Kearney contended that 'the precarious fortunes of Irish intellectuals in politics' proved Chubb's point. Kearney asserted that from the Irish public's point of view 'Intellectuals [were] alright as long as they remain in their ivory towers'.[55] Likewise, historian Diarmaid Ferriter contended that Conor Cruise O'Brien's departure from

[50] Richard Kearney, 'When we began listening to each other', *Irish Times*, 3 Nov. 1986; Deaglán de Bréadún, 'Academics gather to elucidate intellectual life today', *Irish Times*, 17 May 1993.
[51] Declan Kiberd, 'Keeping a watch on nation's state', *Irish Times*, 21 Oct. 2017.
[52] Declan Kiberd, 'After Ireland?', *Irish Times*, 29 Aug. 2009; Paula McGrath, 'Declan Kiberd interview', *Irish Times*, 11 Feb. 2016.
[53] Basil Chubb, *The government and politics of Ireland* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 21-23.
[54] Bryan Fanning, *The quest for modern Ireland: the battle of ideas, 1912-1986* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008), 3.
[55] Kearney, 'When we began listening to each other', *Irish Times*, 3 Nov. 1986.

politics in the seventies proved the notion that 'intellectuals … had no place or role in Irish politics'.[56] The journalist John Drennan claimed that for the Irish politician looking to establish himself or herself, they should avoid earning 'a reputation for lofty thoughts'.[57] Frequently clustered alongside this set of ideas is the notion that Irish political culture has been exceptional in its disdain for intellectuals. For instance, John Horgan, a journalist who enjoyed a successful career in politics and academia, has posed the question 'why has "intellectual" always been a dirty word in Irish politics, and stated 'Among other nations … no such inhibitions circumscribe public life'.[58] One of the answers Horgan posited to his own question was that this attitude derived from 'those famous seven hundred years of foreign rule'.[59] Similarly, historian J.J. Lee postulated that Irish unease with public intellectuals was

> a symptom of the serf mentality, a feeling that there is something suspicious about the person who does not know his appointed place in the hierarchy of specialisms … so reassuring to the dependent psyche.[60]

Others, namely Sean O'Faolain and Edna O'Brien, have asserted that something in the Irish genetic code blocked the country's ability to develop intellectuals.[61] The problem with this line of thinking is that hostility and suspicion towards 'intellectuals' has not been unique to Irish public life, but has manifested itself in Great Britain, the United States, and continental Europe.

In Ireland, one of the bodies most interested in exploring the question of intellectuals/public intellectuals has been the Royal Irish Academy (RIA). The RIA has hosted two major conferences in recent times focusing on the role of intellectuals in Irish public life. From those two conferences come two collections of essays dealing with this subject. Reporting on the first of these, *Irish Times* columnist Deaglán de Bréadún speculated that it was 'possibly

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[56] Diarmaid Ferriter, 'The state of Ireland', 2 Apr. 2012 [https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/state-of-ireland/, accessed 17 Mar. 2022].
[57] John Drennan, *Paddy Machiavelli: how to get ahead in Irish politics* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2014), esp. Ch. 3.
[58] John Horgan, 'Death by respectability?', *Dublin Review of Books* [https://drb.ie/articles/death-by-respectability/, accessed 14 Oct. 2022].
[59] Ibid.
[60] J.J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: politics and society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 636.
[61] Aidan Hennigan, 'Aidan Hennigan talks to Edna O'Brien', *Irish Press*, 24 July 1968; Sean O'Faolain, *The Irish* (New ed., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981); see also O'Faolain to Kelleher, 31 Aug. 1948, University College Cork, Boole Library, BL/L/JVK/25.

the first conference ever to be held in Ireland with the I-word in its title'.[62] The first conference, held in 1993, resulted in a collection of essays that the sociologist Liam O'Dowd edited and introduced.[63] O'Dowd's introduction has become central to most scholarly accounts on intellectuals in Ireland. Although O'Dowd's introduction usefully summarised the state of sociological literature as it stood in the early 1990s, the continued reliance by scholars on what is now a thirty-year-old summary means that three decades of new research in intellectual history and the sociology of intellectuals has been largely ignored.

As Zygmunt Bauman has noted, most, if not all, accounts of the role of intellectuals are '*programme*[s], masquerading as the state-of-the-game *report*[s]'.[64] In this regard, the writing on public intellectuals in Ireland is no different. For instance, Mary P. Corcoran and Kevin Lalor's edited collection *Reflections on crisis: the role of the public intellectual*, which was the result of the RIA's second conference on intellectuals, was more programmatic than analytical in tone. It reflected Corcoran's strongly held desire to see public intellectuals have a powerful voice in Irish public life. Indeed, in her contribution to an *Irish Times* piece entitled '10 ideas for making Ireland better', Corcoran urged readers to 'celebrate public intellectuals', whom she asserted were finding it more difficult to intervene than in 'previous eras'.[65] Writing about this second conference, critic John-Paul McCarthy judged that such was the sub-standard level of the contributions it seemed to indicate that 'Intellectuals are at their least impressive, or useful, when organising conferences about being intellectuals.'[66] Journalist Paul Cullen reported that the main theme of the conference was that 'Artists, academics and intellectuals are contributing ever less to the public sphere'.[67] One of Corcoran and Lalor's central claims is that 'Unlike the British, the French, and the Germans, the Irish don't have a tradition of public intellectuals.' Corcoran's introduction identifies belief in the decline of the public intellectual as

[62] de Bréadún, 'Academics gather to elucidate intellectual life today', *Irish Times*, 17 May 1993.
[63] Liam O'Dowd, ed., *On intellectuals and intellectual life in Ireland: international, comparative and historical contexts* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast, 1996).
[64] Zygmunt Bauman, 'Love in adversity: on the state and the intellectuals, and the state of the intellectuals', *Thesis eleven*, 31 (1992), 81-104.
[65] Mary P. Corcoran, 'Celebrate public intellectuals', *Irish Times*, 26 Oct. 2013.
[66] John-Paul McCarthy, 'O'Brien spelled out the dark impulses of the Catholic faith', *Sunday Independent*, 29 Nov. 2009.
[67] Paul Cullen, 'Narrowing of "allowed opinion" within public arena, conference told', *Irish Times*, 28 Nov. 2009.

the link between the contributions, stating that all the essays concurred in the claim that 'the role of the public intellectual has come under pressure'.[68] Several contributors emphasise their indebtedness to Posner's declinist framework. In his contribution to the conference, snippets of which appeared in the resultant publication, Kiberd declared that the decrease in the number of 'third spaces', venues outside of the home or the workplace, 'led to the decline of public intellectuals'.[69]

Brad Kent has done more than most contemporary scholars to study public intellectuals in Ireland. In several essays on Sean O'Faolain, Kent draws on what he calls Julien Benda's celebrated study of public intellectuals, *La trahison des clercs*, to help set up his definition of a public intellectual.[70] According to Kent, Benda defined public intellectuals as 'all those whose activity essentially is *not* the pursuit of practical aims, all those who seek their joy in the practice of an art or a science or metaphysical speculation, in short, in the possession of non-material advantages'. Developing on this claim, Kent states that a public intellectual who fails to live up to this description 'betrays the people and loses all claim to the title "public"'.[71] There are several problems with Kent's argument. Firstly, Benda's 'celebrated stud[y] of public intellectuals' was not a study of public intellectuals at all. Moreover, it was not even a study of intellectuals. As Collini points out, 'in this supposedly classic work on the role of intellectuals, the word "intellectuals" never appears'.[72] By the time Benda published *La trahison des clercs*, the very activity he denounced as treasonous, namely intervening in public debate, had become integral to the understanding of what it meant to be an intellectual. Thus, Kent is in dubious territory when he places so much weight on Benda's pronouncements about the true role of

[68] Mary P. Corcoran, 'Introduction: challenging intellectuals', in Corcoran and Lalor, eds, *Reflections on crisis*, 9.
[69] Quoted in Corcoran and Lalor, eds, *Reflections on crisis*, 1.
[70] Kent, 'Irish public intellectual'; idem, 'Introduction: on polemical essays and the public intellectual', in Brad Kent, ed., The *selected essays of Sean O'Faolain* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), xi-xxxvi; idem, 'Outside the whale: Seán O'Faoláin, totalitarianism and the European public intellectual', in Eve Patten, ed., *Irish literature in transition, 1940-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020),46-65.
[71] Kent, 'Irish public intellectual', 332; Kent's historical account of what has been called 'the birth of the intellectuals' is also unreliable. For example, he states that the day after Emile Zola's famous open letter *J'Accuse* appeared in print, a petition he says was 'tellingly titled' 'Le manifeste des intellectuels' was published in the same journal. However, this is not the case. The petition in question carried the title 'Une Protestation' and only later came to be known as 'Le manifeste des intellectuels'. The signatories did not term it a 'manifesto' nor did they identify themselves as 'intellectuals', see Collini, *Absent minds*, 21.
[72] Collini, *Absent minds*, 280; as Collini later makes clear, Benda did, in fact, use the term twice in his book, but on both occasions the word was flanked by inverted commas, indicating that the usage was not his own.

the *clercs*. Additionally, Kent neglected to note that many of Sean O'Faolain's publications came not from his search for 'joy in the practice of an art', but from his perfectly reasonable desire to earn money. For example, when the publishing house Penguin approached him to write a book about Ireland, which ultimately became his classic text, *The Irish*, O'Faolain's first thought was

> the problem if [sic] one of time and money: or of the equation time=money. Much as I would like to do such a book I would prefer to be writing stories, and everything else but has to be measured in the beastly terms of cash. If your offer were what you people paid me for my Penguin De Valera, i.e. £50, I regretfully should have to say, "That's worth about £15 to-day', and churn out something infinitely less interesting but more profitable.[73]

Clearly, material advantage was a significant motivating factor, even for the man Kent lauds as 'the leading Irish public intellectual of his day'.[74] Kent's dismissal of the importance of financial gain to intellectual production feeds into what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called the 'scholastic fallacy'.[75] This thesis does not shy away from the idea that material factors played a role in Cruise O'Brien's choice of intellectual pursuits, the frequency of his publications, or his efforts to perform the role of the public intellectual.

Synopsis

This thesis has five substantive chapters. Chapter 1 examines Cruise O'Brien's early intellectual career and how he worked to develop his 'cultural authority', charting his rise from budding essayist to global public intellectual. Drawing on a mix of archival material, published primary sources, and secondary literature, this chapter challenges previous accounts of this period, particularly those put forward by D.H. Akenson and Diarmuid Whelan. It details how Cruise O'Brien worked closely with publishers and editors to prepare his first book, *Maria Cross*, and argues that the successful intellectual intervention that this book represented helped him to grow his brand as an intellectual. Finally, it looks at how his involvement in the Congo as an

[73] O'Faolain to Glover, 6 Mar. 1946, UBSC, Penguin Archives, DM1107/A184.
[74] Kent, 'On polemical essays', xxxii.
[75] Baert, 'Positioning theory', 310.

international civil servant catapulted him to global recognition. The chapter argues that Cruise O'Brien skilfully took advantage of this unexpected fame to position himself as an authoritative public intellectual in the *Dreyfusard* mould.

In Chapter 2, the thesis takes a step back from the heady post-Katanga period to explore Cruise O'Brien's formation as an historian of nineteenth-century Ireland. Focusing mainly on his published statements, but also utilising some previously unseen archival material from the Oxford University Press Archives and the BBC Written Archives, Chapter 2 calls into question earlier descriptions of how Cruise O'Brien came to publish his classic work, *Parnell and his party*, and takes issue with claims that his conclusions in that book signified the author's belief that Charles Stewart Parnell was a proto-fascist dictator. Chapter 2 also delves into Cruise O'Brien's ideas about historiography, identifying the political theorist Michael Oakeshott as a major intellectual predecessor, even if Cruise O'Brien disagreed with his philosophy of history. Moreover, Chapter 2 confronts Diarmuid Whelan's version, which has gained traction in the scholarly literature, of the development of Cruise O'Brien's own philosophy of history. It traces his thought from the earliest stages of his career through to the 1990s, arguing that contrary to Whelan's assertion Cruise O'Brien never renounced his fidelity to the idea of history as an art form.

Chapter 3 addresses another of the key themes of Cruise O'Brien's career, examining his ideas about the role of intellectuals in politics, especially relating to how they should position themselves in the context of the Cold War. It also looks at his own transition from an independent public intellectual to one committed to a particular political party – the Irish Labour Party in this case – interrogating this decision alongside his contemporary commentary on the relationship between intellectuals and politics. Cruise O'Brien's entry into electoral politics provides an interesting prism through which to examine Irish attitudes about intellectuals, and the next section investigates how Irish public opinion dealt with the question of intellectuals in the period surrounding Cruise O'Brien's time in politics. The final section of Chapter 3 scrutinizes the lessons that Cruise O'Brien drew about the relationship between intellectuals and politics from his political experience.

Chapter 4 deals with one of the great obsessions of Cruise O'Brien's intellectual life, namely the relationship between intellectual outputs and revolutionary violence. By examining his attempts to answer the question posed in W.B. Yeats's 'Man and the echo', this chapter probes how Cruise O'Brien's interpretation evolved over the course of his career as he became more acquainted with revolutionary violence during the conflict in Northern Ireland. The chapter is overtly revisionist regarding previous scholarship on the trajectory of Cruise O'Brien's thinking, arguing that the Northern Irish 'Troubles' did not have the impact on his position that historians have suggested.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, also focuses primarily on Cruise O'Brien's reaction to political violence in Ireland. However, it does so from an oblique angle, considering it through his use of disease imagery to describe nationalism and political violence. It posits that as a public intellectual Cruise O'Brien envisioned himself as a doctor to the body politic, charged with protecting the state from the sickness that was the Irish Republican Army and revolutionary nationalism. Ultimately, it concludes that his reliance on this kind of imagery indicated his inability to come to terms with the nature of nationalism and political violence.

1

A public intellectual

"Who is Conor O'Brien?"[1]

Harold MacMillan, British Prime Minister, September 1961.

A key feature of becoming a public intellectual is the development of a reputation for having noteworthy things to say and the courage, ability, and opportunity to communicate those things in public. In other words, to become a public intellectual, one requires the achievement of a certain level of 'cultural authority'. Due to the conceptually challenging nature of 'cultural authority', previous scholars have identified that the study of public intellectuals and how they earn their cultural authority is best approached through an investigation of how they construct their careers.[2] This chapter describes the process by which Cruise O'Brien established his reputation as a public intellectual, analysing his transition from essayist to authoritative public intellectual in the *Dreyfusard* mould.

First, it investigates Cruise O'Brien's entry into the public intellectual world in Ireland, primarily through his association with the 'little magazine' *The Bell*. It shows how Cruise O'Brien drew on familial and friendship networks to help secure chances to contribute to this magazine and to other mediators, such as Radio Éireann and several national dailies. It addresses the relationship between Cruise O'Brien and Sean O'Faolain, challenging previous accounts of their first interactions as editor and contributor. The section also discusses Cruise O'Brien's preference for writing under a pseudonym and explores his experience of censorship in Ireland, arguing that he got off lightly compared to many of his contemporaries in this regard. Finally, it argues that *The Bell*'s international reach played an important role in bringing Cruise O'Brien's

[1] Quoted in Conor Cruise O'Brien, *To Katanga and back: a UN case history* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1962), 12.

[2] See Collini, *Absent minds*, 56; see also Misztal, *Public good*, 101.

writing to the attention of influential readers throughout the Anglo-world. Following on from this point, the second section looks at how Cruise O'Brien worked alongside editors at Oxford University Press New York (OUPNY) to develop his profile as a literary critic while he was writing his first book of criticism, *Maria Cross*, an investigation into the imaginative worlds of eight Catholic authors. It challenges aspects of Akenson's account of its production, showing it to be an outcome of collaboration, rather than solely an authentic product of Cruise O'Brien's own personality. In section three, the chapter examines the impact that this first book had on his intellectual career, arguing that the book was a vital intervention that led to increased opportunities to publish his work and to address wider publics through multiple forms of media. This part of the chapter charts Cruise O'Brien's reception in literary circles in London and New York, the twin capitals of letters in the Anglo-world, illustrating how the Irishman developed trust in his 'brand'. Finally, the chapter changes tack slightly, scrutinizing, on the one hand, the impact that Cruise O'Brien's time as UN representative in Katanga had on his reputation as an intellectual. It studies how a hostile British Conservative media constructed a dual image of him as an unhinged, would-be revolutionary Irishman and an ineffective, irresponsible academic, ill-suited for his role. On the other hand, it also depicts how his supporters in intellectual circles and beyond created a contrasting image of him as an intellectual in politics, emphasizing his personal courage and intellectual integrity. Ultimately, the chapter contends that the Katanga episode helped to solidify his position as a globally recognised intellectual possessing a strong moral voice.

The Bell

According to the sociologist Patrick Baert, possessing the right connections plays a critical role in the development of a public intellectual's career. In this regard, Conor Cruise O'Brien was amply endowed with a plethora of kinship and friendship relationships that helped him gain access to print and broadcast media in Ireland. His writing career began while he was still attending TCD, where he wrote for a college magazine and secured a post as the *Irish Times*'s Trinity correspondent. Paid a pound a week by the *Irish Times* for a 900-word article on College life, Cruise O'Brien felt annoyed that, as he put it, 'spinning superfluous words round

insignificant events' for a newspaper once a week brought him greater rewards than his efforts at writing poetry.[3] After graduation, he continued to pursue a career in letters with his reviews of books and periodicals on literary criticism, political thought, and history appearing frequently on the *Irish Times*'s books' page first under his full name, then under the name 'Conor O'Brien', before 'Donat O'Donnell' became his *Nome de plume* in 1945.[4] He also wrote anonymous book reviews for the *Irish Independent*, which paid for unsigned reviews, unlike the *Irish Times*.[5] Cruise O'Brien drew on his family network to try to secure opportunities with the state broadcaster, Radio Éireann. While his wife, Christine Foster, was expecting their first child, her aunt, Sylvia Lynd, wife of the essayist Robert Lynd, used her connections with John Dulanty, the Irish High Commissioner to London, to get Cruise O'Brien's foot in the door at Radio Éireann as an 'ideas-merchant'.[6] Throughout the 1940s, he occasionally appeared on Radio Éireann programmes, such as 'Information please', and presented reviews of contemporary literature.[7] Alongside his writing, Cruise O'Brien secured a position in the Irish civil service, first in the Department of Finance and then in the Department of External Affairs where he swiftly progressed through the ranks. This appointment gave him the material security he needed to pursue his intellectual interests without the pressure of having to live off the proceeds.[8]

During the war years in Ireland, the most significant outlet for public intellectual activity was a cultural magazine called *The Bell*. Established in 1940 and edited for its first five years by Sean O'Faolain, *The Bell* encapsulated everything that was 'most consciously intellectual in modern Ireland'.[9] When the magazine had its initial launch in 1940, a mutual acquaintance, the left-wing Jewish intellectual Leslie Daiken, a family friend of Cruise O'Brien's, showed samples of Cruise O'Brien's poetry to O'Faolain with the hope of getting some of it published. The

[3] Commonplace book, 25 Jan. 1940, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/624.
[4] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The Post-symbolists', *Irish Times*, 10 Apr. 1943.
[5] Donat O'Donnell, 'The fourth estate: the Irish Independent: a business idea', *The Bell*, Feb. 1945, 388-89.
[6] Lynd to Dulanty, undated, Forest Green, UCDA, RTE Scripts, P260/389; Kiernan to Dulanty, 11 July 1941, UCDA, RTE Scripts, P260/389; Note by Riobard O Farachain, undated, UCDA, RTE Scripts, P260/389.
[7] 'Radio', *Irish Independent*, 19 Feb. 1947; 'Tonight's radio programmes', *Evening Echo*, 16 Jan. 1947.
[8] Additionally, in 1943, Cruise O'Brien began work towards a doctorate in his history under the supervision of T.W. Moody. This aspect of his career is the subject of Chapter 2.
[9] Donat O'Donnell, 'Horizon', *The Bell*, Mar. 1946, 1030; for a detailed account of *The Bell* and its significance to Irish society, see Kelly Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the representation of Irish identity: opening windows* (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2012); see also Niall Carson, *Rebel by vocation: Sean O'Faolain and the generation of The Bell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

poems, which Cruise O'Brien retrospectively described as 'absolutely awful', did not impress *The Bell*'s editor, who 'cruelly' - Cruise O'Brien's word - quashed the young writer's poetic ambitions.[10] Although he did not appreciate it immediately, O'Faolain's 'astringent criticism' led Cruise O'Brien to abandon poetry and pursue criticism as his primary form of intellectual production. Furthermore, O'Faolain modelled the role of the intellectual, 'combining the activity of the writer with social criticism', that Cruise O'Brien later embodied.[11] Cruise O'Brien alluded to O'Faolain's criticism of his poetry on several occasions throughout his career, but he never revealed the precise words O'Faolain used. Understandably, historians have been interested to discover what exactly O'Faolain said to Cruise O'Brien to have such a profound effect on his intellectual trajectory. However, the search for an answer has led to some problems. For example, in his study of Cruise O'Brien's intellectual development, Diarmuid Whelan quoted O'Faolain as summing up Cruise O'Brien's body of work as 'congeries of one man's ideas and another man's style, both misunderstood and misused, which constitutes your sole originality'.[12] These are indeed withering words, but there is scant evidence to suggest that they can be ascribed to O'Faolain. Whelan cited 'correspondence with O'Faolain' to support his claim; however, the correspondence Whelan referred to has no relation with the event in question. Whelan's evidence dates from nearly ten years after O'Faolain dismissed Cruise O'Brien's poetry, and the words in question do not appear in that correspondence between the two men. The place where these words occur is in the commonplace book Cruise O'Brien kept during his young adulthood in which he wrote poetry and prose entries critiquing his own literary abilities. Indeed, he called the passage in which it appears his 'self-accusations'.[13] Thus, despite Whelan's confident assertion, it does not appear as if a record of what O'Faolain said to Cruise O'Brien remains extant.

Five years elapsed before Cruise O'Brien finally debuted in *The Bell* under his pseudonym 'Donat O'Donnell'. In 1945, Cruise O'Brien contributed to the magazine's series on the media in Ireland alongside his college friend Vivian Mercier, who was himself an up-and-

[10] Fintan O'Toole, 'The life and times of Conor Cruise O'Brien: part one: the making of a liberal', *Magill*, Apr. 1986, 27.
[11] Des Hickey and Gus Smith, *A paler shade of green* (London: Leslie Frewin of London, 1972), 231-2.
[12] Whelan, *Violent notions*, 57.
[13] Commonplace book, 1937-41, 23 July [1940], UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/624.

coming literary critic.[14] Cruise O'Brien wrote articles on the *Irish Independent*, the Catholic press in Ireland, and a satirical companion piece for Mercier's article on *The Bell*. As noted, Cruise O'Brien had written for publication under his own name for several years since joining the civil service, so it must be asked why he felt the need to adopt a pseudonym for his debut in *The Bell*. The historian Owen Dudley Edwards has maintained that by dint of Cruise O'Brien's employment in the civil service, he was in an exposed position and adopting a pseudonym gave him license to publish without risking clerical or lay-Catholic oppression.[15] Indeed, when he published his first article in an American academic periodical under his pseudonym, the journal's front matter explained, 'We are informed from other sources that many of the ablest Irish writers are using pseudonyms under the present ecclesiastical censorship'.[16] Moreover, during the mid-twentieth century in Ireland, many intellectuals suffered retribution for perceived transgressions against the dominant Catholic culture, such as Hubert Butler's persecution after the 1952 Papal Nuncio Incident or John McGahern's dismissal from his teaching post after the publication of his novel *The Dark* in 1965.[17] According to Cruise O'Brien's own account, however, the threat of clerical oppression was less of a consideration than his concerns about what his superiors in the civil service might think about his moonlighting as a critic. Cruise O'Brien explained that he opted for a pseudonym on the advice of his colleague John O'Donovan. O'Donovan published his *Economic history of live stock in Ireland* while he was in the employ of the Department of Finance. The book touched on an issue close to the heart of the Irish economy, namely the dual-purpose cow (cow breeds deemed suitable for both milk and beef). O'Donovan's superiors were unimpressed that he would call official policy into question in such a public manner. Consequently, he was warned that the book would be a

[14] See Felix M. Larkin, 'Mirrors of a changing Ireland: *The Bell*'s series "The Fourth Estate", 1944-1945', in Mark O'Brien and Felix M. Larkin, eds., *Periodicals and journalism in twentieth-century Ireland 2: a variety of voices* (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2021).
[15] Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Maria cross roads: a study of "Donat O'Donnell"', in English and Skelly, eds, *Ideas matter*, 361-62.
[16] 'Front Matter', *Kenyon Review*, ix, 3 (Summer, 1947).
[17] On the Nuncio Incident, see Robert Tobin, *The minority voice: Hubert Butler and southern Irish Protestantism, 1900-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); for McGahern's account of his dismissal, see 'John McGahern on being banned' [https://www.rte.ie/archives/2019/0613/1055145-banned-writer-john-mcgahern/, accessed 9 June 2022].

'millstone round [his] neck as long as you remain in the service'.[18] Fearing that his own intellectual work might draw a similar rebuke, Cruise O'Brien took this warning to heart and adopted a pseudonym. Yet, 'Donat O'Donnell' was a thin disguise and not one from which he took any great care to distance himself. For example, *Irish Historical Studies*' 1945 round-up of new writing in Irish history included an entry 'O'Brien (Conor Cruise). Parnell's monument. By Donat O'Donnell. [i.e. Conor Cruise O'Brien]. In *The Bell*, x. 566-73.' A second entry read, 'O'Donnell (Donat), *pseud*. See O'Brien (Conor Cruise).[19] If he had been genuinely concerned about persecution for his ideas, surely Cruise O'Brien would have taken greater care to conceal his identity than he did. Indeed, ten years later, when he published articles about the French-Algeria war in the Irish and American press while serving as a Counsellor in the Irish Embassy in Paris, he camouflaged his identity by publishing in the *Irish Times* as 'Special correspondent' and in *Commonweal* as 'John Caxton' rather than under his usual pseudonym.

Despite feeling the need to write under a pseudonym, and in contrast with some of his contemporaries, Cruise O'Brien's early intellectual career was markedly free from direct interference, oppression, intimidation, or censorship. Consequently, he was not nearly as concerned about the phenomenon of literary censorship as were people like O'Faolain and Frank O'Connor. In fact, he often mocked O'Faolain's obsession with the literary censorship.[20] The only point at which official Irish censorship had a noticeably adverse impact on Cruise O'Brien's intellectual production came in the early 1950s when the American literary magazine *Kenyon Review* commissioned him to review Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*. Cruise O'Brien wrote to the editor to inform him that he would not be able to produce the review for, as he put it, the 'rather absurd reason' that it had been prohibited in Ireland by the 'ineffable Censorship board'. Cruise O'Brien had lent his own copy to an acquaintance who had not returned it to him and because of the ban he was unable to source a new copy to do the review. In a rather embarrassed tone, Cruise O'Brien explained that 'Normally the Censorship does not incommode us much, as a book often circulates for months before the Censors get

[18] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Memoir: my life and themes* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1998), 116.
[19] 'Writings on Irish history, 1945', *Irish Historical Studies*, 5 (1946), 165.
[20] Donat O'Donnell, 'A rider to the Verdict', addendum to Vivian Mercier, 'Verdict on *The Bell*', *The Bell*, May 1945, 164-67.

round to banning it but getting hold of a book several months *after* it has been banned can present problems.'[21] Other than this, the only other example of censorship he experienced – this time in its more insidious unofficial variety – came when a Dublin publisher rejected the collection *The shaping of modern Ireland*, of which he was editor, for including too many contributions from scholars with Trinity College Dublin affiliations. In the preface to that volume, Cruise O'Brien sanguinely reflected that such 'intellectual apartheid' was in the process of receding and 'probably injure[d] its adherents more than its enemies'.[22]

Owen Dudley Edwards has noted that *The Bell* was a courageous enterprise in and of itself. According to Dudley Edwards, Cruise O'Brien intended for his own interventions to make it even more courageous, expanding on its remit to report on Irish life to take on the task of 'pursuing the true, the good and the beautiful'.[23] Over the course of eight years, Cruise O'Brien published frequently in *The Bell*. He contributed articles on Irish history, the British literary magazine *Horizon*, English writers George Orwell, Graham Greene, and Evelyn Waugh, a series of linked essays on François Mauriac, as well as several unattributed book reviews. Most of his interventions in *The Bell* occurred after O'Faolain had passed on the editorship of the magazine to the left-wing republican intellectual Peadar O'Donnell in 1946. In addition to being a contributor, Cruise O'Brien was appointed to the magazine's advisory committee, which was set up to support the new editor. His colleagues on the committee included fellow civil servants Valentin Iremonger, Thomas Woods ('Thomas Hogan'), and Patrick Lynch, as well as Vivian Mercier. Contrary to Owen Dudley Edwards' claim, Cruise O'Brien's cousin, Owen Sheehy Skeffington, did not serve on the committee.[24] However, Sheehy Skeffington was aware of what the committee's work entailed. According to the Trinity don, the committee 'would plan meticulously, garner material, [and] sift and recommend' pieces for publication. Despite this work, the committee 'never got anywhere' because Peadar O'Donnell refused to take their

[21] Cruise O'Brien to Rice, 3 Feb. [1952], Chalmers Library, Kenyon, Records of the Kenyon Review, Conor Cruise O'Brien file.
[22] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Foreword' in idem, ed., *The shaping of modern Ireland* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 8.
[23] Edwards, 'Maria cross roads', 361.
[24] Ibid., 362.

advice.[25] Frustrated by O'Donnell's lack of cooperation, the committee did not last, breaking up before *The Bell* suspended publication in 1948 due to a lack of funds.

As Kelly Matthew has noted, at least a third of *The Bell*'s regular print run was sold outside of Ireland, bringing Irish talent to a wider audience, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States.[26] Cruise O'Brien was one of the contributors whose intellectual career was given a major boost by *The Bell*'s international reach. Cruise O'Brien's work for *The Bell* garnered attention in England where a reviewer for *The Sunday Times* singled out his essay on Evelyn Waugh as 'remarkable'. Likewise, the group of intellectuals who produced the little magazine *Politics & Letters* appreciated his criticism of Graham Greene so much that they felt they simply had to publish this exciting new critic.[27] Edited by Raymond Williams, Clifford Collins, and Wolf Mankowitz, *Politics & Letters* featured some of the period's foremost intellectuals, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, F.R. Leavis, and George Orwell. Clifford Collins commissioned Cruise O'Brien to write a short piece on Evelyn Waugh with a view to commissioning further articles in the future.[28] Unfortunately, from Cruise O'Brien's perspective, *Politics & Letters* was not commercially viable and suspended publication before his writing appeared in its pages. Cruise O'Brien did not just rely on the magazine's reach to bring his work to new publics. Instead, he actively pursued publication in the United States where the market for literary criticism was comparatively lucrative. Not long after *The Bell* published his critical study of the English novelist Evelyn Waugh, he offered it to the American academic literary periodical *Kenyon Review*. Edited by J.C. Ransom, one of the fathers of New Criticism, *Kenyon Review* was (and still is) a highly regarded journal of imaginative and critical writing based at the Ohio liberal arts college Kenyon College. Cruise O'Brien received nearly one hundred dollars for his contribution, a fee that could not be matched in Britain or Ireland.[29] In the same year, thanks to the good offices of his friend Vivian Mercier, Barbara Howes, editor of the New York literary magazine *Chimera*, published a revised and extended version of his study of Graham

[25] Sheehy Skeffington to Butler, 5 Sept. 1951, Trinity College Dublin Archives (TCDA), Butler papers, 10304/644/6.
[26] Quoted in Declan Kiberd, 'Perfect furrow', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 Jan. 2013.
[27] *Sunday Times*, 29 Dec. 1946; Wolf Mankowitz, 'The bogey-man', *Politics & Letters* (Winter-Spring, 1947), 121.
[28] Collins to Cruise O'Brien, 13 May 1948, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/517.
[29] Rahming to Cruise O'Brien, 9 July 1947, Chalmers Library, Kenyon, Records of the Kenyon Review, Conor Cruise O'Brien file.

Greene.[30] *Kenyon Review* and Cruise O'Brien developed a good working relationship to the point that the magazine asked for his advice regarding which Irish writers they should be looking to publish and for his help commissioning new Irish writing.[31] Most importantly, the connection with *Kenyon Review* brought his own writing to an entirely new public, which helped to launch his career as a serious literary critic.

Maria Cross

One of the people who encountered Cruise O'Brien's literary criticism for the first time in *Kenyon Review* was Alison Lurie, an editorial assistant at OUPNY. The Waugh essay, 'The pieties of Evelyn Waugh', caused great 'excitement' in the OUPNY offices, leading to Lurie contacting Cruise O'Brien through *Kenyon Review* to ask him about his plans for future works of criticism 'with a view to its publishing possibilities'.[32] This began a series of transatlantic conversations about producing a book of critical essays, culminating in the publication of his first book, *Maria Cross*, named after the female protagonist in Mauriac's novel, *Desert of love*. Akenson contends that the individual chapters comprising that book were already completed by the time the publisher approached Cruise O'Brien.[33] However, the evidence he adduces purporting to support that claim does nothing of the sort.[34] A critic of Akenson's biography once summarised his representation of Cruise O'Brien with the phrase 'Conor as prodigy'.[35] The idea that Cruise O'Brien had an entire book's worth of essays squirreled away awaiting a publisher would certainly have been attractive to an author looking to render his subject as a genius. Yet, this was not what transpired. Only two of the volume's nine substantive chapters, on Waugh and

[30] Cruise O'Brien to Howes, 18 Mar. 1947, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature, Chimera papers, Box 1, Folder 65.
[31] Rice to Cruise O'Brien, 12 Sept. 1949, Chalmers Library, Kenyon, Records of the Kenyon Review, Conor Cruise O'Brien file.
[32] Lurie to Cruise O'Brien, 29 July 1947, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/517.
[33] Akenson, *Conor*, 122.
[34] Ibid., 508 fn. 32; the full text of the sentence Akenson partially quotes runs as follows: 'We have taken an unconscionably long time in making up our minds about the possibility of our taking on a book of essays on Catholic writers along the lines suggested by your pieces on Evelyn Waugh, Mauriac, and Graham Greene; but perhaps the fact that, in the end, our decision has been in principle a favourable one will dissipate some of the annoyance you must be feeling.', see Vaudrin to Cruise O'Brien, 6 Feb. 1948, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/517.
[35] McCormack, 'The historian as writer or critic', 118.

Mauriac, could be said to have been completed, nearly completed, or even started by the time OUPNY contacted Cruise O'Brien.

In response to Lurie's request for him to tell her more about his work, Cruise O'Brien informed her about his writing on François Mauriac and Graham Greene in addition to the Waugh essay she had already read. He proposed developing on these pieces to create a book of essays on modern Catholic writers. The authors whose writing he planned to investigate in addition to the three already mentioned were G.K. Chesterton, Georges Bernanos, Marcel Jouhandeau, and Sean O'Faolain. In the finished product, Chesterton and Jouhandeau were replaced with Paul Claudel, Paul Valery, and Leon Bloy. With the heavy emphasis on French and English writers, Akenson has claimed that Cruise O'Brien intended the book to be as 'un-Irish' as he could make it.[36] Yet, this was not the case. Indeed, Cruise O'Brien envisioned the volume being considerably more 'Irish' than it was when it was published. In his initial pitch, Cruise O'Brien stated that he wished to conclude the work with an exploration of the 'Catholic content of modern Irish writing'.[37] The editors at OUPNY, however, warned him off such a course, urging him to consider a more general essay taking in 'the nature and intentions of modern Catholic writers in general'.[38]

Once they had decided on the shape of the book, Cruise O'Brien and OUPNY agreed a contract for a 90,000-word manuscript with the New York house holding worldwide rights for the English language edition and any translations that might arise in future.[39] British, including Irish, rights were dealt with separately and, ultimately, the London-based publisher Chatto & Windus picked up the rights to the work across Ireland and the British Commonwealth. Securing such a prestigious international publisher for a first book would have been a boon for any aspiring intellectual, but the sorry state of the Irish publishing industry made it even more important for a young Irish critic. As Tony Farmar has shown, Irish publishers were struggling in the post-war years due to constraints placed upon it by the British Board of Trade, which banned the import of books and other literary matter from Ireland and numerous other

[36] Akenson, *Conor*, 124.
[37] Quoted in Vaudrin to Cruise O'Brien, 6 Feb. 1948, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/517.
[38] Vaudrin to Cruise O'Brien, 6 Feb. 1948, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/517.
[39] Memorandum of agreement, 1 Mar. 1948, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/509.

territories. This meant that Irish publishers were restricted to a domestic market that was too small to justify significant investment in risky publishing enterprises, such as a first book by a relatively unknown critic.[40]

Having signed his contract, Cruise O'Brien collaborated with various editors at OUPNY, Philip Vaudrin being the most significant in the beginning, to bring the work to fruition. As he drafted chapters, Cruise O'Brien succeeded in getting them into print as articles in little magazines across Great Britain and Ireland, and he drew on his relationship with the editors at *Kenyon Review* to publish slightly abridged versions of the chapters on Mauriac and Bernanos in the United States.[41] Additionally, Vaudrin used his connections with the New York *literati* to help the Irish critic place articles in prestigious journals, such as *Hudson Review*. Although it was a new periodical (it was only founded in 1947), *Hudson Review* had a standing which belied its years. Its first issues contained writing by highly regarded critics, such as William Empson, Cleanth Brooks, Marshall McLuhan, and Hugh Kenner among others. Not only did *Hudson Review* possess an impressive stable of contributors, but it was also an attractive proposition because of its readership. It was this factor that pushed Vaudrin to advise Cruise O'Brien to publish with this magazine. As he put it, it 'would be a good idea to have something appear in The Hudson review, as it is a particularly good magazine of its kind with a rather discerning list of subscribers – about 3,500'.[42] As well as bringing him to the attention of *Hudson Review*, Vaudrin tried to convince Cruise O'Brien to publish his O'Faolain chapter in *The Atlantic*. However, trying to run a publicity strategy at an ocean's remove proved difficult, as Cruise O'Brien had already promised the O'Faolain piece to *Renascence*, a twice-yearly journal dedicated to publishing scholarship on the revival of Catholic art and letters. Its editor, John Pick of Marquette University, read Cruise O'Brien's work in *Kenyon Review* and wanted to print the young critic's writing in his own magazine. Cruise O'Brien offered him the essay on O'Faolain, which Pick eagerly accepted.[43] Pick explained that while his journal did not have the

[40] Tony Farmar, *The history of Irish book publishing* (Stroud: The History Press, 2018), 132.
[41] Cruise O'Brien to Ransom, undated, Chalmers Library, Kenyon, Records of the Kenyon Review, Conor Cruise O'Brien file; Cruise O'Brien to Ransom, 6 Aug. 1948, Chalmers Library, Kenyon, Records of the Kenyon Review, Conor Cruise O'Brien file.
[42] Vaudrin to Cruise O'Brien, 15 Apr. 1949, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/517.
[43] Pick to Cruise O'Brien, 24 July 1949, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/517.

financial might of *Kenyon Review* or *Hudson Review*, he could 'guarantee, at any rate, that [Cruise O'Brien's] article would be read by a group of potential book-buyers'.[44] Vaudrin was disappointed that Cruise O'Brien had committed the article to *Renascence*, as he felt that having an article appear in *The Atlantic* would be 'pretty effective publicity' given the size of its readership (c. 150,000).[45] Periodical publication helped to generate 'buzz' in literary circles about Cruise O'Brien's output, and by the time *Maria Cross* came out his work had featured in cultural journals across the United States, Ireland, Great Britain, and continental Europe, even appearing in German translation in the monthly magazine, *Merkur*.[46] As they collaborated on *Maria Cross*, Cruise O'Brien and Vaudrin formed a close working relationship. Cruise O'Brien appreciated Vaudrin's guidance, telling *Hudson Review* editor Fred Morgan that Vaudrin had been 'extremely helpful' about the book.[47] Consequently, he was 'rather perturbed' when, in early 1951, he heard from William Oman, vice-president of OUPNY, that Vaudrin had left the publishing house.[48]

Cruise O'Brien finished writing the substantive chapters of *Maria Cross* in May 1951, completing the introductory material and revisions over the next six months. The finished product comprised nine chapters – eight on individual writers and a final one pulling together the book's connecting themes – and a preface in which the author explained the work's intention. The writers he put under the microscope were François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, Graham Greene, Sean O'Faolain, Evelyn Waugh, Charles Péguy, Paul Claudel, and Léon Bloy. In May 1952, OUPNY published the United States edition, but due to problems finding a publisher, obtaining import licences, and delays in getting the imported sheets bound, it took a further eighteen months before the book was available in Great Britain and Ireland where it came out under the imprint of Chatto & Windus. As if to underline the fact that Cruise O'Brien's moonlighting as 'Donat O'Donnell' did not hurt his civil service career, the Irish Ambassador in London, F.H. Boland, hosted the book's launch at the London embassy, inviting influential

[44] Pick to Cruise O'Brien, 3 Sept. 1949, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/517.
[45] Vaudrin to Cruise O'Brien, 1 Sept. 1949, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/517.
[46] Donat O'Donnell, 'Der Faust des Bernanos', *Merkur* (Oct. 1952), 924-43.
[47] Cruise O'Brien to Morgan, 8 Mar. 1951, Princeton University Library (PUL), Hudson Review Archives (HRA), C1091/92/9.
[48] Ibid.

figures from the London literary world.[49] Initial sales in the United States were underwhelming, especially when compared to the praise the book was getting from reviewers.[50] By contrast to the US edition, when *Maria Cross* finally appeared on shelves in Britain and Ireland, it sold out almost immediately. At several stages, Cruise O'Brien was forced to use his diplomatic contacts to smooth the way for Chatto & Windus, operating under a strict quota due to paper supply issues, to bring in a sufficient volume of sheets to meet the demand.[51] The publication of *Maria Cross* was a major staging post along Cruise O'Brien's intellectual career path. In the next section, we shall explore the ways in which the success of his first book created many new opportunities for Cruise O'Brien, who adroitly took advantage of his critical breakthrough.

Building a reputation

Maria Cross's critical reception was, in the words of OUPNY's John Cushman, 'exceptional' for a first book of criticism.[52] *The New York Times Book Review* devoted nearly an entire page to its approving review, including photos of the eight authors Cruise O'Brien discussed. Its reviewer, John Cogley, editor of the intellectual Catholic periodical *Commonweal*, declared that with this book Cruise O'Brien had written 'more profoundly' than any other critic on his chosen subjects.[53] The prestigious *Times Literary Supplement* featured its review of *Maria Cross* on the front page, giving over two and a half pages to Robert Speaight's review. Speaight compared *Maria Cross* with another new book on a similar theme, Kathleen Nott's *The emperor's clothes*, praising the Irishman's work to the same extent as he denigrated Nott's.[54] Catholic critics across the Anglosphere hoped that *Maria Cross* would revitalise Catholic literary criticism and provide a powerful argument against the 'notion that Catholic criticism [was] normally anaemic'.[55] In *Blackfriars*, an English Catholic journal, Ian Gregor called the collection of essays a ground-breaking piece of criticism, even if not all Cruise O'Brien's conclusions were wholly convincing.

[49] Cruise O'Brien to Cunliffe, 19 Aug. 1953, University of Reading Special Collections (URSC), Chatto & Windus papers, CW 131/3.
[50] Cushman to Cruise O'Brien, 21 July 1952, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/517.
[51] M.G. Barry to Parsons, 3 Nov. 1953, URSC, Chatto & Windus papers, CW 131/3.
[52] Cushman to Parsons, 10 July 1952, URSC, Chatto & Windus papers, CW 125/21.
[53] John Cogley, 'A preoccupation with evil', *New York Times*, 15 Jun. 1952.
[54] Robert Speaight, 'Literature and dogma', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 Jan. 1954.
[55] John H. Meyer, 'Contemporary Catholic writing', *Renascence* 6 (Fall 1953), 33-39.

Despite this caveat, he thought the Irish author's first book succeeded 'triumphantly'.[56] Similarly, the American intellectual John W. Simons demurred at many of Cruise O'Brien's analyses but still determined that his brand of literary criticism was superior to previous attempts to grapple with these authors.[57] In Ireland, the classical scholar John O'Meara reviewed *Maria Cross* on Radio Éireann and his review was then reprinted in the highbrow Jesuit quarterly *Studies*. Again, O'Meara found himself baulking at some of Cruise O'Brien's ideas but, nonetheless, deemed it a 'brilliant' book, which revealed its author to be an 'unusually perceptive and intelligent critic'.[58] Although he contested Cruise O'Brien's portrayal of his own *oeuvre*, Sean O'Faolain deemed the book 'provocative and stimulating' and pronounced him as one of François Mauriac's 'best critics'.[59]

One of the criticisms made about *Maria Cross* was that Cruise O'Brien did not explicitly stake out his position *vis a vis* Catholicism.[60] This lack of clear self-positioning led to confusion among the ranks of reviewers, leaving them to draw their own conclusions and ascribe characteristics to him based on their own interpretations of his work. As a result, many critics labelled him a 'Catholic intellectual'. This positioning of Cruise O'Brien has echoes in the historical literature. For example, historian Bryan Fanning has argued that in the early stages of his career Cruise O'Brien was a 'Catholic intellectual'.[61] However, Cruise O'Brien was not a Catholic in any meaningful sense of the term. His mother was a devout Catholic who ensured that he made his first communion, but his father was a convinced agnostic, who insisted that his son was educated at a non-denominational secondary school before going on to university at TCD. Privately, Cruise O'Brien thought of *Maria Cross* as an attempt 'by a non-religious person to cross the gap and try and think and imagine in the terms and images of religious people'.[62] Nevertheless, given the book's focus on Catholic writers and the nationality of its author, many commenters assumed that Cruise O'Brien was a 'Catholic' intellectual and that

[56] Ian Gregor, 'New bearings in the "Catholic" novel', *Blackfriars*, 34 (1954), 24-26.
[57] John W. Simons, 'Eight Catholic writers and a search for a pattern', *Commonweal*, 30 May 1952.
[58] John J. O'Meara, 'Review of *Maria Cross: imaginative patterns in a group of modern Catholic writers* by Donat O'Donnell', *Studies: an Irish Quarterly Review*, 43 (Summer 1954), 228-31.
[59] Sean O'Faolain, 'New Novels', *The Listener*, 23 Dec. 1954.
[60] Raymond Mortimer, 'Christian writers now', *Sunday Times*, 22 Nov. 1953.
[61] Bryan Fanning, *Histories of the Irish future* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 6.
[62] Cruise O'Brien to Barlow, 13 Feb. 1965, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/100/159.

Maria Cross represented a 'Catholic point of view'.[63] The English writer Philip Toynbee encapsulated this line of thought, writing 'Mr. O'Donnell is himself, one rather dubiously assumes, a Catholic'.[64] The Swedish political scientist Herbert Tingsten even went so far as to position Cruise O'Brien as an apologist for and 'defender of the faith'.[65] Cruise O'Brien took such umbrage to Tingsten's representation as a Catholic apologist that he penned a response of the same length as the initial review. In his riposte, Cruise O'Brien explained that Tingsten had misrepresented the objective of his book, arguing by reference to its preface that the 'real aims' of *Maria Cross* were to investigate the 'imaginative worlds' of 'eight writers who [were] Catholics'. Therefore, as far as Cruise O'Brien was concerned, 'so far from being a defence of Catholicism', the book was 'not even about Catholicism'.[66] Despite Cruise O'Brien's protests to the contrary, the idea of him as a Catholic intellectual persisted. Nearly a decade later, a *Times* profile stated that *Maria Cross* established his brand as 'a Roman Catholic intellectual with a subtle understanding of creative writing'.[67]

Despite the confusion over Cruise O'Brien's confessional status, *Maria Cross*'s critical success led to many opportunities for Cruise O'Brien to make further interventions in the public sphere, particularly outside of Ireland. Ambitious Irish intellectuals did not consider their publics as being exclusively, or even predominantly, situated in their native land. As Ireland's leading contemporary public intellectual, Sean O'Faolain, somewhat snobbishly put it, 'The selective audience in Ireland [was] minute', meaning that Irish intellectuals had to 'find it in Great Britain for the most part'.[68] Therefore, securing recognition in London and New York literary circles was vital in developing Cruise O'Brien's intellectual career. From the point of view of building his brand as an intellectual, *Maria Cross* was a hugely successful intervention, earning him plaudits in even 'the most fastidious highbrow circles, in Britain and America'.[69] In the United States, he started receiving assignments from *Commonweal*. Soon after publication

[63] R.D. McCay, 'Idea and pattern in the novels of Evelyn Waugh', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Iowa, 1953.
[64] Philp Toynbee, 'The wicked world', *The Observer*, 18 Oct. 1953.
[65] Herbert Tingsten, 'Diktaren och korset', *Dagens Nyheter*, 23 Nov. 1952.
[66] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The writer and the cross', undated, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/527.
[67] Special Correspondent, 'Irish voice in the Katanga crisis', *The Times*, 15 Sept. 1961.
[68] Sean O'Faolain, 'Getting at which public?', *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 24 (Winter 1948), 90-95.
[69] Special Correspondent, 'Irish voice in the Katanga crisis', *The Times*, 15 Sept. 1961.

in Britain, Cruise O'Brien began to obtain commissions to review books in highly regarded English journals, such as *The Spectator*, *New Statesman*, *The Manchester Guardian*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*.[70] Irishman Brian Inglis's appointment as *The Spectator*'s assistant editor might also have contributed to Cruise O'Brien's entry into the ranks of its army of reviewers. These magazines had a much larger reach than their Irish equivalents and were less specialised than the American literary journals that had hitherto featured his writing. The book also earned Cruise O'Brien a contract with the Clarendon Press to write a study of 'Irish writing in English', although the Irishman never actually got around to producing the study despite the fact that the Clarendon Press continued to pay him periodic advances for the best part of two decades.[71] To highlight the extent of the excitement *Maria Cross* generated, in March 1954, the magazine *Vogue*, one of America's most influential lifestyle publications, listed the book as one of the subjects 'People are talking about'. Notably, *Vogue* attributed the book's authorship not to 'Donat O'Donnell' but to 'Conor Cruise O'Brien, one of Ireland's most brilliant critics', undercutting historian Bryan Fanning's contention that at this point in his career Cruise O'Brien was more a 'private intellectual' than a public one.[72]

Cruise O'Brien quickly became a sought-after authority on French intellectual life, as the reception of *Maria Cross* helped to develop trust in his 'brand'.[73] That his public intellectual career in Britain took off so quickly after the publication of *Maria Cross* points to the significance of an already established system of commentators, critics, and interpreters in the 'making of an intellectual'.[74] In *The Spectator*, Cruise O'Brien reviewed books on literary criticism and French, English, and Irish subjects, writing essays on Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valery, Brian Inglis' *Freedom of the press in Ireland*, and R.P. Blackmur's *Language as gesture*. Alan Pryce-Jones, the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, invited Cruise O'Brien to write on similar topics in his paper, commissioning reviews on new investigations into Graham

[70] Cruise O'Brien's *Times Literary Supplement* and *Manchester Guardian* output does not appear in Akenson's extensive bibliography of Cruise O'Brien's works, see D.H. Akenson, ed., *Conor: a biography of Conor Cruise O'Brien: anthology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).
[71] Davin to O'Brien, 23 Aug. 1971, Oxford University Press Archives (OUPA), PB/ED/006499.
[72] *Vogue*, 15 Mar. 1954; Fanning, *Irish future*, 197.
[73] Patrick Baert and Josh Booth, 'Tensions within the public intellectual: political interventions from Dreyfus to the new social media', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 25, Public Intellectuals (Dec. 2012), 118.
[74] Baert and Morgan, 'Performative framework', 329.

Greene and connections between writers and religion. For his debut in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the editor gave Cruise O'Brien an entire page to delve into the relationship between French writers, particularly critics, and politics. In this essay, he expressed his admiration for *littérature engagée*, writing,

> The fact of *engagement*, the idea of literature as a battleground of ideas and the critic as a partisan, begets a criticism that is, in the fullest sense, lively. The critic's high conception of his own moral responsibility, and of the writer's function as a *directeur de conscience*, makes him speak up with a seriousness and an apparent clarity rarely found together among critics outside France.[75]

According to the literary editor Karl Miller, for whom he wrote at *The Spectator* and *New Statesman*, Cruise O'Brien transferred his esteem for engaged writing to his work in London's intellectual world. For Miller, this was no bad thing. Instead, he thought it was an 'invaluable' contribution to English intellectual life. Miller believed that Cruise O'Brien's 'Francophile perspective' and his brand of reading 'literature with politics in mind but not just politics in mind' punctured the 'parochial ... politico-literary London scene'.[76] The essays and reviews he wrote in this period, between 1954 and 1961, formed the spine of his celebrated collection *Writers and politics* (see Chapter 3).

One of the doors that opened for Cruise O'Brien around the time *Maria Cross* came out in Britain was at the BBC, specifically the *Third Programme*. As one *Irish Times* reviewer noted, Cruise O'Brien's newfound access to the BBC represented 'a cordial pat on the back from the BBC, on the strength of a book of essays he has written'.[77] Founded in 1946, the BBC's *Third Programme* gave intellectuals a space where they could speak to a self-selected, highly cultured audience. The *Third* was unashamedly committed to delivering 'highbrow' programming to Britain's cultural and intellectual elite, or 'egg-headed England' as Cruise O'Brien playfully

[75] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Examen de conscience', *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 Mar. 1954.
[76] Sarah O'Reilly, *Author's lives: life story interview with Karl Miller* [https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Authors/021M-C1276X0027XX-0017V0, accessed 14 Oct. 2022].
[77] G.A. Ogden, 'Toscani version of "La Boheme"', *Irish Times*, 5 Nov. 1953.

christened this public.[78] We should note that even though Cruise O'Brien and others primarily associated the *Third* with English intellectual elites, BBC radio was also broadcast on Irish airwaves. Therefore, the *Third*'s public also included Irish listeners interested in the intellectual subjects discussed on that channel. In Ireland, the native media institutions were too small to support something akin to the *Third Programme*. The state broadcaster, Radio Éireann, had a single wavelength, meaning that its programmes could not solely target highly sophisticated listeners but needed to be accessible to an audience of varying levels of erudition. Consequently, its productions could not afford to be too esoteric. Instead, it had to accommodate a broader range of tastes than the *Third*. For instance, H.L. Morrow's weekly cultural programme 'Wednesday Magazine' boasted of being 'intended for brows of all altitudes and tastes of all thicknesses and thinnessesses [sic]'.[79] As a corollary of this situation, Radio Éireann had practically 'no standing with intellectuals' in Ireland, as the historian F.X. Martin has explained.[80]

In addition to the intellectual reasons for wanting to break into the British market, British media outlets were attractive for Irish intellectuals who wanted financial compensation that reflected the hard work that went into their intellectual productions. In Ireland, Radio Éireann was the leading institutional mediator and the broadcaster offered larger commissions than any of the country's national newspapers or cultural periodicals. However, its ability to dispense patronage was dwarfed by the BBC's financial resources. For example, in the late 1940s Radio Éireann paid contributors £4 for a 2,800 word, twenty-minute book review, whereas the *Third Programme* offered £21 for less work and greater intellectual freedom. As Frank McManus, Radio Éireann's General Features Editor, wrote to the Anglo-Irish man of letters Hubert Butler, the Irish national broadcaster could never hope to compete with the pay on offer at its British equivalent as 'Irish and British broadcasting economies are as different as the Irish and British economies.'[81] Irish intellectuals were not the only group of thinkers excited by the lucrative fees on offer at the BBC. As Cambridge don Noel Annan noted, the hefty fee

[78] Cruise O'Brien to Kallin, undated, BBC Written Archives, O'Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[79] H.L. Morrow, ed., 'Wednesday Magazine', 20 Jun. 1956, UCDA, RTE Scripts, P260/8.
[80] F.X. Martin, 'The Thomas Davis lectures, 1953-67', *Irish Historical Studies*, 15 (1967), 280.
[81] McManus to Butler, 24 May 1949, UCDA, RTE Scripts, P260/320.

was ‘a most welcome addition to the income of most intellectuals’ who managed to access the platform.[82]

Before *Maria Cross* appeared in the United Kingdom, Cruise O’Brien had attempted to gain access to the *Third Programme*, but his efforts were unsuccessful. In 1950, Cruise O’Brien encountered Eileen Molony, a junior talent scout at the BBC interested in the Irishman’s work. Molony tried to get Cruise O’Brien’s foot in the door at the BBC by offering the *Third Programme* planners a talk on the poet Charles Péguy. However, as she put it, her ‘function in this organisation [was] simply to supply ideas’, and the programme planners did not take up the opportunity to broadcast Cruise O’Brien on Péguy.[83] Three years went by before Cruise O’Brien had another chance to access the *Third Programme*’s exclusive platform. This time around, his contact was the influential producer Anna Kallin, whose stable of contributors included scholars like Isaiah Berlin. Kallin and Cruise O’Brien had several mutual acquaintances, including Hubert Butler and the novelist Elizabeth Bowen. The pair began corresponding not long after Kallin returned to London following a visit to Bowen’s Court, Elizabeth Bowen’s ancestral home.[84] Through Kallin, Cruise O’Brien participated in a series of broadcasts about French intellectual life alongside the noted philosopher A.J. Ayer, Alan Pryce-Jones, and the controversial philosopher Kathleen Nott.[85] Cruise O’Brien was thrilled to get the opportunity, and his excitement mounted when he discovered that Albert Camus was going to present the series’ epilogue. In his lecture, Cruise O’Brien spoke about French intellectuals, including Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, exhorting listeners to stay abreast of developments in what he called ‘the conscience of Europe’, meaning France.[86] Following the broadcast, the BBC journal, *The Listener*, printed the text under the title ‘France as the conscience of Europe’. After that he received further commissions from the *Third Programme*, lecturing on Merleau-Ponty (see Chapter 2), Pierre Hervé, and on Camus again.

[82] Quoted in Collini, *Absent minds*, 442.
[83] Molony to Cruise O’Brien, 20 Jun. 1950, BBC Written Archives, O’Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[84] Kallin to Butler, 29 Sept. 1953, TCDA, Butler papers, 10304/647/65.
[85] Unsigned to Cruise O’Brien, 21 July 1954, BBC Written Archives, O’Brien file 1, 1938-62; Cruise O’Brien to Kallin, 4 Feb. 1955, BBC Written Archives, O’Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[86] Donat O’Donnell, ‘The Gallic scene to-day - The present phase of the French Revolution (speaker’s copy), BBC Written Archives, O’Brien file 1, 1938-62.

During his involvement with the *Third Programme*, Cruise O'Brien developed a reputation among the producers as a 'brilliant broadcaster'.[87] This complemented his status in Ireland as one of the country's 'topmost broadcasters'.[88] However, as the next section illustrates, despite 'playing the game' well for more than a decade and working hard to develop a name for himself as an intellectual alongside his career as a civil servant, Cruise O'Brien became embroiled in events that had a profound impact on both of his careers, ending one of them and sending the other into a different stratosphere.

An authoritative public intellectual

During the 1950s and into the early 1960s, Cruise O'Brien constructed a relatively successful career for himself as an intellectual. He published three books, myriad essays in prestigious journals, and became a well-regarded broadcaster in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Working with institutional mediators like *The Spectator*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, and the *Third Programme*, he fashioned a significant reputation as an authority on French intellectual life and as 'a man of ideas worth hearing'.[89] However, in 1961, his career trajectory altered drastically when he was thrust into the global media spotlight for reasons unconnected to his intellectual output. Alongside his intellectual work, he prospered in his day job as a civil servant in the Department of External Affairs, developing Ireland's United Nations policy and rising to become an Assistant Secretary in the department. During several short stints at the United Nations General Assembly as a member of the Irish delegation, he earned the respect of Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold. In 1961, Hammarskjold requested that Cruise O'Brien be seconded from the Irish diplomatic service to join the UN Secretariat. Hammarskjold appointed the Irish diplomat to serve as his representative in the Congolese province Katanga, which was then controlled by a secessionist provincial government backed by several European powers, including Britain and Belgium. His experience in Katanga and the fallout from it not only resulted in his resignation from the civil service, but also had major implications for his brand as

[87] Toulmin to Talks, 18 Aug. 1960, BBC Written Archives, O'Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[88] *Irish Press*, 7 Feb. 1955.
[89] Special Correspondent, 'Irish voice in the Katanga crisis', *The Times*, 15 Sept. 1961.

an intellectual, catapulting him from a moderately well-known literary intellectual into a globally recognised authoritative public intellectual.

In Ireland, his appointment elicited great excitement. For instance, journalist Conor Mann maintained that Cruise O'Brien's elevation to the Secretariat indicated the high esteem in which the international community now held Ireland.[90] Despite the initial elation, Cruise O'Brien's time in Katanga did not end well. He found himself at the centre of a storm of controversy surrounding a UN military operation called 'Operation Morthor'. There was enormous confusion about the objectives of the operation and whether it was authorised at the highest levels. This uncertainty was not helped by discordant media briefings from Cruise O'Brien and his superiors in Leopoldville. Furthermore, Hammarskjold perished in a plane crash just days after the abortive military action, further fuelling the sense of crisis. Ultimately, this crisis precipitated Cruise O'Brien's resignation from the Secretariat and the Irish foreign service. The now ex-diplomat felt that the UN had turned him into a scapegoat for Morthor's failure and he was not content to permit that to happen.

In a widely reported statement to the press upon his resignation, Cruise O'Brien declared that he had quit his post so that he could 'recover [his] freedom of speech and action'.[91] He made several allegations against European countries, including the United Kingdom, charging them with hindering the United Nations' mission and conspiring to remove him from the scene.[92] Days later, he announced his intention to write a book fleshing out his case.[93] In the resultant book, *To Katanga and back*, Cruise O'Brien claimed that not only had the operation been authorised, but that when it went pear-shaped the late Secretary General, Hammarskjold, got involved in trying to cover up the UN's true objective. For decades, Cruise O'Brien's charges were hotly contested.[94] On the day of publication, the United Nations released a statement describing his account as 'a fabrication bearing no relation to the truth'.[95]

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[90] 'Irish panorama', *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 3 Jun. 1961.
[91] 'Text of O'Brien statement', *New York Times*, 3 Dec. 1961.
[92] Ibid.
[93] 'No pressure from government', *Irish Times*, 4 Dec. 1961.
[94] Brian Urquhart, *Hammarskjold* (New York: Norton, 1994), 566; see also Rajeshwar Dayal, *Mission for Hammarskjold: the Congo crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 267.
[95] 'Angry denial by UN', *Irish Press*, 13 Nov. 1962.

Nevertheless, in recent years, archival investigations conducted by professional historians have produced evidence corroborating Cruise O'Brien's version of events.[96] Whatever the case, this section does not intend to rehash this argument. Instead, it examines how the experience altered his career trajectory, transforming him from a respected historian and literary critic into a globally recognised public intellectual.[97]

Cruise O'Brien garnered significant media attention across the globe as events in Katanga unfolded, simultaneously turning him into a controversial political figure and enhancing his profile as an intellectual. After 'Morthor', major news outlets rushed to produce profiles of the Irishman at the centre of the crisis and for several months his name was rarely out of the papers and his face was regularly seen in photos and on television. In Britain, the right-wing press, which was fiercely critical of the United Nations' intervention in Congo, was particularly hostile towards Cruise O'Brien, insisting that the Irishman had acted without authority. For example, *The Daily Mail* referred to him as the UN 'hatchet man' and as 'the man who declared war' in Katanga 'off his own bat'.[98] Most outlets noted that in addition to his UN role, Cruise O'Brien moonlighted as 'Donat O'Donnell', the Irish writer. For instance, *The Sunday Telegraph* included the question 'What has the writer Donat O'Donnell to do with the war against Katanga?' in its weekly news quiz, while *The Times* detailed his work as a historian and as an 'intellectual with a subtle understanding of creative writing'.[99] Journalists and politicians targeted two aspects of his character for particular attention: his Irishness and his status as an intellectual.

Officials in the Foreign Office privately expressed concern about his 'pretty "Irish" methods', while in the House of Commons a Conservative M.P. attacked him as a 'blood-thirsty

[96] See Alan James, *Britain and the Congo crisis, 1960-63* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Michael Kennedy and Art Magennis, *Ireland, the United Nations and the Congo: a military and diplomatic history, 1960-1* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014); see also Per-Axel Frielingsdorf, '"Machiavelli of peace": Dag Hammarskjold and the political role of the Secretary-General of the United Nations', Unpublished PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 2016.
[97] See Patrick Baert, *The existentialist moment: the rise of Sartre as a public intellectual* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).
[98] Peter Younghusband, 'Tshombe's Horribles', *Daily Mail*, 6 Sept. 1961; John Hall, 'The man who declared war', *Daily Mail*, 15 Sept. 1961.
[99] 'News quiz', *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 Sept. 1961; Special Correspondent, 'Irish voice in the Katanga crisis', *The Times*, 15 Sept. 1961.

Dublin corner boy'.[100] After he made his allegations against the British government in his resignation statement, the British media and political establishment's hostility towards him increased. According to *The Sunday Independent*'s New York correspondent, behind the scenes at the United Nations the British delegation briefed their international colleagues that 'O'Brien was falling back on the argument of his forefathers and blaming the British for everything'.[101] The press, echoing the political elite, also adopted this line of attack. *The Sunday Telegraph* claimed that Cruise O'Brien's allegations against the British government had their roots not in reality, but in his supposed desire to get revenge for 'Ireland's historical sufferings'.[102] One journalist, noting the parallels between United Nations forces occupying a post office in Katanga and Irish republicans taking over a post office during the 1916 rising, suggested that Cruise O'Brien had wanted to 'find a way of emulating Padraic Pearse's stand in the General Post Office'.[103] The British media was not the only set of journalists to pick out Cruise O'Brien's Irishness as a reason for his charges against Britain. In Sweden, the leading liberal newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, stated: 'O'Brien is an Irishman. One asks oneself to what extent this fact is a basis for his violent accusations against the British government.'[104] Cruise O'Brien was not without defenders in Britain, however. *The Observer*, a consistent critic of British policy towards Congo, argued against the representation of him as a 'wild Irish militarist', pointing out that 'there [was] only too much evidence to support his case'.[105] Similarly, the weekly magazine *New Statesman* supported the Irishman, declaring editorially that the publicly available evidence tended to bolster his argument. In February 1962, Cruise O'Brien commented on this anti-Irish theme in much of the media coverage, asserting that for its own purposes the British government 'invent[ed] the wicked Dr O'Brien, truculently pursuing a policy of his own, for reasons, no doubt, of atavistic chauvinism'.[106]

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[100] James, *Britain and the Congo crisis*, 101; *Hansard*, 17 Oct. 1961.
[101] Spike Hennessy, 'O'Brien a backstage UNO topic', *Sunday Independent*, 10 Dec. 1961.
[102] 'To the point', *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 Dec. 1961.
[103] 'London Letter', *The Guardian*, 14 Sept. 1961.
[104] *Dagens Nyheter*, 9 Nov. 1962, National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), 305/384/42.
[105] 'The Congo, Katanga, and Dr O'Brien', *The Observer*, 10 Dec. 1961.
[106] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Britain's opposition to UN in Katanga, *Irish Times*, 7 Feb. 1962.

The second dominant angle that Cruise O'Brien's critics took was to portray him as an intellectual at sea in the field of action. *The Sunday Telegraph*'s editor argued that the controversy surrounding Cruise O'Brien signalled the end for the United Nations as a world force, maintaining that global power brokers would no longer 'allow intellectual playboys like Dr O'Brien to decide the course of history'.[107] In the *Daily Herald*, an Irish journalist judged that although Cruise O'Brien may possess great 'wit and intelligence', he was a poor choice to take on the Katanga problem because his 'brilliance may have been too much the brilliance of the academic'.[108] The editor of the London-based *The Sphere*, John Connell, who had previously expressed a modicum of support for Cruise O'Brien, viewed him as 'an intellectual who, with neither natural bent nor any test of training, assumed politico-military responsibilities far beyond his competence, and therefore as an architect … of disaster in Africa'.[109] Latter-day representations of the Katanga crisis also emphasise this notion. For example, one of Cruise O'Brien's erstwhile United Nations colleagues, Sture Linnér, recapitulated this perspective in his contribution to the UN Oral History Project when he recalled of Cruise O'Brien that he was, 'a brilliant mind, brilliant writer, brilliant thinker, brilliant everything but not the man to discuss issues with heavy Belgian mining bosses who controlled life in Katanga'.[110] Equally, in the Netflix film, *The siege of Jadotville*, Cruise O'Brien was depicted as an ineffectual but reckless intellectual. Asked to assess Cruise O'Brien's abilities, the lead character, Cmdt. Quinlan, dismissively declares, 'He's a smart man, sir, but he's an academic who thinks that everything stands still while he thinks about what to do.'[111] In some sense, Cruise O'Brien was himself to blame for some of these characterizations. He inadvertently helped foster the idea that he was an intellectual ill-equipped for action when he suggested that Hammarskjold, who had read and been impressed by *Maria Cross*, chose him for the position based not on his competence as an administrator or a negotiator but on his excellence as a literary critic.[112]

[107] 'End of a dream for UN', *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 Dec. 1961.
[108] Sean Greene, 'O'Brien - the bitter man who breathes goodwill', *Daily Herald*, 6 Dec. 1961.
[109] John Connell, 'The heart of the matter', *The Sphere*, 30 Dec. 1961.
[110] Jean Krasno, Interview with Sture Linnér, UN Oral History Project, 8 Nov. 1990, 16.
[111] Richie Smyth, *The Siege of Jadotville* (2016).
[112] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'My case', *The Observer*, 17 Dec. 1961.

Cruise O'Brien took advantage of the media storm surrounding him. Following his resignation, he went on a media blitz in Britain and Ireland, appearing on several television programmes on the BBC and Granada Television dedicated to his activities in Katanga. His appearance on Granada drew in eight million viewers amounting to three quarters of the possible British viewership. *The Irish Press* printed an image of a family gathered around a television set watching Cruise O'Brien's performance on its front page.[113] *The Observer* editor David Astor commissioned two lengthy articles from him where he was able to lay out his case against the British government in a more substantial form than in his other media engagements. These were reprinted in Ireland in the *Irish Independent*. Leading publishers vied with each other to secure rights to the book Cruise O'Brien intended to write, with Hutchinsons of London coming out on top in the battle for his signature. In the United States, Simon & Schuster secured the rights to the work. The terms Cruise O'Brien received wildly exceeded those of his previous books, as publishers sought to capitalise on his newfound notoriety. Hutchinsons' contract included a £3,500 'non-returnable advance', while Simon & Schuster paid him $5,000 for the US rights.[114] These were enormous amounts of money at the time, significantly surpassing the yearly salaries of most professions, including his own at the Department of External Affairs. Additionally, *The Sunday Telegraph*, which at one point described Cruise O'Brien as 'an instrument of civil war', bought the serial rights for £7,000.[115] Of course, these massive fees owed a great deal to the controversy and excitement swirling around Cruise O'Brien and the story of what happened in Katanga. However, his negotiating strength benefited from his decision to employ Elaine Greene as his literary agent. Greene also sold translation rights to publishers in multiple European countries, including Germany, Italy, France, and the Soviet Union.[116]

When he resigned from the UN and the Department of External Affairs, Cruise O'Brien presented himself before the world's media as a truth-teller who wanted to expose the forces

[113] *Irish Press*, 12 Dec. 1961; *Evening Herald*, 15 Dec. 1961.
[114] Hutchinson & Co, Memorandum of agreement, 18 Dec. 1961, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/534.
[115] Douglas Brown, 'Whose cause do they serve', *Sunday Telegraph*, 3 Dec. 1961.
[116] Mondadori to Cruise O'Brien, 7 Jun. 1963, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/539; Greene to Cruise O'Brien, 26 Sept. 1963, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/539; Cruise O'Brien to Greene, 14 Jan. 1964, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/539.

militating against the UN[117] Speaking to a gaggle of reporters in London when he arrived there for a television appearance, he positioned himself as 'a witness of the truth'.[118] His supporters accepted this narrative. For example, in the House of Lords, the Labour peer Lord Longford, the Anglo-Irish intellectual Frank Pakenham, jumped to defend Cruise O'Brien from his fellow Peers' criticisms, declaring him 'a man of passionate integrity, exceptional intellectual force and a certain reluctance to keep quiet when he considers that the issues of truth and justice are concerned'.[119] In his book *To Katanga and back*, published in November 1962, Cruise O'Brien adopted a similar pose. Introducing the volume, he proclaimed that the work's value 'derive[d] from the attempt which the writer has made to tell the truth'.[120] Some critics baulked at Cruise O'Brien's self-positioning as a 'lonely Apostle of Truth', while others applauded him for lifting the veil shrouding the inner workings of the United Nations.[121] On the publication of *To Katanga and back*, journalist Douglas Johnson wrote that long after the Katanga secession was forgotten, people would continue to return to Cruise O'Brien's book because it was 'a model of the exercise: the Intellectual as a Man of Action'.[122] As the English man of letters John Gross put it, while he had been 'widely admired as a historian and literary critic' before Katanga, in this new role Cruise O'Brien 'excited some positive hero worship'.[123] The Indian writer Sadhan Kumar Ghosh even went so far as to declare that 'Since Orwell died, civilisation has not had so doughty a defender' as Cruise O'Brien.[124]

As the sociologist Barbara Misztal has argued, being viewed as possessing a high degree of courage is a key component in the formation of an intellectual's authority and their standing as a public intellectual.[125] Cruise O'Brien's experience with the United Nations in Katanga, and his decision to write about it, earned him a reputation as an intellectual prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of a principle. Cruise O'Brien was seen to have 'fearlessly sacrificed his

[117] 'Text of O'Brien statement', *New York Times*, 3 Dec. 1961.
[118] 'Dr O'Brien comes to London', *The Times*, 11 Dec. 1961.
[119] *Hansard*, 18 Dec. 1961.
[120] Cruise O'Brien, *To Katanga and back*, 3.
[121] Dan Kurzman, 'One side of truth', *Saturday Review*, 30 Mar. 1963; Thomas J. Hamilton, 'Congo Crossfire', *New York Times*, 14 Apr. 1963.
[122] Douglas Johnson, 'Formerly our man in the Congo', *Birmingham Post*, 13 Nov. 1962.
[123] John Gross, 'Critic with a mission', *The Observer*, 28 Nov. 1965.
[124] Sadhan Kumar Ghosh, '… about books', undated, URSC, Chatto & Windus papers, CW R/1/113.
[125] Misztal, *Public good*, passim.

brilliant career as a civil servant, both Irish and international, for the very reasons that he wanted to be free to speak out'.[126] The ITV correspondent, Nigel Ryan, who reported from Katanga, argued that by his refusal to stay quiet, Cruise O'Brien had demonstrated himself to be 'a most intelligent and courageous man'.[127] In a similar vein, another Irish intellectual, Proinsias Mac Aonghusa, proclaimed that Cruise O'Brien was undoubtedly 'one of the most courageous men to come out of Ireland for many years' because he 'says and writes what he thinks and what he believes to be true. He does not measure his words to suit the moment or curry favour with authority.'[128] The British literary critic Raymond Williams felt that it was a disservice to Cruise O'Brien to link his authority too firmly to his experience in the Congo. In 1965, Williams insisted that it was wrong to praise the Irishman for being, as he put it, 'the hero of Katanga'. Instead, Williams wanted Cruise O'Brien to receive plaudits for the stances he took in his intellectual work. Cruise O'Brien, according to this observer, was 'not a critic who acquired status in Elizabethville: he is a man who fights for humane values as and where he can, the one way being as valuable as the other'.[129] Even though the Congo episode catapulted him into the public spotlight, his public image as 'Katanga O'Brien' troubled Cruise O'Brien, who felt it had bestowed upon him a 'sensational past to live down'.[130] Nevertheless, as his contemporaries acknowledged, the events surrounding his time in Katanga and his decision to 'speak out' transformed him into what scholars now call 'an authoritative public intellectual'.[131]

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to chart Conor Cruise O'Brien's rise as a public intellectual. This was a crucial period in Cruise O'Brien's formation as a public intellectual as his activities helped him to develop his 'cultural authority', in which he continued to invest throughout his long career. He earned recognition across the Anglosphere as a literary critic and an historian (see Chapter 2) of significant ability, laying solid foundations of intellectual

[126] Owen Sheehy Skeffington, 'Pius XII and the Jews', *Irish Times*, 6 Jun. 1964.
[127] 'O'Brien – "a splendid official"', *Irish Press*, 4 Dec. 1961.
[128] Proinsias Mac Aonghusa, 'Straight from the shoulder', *Munster Express*, 25 Jun. 1965.
[129] Raymond Williams, 'A critic in action', *The Guardian*, 26 Nov. 1965.
[130] The title 'Katanga O'Brien' comes from F.S.L. Lyons, 'Home truths from abroad', *Irish Times*, 2 Dec. 1965.
[131] Baert and Booth, 'Tensions', 124.

achievement from which he was able to build his reputation as a public intellectual. As Collini has argued, this intellectual achievement is a vital component of an intellectual's authority. After establishing a track record of attainment, the next stage in the construction of cultural authority involves a person's ability to access platforms from which they can reach non-specialist publics. As we have seen, Cruise O'Brien had a talent for publicity and was adept at getting his work into print, which in turn led to further opportunities to communicate to audiences through other forms of media. This hard-won access was crucial for making his reputation as a public intellectual. After earning a significant level of intellectual attainment and gaining access to such restricted platforms, to become recognised as a public intellectual, a person needs to communicate with his audience regarding topics of a non-specialist sort. Although he was somewhat restricted by his role in the civil service, Cruise O'Brien's politico-literary style meant that his writing addressed what might be called the 'general concerns' of his audience, including contemporary literature, philosophy, history, and politics. When he left the civil service, his aptitude and willingness to speak out on matters of general interest became even more apparent. After Katanga, Cruise O'Brien possessed a celebrity status unmatched by most contemporary intellectuals, certainly Irish intellectuals. This celebrity was not a 'flash in the pan'. His principled stand and the dexterous way he took advantage of the storm of controversy surrounding him marked him out as a figure who had a unique perspective on world affairs and could not be cowed from stating his provocative opinions. Media outlets began courting him for his views on subjects ranging from the role of the United Nations to imperialism, African politics, the Cold War, and Irish politics, history and literature. His reputation for personal and intellectual courage earned him plaudits and adulation from many in the liberal, left-leaning media, and attracted the attention of Ghanaian President, Kwame Nkrumah, who appointed him as vice-chancellor of the University of Ghana based on his stand. It also led to him being put forward as a candidate for the editorship of the London-based periodical *New Statesman*. The continued attention he received from news organisations, magazine editors, and publics across the globe illustrated that he had successfully cultivated the cultural authority necessary to be recognised as a major public intellectual. The following chapters investigate different aspects of Cruise O'Brien's

multifaceted public intellectual career, beginning in Chapter 2 by charting the nature of his views on the role of the historian, the link between politics and historiography, and his own complex identity as an historian.

2

The writing of history

> *Personally, I like histories to tell us their prejudices, both because it is often fun, and because it shows us where, in their narrative they are likely to go wrong, what sort of things they are likely to misinterpret or miss, what they exaggerate*.[1]

History was a vital component of Cruise O'Brien's intellectual self-image and, as mentioned, a significant contributor to his cultural authority as a public intellectual. Consequently, one of the main idioms he used when engaging in public debate was a historical one, drawing on the cultural authority he earned as a historian of Parnellite politics and as a literary critic. Throughout his career, one of his abiding interests was the intricate relationship between historians, historiography, and contemporary politics. Appropriately, for a public intellectual, the vast bulk of his methodological and stylistic reflections occurred in forms of media, such as generalist periodicals or broadcast media, intended for a non-specialist public. To describe Cruise O'Brien as a philosopher of history would be an overstatement but it is fair to say that he was exceptionally reflexive about the historian's craft.

This chapter elucidates the core elements of Cruise O'Brien's historical imagination, tracing the sources and evolution of his ideas about history through his myriad essays, lectures, and books. In doing so, it directly challenges pre-existing interpretations of his perspective on historiography. First, it inspects the process by which Cruise O'Brien's classic text *Parnell and his Party* was published, drawing on editorial correspondence to revise D.H. Akenson and Fintan O'Toole's earlier accounts of the book's production. This section also interrogates the volume's

[1] 'Manuscript text of address to the Literary and Historical Society, University College Dublin, on the subject of historical objectivity', undated, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/861.

critical reception and legacy, evaluating recent claims that it presented Parnell as a prototype fascist dictator in the mould of a Mussolini or a Hitler. It rejects the assertion that in his determination to place such a frame on the iconic home ruler, Cruise O'Brien expunged the popular, democratic elements in the land reform and nationalist movements from his historical representations. Next, the chapter looks at the evolution of Cruise O'Brien's idea of history, focusing on his reception of the philosopher Michael Oakeshott's lecture, 'The activity of being an historian'. Utilising a mix of previously unseen archival material and published sources, this section illustrates the profound effect that Oakeshott's thought had on Cruise O'Brien's thinking about historical objectivity. His revolt against Oakeshott helped him to come to terms with his own ideas about how history should be written. Then, the chapter examines Cruise O'Brien's adherence to the concept of 'history as art', unpacking his essay 'Michelet today' and arguing that scholars have been too quick to dismiss Cruise O'Brien's methodological reflections as aberrant. Finally, the chapter repudiates the notion that Cruise O'Brien turned away from the perspective laid out in 'Michelet to-day', demonstrating his continued fidelity to its central themes by interrogating his later utterances on historical method. It shows how Cruise O'Brien came to assert Vico's concept of *fantasia*, understood as 'imaginative insight', as the pinnacle of historiography, and depicts the ways in which Cruise O'Brien applied *fantasia* in his own writing.

Parnell and his party

Parnell and his party is one of the classic texts of the first generation of historical revisionism in Ireland. The story of how Cruise O'Brien came to publish *Parnell and his party* with the Clarendon Press has been told in several different ways by different commentators. Cruise O'Brien's biographer, D.H. Akenson, has stated that New Zealander Dan Davin, the secretary to the delegates at the Clarendon Press, encountered the manuscript by chance while on a 'talent-scouting tour' in Dublin.[2] Fintan O'Toole, who interviewed Cruise O'Brien in the mid-1980s for *Magill*, a prominent current affairs magazine, has claimed that Davin approached 'an official of the Department of External Affairs', who just so happened to be Conor Cruise O'Brien, looking

[2] Akenson, *Conor*, 141.

for information 'about interesting new writing in Ireland'. Cruise O'Brien, O'Toole wrote, 'mentioned his own thesis; Davin read it, and Cruise O'Brien was happy not to have to rewrite it in order to get it published'.[3] However, as will be shown, neither of these narratives have their basis in reality.

Implied in both Akenson's and O'Toole's accounts is the idea that Davin was not previously known to Cruise O'Brien. However, as detailed below, Cruise O'Brien and Davin had corresponded for several years by the time Davin read *Parnell and his party*. In the early 1950s, the Clarendon Press was looking for someone to write a book on Irish literature in English. Unfortunately, from Clarendon's perspective, they 'had not been able to find a man who could write well enough and would at the same time be free'.[4] In 1952, Davin made a breakthrough with the project after reading a new work of literary criticism, which he considered 'excellent', by an author named Donat O'Donnell, Cruise O'Brien's penname. The book in question was *Maria Cross*. Among those with whom Davin had discussed *Maria Cross* were the historian David Cecil, the literary critic Helen Gardner, and the writer Joyce Cary, who agreed that it was 'brilliantly written'.[5] Davin did some digging and realised that he and Cruise O'Brien had mutual friends, including the poets W.R. Rodgers and Louis MacNeice, both of whom thought highly of his abilities as a critic. Davin sent out informal feelers to see if Cruise O'Brien would be interested in doing the project on the back of these contacts.[6] Davin got in touch with his counterpart at OUPNY, the house that published *Maria Cross*, to ask about Cruise O'Brien's future literary plans. Cruise O'Brien, according to his publisher in New York, had two prospective projects he wanted to complete. First, he intended to publish on Charles Stewart Parnell, on whom he was writing his doctoral thesis, and second, he had a vague notion of writing about 'the style of some right-wing and liberal writers'.[7] Davin had not previously worked with Cruise O'Brien but was interested in getting the Irishman to write a book on Irish literature in English for Clarendon. As OUPNY had an option on Cruise O'Brien's following two books, Davin wanted to ensure that he would not be stepping on anyone's toes if he were to

[3] O'Toole, 'Making a liberal', 27.
[4] Davin to The Vice-Chancellor, Wadham College, Oxford, 26 Jun. 1953, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Davin to Sisam, 9 Jun. 1953, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.
[7] Oman to Davin, 23 Sept. 1952, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.

make him an offer. The New York branch gave Davin the go-ahead to approach Cruise O'Brien, although Davin had already contacted the Irishman informally.[8]

During the contract negotiations for the book on Irish literature, Cruise O'Brien also wanted to know whether Davin would 'option' any future works. Here, Cruise O'Brien was mainly thinking about his PhD dissertation on 'Parnell and his Party' – 'nearly finished' – because his supervisor had plans to publish that work with Faber & Faber.[9] Faber published a series called 'Studies in Irish history', jointly paid for by the history faculties of University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, and Queen's University Belfast. At this point, Cruise O'Brien did not have a contract with Faber, but he wanted to apprise Davin of this 'standing arrangement'. Cruise O'Brien need not have worried because Clarendon Press did not intend to have an option clause in the contract. Unlike the New York branch, the Clarendon Press thought such clauses were unfair 'in most circumstances'.[10]

In December 1953, plans for Cruise O'Brien's book on Irish writing in English ran aground. As previously stated, at this time, Cruise O'Brien was in the process of writing up his PhD thesis – 'a historical thing', in his words – on Parnell, and the fatigue of dealing so intensely with an Irish subject had started to affect him. In this mental atmosphere, which he described as 'a sort of claustrophobia', he was apprehensive at the prospect of beginning a new '"Irish" book' so soon after the last one. He went so far as to say that the idea 'depresse[d]' him. According to Cruise O'Brien, the topic Davin wanted him to write about came with enormous cultural baggage that carried 'some rather dismal associations'.[11] Writing to another literary associate, *Hudson Review's* Fred Morgan, Cruise O'Brien decried the PhD writing process as being akin to being stranded in a 'desert, composed of minute particles of historical knowledge'.[12] Cruise O'Brien sought a release from this desert of Irish history, and in his eyes, this escape came in the form of a project on the French writer Andre Gide. Cruise O'Brien believed that the Gide project was an ambitious one, involving 'trying to lay hold of a misty but

[8] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 30 Oct. 1952, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.
[9] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 2 Aug. 1953, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.; see also letter from Moody to Davin, 6 Apr. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[10] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 18 Aug. 1953, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.
[11] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 4 Dec. 1953, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.
[12] Cruise O'Brien to Morgan, 9 Sept. 1954, PUL, HRA, C1091/92/9.

powerful entity, the conscience of modern man'.[13] Only after he had pursued this elusive entity did Cruise O'Brien think he would be ready to return to Irish writing in English.[14] Davin was not concerned about Cruise O'Brien postponing his study, reassuring Cruise O'Brien that he was more than willing to wait until the Irishman was ready to address himself to the subject. Davin reckoned that the 'project [would] not spoil with keeping'.[15] After a gap of several months, Cruise O'Brien came back to Davin looking to reignite the latter's interest in a book on Irish literature. By now, he had finished his thesis, and as he read through Justin O'Brien's *Portrait of Andre Gide* (1953), his idea for a project on the Frenchman had 'perished of sheer boredom'. Thus, Cruise O'Brien now wanted to meet with Davin to discuss getting the Irish writing project back on track.[16] The two men arranged to meet for lunch at the Café Royal in London for their first face to face meeting.[17]Davin and Cruise O'Brien's friendship blossomed after that. The two men sent each other books they thought the other might like, and Davin visited Cruise O'Brien at his home in the salubrious Dublin suburb, Howth. However, the study of Anglo-Irish literature remained a seed. On one visit to Cruise O'Brien's home, Davin urged Cruise O'Brien to show him his thesis on Parnell.[18]

In their accounts of the book's publication, Akenson and O'Toole emphasised that Cruise O'Brien did not have to revise the manuscript before Clarendon published it.[19] Indeed, Cruise O'Brien himself also fed into this narrative in his memoirs.[20] Cruise O'Brien did, in fact, revise the manuscript, contrary to what both Akenson and O'Toole claim. As Cruise O'Brien wrote to Davin in June 1955, while the manuscript was 'in large part' made up of 'work done for the degree of PhD', 'I [Cruise O'Brien] have revised it extensively in the past six months for the purpose of this conversion'.[21] Comparing *Parnell and his party* with the text of Cruise O'Brien's

[13] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 4 Dec. 1953, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 21 Dec. 1953, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.
[16] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 4 May 1954, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.
[17] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 5 May 1954, OUPA, BACKB01340/BLB248.
[18] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 14 Apr. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499; while Cruise O'Brien was stationed at the Irish embassy in Paris, Davin got him to procure copies of Beckett's novels, see Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 24 Oct. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[19] Akenson, *Conor*, 141; O'Toole, 'Making a liberal', 27.
[20] Cruise O'Brien, *Memoir*, 124.
[21] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 7 Jun. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.

PhD thesis, 'The Irish Parliamentary Party, 1880-90', reveals that Cruise O'Brien did make significant changes to the manuscript. Most strikingly, he completely rewrote the introductory chapter and added a 'Preface'. He also excised all appendices, added an index, and revised his bibliography, which included, among other things, adding a reference to the Gladstone papers, as his external examiner, Robert Dudley Edwards, had demanded.[22]

Before Davin could give *Parnell* the final seal of approval, he was required to seek the Delegates' judgment and wanted to get some expert opinions. T.W. Moody, Cruise O'Brien's PhD supervisor, had already written to Davin to assure him that the book was 'a winner'. Moody wanted Cruise O'Brien to publish with Faber and Faber in the 'Studies in Irish history' series, but he recognised that 'it [was] better for Cruise O'Brien to have the imprint of the Clarendon Press'.[23] After sending his work to Davin, Cruise O'Brien wrote the publisher another letter in which he begged the New Zealander not to ask Robert Dudley Edwards to review the manuscript. Dudley Edwards had acted as Cruise O'Brien's external examiner for his *viva voce*. During the examination, he pointed out that Cruise O'Brien had omitted to refer to the Gladstone papers, forcing the thesis to be withdrawn and resubmitted – much to Cruise O'Brien's chagrin.[24] Cruise O'Brien was worried that in the search for a reviewer someone at the Clarendon Press might put Dudley Edwards's name forward as an expert in the field. Cruise O'Brien called Dudley Edwards 'a barbarian and an enemy' and asserted that the Professor of Modern History at University College Dublin was not among the small 'number of people who kn[e]w much about Anglo-Irish politics of the period'.[25] Davin reassured Cruise O'Brien that he had no intention of asking Dudley Edwards to provide an opinion. He wanted an opinion from a 'general historian' who was well-known to the Delegates. Davin invited Sir Robert Ensor, a fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford, to review the manuscript.[26]

Several months ticked by, and Ensor's report had not yet materialised. This delay caused Cruise O'Brien a good deal of anxiety because while he was waiting for the go-ahead from

[22] Akenson, *Conor*, 139.
[23] Moody to Davin, 6 Apr. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[24] Cruise O'Brien, *Memoir*, 124.
[25] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 18 Jun. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[26] Davin to Ensor, 21 Jun. 1955; Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 22 Jun. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.

Clarendon, he had lost his 'place in the queue in the Faber and Faber series'.[27] Ensor, an aged historian, 'advancing towards his century in years', as Davin put it, was having some medical difficulties, hence the delay.[28] Regardless, the Delegates had no meetings scheduled until October, so Cruise O'Brien had no choice but to wait patiently.[29]

When Ensor eventually submitted his report, he recommended publication, but the manuscript did not wholly convince him. In his words, Cruise O'Brien's study, 'As a publishing proposition … exemplifie[d] a clash of opposite qualities'. Concerning its scholarly intervention in the field, Ensor was hugely positive about its merits, stating that it had 'strong claims' to be published. He argued that *Parnell and his party* would undoubtedly become 'a standard book' on the subject and that it would be a 'credit' to the Clarendon Press to be associated with it. By contrast, Ensor thought it was a bit of a dud regarding its appeal in the literary market, especially in the English market. He contended that the topic Cruise O'Brien addressed was 'of far greater moment in Irish history than in English history'. On the question of whether the book's literary merit was such that it could overcome this fault, Ensor answered, 'Emphatically not.'[30] As he wrote, '"dull" is an unkind word', but the first half of Cruise O'Brien's 412-page manuscript deserved it. Ensor felt this dryness was understandable given that the author's ambition was to present an 'impartial' and 'objective' history of Parnell's rise and fall to 'damp down the passions of controversy' that dominated previous work on the subject. He surmised somewhat dolefully that Cruise O'Brien's 'cold, almost indifferent manner may seem requisite'. Among a 'public whose interest in Parnell can be taken for granted', Ensor judged that Cruise O'Brien's sober discussion might be 'more arresting (because more unusual) than a dramatic one'. While, in Ensor's opinion, the narrative never quite caught fire, Cruise O'Brien's conclusion in which he proffered some of his own opinions about the events of Parnell's later life was 'most attractive'. The only problem with the conclusion, he stated, was that one had to read through the rest of the book to get to it. Despite coming across as exceedingly bored by the task of having to trawl through Cruise O'Brien's rigorous sifting of the relevant evidence,

[27] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 26 Aug. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[28] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 31 Aug. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ensor, 'Parnell and his party by Donat O'Donnell', 30 Aug. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.

Ensor concluded that the book was a work of great learning that would be a creditable addition to the press's list.[31]

Despite Ensor's scepticism about the book's saleability, Davin felt sure that his estimation of its scholarship would sway the Delegates.[32] Cruise O'Brien was worried about the adverse judgement concerning its commercial potential, which led him to beg Davin to intercede with the Delegates on his behalf. Indeed, Cruise O'Brien considered that contrary to Ensor's opinion, he was open to the accusation that he had popularized events rather than the 'opposite charge (unpopularizing?)'. Cruise O'Brien disputed Ensor's 'guess' as to the book's potential sales, insisting that the 'enduring, romantic, interest evoked by the name of Parnell' would ensure significant sales in Ireland and among the Irish diaspora. He thought this public would be 'more than sufficient to offset any allergy – or apathy – to Hibernica which may exist among the Saxon churls', even if it might not constitute the expected public for a scholarly work. It seemed to Cruise O'Brien that even these churlish Saxons, meaning his potential English readership, would be interested in the book for what it said about this period of British history. He asserted that it was implausible to think that any specialist on nineteenth-century political history would want to 'ignore the first serious study of the Parnell movement'.[33] Davin sympathised with Cruise O'Brien on these points and tried to ease his mind by claiming that scholarship, not commercial gain, drove the Delegates' decisions. As things transpired, Davin was correct in his assessment, and the Delegates gave *Parnell* the 'green light' at their October meeting.

Conveying the news to Cruise O'Brien, Davin offered him a contract involving royalties of ten per cent on the UK published price on sales within the United Kingdom and 7.5% on sales in other territories. He reduced royalties on sales outside the United Kingdom because the Clarendon Press had to offer substantial discounts on export copies.[34] Cruise O'Brien was, naturally enough, elated at the news. However, he did have some qualms with the terms and a few more minor queries about the book's production. First, Cruise O'Brien sought assurances

[31] Ibid.
[32] Davin to Ensor, 6 Sept. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[33] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 27 Sept. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[34] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 18 Oct. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.

that Davin, 'with [his] usual crass imperialism', was including Irish sales as United Kingdom sales for the sake of royalties. The lower rate in overseas territories was not much of a concern, but as he saw Ireland as his key market, Cruise O'Brien wanted to ensure that he maximised his earnings from the volume.[35] Davin was reasonably sure that the Press usually counted Ireland as part of the United Kingdom in distribution matters. However, he informed Cruise O'Brien that he would make sure that this was the case concerning *Parnell* so that the author would receive his ten per cent royalty.[36] Second, Cruise O'Brien sought clarity on the size of the print run that Davin envisioned, the retail price, and the publication date.[37] Cruise O'Brien was getting slightly ahead of things on these points. Davin had not yet given the matter a great deal of thought but presumed that the initial run would number 1,500 or 2,000 copies. In terms of the publication date, Davin told Cruise O'Brien that it all depended on when Cruise O'Brien submitted the final typescript to the printer, corrected the proofs, and the significance of any corrections that arose. Nonetheless, he hoped to publish within a year, all going well. As regards the retail price, Davin, again, was unable to give a precise figure. He estimated that at 1/- for every ten pages, Cruise O'Brien's volume would cost 'roughly' 42/-. However, Davin anticipated price increases, so he predicted that the final retail price would exceed this figure.[38] Third, Cruise O'Brien wanted to include images in the finished volume. At the very least, he wished to have a frontispiece of Parnell, and, ideally, he believed the book would have a couple more, as he thought 'they would increase sales'.[39] Davin concurred that a frontispiece featuring Parnell would be an excellent addition to the volume but argued that as plates were expensive and generally did not affect a person's decision to buy a book, they were undesirable from a publisher's perspective.[40] Cruise O'Brien's interest in the book's presentation went beyond the inclusion of plates to the colour of the book's binding on the finished product. There had been some suggestion that the Clarendon Press intended to format the book in the same way that they did Peter Smithers's 1954 book, *The life of Joseph Addison*, which was bound in a green

[35] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 24 Oct. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[36] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 27 Oct. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[37] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 24 Oct. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[38] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 27 Oct. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[39] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 24 Oct. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[40] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 27 Oct. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.

cover. Cruise O'Brien begged Davin not to force his *Parnell* to wear green, as he disapproved of the tendency to cover books on Irish topics in green. Moreover, he pointed out that Parnell himself abhorred the colour green because 'he regarded Ireland's troubles as in some way related to her national colour'.[41] Cruise O'Brien need not have worried, as Clarendon's usual practice was to bind historical works in the famous dark blue of Oxford and Davin saw no reason to deviate from that practice.[42] Finally, Cruise O'Brien enquired about details of any revisions Ensor recommended.[43] Davin stated that the reviewer's criticisms were 'rather negative' and did not set out a course for revision beyond brightening up the turgid narrative. Thus, Davin just asked Cruise O'Brien to 'brighten it up in any way without spoiling it'.[44] Cruise O'Brien found it hard to see how he could achieve this task without compromising the quality of its scholarship. He posited that the book's dust jacket could warn potential readers that the first four chapters were exceedingly technical but that the rest of the volume could 'be read as a straight historical narrative'.[45] Davin quickly shot down this rather inelegant solution and suggested that Cruise O'Brien might make this point in the 'blurb', for which Davin was about to start chasing him.

When *Parnell and his party* appeared in book shops and academic libraries, it bore the name Conor Cruise O'Brien as its author rather than Donat O'Donnell. The decision to use his name was a late development in the publishing process. Initially, Cruise O'Brien leaned toward publishing under his well-established pseudonym.[46] Davin had 'no strong feeling either way' but pointed out that as the book came from Cruise O'Brien's 'official persona', the case could be made that it should appear under his own name.[47] Cruise O'Brien was indignant at the notion that *Parnell* sprang from his official persona, writing reprovingly, 'Official persona be blowed [sic]!' He continued, 'In fact you decide me that when the thing is published – whether by you, as I hope, or by some lesser light – it will be under the name of Donat O'Donnell.'[48] Davin took

[41] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 25 Apr. 1956, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[42] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 25 Apr. 1956, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[43] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 24 Oct. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[44] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 27 Oct. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[45] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 4 Nov. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[46] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 24 Jun. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[47] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 28 Jun. 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[48] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 5 July 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.

Cruise O'Brien's petulant outburst in good humour, happy that his 'jest' triggered Cruise O'Brien's decision-making faculties.[49] Nevertheless, this was not the final word on the issue. In April 1956, Cruise O'Brien changed his mind and asked that *Parnell and his party* appear under his real name. Cruise O'Brien had good reason for doing so. In the intervening period, he had become involved with Radio Éireann, the national radio station in Ireland, on a project on the period. Cruise O'Brien was editing a series of talks as part of Radio Éireann's Thomas Davis Lecture series on 'The shaping of modern Ireland' (See Chapter 4) to which he contributed two talks. In addition to being broadcast on national radio, *The Irish Times* reprinted the lectures. Cruise O'Brien was pleased with the coverage the series was getting in Ireland. As he was participating in the Radio Éireann series under his real name, Cruise O'Brien thought that the publicity he was getting due to the radio broadcasts might aid sales if *Parnell and his party* also bore the name Conor Cruise O'Brien.[50]

Clarendon Press published *Parnell and his party* in March 1957, but by April, the book had yet to materialise on the shelves of Irish bookshops, much to Cruise O'Brien's dismay. In an informal discussion with Hodges Figgis's manager, Cruise O'Brien discovered that the famous Dublin bookshop had not received the copies they had ordered. The problem extended beyond Hodges Figgis, and as Cruise O'Brien relayed to Davin, 'None of the Dublin bookshops has it yet.'[51] According to Davin, the issue lay at the Dublin end of things. He told Cruise O'Brien that the press had had similar difficulties on previous occasions. Each time, 'the explanation ha[d] always been that the Dublin booksellers [were] too slow in ordering'.[52] Nevertheless, he promised to get to the bottom of it and report back, which he did a week later. As far as the Press was concerned, the book should have been in Ireland on the day before it was officially published. Davin posited that the shipment might have been held up at Irish customs but could not give Cruise O'Brien any greater detail than that.[53]

Despite this hitch, an annoying delay rather than a significant setback, Cruise O'Brien's study of the talismanic statesman received excellent reviews, including a glowing one from the

[49] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 11 July 1955, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[50] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 25 Apr. 1956, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[51] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 1 Apr. 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[52] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 3 Apr. 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[53] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 11 Apr. 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.

prestigious historian A.J.P. Taylor, who proclaimed that it was 'long since a book taught me so much or which I read with such unalloyed enjoyment'.[54] Cruise O'Brien was particularly pleased to have received such praise from a historian of the Oxford don's calibre.[55] Taylor was not the only reviewer to think so highly of the work. In a private letter to Davin, the English historian Michael Foot, then at Trinity College Dublin, wrote that *Parnell and his party* was 'one of the best and most interesting books on the nineteenth century that he ha[d] ever read'.[56] Likewise, F.S.L. Lyons, Cruise O'Brien's contemporary at TCD, thought the book's quality so 'impeccable that it [was] difficult for a reviewer not to fall into what Lytton Strachey once called "a tone of tedious panegyric".'[57] The UCD historian T. Desmond Williams deemed it a 'veritable landmark in the historiography of Ireland'.[58]

In their marketing strategy for *Parnell and his party*, the Clarendon Press pitched the book as the first 'impartial' study of the subject. In turn, reviewers lavished praise on Cruise O'Brien for his objectivity and impartiality. The Canadian historian D.J. McDougall commended the book's 'exact scholarship, close attention to detail, a good narrative style, and above all, an entire absence of the tedious partisanship that has marred so many books on this, as on most subjects in recent Anglo-Irish history'.[59] Thomas Bodkin called it a 'model of scientific research and dispassionate statement'.[60] For the man of letters Shane Leslie, Cruise O'Brien's 'anatomy of statistics and scientific pigeon-holing' brought to mind the great Cambridge historian J.B. Bury, whose 'shadow', as Leslie put it, 'never crossed his paper'.[61] C.H.D. Howard, a noted authority on nineteenth-century British politics, agreed with Ensor about the quality of Cruise O'Brien's epilogue, declaring it 'the most stimulating and convincing appraisal of the

[54] A.J.P. Taylor, 'Parnell in prose', *The Observer*, 31 Mar. 1957.
[55] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 1 Apr. 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[56] Davin to Cruise O'Brien, 3 Apr. 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[57] F.S.L. Lyons, 'Parnell and his party', *Irish Times*, 5 Apr. 1957; Lyons reviewed the book on at least two other occasions, see F.S.L. Lyons, 'Parnell and his party, 1880-90 by Conor Cruise O'Brien', *Irish Historical Studies*, 11 (1958), 64-69 and idem, 'Parnell and his party, 1880-90', *History*, 43 (1958), 155-56.
[58] T. Desmond Williams, 'Parnell: deviator and opportunist', *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 23 May 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[59] D.J. McDougall, 'Parnell and his party, 1880-90 by Conor Cruise O'Brien', *The Journal of Modern History*, 30 (1958), 147-48, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[60] Thomas Bodkin, 'Dictatorial skill', *Birmingham Post*, 9 Apr. 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[61] Shane Leslie, 'The abandoned leader', *Time & Tide*, 4 May 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.

significance of Parnell's career that has appeared'.[62] The American political scientist James B. Christoph noted the similarities between Cruise O'Brien's methodology and historians in the Namierite school. However, he argued that Cruise O'Brien's work surpassed this school as it was 'as much concerned with evaluating policy and strategy as with snapping candid and detailed pictures of a political situation'.[63] Lyons also judged that Cruise O'Brien successfully managed to avoid the worst excesses of 'namierization'.[64] Concluding his laudatory review, Peterhouse don D.W. Brogan noted that Cruise O'Brien was 'one of the ornaments of the Irish Foreign Service' and mused - in a comment that Iveagh House would not have appreciated - that 'it would be a pity if his official duties kept him away from scholarship. First things first, and Ireland needs sound history more than she needs diplomats.'[65]

The old Parnellite John J. Horgan, author of *From Parnell to Pearse*, acclaimed Cruise O'Brien for coming at his subject with 'a fresh and objective mind'.[66] Likewise, the Parnellite historian Leon O'Broin hailed Cruise O'Brien's work for its 'unimpeachable' scholarship, calling it a 'book of quite unusual importance'.[67] The journalist and historian Denis Gwynn, son of the Irish party MP Stephen Gwynn, judged that Cruise O'Brien demonstrated 'the detachment and candour of a true historian'.[68] However, he also noted Cruise O'Brien's 'profound admiration for Parnell's gifts of leadership'.[69] Similarly, though he thought Cruise O'Brien was 'scrupulously fair to all sides', the Oxford political scientist P.M. Williams believed that he could discern Cruise O'Brien's political sympathies from reading the text. Williams asserted that 'Cruise O'Brien's sympathies [were] with the nationalists, and against both the Irish extremists and the British Unionists'.[70] The *Liverpool Daily Post's* Henry Douglas also detected Parnellite tendencies in

[62] C.H.D. Howard, 'Review of *Parnell*', *The English Historical Review*, 74 (1959), 139-41, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[63] James B. Christoph, 'Review of *Parnell*', *The American Political Science Review*, 52 (1958), 565-66, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[64] Lyons, 'Review of Parnell', 65.
[65] D.W. Brogan, 'The chief', *The Spectator*, 3 May 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[66] John J. Horgan, 'Parnell's policy is re-examined', 2 Apr. 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[67] Leon O'Broin, 'Parnell and his party', *The Leader*, 22 Jun. 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[68] Denis Gwynn, 'Now and then: the Parnell legend', *Cork Examiner*, 17 May 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[69] Ibid.
[70] P.M. Williams, 'Parnell and his party, 1880-90', *Political Science Quarterly*, 73 (Mar. 1958), 146-48, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.

Cruise O'Brien's writing, stating that Cruise O'Brien did 'not disguise his admiration for Parnell'.[71]

Despite receiving praise for its fairness and impartiality, or at worst being implicitly Parnellite, *Parnell and his party* has recently come under attack from the political theorist Mark McNally, who has claimed that an unacknowledged 'conservative anti-nationalism' pervaded the work. According to McNally, this political outlook caused Cruise O'Brien to represent Parnell in the style of a 1930s European dictator, like Benito Mussolini or Adolf Hitler. In McNally's view, this derived from a common post-war conservative disposition to point to the German and Italian regimes as the logical corollary of mass political support. McNally wrote, in *Parnell and his party*:

> Parnell's nationalism is in fact identified with fascism by playing down its reliance on rationally formulated objectives, proposed and to some extent delivered to the people, and focusing on its *emotive* and *mystical* character - and especially that of its heroic leader - which is above all what O'Brien argues gave it its *popular* appeal.[72]

As McNally perceived Cruise O'Brien's viewpoint, Cruise O'Brien devalued the rationality of Parnell's nationalism to identify it with the fascism that dominated the European political scene during Cruise O'Brien's formative years. By contrast, Cruise O'Brien's contemporary T. Desmond Williams felt that Cruise O'Brien overplayed the 'masterful "rationality" of Parnell's policy'.[73] McNally asserted that Cruise O'Brien reduced the Irish nationalist movement under Parnell to one 'whose mobilization strategy - like the defeated fascist European Powers - depended primarily on "mystical "awe-inspiring" leadership and the vengeful passion of the mob'.[74] Focusing specifically on the book's 'Epilogue', McNally insisted that Cruise O'Brien provided an 'interpretation of the rise of Parnell' that relied on

[71] Henry R. Douglas, 'Portrait of Parnell', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 10 Apr. 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[72] McNally, 'Conservative anti-nationalism', 315.
[73] Williams, 'Parnell: deviator and opportunist', *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 23 May 1957, OUPA, PB/ED/006499.
[74] McNally, 'Conservative anti-nationalism', 316.

> brushing aside the notion that the success of Parnell's nationalist movement was at least partly founded on wider *rational* demands for *democratic* (Home Rule) and *socioeconomic* (land reform) rights among the Irish masses.[75]

There are several quite significant problems with McNally's account. Firstly, McNally's allegation that Cruise O'Brien painted his subject as a 1930s dictator was some way wide of the mark, as will be shown. Second, in *Parnell and his party's* epilogue, contrary to what McNally stated, Cruise O'Brien did not provide an interpretation of Parnell's rise to power, but quite the opposite. In this section, Cruise O'Brien put forward his thoughts on Parnell's *fall from* power, his analysis of the party's achievements during the years of Parnell's leadership, and his ideas about how contemporary intellectuals helped create the 'Parnell myth'. Thirdly, the idea that Cruise O'Brien 'brushed aside' the land movement as a reason for Parnell's popularity is absurd. Indeed, Cruise O'Brien framed the politics of the whole period around the land question, arguing in several different places, including in his thesis, that 'the Land League was the most powerful force' in Ireland.[76]

Cruise O'Brien did not impose an image of a fascist dictator on Parnell but drew the image of Parnell as a dictator from the contemporary political discourse. As Eugenio Biagini has noted, Cruise O'Brien may have given more credence than many scholars would be willing to do to 'contemporary claims that [Parnell] was a "dictator" in the making'.[77] However, the critical point here is that these claims were 'contemporary'. Parnell's opponents thrust the title dictator upon him because he was a popular figure who upset the existing party structures. English politicians and journalists, particularly conservative ones and some radicals like Joseph Chamberlain, frequently denounced Parnell's 'dictatorship', as did Irish unionists. During the 1880 general election campaign, *The Times* warned that Parnell had 'leaped into importance as a dictator in Irish politics' and declared its hope that the Irish middle classes would oppose his 'demagogic tyranny'.[78] Likewise, members of the Catholic hierarchy protested against Parnell's

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The Irish Parliamentary Party, 1880-90', PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1953, ii.
[77] E.F. Biagini, *British democracy and Irish nationalism, 1876-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29.
[78] Quoted in *The Munster Express*, 27 Mar. 1880.

purported aspirations to 'play the role of universal dictator'.[79] However, it was not just Parnell's opponents who depicted him in this fashion. Nor did the epithet necessarily have negative connotations. For example, the home rule MP, Joseph Biggar, appealed to the Irish electorate to 'make him [Parnell] dictator' to bolster the party's ability to achieve its objective of self-government for Ireland.[80] Similarly, in 1885, the Parnellite lieutenant T.M. Healy proclaimed that for centuries the Irish people had wanted 'an honest dictator, and they had at last got one in the person of Mr Parnell'.[81] The image of Parnell as a dictator was also evident in Irish political coverage in the United States, where newspapers like *The Boston Daily Advertiser* depicted him as 'a political dictator, in the sense that a general is the dictator of the movements of the forces under him'.[82]

Had Cruise O'Brien wished to make direct comparisons between Parnell and the 1930s European dictators, that avenue was open to him. In the 1940s and 1950s, eminent scholars such as Sir Lewis Namier and the Dutch historian Pieter Geyl - who spent much of the Second World War interned in Buchenwald concentration camp - did not shy away from likening historical figures with Hitler or Mussolini.[83] However, far from being 'candid about Parnell's fascist potential', Cruise O'Brien, in a 1956 essay, explicitly repudiated the idea of comparing late nineteenth-century popular politics with fascist politics. In a review of a biography of the French man of letters Victor Hugo, Cruise O'Brien compared the Frenchman with Gladstone, whom Cruise O'Brien called Hugo's 'corresponding contemporary figure in England' even though he was a politician. He wrote:

> Gladstone and Hugo had the *souffle*, the mastery of language, and the legend-focussing personality that could confer a formal order on a general release of emotion. In the case of the orator, it has been held that this faculty was daemonic and annunciatory of disasters to come. The road to Nuremberg, on

[79] 'The Bishop of Achonry on Mr Parnell', *Cork Examiner*, 10 Apr. 1880.
[80] 'Mr. Parnell', *The Times*, 22 Mar. 1880.
[81] 'Mr McCarthy and Mr Healy in Liverpool', *Westmeath Examiner*, 15 Aug. 1885.
[82] 'Parnellism', *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 27 Aug. 1885.
[83] See Lewis Namier, *Facing east* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947), 18-22; see also Pieter Geyl, *Napoleon: for and against*, trans. Olive Reiner (London: Cape, 1949).

> this view, begins at Midlothian. It might be truer to say that it was the nation which had no Midlothians that found itself a voice at Nuremberg. The relevant metaphor, for the age, is still that of "letting off steam": that was, in part, the function of their nations, and in their very different ways, of Hugo and of Gladstone. It is hardly wise to regard the process with suspicion because another nation, in a later day, blew up the boiler.[84]

This statement directly contradicts McNally's claim that Cruise O'Brien believed that 'popular rule must inevitably lead' to fascist dictatorship.[85]

Twelve years after the Gladstone and Hugo essay, reviewing the Oxford don Michael Hurst's deeply problematic psychohistory, *Parnell and Irish nationalism*, Cruise O'Brien censured Hurst for making comparisons between Parnell and Hitler or Mussolini. Hurst posited similarities between Parnell and Hitler at several points in his book, suggesting that Parnell would have endorsed a Hitlerian form of nationalism. Hurst thought the talismanic home-ruler would have

> agreed with Hitler's words; "I do not myself believe that any nation (i.e. state) not rooted in the people, born of the people and desired by the people, can in the long run maintain itself."[86]

Cruise O'Brien rejected such comparisons, judging them to be 'superficial' and arguing that Hurst gave short shrift to documentary evidence that undermined these analogies.[87] There are several reasons why such analogies fall flat. First, there is the Roman understanding of a dictator who headed an emergency government, an understanding that had nineteenth-century legacies. For example, in 1860, the Italian leader Giuseppe Garibaldi proclaimed himself 'dictator' of Sicily.[88] Second, the political objectives of Mussolini and Hitler involved the

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[84] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The people's victor', *Writers and politics: essays and criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976 [1965]), 93.
[85] McNally, 'Conservative anti-nationalist', 316.
[86] Michael Hurst, *Parnell and Irish nationalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 55.
[87] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Review of *Parnell and Irish nationalism*', *Irish Historical Studies*, 16 (1968), 235.
[88] Lucy Riall, 'Garibaldi's dictatorship: the reality of government, May-November 1860', in *Sicily and the unification of Italy: liberal policy and local power, 1859-1866* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 76-107.

termination of class struggle in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, while Parnell was doing something completely different.

Ironically, just as McNally assailed Cruise O'Brien's work for devaluing the significance of land reform to the political success of Parnell, Cruise O'Brien attacked earlier commentators for doing the same thing. Indeed, he asserted that the major flaw in previous accounts of the Parnellite movement was the tendency to overlook the land movement. Cruise O'Brien's 1945 essay 'Parnell's monument' illustrates this point. In October 1945, just in time for Ivy Day, when the 'Parnellite Old Guard', suggestive of Napoleon's Old Guard, would lay a wreath at the base of the monument to the fallen home rule leader, Cruise O'Brien published 'Parnell's monument' in *The Bell* on historical representations of Charles Stewart Parnell. In his biography, Akenson chided the youthful Cruise O'Brien for writing this piece before he had done any research into the subject. Indeed, Akenson claimed that in this essay, Cruise O'Brien made the argument that would later be central to his PhD thesis 'several years before he even began it'.[89] However, Akenson's claim was erroneous. Cruise O'Brien was listed as a PhD candidate at Trinity College Dublin for nearly two years before the essay's publication.[90] In fact, Cruise O'Brien began collecting data for his thesis as early as June 1943.[91] The month before 'Parnell's monument' appeared, *Irish Historical Studies* published his review of Maev Sullivan's deeply flawed account of her father T.M. Healy's role in the Parnell split, *No man's man*. In this review, Cruise O'Brien censured Sullivan for 'adopt[ing] the tone of a controversialist rather than of a historian'.[92] Furthermore, in March 1946, just months after 'Parnell's monument' appeared in print, Cruise O'Brien published a deeply researched article, again in *Irish Historical Studies,* on the Irish Parliamentary Party's intricate political machine, using previously unused archival material. This article appeared with minor alterations, mainly involving moving footnotes into the body of the text, as a chapter in his book *Parnell and his party*.[93] He had previously delivered a paper on this

[89] Akenson, *Conor*, 139.
[90] 'Research on Irish history in Irish universities, 1942-4', *Irish Historical Studies*, 4 (1944), 100-102.
[91] Harrison to Cruise O'Brien, 29 Jun. 1943, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/28.
[92] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Review of *No man's man*', *Irish Historical Studies*, 4 (1945), 375-76.
[93] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The machinery of the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1880-85', *Irish Historical Studies*, 5 (1946), 55-85.

topic to the Irish Historical Society.[94] Thus, contrary to Akenson's assertion, by the time Cruise O'Brien wrote 'Parnell's monument', he was well versed in both the secondary literature and primary source material for the period.

Cruise O'Brien's verdict was that the Parnell monument represented a myth, which had lost touch with historical reality. He was concerned that this myth was hypostasizing into the primary historical representation of Parnell and home rule as the years wore on. Cruise O'Brien wrote that the 'elements that have gone to make up that myth are past counting', but he identified two main reasons for its survival. He pinpointed 'Parnell's real greatness' as well as 'the natural tendency of teachers, writers and even parents, to simplify history by a lavish application of the *Fuhrerprinzip*'.[95] Akenson contends that this last word, '*Fuhrerprinzip*', meaning 'leader-principle', could have been used only in a post-war context, missing the fact that the term had been in circulation for decades.[96] In the context of the historical representation of Parnell, Cruise O'Brien utilised the term to describe how commentators had generally placed a heavy emphasis on the leader of the home rule movement instead of the broader movement.

Cruise O'Brien posited that the temptation to employ the 'leader-principle' version of events derived from the 'tragedy of Parnell's fall', which he argued gave 'to his myth the same high charge of emotion that fills the legends of Stuart and Bonaparte'. He pointed to W.B. Yeats's 1937 ballad 'Come gather round me, Parnellites', written at the behest of the Parnellite home-ruler Henry Harrison, eager to see 'Parnell vindicated', as an example of this kind of mythmaking.[97] He also identified the American playwright Elsie T. Schauffler's play 'Parnell' as a manifestation of this kind. Played to wide acclaim in New York and London in the mid-thirties

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[94] 'Bulletin of the Irish Committee of Historical Sciences', Jan. 1946, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/36.
[95] Donat O'Donnell, 'Parnell's monument' *The Bell*, Oct. 1945, 567.
[96] George Orwell used the English term in his work *Critical Essays*, which Cruise O'Brien reviewed for *The Bell* earlier in 1945. Orwell associated it with 'a central dominating character' in addition to 'bully-worship and the cult of violence', see George Orwell, *Critical essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1946), 73; see also Donat O'Donnell, 'Raffles, Stalin, and George Orwell', *The Bell*, May 1946, 168-71.
[97] O'Donnell, 'Parnell's monument', 567; see also Allan Wade, ed., *The letters of W.B. Yeats* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis), 1954, 862-3; for more on Yeats and the Parnell myth, see Nicholas Grene, 'Yeats and the mythopoeia of Parnell', *Yeats Journal of Korea* (2015), 21-34; *Parnell vindicated* was the title of Harrison's 1931 book, Henry Harrison, *Parnell vindicated: the lifting of the veil* (New York: R.R. Smith Inc, 1931); Yeats thought the 'Catholic press had ignored' Harrison's work, see Wade, ed., *Letters*, 863.

before being turned into a Hollywood film starring a beardless Clark Gable, Schauffler's play was first produced in Ireland in 1937 by the Torch Theatre, a small, short-lived Dublin company.[98] Despite the theatre's small size, the play drew large and esteemed audiences. The 'first-nighters' included several government ministers, including Frank Aiken, James Ryan, Joseph Connolly, and the Ceann Comhairle and the President of the High Court. According to the *Irish Times* theatre critic, Kitty Clive, old Parnellites, who 'live in their memories of the stirring days of the last half-century', occupied the rest of the theatre.[99] Clive reported that this politically engaged audience was highly critical of the production 'from the Irish point of view', which she deemed understandable considering that few in Ireland 'could sit through a dramatization of the Irish leader's life without prejudice'.[100] Five years on, in 1942, Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir revived Schauffler's play, putting on a well-received production in the Gaiety Theatre.[101] Cruise O'Brien attended the Edwards-MacLiammóir production. He complained that Schauffler represented Parnell as 'an impassive and solitary genius, surrounded by a servile caucus of peasants in Sunday clothes'. Most egregiously, from Cruise O'Brien's perspective, Schauffler's script portrayed the agrarian leader Michael Davitt as 'a sort of Man Friday, whining sentences of admiration and warning, all beginning with "Chief"'.[102]

Cruise O'Brien argued that Schauffler's play and the Hollywood adaptation represented more than an artist's 'rough hand with history'. He believed that they were pretty representative, if in an exaggerated form, of the general tendency of the historiography of the home rule movement and its leader.[103] This tendency ranged from St John Ervine's depiction of Parnell as 'a Mowgli among the apes' to the more respectable writings of R. Barry O'Brien, Joan Haslip, and M.M. O'Hara, all of which exhibited 'the germ of Hollywoodian conception', as Cruise O'Brien put it.[104] In these writers' works, Parnell emerged not simply as the vital cog in

[98] *New York Times*, 31 May 1936; *Irish Times*, 5 Mar. 1937.
[99] *Irish Times*, 5 Mar. 1937.
[100] Ibid.
[101] *Irish Times*, 24 Nov. 1942.
[102] O'Donnell, 'Parnell's monument', 567.
[103] Ibid., 568.
[104] Ibid.

the machine but as 'the one brain animating and directing' it. Cruise O'Brien rebuked these biographers for reducing all the period's major historical landmarks to his 'personality'. As he wrote:

> The effects of the famine and land-revolution of 1879-82 and the Franchise Act of 1884, whatever was won by the social-political strategy of Davitt and Devoy, or the tactical devices of Biggar, Healy and Harrington, by the money of the American exiles or the devotion of Fenian remnants, are all chalked up to the genius of Parnell.[105]

As a historical representation, Cruise O'Brien considered this account to be severely lacking. Even the anonymous contributor to as austere a scholarly monument as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* earned Cruise O'Brien's wrath for endorsing, 'more or less unconsciously', the 'popular heroic conception' that, in Yeats's words,

> Whatever good the farmer's got
> He [Parnell] brought it all to pass.

For Cruise O'Brien, this version of events was little more than 'an idea for a ballad, or a Goebbels', meaning a propagandist, and its pervasiveness obscured 'what Parnell did and could have done'. It seemed to him that the popular narrative led to an over-estimation of the home rule movement and a corresponding under-appreciation of the land movement. In Cruise O'Brien's eyes, Parnell was the 'undisputed leader' of the former movement, but other power brokers kept him in check in the latter case. However, the historical focus on the home rule movement to the detriment of the land movement, Cruise O'Brien contended, meant that Irish 'Educated opinion' was reluctant to accept the 'decisive part played by the Land League' or the significance of 'social revolutionary action' in the history of the national movement. He thought the Parnell-centric narrative captivated people emotionally. He asserted that a greater level of what intellectual historian Mark Salber-Philips has called 'affective distance' was needed to assess the period properly. Cruise O'Brien suggested that if people's 'emotions ever died down',

[105] Ibid., 569.

they would realise that without the successes the land war won, 'Parnell made a Napoleonic splash but accomplished nothing of any value'.[106] He argued that in this scenario, Parnell's most significant success would have been 'the conversion of the Liberal Party', which he did not consider to be on the same level of importance as the land settlement. The popular narrative, which Cruise O'Brien termed the 'Führer school of thought', erased the fact that the most lasting achievements were the product of 'a policy framed by other men'.[107] This policy was the New Departure, the brainchild of Michael Davitt, who thought out the policy while incarcerated in Dartmoor Prison for arms trafficking. As Cruise O'Brien's PhD supervisor T.W. Moody put it in his 1946 *Studies* article on Davitt,

> While Parnell was superb as the leader to whom all sections of national opinion rendered allegiance and who gave the agitation the character of a united front against the national enemy, Davitt was the inspiring genius and principal organiser of the league, directing and coordinating its operations.[108]

Envisioning a combination of 'physical force men', land agitators, and parliamentary obstructionists, the New Departure's purpose was to 'work from a basis of land-agitation to eventual revolution'.[109] Parnellism, Cruise O'Brien argued, was an outgrowth of the 'New Departure principles as were put into practice'.[110] For Michael Davitt this meant 'the investing of the fortunes and guidance of the agitation, both for national self-government and land reform, in a leader's nominal dictatorship.'[111]

Cruise O'Brien thought there was a high probability that when the leaders of the New Departure chose Parnell as the Land League's president, they expected him to be the leader in

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[106] Ibid.; see Mark Salber Phillips, 'Rethinking historical distance: from doctrine to heuristic', *History and Theory*, 50 (2011), 11.
[107] O'Donnell, 'Parnell's monument', 569.
[108] T.W. Moody, 'Michael Davitt, 1846-1906: a survey and appreciation', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 35 (1946), 204.
[109] Moody, 'Davitt', 206.
[110] O'Donnell, 'Parnell's monument', 570; for a more detailed discussion of the New Departure, see T.W. Moody, 'The new departure in Irish politics, 1878-9', in D.B. Quinn *et al*, eds, *Essays in British and Irish history in honour of James Eadie Todd* (London: Muller, 1949), 303-34.
[111] Michael Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland, or the story of the Land League revolution* (London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1904), 378.

name only. At the time, Cruise O'Brien asserted, Parnell was but the most popular obstructionist MP in Isaac Butt's home rule party. Cruise O'Brien posited that Parnell was so much more popular than his obstructionist colleagues because of 'adventitious circumstances', namely that he was a remarkably handsome landlord who heroically chose the 'people's side'. In addition to these features, according to Cruise O'Brien, Parnell's mannerisms, particularly his 'dignified aloofness', rendered him 'superb figurehead material'. Nevertheless, it was his view that Parnell was more than a mere figurehead. Exactly how much more was demonstrated, he reckoned, by 'the greatness of his leadership in the land-agitation'. The period in which Parnell was actively involved in the land agitation, from Cruise O'Brien's perspective, 'marked the height both of Parnell's popularity and of his usefulness'. He wrote:

> In the autumn of 1880, when he was already, with the help of the Land League, leader of the Parliamentary Party, an almost revolutionary crisis occurred. A Government Bill which intended to provide compensation for the evicted tenants of that famine time was thrown out by the House of Lards [sic], and Parliament then dissolved leaving Ireland to look after itself as best it might. That the country did not collapse in a repetition of 1847 was due primarily to the Land League policy, but the country would hardly have rallied with such enthusiasm to that policy had it not been for the fire and energy of Parnell's leadership. Throughout that terrible autumn and winter of 1880-81, speaking every week in a different part of the country, he showed the people how to combine and how to defeat the landlords and land-grabbers. "When a man takes a farm from which another has been evicted … you must show him in the fair and in the market-place and even in the house of worship, by leaving him severely alone," he said at Ennis at the start of the campaign. The lesson was repeated, hammered home, added to, until men like Boycott and Bence-Jones had learned it the hard way, until Irish landlords found it almost impossible to evict, and, in

> England, Gladstone began to realize that he had better make his new Land Bill a serious affair.[112]

In Cruise O'Brien's opinion, Parnell's leadership during the land war 'struck a far more powerful blow for Irish freedom than Tone or Emmet or Mitchel had ever struck'.[113] Nevertheless, after the land war, Cruise O'Brien considered that the rest of Parnell's political career was an 'anti-climax', despite, or maybe because of, its 'drama'. His subsequent achievements, as adumbrated by Cruise O'Brien, included

> His ingenious side-tracking of the "New Departure" early in 1881, his mock opposition to the Land Bill, his theatrical defiance of Gladstone as a "masquerading knight-errant"; his consequent imprisonment, and his final ditching of the land-movement by the "Kilmainham Treaty" (with the same knight-errant) in May 1882…[114]

Cruise O'Brien's opinion was that these actions each exhibited Parnell's skill as a political tactician, but he proclaimed them all to be 'historically negative'. Negative in what terms, we might ask? For Cruise O'Brien, they were negative because they constituted 'at worst, a clever betrayal of a revolution'.[115] Despite the supposed anti-climax, Cruise O'Brien was adamant that nothing Parnell did in his 'years of reaction' detracted from the 'few magnificent revolutionary months' of his leadership of the land agitation.[116] Cruise O'Brien's belief in the land movement's fundamental importance to Parnell's career shows that McNally's assessment of his understanding of the period is some way wide of the mark.

'The dead past'

In 1974, literary scholars Elisabeth Young-Bruehl and Robert Hogan produced a short volume appraising Cruise O'Brien's career. Strangely, considering *Parnell and his party*'s reputation as a

[112] O'Donnell, 'Parnell's monument', 571.
[113] Ibid., 572.
[114] Ibid., 571.
[115] Ibid., 572.
[116] Ibid.

classic text, the two critics deprecated that book, describing it as 'not a distinguished history'. Nonetheless, they made a keen observation regarding its 'Preface', which they claimed, 'almost refutes the method of the book'.[117] As mentioned, much of the analysis, particularly the earlier chapters, in *Parnell and his party* was decidedly Namierite, meaning that it involved a detailed prosopography of the Irish party. By 1956, when he wrote the work's 'Preface', Cruise O'Brien dismissed these analyses as a 'spiritual exercise in objectivity', claiming that they revealed little that was 'either precise or surprising'.[118] The question then becomes why Cruise O'Brien felt the need to write a 'Preface' repudiating his method. To answer this question, this section examines his lesser-known intellectual output, drawing on previously unused archival material. Specifically, it looks at the production of his radio lecture written for the BBC's *Third Programme* entitled 'An intellectual watershed', which provides a fresh perspective on the development of Cruise O'Brien's historical imagination.

As laid out in Chapter 1, in 1953 Cruise O'Brien encountered BBC producer Anna Kallin, who helped him gain access to the airwaves in Great Britain. In 1954, Kallin arranged for Cruise O'Brien to contribute to a series on contemporary French intellectual life alongside the noted philosopher A.J. Ayer, Alan Pryce-Jones, editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, and the French intellectual Albert Camus, who did an epilogue for the series.[119] Cruise O'Brien's script 'enchanted' Kallin's colleagues.[120] Producer Joe Weltman was one of Kallin's colleagues Cruise O'Brien's work enchanted. In May 1955, several months after Cruise O'Brien's 'splendid talk' for Kallin, Weltman asked Cruise O'Brien to review the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's new book, *Les eventures de la dialectique* [*Adventures of the dialectic*].[121] As Cruise O'Brien was reading Merleau-Ponty's book and starting to think about how to frame his review, he attended a historical conference in Dublin that had a profound impact not only on the

[117] Young-Bruehl and Hogan, *Conor Cruise O'Brien*, 12.
[118] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Parnell and his party, 1880-90* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964 [1957]), xvi.
[119] Unsigned to Cruise O'Brien, 21 July 1954, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien File 1, 1938-62; Cruise O'Brien to Kallin, 4 Feb. 1955, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien File 1, 1938-62.
[120] Kallin to Cruise O'Brien, 20 Dec. 1954, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien File 1, 1938-62; Donat O'Donnell, 'The Gallic scene to-day - The present phase of the French Revolution (speaker's copy), BBC Written Archives, Scripts; Cruise O'Brien's script later appeared in Donat O'Donnell, 'France as the conscience of Europe', *The Listener*, 20 Jan. 1955.
[121] Weltman to Cruise O'Brien, 25 May 1955, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien File 1, 1938-62.

review but also on his historical imagination. The keynote speaker at the conference was Michael Oakeshott, who delivered a paper entitled 'The activity of being an historian'.

In July 1955, University College Dublin and Trinity College Dublin co-hosted the Second Irish Conference of Historians. Under the Irish Committee of Historical Sciences' auspices, around eighty British and Irish historians gathered for three days of papers, discussion, and revelry.[122] Bizarrely, this conference has caused a great deal of confusion in the Irish historical community. Several eminent scholars have given different dates for when it occurred, conflicting dates for when its proceedings were published, and gotten speakers' identities wrong. For example, Ciaran Brady, one of Ireland's most distinguished intellectual historians, has suggested that Oakeshott spoke alongside Herbert Butterfield at this event, which he mistakenly called the First Conference of Irish Historians. However, the First Conference of Irish Historians occurred in 1953, two years before Oakeshott delivered his paper at the second iteration of the conference.[123] Butterfield did indeed give the keynote at the first conference, but Oakeshott was not one of the speakers. As mentioned, he read his paper 'The activity of being an historian' in July 1955. Brady also thought it was noteworthy that Butterfield's paper did not appear in the published proceedings of the 1955 conference, which T. Desmond Williams published in 1958.[124] It should not surprise anyone that Butterfield's 'paper' was not published in the proceedings of the 1955 conference given that he did not read a paper at that year's event. The person who did give the keynote lecture in 1955 was the prestigious conservative political philosopher, Michael Oakeshott, who headlined, as the *Irish Times's*

[122] *Irish Times*, 12 July 1955.
[123] *Irish Times*, 7 July 1953.
[124] Ciaran Brady, 'Robert Dudley Edwards and the uses of Catholic nationalism', in Huw Pryce and Neil Evans, eds, *Writing a small nation's past: Wales in comparative perspective, 1850-1950* (London: Routledge, 2016), 295; Brady is not the only scholar to slip up on the details of this conference; in two separate essays, Ian McBride has claimed that the event took place in 1957, see Ian McBride, 'Ireland's history troubles', *Field Day Review*, 3 (2007), 212 and idem, 'The shadow of the gunman: Irish historians and the IRA', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46 (2011), 694; in 1968, at another Irish conference of historians, the philosopher W.H. Walsh suggested that Oakeshott delivered and published his paper in 1956, see W.H. Walsh, 'The practical and the historical past', in Preston King and B.C. Parekh, eds, *Politics and experience: essays presented to Professor Michael Oakeshott on the occasion of his retirement* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1968), 5, 6; Evi Ghotzaridis has written that Williams published the conference proceedings in 1955 rather than in 1958 when he did publish them, see Evi Ghotzaridis, *Trials of Irish history: genesis and evolution of a reappraisal, 1938-2000* (London: Routledge, 2006), 117.

'Irishman's Diary' put it, 'what would be described theatrically as an all-star bill' of British and Irish historians.[125]

Oakeshott delivered a paper entitled 'The activity of being an historian', much of which he distilled from his 1933 work *Experience and its modes*. As Preston King points out, however, the essay did represent something of an evolution in Oakeshott's thought.[126] Recently described as a 'period piece' by Ian McBride, Brady and Evi Ghotzaridis have illustrated the significance that Oakeshott's classic text, *Experience and its modes*, had for Irish historians like Robert Dudley Edwards, whose journal was full of references to Oakeshott's work.[127] As McBride has outlined, Oakeshott offered a basis by which Irish historians could claim to be removing unhistorical 'propaganda' from historical 'knowledge'.[128] Dudley Edwards drew upon *Experience and its modes* in his 'agenda' for Irish history, which he put forward in a paper read to the Irish Historical Society. Specifically, Dudley Edwards endorsed Oakeshott's strictures against the search for origins.[129] As H.F. Kearney tells us, Dudley Edwards frequently quoted Oakeshott's slogan that 'History is what the evidence obliges us to believe.'[130]

However, no historian has hitherto realised the centrality of Oakeshott's ideas to the development of Cruise O'Brien's historical imagination. In his lecture, Oakeshott argued that the kind of past that should concern 'the historian' was the 'historical past', a past that was completely divorced from present concerns, distinct from the 'practical past', the preserve of partisans who wished to use history for present political ends. This 'practical attitude' towards the past, Oakeshott maintained, was 'the chief undefeated enemy of "history"'. He maintained that

> 'The historian' adores the past; but the world today has perhaps less place for those who love the past than ever before. Indeed, it is determined not to allow

[125] *Irish Times*, 12 July 1955.
[126] Preston King, 'Michael Oakeshott and historical particularism', in idem, ed., *The history of ideas: an introduction to method* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 119.
[127] Ian McBride, 'The Peter Hart affair in perspective: history, ideology, and the Irish revolution', *The Historical Journal*, 61 (2018), 256; see Brady, 'Uses of Catholic nationalism'; see also Ghotzaridis, *Trials of Irish history*.
[128] McBride, 'Shadow', 694.
[129] Robert Dudley Edwards, 'An agenda for Irish history, 1978-2018', *Irish Historical Studies*, 21 (1978), 16.
[130] H.F. Kearney, *Ireland: contested ideas of nationalism and history* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 15.

> events to remove themselves securely into the past; it is determined to keep them alive as long as possible by a process of artificial respiration. Whatever we imagined to be safely dead and ready to decay into 'history', is revived, dressed up in modernity and made to gesticulate again. The past is longer-lived to-day than ever before. The pen of every journalist is dedicated to the task of bringing to life what was dead or dying, and of keeping alive what might be allowed to lie down in peace. But to 'the historian' this is a piece of obscene necromancy. He has no love of a living past, replete with messages and instructions; his task is to endow the past with death, for the past he adores is dead. Once it was religion that did not allow the dear, dead 'historic' past to appear; now it is politics; but always it has been this practical attitude.[131]

The world and 'the historian', Oakeshott concluded, had different expectations of the past. The world expected the past to make sense. In a highly gendered, bordering on chauvinist, peroration, Oakeshott proclaimed: 'But for "the historian", for whom the past is dead and irreproachable, the past is feminine. He loves it as a mistress of whom he never tires, and whom he never expects to talk sense.'[132] Seemingly, the correct activity for the historian (an exclusively male category in Oakeshott's schema) included less necromancy and more necrophilia. Reflecting on Oakeshott's argument more than a decade later, Cruise O'Brien wondered whether 'a certain morbidity, a preoccupation with death-in-life, may be at the root of the historical imagination'.[133]

On the second day of the Dublin conference, Oakeshott's friend and intellectual ally Desmond Williams, the somewhat eccentric professor of modern history at UCD, joined the LSE philosopher in condemning the study of the past for the present's sake. Friends from their time at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, together they established and edited the conservative

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[131] Michael Oakeshott, 'The activity of being an historian', in T. Desmond Williams, ed., *Historical studies: papers read before the 2nd Irish Conference of Historians* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1958), 18; for more on Oakeshott and the writing of history, see Luke O'Sullivan, *Oakeshott on history* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003); see also Brady, 'Uses of Catholic nationalism', 295-7.

[132] Oakeshott, 'Activity', 19.

[133] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Burke and Marx', *New American Review*, 1 (Sept. 1967), 245.

periodical *The Cambridge Journal*. In his lecture, Williams attacked contemporary history, or how historians were writing it in the immediate post-war world (Sir Lewis Namier was the principal target).[134] For Williams,

> Most, if not all, of those scholars have tended to consider that particular section of the past from the viewpoint of present problems, and have rarely been able, and equally rarely willing, to look at it as if it were a "dead" past. Practical, sociological, and political presuppositions have underlain much of the historical analysis of the period, and the historian will also have to ask himself if similar presuppositions have not influenced their selection of the archival material which has become available.[135]

In a letter to his mentor Herbert Butterfield, Williams insisted that the period immediately preceding the war could be and should be 'reviewed & interpreted historically without raising the question of "guilt" etc – or moral responsibility.'[136] In a review of the published version of Williams's paper, the historian A.J.P. Taylor, noting that Williams had his own 'unavowed [sic] slant', asserted that the Irish Petrean 'seem[ed] to think, not only historians should strive for truth, but that they should hold the balance even between Hitler and his opponents'.[137] Reflecting on Taylor's brief review in another letter to Butterfield, Williams stated that he thought Taylor let him get away relatively lightly.[138]

In an earlier essay, written for the previously mentioned *Cambridge Journal*, Williams expressed these concerns in a less guarded way. He asserted that when it came to the recent past, 'we often find our history cut according to the measure of the historian', with 'prejudice and passion frequently tak[ing] on very subtle forms'. Williams identified G.W.F. Hegel, J.G.

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[134] In a review of Namier's *In the Nazi era*, which bordered on being anti-Semitic, Williams declared that Namier, 'as an assimilationist Jew, can naturally have little sympathy with a Germany which produced Hitler and Auschwitz, but it is dangerous for him *qua* historian to write about it, at least if he wishes to maintain his professional status', see T. Desmond Williams, 'Dead Ground', *Irish Times*, 28 Feb. 1953.
[135] T. Desmond Williams, 'The historiography of World War II' in idem, ed., *Historical studies: papers read before the 2nd Irish Conference of Historians* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1958), 33.
[136] Williams to Butterfield, 18 Mar. 1955, Cambridge University Library (CUL), Butterfield papers, W240.
[137] A.J.P. Taylor, 'Historians in conference', *Manchester Guardian*, 30 May 1958.
[138] Williams to Butterfield, 2 Jun. 1958, CUL, Butterfield papers, W276.

Herder, and Jules Michelet as the responsible parties for demonstrating the importance of the intersection of history and politics for the 'lives of nations and states'.[139] From Williams's point of view, the primary risk associated with contemporary history was 'the fact that the pressure of emotional prejudice is greater among historians (as well as others) in relation to what concerns the living than to what concerns the dead'.[140] In his paper, Oakeshott also queried scholars' ability to perform genuinely historical analysis on the recent past, concluding that since the historian was required to 'translate' 'the idiom of practice' into 'the idiom of history', writing contemporary history was 'specially difficult'. As he put it, 'Just as it is easier to see the joke when it is not against oneself, so it will be easier … to make "history" out of a past which does not provoke a non-historical attitude.'[141] For both Oakeshott and Williams, historians required an indefinite amount of temporal distance from their subject to gain the affective distance necessary to write their history.[142]

Cruise O'Brien's experience attending the Second Conference of Irish Historians provoked him into framing his Merleau-Ponty review around a contrast between two 'intellectual watersheds' – one in France and one in England. The French example consisted of Merleau-Ponty's abandonment of Marxism, while Cruise O'Brien's strong reaction against Oakeshott informed the English example. As Cruise O'Brien saw it, Oakeshott's succession to the chair at the London School of Economics vacated by Labour Party intellectual Harold Laski, who died in March 1950, symbolised an important shift in English intellectual life from 'vaguely left to implicitly conservative'.[143] As J.G.A. Pocock has noted, Oakeshott's views on the activity of the historian were indicative of 'the conservative style', but masqueraded as non-political.[144] As is the case with many public intellectual engagements, the level of analysis in Cruise O'Brien's essay was shallow but provocative, written in the first flurries of engagement with the

[139] T. Desmond Williams, 'Some aspects of contemporary history', *Cambridge Journal*, 2 (Sept. 1949), 734.
[140] Williams, 'Some aspects', 735.
[141] 'Oakeshott, 'Activity', 16.
[142] For more on the metaphor of historical distance, see Mark Salber Philips, *On historical distance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).
[143] Donat O'Donnell, 'An intellectual watershed', 1, BBC Written Archives, Scripts; for more on Laski, see Michael Newman, *Harold Laski: a political biography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).
[144] J.G.A. Pocock, 'Time, institutions and action: an essay on traditions and their understanding', in Preston King and B.C. Parekh, eds, *Politics and experience: essays presented to Professor Michael Oakeshott on the occasion of his retirement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 271.

subject rather than after a process of sustained and considered thought. Hearing Oakeshott and reading his paper as he was reading Merleau-Ponty, Cruise O'Brien was, as he put it in a letter to his producer, struck 'by the discrepancy in the quality of the thought' between the two philosophers.[145] The Irishman was unconvinced by what he called 'Oakeshott's doctrine'.[146] The view that the historian's proper activity was studying 'the dead past', meaning a past that did not excite contemporary political passions, was, Cruise O'Brien contended, 'probably not true'.[147] Cruise O'Brien had long suspected historians who claimed their work was impartial because, as he saw it, the 'camouflage of impartiality' often disguised the 'snipings of the partisan'.[148] In this case, as far as Cruise O'Brien was concerned, Oakeshott hid his conservative views behind this kind of camouflage, rendering his image of the historian disingenuous.

Cruise O'Brien contrasted the English political philosopher's injunction, quoted above, with Merleau-Ponty's statement on the same topic. According to Merleau-Ponty, as Cruise O'Brien translated him:

> The historian cannot look at the past without finding a meaning in it, without distinguishing between the important and the merely necessary, between attempts and achievements, preparations and decadence. These vectors which he traces for himself into the past cannot help disfiguring reality, in which everything is equally real. The historian's activities of their nature cause present interests to crystallise in the structure of the past as the historian describes it…[149]

Cruise O'Brien found this summation of the historian's activity, which Merleau-Ponty derived from the German sociologist Max Weber, far more convincing than Oakeshott's emphasis on

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[145] Cruise O'Brien to Weltman, 4 Aug. 1955, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[146] Weltman to Cruise O'Brien, 28 July 1955, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[147] O'Donnell, 'Watershed', 6, BBC Written Archives, Scripts.
[148] *Irish Times*, 23 Nov. 1946.
[149] O'Donnell, 'Watershed', 6, BBC Written Archives, Scripts; 'The historian cannot look at the past without giving it a meaning, without putting into perspective the important and the subordinate, the essential and the accidental, plans and accomplishments, preparations and declines. And already these vectors which are traced through the dense whole of the facts distort the original reality, in which everything is equally real, and cause our own interests to crystallise on its surface.' See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 10.

detachment. In Merleau-Ponty's view, it was impossible to prevent 'the invasion of the historian into history', meaning that no matter how hard they might try, the histories written by historians would always be imbued with their own judgments, blind spots, and biases. On the other hand, he did not see historiography as a wholly relative enterprise. Merleau-Ponty argued that historians could 'see to it that, like the Kantian subject, the historical understanding constructs according to certain rules which assure an intersubjective value to its representation of the past'.[150] Like Merleau-Ponty, Cruise O'Brien did not advocate a relativist conception of history. Indeed, he argued strongly against such a position in an unpublished essay, alleging that naked relativism in historiography constituted a 'prostitution of history'.[151] Cruise O'Brien thought that the Frenchman's admission that the historian, by the very enterprise of studying the past, cannot fail to 'disfigur[e] reality' was a 'dangerous truth', but an admirable one.[152] In his opinion, Merleau-Ponty grasped what Cruise O'Brien thought was the central issue of historiography - the historian's selection of evidence. Conversely, for Oakeshott, when the 'historian' examined the sources with a 'specifically "historical" attitude', the historian's subjectivity did not figure. In his view, in the historian's analysis 'Everything that the evidence reveals or points to is recognized to have its place; nothing is excluded'.[153] For Cruise O'Brien, Oakeshott did not have the courage that Merleau-Ponty had to face up to an uncomfortable, possibly dangerous truth, even if his viewpoint did supply historians with a functional moral code. He argued that Oakeshott's reluctance to grapple with this truth was borne of a peculiarly English pragmaticism, which prioritised 'how people are likely to behave' over intellectual integrity, and he suggested that it 'might be desirable from time to time for more English people to put their heads out of their pragmatic bunker'.[154]

Producer Joe Weltman was deeply concerned about Cruise O'Brien's initial comments on Oakeshott, which he felt would come across to listeners as 'unnecessarily disagreeable'. He reminded Cruise O'Brien that the force behind the spoken word would amplify his criticisms. Weltman feared Cruise O'Brien's argument would be 'distorted by what sounds like the

[150] Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures*, 10.
[151] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The sanctity of probability', c. 1950s, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/467/3.
[152] O'Donnell, 'Watershed', 6, BBC Written Archives, Scripts.
[153] Oakeshott, 'Activity', 11.
[154] O'Donnell, 'Watershed', 6, BBC Written Archives, Scripts.

distasteful noise of grinding axes'. Therefore, Weltman asked Cruise O'Brien to drop the Oakeshott comparison.[155] Defending his position, Cruise O'Brien maintained that he bore no ill feelings towards the Englishman. Cruise O'Brien had only met him on a single occasion and had found him personally 'very pleasant'. Thus, he maintained he had 'no more axe to grind than had the child who made the celebrated and distasteful comment about the Emperor's clothes'.[156] Just how truthful Cruise O'Brien was at this moment is uncertain, as his animosity for Oakeshott lingered well into the 1960s. Writing to his son, Donal, who was beginning his postgraduate career at the LSE, Cruise O'Brien warned him against the Professor of Political Science. He denounced Oakeshott as a 'fraud and is apt to attract other frauds.'[157]

Cruise O'Brien insisted on retaining the Oakeshott/Merleau-Ponty comparison. Without this frame, he thought that he and Weltman might as well cancel their contract.[158] Weltman came close to taking the Irishman up on his offer. Still, as Cruise O'Brien was about to take up his post at the Irish Embassy in Paris, he decided to 'persist a little further', as he reckoned there was a strong likelihood that he would want to work with him again. Howard Newby, who later became the BBC's Managing Director, favoured dropping the troublesome writer.[159] While waiting for a response to his ultimatum, Cruise O'Brien recognised his mistake. Concerned that his touchiness put future broadcasting work in jeopardy, he wrote to Weltman in a far more docile tone, enclosing a revised draft, which, in his words, was free from 'all trace of petulance'.[160] In any case, the critical reception was positive but limited. Writing in *The Listener*, the radio critic Martin Armstrong was effusive in his praise, stating that Cruise O'Brien was 'an extremely good talker' and calling it 'an absorbing talk'.[161]

In the 'Preface' to *Parnell and his party*, which the Clarendon Press had just commissioned when he began his Merleau-Ponty review, Cruise O'Brien defended his decision

[155] Weltman to Cruise O'Brien, 28 July 1955, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[156] Cruise O'Brien to Weltman, 4 Aug. 1955, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[157] Akenson, *Conor*, 321.
[158] Cruise O'Brien to Weltman, 4 Aug. 1955, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[159] Weltman to CT (Sound), 16 Aug. 1955, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[160] Cruise O'Brien to Weltman, 16 Aug. 1955, BBC Written Archives, Cruise O'Brien file 1, 1938-62.
[161] *The Listener*, 27 Oct. 1955.

to write contemporary history, explicitly positioning himself against Oakeshott and Williams. Cruise O'Brien wrote,

> If, as some distinguished historians tell us, the proper theme of history is "the dead past" – a past which can evoke no emotions in our contemporaries – then Parnell's time is not yet ripe for the historian.

Cruise O'Brien, as we have seen, held a different view. He argued that discussing events with those who played a part in their making allowed the historian to learn a great deal more about the period. Yes, Cruise O'Brien admitted, such conversations might be 'upsetting to the impartiality', but they could also be upsetting to 'ignorance'. As he put it, 'one tended to become involved, but one got to know more'.[162] Cruise O'Brien argued that the lack of temporal and affective distance between the period under investigation and the historian, the 'nearness of the time and its passions', demanded 'not indeed detachment but a fascinated scepticism'.[163]

This preface was not the last time Cruise O'Brien used Michael Oakeshott as the foil for discussing his ideas about history. In the introduction to his controversial 1962 memoir, *To Katanga and back*, Cruise O'Brien explained why he felt justified writing the book before the events lost their political relevance. He outlined two reasons why he refused to wait, as he put it, 'until it had reached that stage of total detachment from any contemporary preoccupation, which is - in the view of one school of academic thought - the critical symptom of ripeness for the historian's attention'. Firstly, even if this 'austere view' was correct, Cruise O'Brien judged that as a central player in the events, his perspective would never come across as being sufficiently detached. Thus, he did not stand to gain credibility by waiting for the archival material to become available. Secondly, he reckoned that his account would be a vital primary source for 'that detached historian, the Oakeshott of the future', who eventually attempted such a documentary history.[164]

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[162] Cruise O'Brien, *Parnell*, xv.
[163] Ibid., xvi.
[164] Cruise O'Brien, *To Katanga and back*, 6.

History as art

In 1959, Cruise O'Brien published an essay entitled 'Michelet to-day' in the short-lived Irish intellectual magazine *nonplus*, edited by Patricia Murphy. The piece appeared in the first issue alongside essays from some of Ireland's most prominent intellectuals, such as Myles na Gopaleen, Terence de Vere White, and Patrick Kavanagh. Cruise O'Brien republished it in his 1965 collection, *Writers and politics* (discussed in Chapter 3), bringing it to a far broader readership. The essay nearly did not make it into the volume because Cruise O'Brien had difficulty obtaining a copy of it. Eventually, a former colleague of his at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Paul Keating, who possessed a complete collection of *nonplus*, lent his copy to Cruise O'Brien's publisher.[165]

According to Diarmuid Whelan, Cruise O'Brien wrote 'Michelet to-day' at some point in the mid-fifties.[166] However, internal evidence from the essay suggests that Cruise O'Brien penned it several years later, specifically in 1959, its year of publication. Firstly, in the opening paragraph, Cruise O'Brien discussed 1869 as ninety years in the past, meaning that Cruise O'Brien's present at the moment of composition was 1959. Second, in the essay Cruise O'Brien made a passing remark to the French philosopher Edgar Morin's book *l'Autocritique*, published in 1959. Finally, towards the end of the essay, Cruise O'Brien speculated about what Michelet would make of the 'Fifth Republic', which only came into being in 1958 after Charles de Gaulle returned to power following the military coup in Algeria.

For students of French at Trinity in Cruise O'Brien's generation, the nineteenth-century French historian Jules Michelet was a key figure in their education, as the professor of French, Thomas Rudmose Brown, set gobbets from Michelet's histories for his students.[167] In 'Michelet to-day', Cruise O'Brien mounted a defence of Michelet from the 'strictures of more academic historians', as F.S.L. Lyons phrased it, and advocated for the view that historiography was more an art form than a science.[168] According to Cruise O'Brien, Michelet's style raised his history

[165] Greene to Schiffrin, 4 Aug. 1964, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/539.
[166] Whelan, *Violent notions*, 121; see also Diarmuid Whelan, 'Emblems of his early adversity: Conor Cruise O'Brien and France', *Études Irlandaises*, 34 (2009), 71-86.
[167] Frank McShane, 'O'Brien's "bloated bullfrog"', *Irish Times*, Apr. 1968, URSC, Chatto & Windus papers, CW R1/113; Cruise O'Brien's first degree was in Irish and French.
[168] Lyons, 'Home truths from abroad', *Irish Times*, 2 Dec. 1965.

writing to an art. As he asserted, Michelet 'was a great artist, with the respect for his material that that implies'. The material with which Michelet made his art was the archival document. Here, Cruise O'Brien quoted the Dutch historian Pieter Geyl, who claimed 'Michelet's imagination did not work in a void, he had a sense of fact, his imagination throve on the truth and genuineness of archive documents.'[169] Cruise O'Brien called this form of history writing '*l'histoire engagé*', a play on the term '*la littérature engagé*'. This engaged history or committed history involved the historian in contemporary debates in a way that Cruise O'Brien felt academic historians tried to evade. For Cruise O'Brien, engagement, whether it be in literature, history, or criticism, amplified the stakes involved in intellectual productions, enriching them and raising them to a higher plane of significance.

Cruise O'Brien dismissed the academic limitations Lyons referred to because he felt that they were hypocritical. He refused to accept the idea that a historian's scholarly and non-specialist work occupied mutually exclusive worlds of discourse. Cruise O'Brien contended that it was dishonest for academic historians to put their 'opinions, hot and strong ... into newspaper articles, radio, [and] television' while keeping their scholarly work 'tightly buttoned [and] ostentatiously unemotional'. As he expressed it, 'The plain dry style implie[d] the acceptance of rigorous standards, submission to ascertainable facts, the aspiration of historiography towards the status of an exact science.' However, it seemed to Cruise O'Brien that this style, this 'dangerous and deceptive mildness', masked the fact that underneath,

> 'X' the historian is still 'X' the man, often 'X' the journalist. His emotions, interests, prejudices are with him as he selects and relates facts, sifts conflicting accounts, [and] attributes degrees of credibility to sources.[170]

As he saw it, when 'a modern scientific historian rebukes Michelet for prejudice and emotionalism, what he really objects to is Michelet's *unguarded expression* of prejudice and emotion'.[171] By contrast, Cruise O'Brien considered this unguardedness a positive feature of

[169] Pieter Geyl, *Debates with historians* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 60 quoted in Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Michelet to-day', *Writers and politics*, 87.
[170] Cruise O'Brien, 'Michelet to-day', 76, 79.
[171] Ibid., 76.

Michelet's style for which 'readers should surely be grateful'. Essentially, Cruise O'Brien accused modern historians of hiding behind the rhetoric of objectivity and conducting a covert ideological struggle. Thus, Cruise O'Brien put forward the argument that by disclosing his personal viewpoint Michelet was 'not merely a very great historian but, within certain limits, [was] an exceptionally honest one'.[172] Indeed, Cruise O'Brien contended that Michelet was not just honest but that he was 'in some ways more honest and therefore more scientific than most modern scientific historians'.[173]

In the summer and autumn of 1959, Cruise O'Brien read and reviewed C. Wright Mills' new book, *The sociological imagination*.[174] He also cited Wright Mills' appendix, entitled 'On intellectual craftsmanship', in a separate review essay published in *The Spectator* in September 1959. In that piece, Cruise O'Brien extolled Wright Mills' ideas as a model for 'workers in the science/art borderland'.[175] In *The sociological imagination*, Wright Mills argued that the key to doing good social science – historiography included – was openness. He insisted that where value judgments came into the equation, these should be made explicit. Wright Mills contended that a heightened sense of self-awareness would not lead to increased subjectivity in intellectual productions but would lead to greater objectivity. He believed that if scholars and publics were aware of the biases lying behind or informing a writer's choices, they could discuss these issues openly and honestly.[176] It was to this openness that Cruise O'Brien was referring when he remarked that Michelet was 'in some ways more honest and therefore more scientific than most modern scientific historians'.[177] Here, both Cruise O'Brien and Wright Mills operated within a distinctly Weberian framework. In his famous 1904 essay on objectivity, Weber denied the need to cleanse scholarly work of value judgments to achieve objectivity. Instead, Weber argued that in the interest of objectivity, scholars should 'keep the readers and themselves sharply aware at every moment of the standards by which they judge reality and from which

[172] Ibid., 74.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Donat O'Donnell, 'Distortions of sociology', *The Guardian*, 18 Sept. 1959; Akenson did not include this essay in his extended bibliography at the end of his Cruise O'Brien anthology, see Akenson, *Anthology*.
[175] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Re-enter the hero', *Writers and politics*, 197.
[176] C. Wright Mills, *The sociological imagination* (40th anniversary edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21, 177.
[177] Cruise O'Brien, 'Michelet to-day', 75.

the value-judgment is derived'. He declared that should writers do this rigorously then their judgments were not only *not* a hindrance to objectivity but were 'indeed mandatory'.[178]

Historians have classified Cruise O'Brien's approach to historiography as laid out in 'Michelet to-day' as 'unusual'. For instance, Whelan claimed that in thinking about history as a creative act rather than a scientific enterprise, Cruise O'Brien favoured an 'unusual method'.[179] For Whelan, Cruise O'Brien's commitment to 'history-as-art' was openly at variance with the historical discipline's self-perception as a 'scientific endeavour'.[180] To reinforce this claim, Whelan relied on the Oxford historian of ideas R.G. Collingwood's authority, writing that since the posthumous publication of Collingwood's *Idea of history*, the debate about the nature of history had settled into a consensus that historiography was a science. The reality was not so clear cut. Even so austere a historian as F.S.L. Lyons, who later admonished Cruise O'Brien for his Michelet essay, thought it naive to think history a science. In 1957, Lyons wrote,

> We know only too well that while the individual historian may approach his task with the same attitude of mind as, say, the physicist or the chemist, the material he has to handle is so imprecise and fragmentary that he can never hope to emulate the researcher in the experimental sciences.[181]

Likewise, as Evi Ghotzaridis has illustrated, Robert Dudley Edwards, reflecting on the philosopher W.H. Walsh's paper 'The Limits of Scientific History', which Edwards heard at the fourth Irish Conference of Historians in May 1959, confided to his diary,

> Historians should go beyond Oakeshott employing their expertness to select. Significance and comprehensiveness are needed or history becomes a mere

[178] Max Weber, '"Objectivity" in social science and social policy', in Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, eds, *The methodology of the social sciences: Max Weber* (Glencoe, Il: The Free Press, 1949), 59.
[179] Whelan, *Violent notions*, 139.
[180] Ibid.
[181] F.S.L. Lyons, 'The writing of history', *Irish Times*, 14 Dec. 1957.

> technique. Not Namier but Gibbon and Macaulay in the hard thrusts of a creative act.[182]

Thus, even within the narrow confines of Irish academia, Whelan's claim that Cruise O'Brien's views were deviant collapses under scrutiny.

In a broader view, Cruise O'Brien's preference for thinking about history as an art rather than a science placed him on one side of a long-standing discourse. Indeed, so many thinkers had engaged with this subject that the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce judged that the question 'Is history science or art?' had almost become a cliche as, despite the frequency with which it was posed, it was generally poorly asked and inadequately answered.[183] As Croce noted, most answers to the question asserted that history was both a science and an art. Even J.B. Bury - who notoriously insisted 'history [was] a science, no less and no more' - argued against the idea 'that the presentation of the results of historical research is not an art, requiring the tact and skill in selection and arrangement which belong to the literary faculty'.[184] Likewise, in his hugely influential little book, *The whig interpretation of history*, Herbert Butterfield devoted an entire chapter to 'The art of the historian'. In a passage that would fit comfortably within Cruise O'Brien's understanding of history as art, Butterfield contended that the historian

> may run through the whole gamut of emotions, and there is no reason why he should not meet history in any or all the moods that a man may have in meeting life itself. It is not a sin in a historian to introduce a personal bias that can be recognized and discounted. The sin in historical composition is the organization of the story in such a way that bias cannot be recognized and the reader is

[182] Quoted in Ghotzaridis, *Trials of Irish history*, 117; see also D.W. Hayton, 'The laboratory for "scientific history": T.W. Moody and R.D. Edwards at the Institute of Historical Research', *Irish Historical Studies*, 41 (2017), 41-57.
[183] Benedetto Croce, 'History brought under the general concept of art', in Brian P.A. Copenhaver and Rebecca Copenhaver, eds, *From Kant to Croce: modern philosophy in Italy, 1800-1950* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011), 484.
[184] J.B. Bury, *An inaugural lecture delivered in the Divinity School Cambridge on January 26, 1903: the science of history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 7; idem, *The life of St Patrick and his place in history* (London: Macmillan, 1905), viii fn. 1.

> locked along with the writer in what is really a treacherous argument in a circle.[185]

Although Whelan drew upon Collingwood's authority to assert that the historical discipline saw itself as a science, Collingwood's position was not nearly as black and white as that. In *The idea of history*, Collingwood, like Cruise O'Brien, underscored the artistic nature of the discipline. In his essay on 'The historical imagination', the Oxford don likened the historian to a landscape painter, stating,

> The historian who tries to work on the common-sense theory, and accurately reproduce what he finds in his authorities, resembles a landscape painter who tries to work on that theory of art which bids the artist copy nature. He may fancy that he is reproducing in his own medium the actual shapes and colours of natural things; but however hard he tries to do this he is always selecting, simplifying, schematizing, leaving out what he thinks unimportant and putting in what he regards as essential. It is the artist, and not nature, that is responsible for what goes into the picture. In the same way, no historian, not even the worst, merely copies out his authorities; even if he puts in nothing of his own (which is never really possible), he is always leaving out things which, for one reason or another, he decides that his own work does not need or cannot use.[186]

Fantasia

During his discussion of Cruise O'Brien's ideas about writing history, Whelan speculated that on reflection Cruise O'Brien would 'no doubt repudiate the essay ['Michelet to-day']'.[187] According to Whelan, continued adherence to the viewpoint he staked out in 'Michelet to-day' would have put Cruise O'Brien on the opposite side of the 'revisionist' debate in Ireland than the one

[185] Herbert Butterfield, *The whig interpretation of history* (London: G. Bell, 1968 [1931]), 105.
[186] R.G. Collingwood, *The idea of history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1946]), 236.
[187] Whelan, *Violent notions*, 124.

he occupied.[188] Whelan's account of Cruise O'Brien's position on historiographical questions has influenced other scholars who have taken Whelan at his word. In the new series, *Irish literature in transition*, Aidan O'Malley echoes Whelan's assertion that Cruise O'Brien would have disavowed his earlier writings on historiography in light of the Northern Irish 'Troubles' (See Chapters 4 and 5). O'Malley goes so far as to say that Cruise O'Brien's 'promotion of Michelet's overtly partial historiography' was an aspect of the Irishman's early thought that he came to 'fundamentally repudiate' later in his career.[189] However, Cruise O'Brien did *not* repudiate the essay or its themes. Indeed, at various points in his career, he reiterated and expanded on the arguments he made in 'Michelet to-day'.

In 'Michelet to-day', Cruise O'Brien contended that 'Class war, religious war, [and] national war all rage in historiography as they have raged in history'.[190] Over a decade later, in his classic revisionist work, *States of Ireland*, he restated this point at greater length, writing,

> Most history is *tribal* history: written that is to say in terms generated by, and acceptable to, a given tribe or nation, or within such a tribe or nation. If you know the language, etc., in which any 'standard' history of the origins of the First World War is written you will be able to make predictions, with a small margin of error, about its selection of data, conclusions on controversial points, and general emphasis... Historians, like other people, tend to identify with a community – not necessarily the one into which they were born – and in the case of modern historians this identification is likely to affect, and interact with, the character of their work, their career, their geographical location, and their public. Normally they write within a convention which suggests that these conditions do not exist, or can be ignored.[191]

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[188] On the Irish historical debate, see Ciaran Brady, ed., *Interpreting Irish history: the debate on historical revisionism, 1938-1994* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994); see also Ghotzaridis, *Trials of Irish history*; for a more critical perspective, see Regan, *Myth & the Irish state*, esp. Ch. 11.
[189] O'Malley, 'Irish writers and Europe', 66-82.
[190] Cruise O'Brien, 'Michelet to-day', 76.
[191] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1972), 16-17; on the problems with Cruise O'Brien's use of the term 'tribe', see Bourke, 'Languages of conflict'.

The tone of the final sentence indicates that Cruise O'Brien continued to disapprove of this convention. Nevertheless, without accepting it, he seemed to bow down before this convention a few paragraphs later. Indeed, because of this convention, he denied that he wrote *States of Ireland* as a historian. As he put it,

> The *historian* may claim - though we may be sceptical about the claim - that the scientific rigour of his work, and the accepted standards by which it will be judged, dispense him from any need to identify his own point of view, or the factors which may have conditioned it.[192]

Due to the nature of the book, which contained a large proportion of 'commentary and interpretation', Cruise O'Brien felt he could 'claim no such dispensation'.[193] That he highlighted his scepticism about historians' claims to scientific rigour indicates that he had not abandoned his doubts.

In the early 1980s, the Literary & Historical Society, the most prestigious debating society at University College Dublin, invited Cruise O'Brien to participate in a debate on historical objectivity. In his speech, Cruise O'Brien asserted that the 'work of the historian is more like that of the craftsman or artist than that of the natural scientist'. He insisted, 'Scientific history, in the strict sense, is impossible. The past may have been an experiment, but if so it is God's experiment. We human beings cannot repeat it.'[194] Cruise O'Brien endorsed the viewpoint he advocated in 'Michelet to-day', declaring that historians are

> human beings writing about other human beings. Their feelings are involved as well as their minds. They can have religious or anti-religious prejudices; ideological ones; nationalist ones, and they will vent these from time to time. The great histories of the past did so honestly and frequently. Modern histories do so very discretely. The barest suggestion of a sniff. Personally, I like histories

[192] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 17.
[193] Ibid.
[194] 'Manuscript text of address to the Literary and Historical Society, University College Dublin, on the subject of historical objectivity', undated, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/861; internal evidence, specifically a reference to C.J. Haughey's use of the word 'totality' suggests that Cruise O'Brien delivered this address in late 1980 or after.

> to tell us their prejudices, both because it is often fun, and because it shows us where, in their narrative they are likely to go wrong, what sort of things they are likely to misinterpret or miss, what they exaggerate.[195]

As if to underline that he had not moved away from his earlier understanding, Cruise O'Brien's notes suggest that he illustrated his point using 'the case of Michelet'.[196]

Towards the end of his career, Cruise O'Brien again reflected on the question of historical style and method. First, in a 1991 *New York Review of Books* essay and secondly in the introduction to his book on Edmund Burke, *The great melody* (1992), Cruise O'Brien commended Isaiah Berlin's understanding of the eighteenth-century Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico's concept of *fantasia* to his readers. Notably, Michelet viewed himself as an intellectual descendant of Vico, even going so far as to claim '*Je suis né de Vico* [I am born from Vico.]', indicating that although he emphasised Vico's concept, Cruise O'Brien had by no means disavowed his own debt to the Frenchman.[197] Berlin defined *fantasia* as 'imaginative insight'.[198] Specifically, the following passage from Berlin's essay on Vico and cultural history caught Cruise O'Brien's attention:

> Everyone is today aware of the fundamental difference between, on the one hand, those historians who paint portraits of entire societies or groups within them that are rounded and three-dimensional, so that we believe, whether rightly or mistakenly, that we are able to tell what it would have been like to have lived in such conditions, and, on the other, antiquaries, chroniclers, accumulators of facts or statistics on which large generalisations can be founded, learned compilers, or theorists who look on the use of imagination as opening the door to the horrors of guesswork, subjectivism, journalism, or worse.

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[195] 'Manuscript text of address to the Literary and Historical Society, University College Dublin, on the subject of historical objectivity', undated, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/861.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Joseph Mali, *The legacy of Vico in modern cultural history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 30.
[198] Cruise O'Brien also employed Berlin and Vico in his effusive 'Foreword' to Frank Callanan, *The Parnell split, 1890-91* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1992), xi-xiii.

> This all-important distinction rests precisely on the attitude to the faculty that Vico called *fantasia*, without which the past cannot, in his view, be resurrected. The crucial role he assigns to the imagination must not blind us – and did not blind him – to the necessity for verification; he allows that critical methods of examining evidence are indispensable. Yet without *fantasia* the past remains dead; to bring it to life we need, at least ideally, to hear men's voices, to conjecture (on the basis of such evidence as we can gather) what may have been their experience, their forms of expression, their values, outlook, aims, ways of living; without this we cannot grasp whence we came, how we come to be as we are now, not merely physically or biologically and, in a narrow sense, politically and institutionally, but socially, psychologically, morally; without this there can be no genuine self-understanding. We call great historians only those who not only are in full control of the factual evidence obtained by the use of the best critical methods available to them, but also possess the depth of imaginative insight that characterises gifted novelists. Clio, as the English historian G.M. Trevelyan pointed out long ago, is, after all, a muse.[199]

For Cruise O'Brien, academic historiography was devoid of *fantasia*. He judged that Sir Lewis Namier's influence over academic historians' work was at fault for purging *fantasia* from the discipline. Cruise O'Brien modified A.J.P. Taylor's famous aphorism that Namier 'took the mind out of history', reformulating it so that it read 'Namier took the *fantasia* out of history'. It seemed to Cruise O'Brien that the time was ripe to re-introduce it. In his opinion, he succeeded in bringing these qualities to the writing of *The great melody.* Cruise O'Brien attributed the inspiration for the book's layout to lines from W.B. Yeats's poem 'The seven sages', which run:

> American colonies, Ireland, France and India
> Harried, and Burke's great melody against it.

[199] Isaiah Berlin, *The crooked timber of humanity: chapters in the history of ideas* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1991), 64 quoted in Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The great melody: a thematic and commented anthology of Edmund Burke* (London: Minerva, 1993 [1992]), xxxi.

Since he drew inspiration from the words of a poet, Cruise O'Brien permitted himself to employ as much 'imaginative insight' or *fantasia* as he felt necessary to craft the text. Many admirers pinpoint *fantasia* as the element that elevated Cruise O'Brien's work beyond 'conventional biography'.[200] The Straussian political philosopher Harvey C. Mansfield Jr lauded this imaginative approach, asserting that it rescued Burke's 'greatness' from the 'reductionism' of the 'professional historians'.[201] Richard English and Joseph Morrison Skelly wax lyrical about his ability to bring 'the creative artistry of a novelist' to historiography.[202] Akenson likewise stresses the book's artistry, comparing Cruise O'Brien to 'one of the great innovative Renaissance composers [who] refused to accept the musical forms as they existed'.[203] Akenson also defends *The great melody* as a work of 'very good history from the technical standpoint', as Cruise O'Brien was faithful to the evidence and signposted the points at which he deviated into 'guesses and speculations'.[204] Whether we agree with him or not concerning its technical excellence, Akenson's analysis of Cruise O'Brien's historical method places it firmly within the scope of the viewpoint detailed in 'Michelet to-day', contradicting Whelan's claim that Cruise O'Brien must have recanted that attitude.

On the other hand, Cruise O'Brien's lavish application of *fantasia* drew sharp rebukes from some of his reviewers and has continued to draw criticism from Burke scholars, mainly as it concerned his analysis of the Irish dimension of Burke's thinking. In his *Studies* review, Kevin Barry scathingly defined *fantasia* not as 'imaginative insight' but as 'conjectural history'.[205] E.P. Thompson argued that he leaned too much on *fantasia* to construct Burke's 'Irish layer'. According to Thompson, Cruise O'Brien was too quick to fill in Burke's silences on Ireland and Catholicism with 'copious inferences and confident hypotheses'.[206] As Ian McBride has pointed out, researchers are yet to find 'hard evidence' for many of Cruise O'Brien's imaginative

[200] Paul Arthur, 'Anglo-Irish asymmetries', *Government and Opposition*, 28 (1993), 547-550.
[201] Harvey C. Mansfield Jr, 'The great Edmund Burke', *The New Criterion* (Nov. 1992), 8-11.
[202] English and Skelly, 'Introduction', 11.
[203] Akenson, *Conor*, 481.
[204] Ibid., 486.
[205] Kevin Barry, 'The great melody: a thematic biography of Edmund Burke by Conor Cruise O'Brien', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 82 (Autumn, 1993), 333-39.
[206] E.P. Thompson, 'In the gentlemen's cause', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 Dec. 1992.

insights.[207] For example, in *The great melody's* first substantive chapter, Cruise O'Brien stated that he 'feel[s] sure that he [Burke] did attend Mass regularly' but bolstered this contention with little more than supposition. In the same chapter, based on flimsy evidence, Cruise O'Brien asserted that Burke's father converted to Protestantism to practice law. As one reviewer stated, Cruise O'Brien was on somewhat shaky ground here because this assertion was fundamental to his thesis, and if it proved incorrect, he did not have much else to support it.[208]

Two years after *The great melody* came out, Cruise O'Brien published a short book on Irish history and politics, *Ancestral voices*, which provides a clear illustration of how *fantasia* worked in his writing. According to the *Times* reporter, Martin Ivens, during an interview to promote *Ancestral voices* Cruise O'Brien made it clear that he continued to adhere to the image of the historian he propounded in 'Michelet to-day'. Ivens wrote:

> like one of his favourite historians, Michelet, who told his audience exactly where he would have sat had he been a member of the Convention during the French Revolution, he [Cruise O'Brien] believes it honest to 'put the reader under notice that I am not a disembodied spirit'.[209]

At the book's Dublin launch, a reporter asked whether the book was 'an objective account of Irish history'. Cruise O'Brien answered that 'a book is written by a person and not a committee'.[210] The arch-revisionist Roy Foster, who on Whelan's understanding of Irish historical revisionism should have deplored Cruise O'Brien's use of *fantasia*, stated that he 'read the historical sections of this book (including those dealing with very recent history) in unstinting admiration'.[211] Contrastingly, the anti-revisionist historian Brendan Bradshaw took a dim view of Cruise O'Brien's style. He excoriated him for 'manipulat[ing] the historical evidence

[207] McBride, 'Burke and Ireland', 181-94; see also F.P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, volume 1: 1730-1784* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5 fn. 11.
[208] Barry, 'Great melody', 333-39.
[209] Martin Ivens, The voices of the prophet', *The Times*, 11 Nov. 1994.
[210] 'The Cruiser books in again', *Irish Independent*, 29 Oct. 1994.
[211] R.F. Foster, 'Feeling the pulse of Irish sacral nationalism', *The Tribune*, 13 Nov. 1994.

to suit his case' and 'grant[ing] his own surmises the status of historical fact in the worst post-modernist manner'.[212]

The most telling instance of Cruise O'Brien using his imaginative powers to construct his narrative came in his discussion of the republican leader Patrick Pearse's nationalist formation. In the passage entitled 'Mystical Nationalism: Patrick Pearse', Cruise O'Brien drew on Barry Coldrey's *Faith and fatherland*, a history of the Christian Brothers' role in the evolution of Irish nationalism, to argue that Pearse's experience at school shaped his nationalism. At first sight, Cruise O'Brien's assertion seems uncontroversial. Coldrey focused intensely on the place of Irish history in the Christian Brothers' curriculum, arguing that this emphasis helped cultivate a nationalist consciousness among students.[213] Cruise O'Brien was particularly interested in Coldrey's recital of an incident involving Pearse and one of his teachers. The teacher asked Pearse to read his essay on the importance of sea power aloud in front of the class. When Pearse used the phrase 'our navy', referring to the British navy, the teacher scolded him and reminded the class that 'England used its naval power to plunder the rest of the world and Ireland as well.'[214] Cruise O'Brien commented that this 'must have been a searing experience for the young Pearse to be thus rebuked, in the presence of the class, for words he must have heard from his father's lips.'[215]

When Cruise O'Brien sent the Edinburgh historian Owen Dudley Edwards a draft of the manuscript to read and comment on, Edwards remonstrated with Cruise O'Brien over this claim. According to Cruise O'Brien, in the draft Edwards received, the phrase 'a sentence' was present instead of 'words'. As Edwards pointed out, Cruise O'Brien possessed no evidence that Pearse's father had made this kind of statement in the presence of his son or otherwise. Edwards protested,

> No, no. There's no 'he must' about it. 'He must' only because you want him to. The Pearses subscribed to Victorian magazines, notably the enjoyable and

[212] Brendan Bradshaw, 'Republican rebellion to Catholic fury ', *The Review of Politics*, 60 (1998), 212.
[213] Lorcan Walsh, 'The Christian Brothers and their influence', *Irish Times*, 13 Feb. 1988.
[214] Quoted in Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Ancestral voices: religion and nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1994), 97.
[215] Cruise O'Brien, *Ancestral voices*, 97.

> violently imperialist *Little Folks* ... Since we know he read those bound volumes and we know they contained this guff about our navy, and we know sweet Fanny Adams about what his daddy told him, *Little Folks* is a much better source than Dad for the navy.[216]

Rather than excise the offending sentence, Cruise O'Brien included Edwards's remonstrance in the text as well as his own deliberations on how to incorporate Edwards's suggested revisions. The only concession to Edwards's concerns Cruise O'Brien made was to replace 'a sentence' with 'words'. He justified this move by insisting that it was inconceivable that Pearse had never heard this sort of language - 'our navy' - from his English father. He wrote:

> I believe that the young Pearse not merely heard the phrase 'our navy' on his father's lips - how else could an average Englishman refer to the force in question? - but that he must have heard it with very much the same emotional connotations as attached to it in *Little Folks*.

As with the vital importance of his suppositions about Burke's Catholicism in *The great melody*, Cruise O'Brien based his thesis about Pearse's nationalism on mere conjecture that his teacher forced him to 'repudiate, not merely the world of *Little Folks* but *his own father* who inhabited that world and subscribed to it'.[217] From the point of view of Cruise O'Brien's argument, it was critical that Pearse heard these words from his father. Only then, could Pearse's nationalist 'fervour' be explained. In this passage, Cruise O'Brien's belief in history-as-art permitted him to elevate imaginative insight above documentary evidence as a means of writing and understanding history. Had he repudiated 'Michelet to-day', as Whelan speculated, Cruise O'Brien could never have written *Ancestral voices* in the manner he did. Indeed, *Ancestral voices* represented history-as-art taken to its extreme conclusion without becoming merely historical fiction.

[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid., 98.

Conclusion

In 1980, the poet and literary critic Tom Paulin, who was himself a prominent public intellectual, attacked Cruise O'Brien for adopting the front of the 'objective historian, the *engagé* intellectual who is also disengaged by virtue of his superior wisdom'. There is a tension here that Paulin does not address, namely the strain between the concepts 'objective historian' and '*engagé* intellectual'.[218] Paulin's statement touches upon two related contradictions that scholars have highlighted within the concept of the public intellectual: between expertise and generality, and detachment versus passionate commitment. These tensions have dogged the concept since its inception with the emergence of the *Dreyfusard* intellectuals in France. As shown, the book *Parnell and his party* was a key component of Cruise O'Brien's cultural authority as a public intellectual, as it helped to provide him with a reputation as an expert historian who could produce detached, impartial scholarship. Despite this reputation and Paulin's assertion to the contrary, Cruise O'Brien shunned the label 'objective historian'. Indeed, he frequently disputed the notion that such a thing could exist in the common-sense understanding of the term. Although many of his intellectual interventions were historical in style and approach, Cruise O'Brien eschewed the neutral, distanced viewpoint that many professional historians assumed, opting instead to prioritize passionate engagement with contemporary political debate. Rather than trying to unpick the Gordian knot holding expertise/generality and detachment/passion in tension, Cruise O'Brien embraced the contradictions inherent in the role of the intellectual. As he wrote:

> Is an intellectual not human? Does he not have emotions? And if he does, what is to be gained by his concealing them and pretending to be a machine? A historian for example cannot be objective. He is himself part of the historical process; the passions and the interests of the people he is writing about are his too … a modern historian dealing with wars and revolutions which are still vibrating around us, cannot possibly be impartial.[219]

[218] Tom Paulin, 'The making of a loyalist', *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 Nov. 1980.
[219] Cruise O'Brien, 'Michelet To-day', 85-6.

For him, the seeming incongruities could be lived with as long as intellectuals were open and honest about the emotional and political investments they held, making their readers and audiences aware of how these predispositions might have influenced the way they interpreted a subject. In the next chapter, we dig deeper into Cruise O'Brien's ideas about the ways in which intellectuals and politics intermingled, surveying his utterances about the role, nature, and existence of intellectuals in politics in the 'West' and in Ireland.

3

Intellectuals and politics

As a writer brilliant, as an intellectual sparkling, but as a politician a national disaster.[1]

Cruise O'Brien conceived of himself as an intellectual from an early stage in life, and his understanding of the intellectual's role in society helped to shape the way in which he engaged with issues of contemporary significance. This chapter charts the twists and turns of Cruise O'Brien's responses to what Collini has called 'the question of intellectuals', referring to ideas about the role, nature, and existence of intellectuals in society. His ideas about the role of intellectuals in politics and public debate more broadly oscillated throughout his career until, ultimately, he came to a determination that intellectuals should not intervene directly in public affairs, at least not if they wanted to maintain their integrity as intellectuals.

The chapter is comprised of three substantive sections. First, it looks at what Cruise O'Brien had to say about the role of intellectuals in the context of the Cold War. This section focuses on what Cruise O'Brien saw as the failings of Western liberal intellectuals to live up to their own self-image as courageous defenders of truth and liberty. In this regard, it concentrates on the Irishman's recurrent attacks on the group of intellectuals connected with the magazine *Encounter*. It shows how Cruise O'Brien felt that his Irishness, or rather his involvement in the 'Irish situation', bestowed upon him an epistemic position concerning Cold War orthodoxies that Anglo-Saxon, meaning American and British, intellectuals could not attain. The section also points out some inconsistencies in Cruise O'Brien's line of thinking, specifically relating to the idealized image of past intellectuals' political involvements that he presented and his stress on the putative superior levels of intellectual integrity of intellectuals

[1] Ulick O'Connor, 'As I was saying...', *Sunday Independent*, 20 Oct. 1974.

raised in Catholic countries. The second section investigates Cruise O'Brien's own engagement in political affairs in Ireland. It not only examines Cruise O'Brien's ideas about intellectuals' participation in politics, but through an examination of unpublished archival documents it also shows how Cruise O'Brien changed his position once the possibility of entering electoral politics became a viable option for him. Centring on the period surrounding Cruise O'Brien's election to Dáil Éireann in June 1969, this section considers the public discussion in Ireland of the role of intellectuals in politics that occurred following the announcement that he had joined the Labour Party. The final part of the chapter deals with the fallout from Cruise O'Brien's time in politics and the impact that his political experience had on his understanding of the role intellectuals should play in relation to '"real" world' politics. It argues that by the time his career was drawing to a close, Cruise O'Brien had come to the conclusion that intellectuals should not take a direct part in political life.

'Chipping away'

The idea that intellectuals should aim their criticism at their own society was a central pillar of Cruise O'Brien's concept of the intellectual's role. The late historian Diarmuid Whelan contended that Cruise O'Brien's position on this issue stemmed from his reading of the Sartre/Camus controversy during the 1950s.[2] Whelan provided no evidence to support this contention. By 1952, when Camus and Sartre fell out over *L'Homme revolté*, Cruise O'Brien had been admonishing intellectuals who opted to probe other societies' problems while leaving theirs unscrutinised for at least half a decade.

For instance, in 1947, Cruise O'Brien, writing as 'Donat O'Donnell' in *The Irish Times*, reviewed the American literary magazine *Partisan Review's* new British edition.[3] Although he considered *Partisan Review* to be the 'best literary magazine published in English', he thought the journal's politics dragged down its overall quality. In *The Irish Times*, he castigated the liberal intellectuals associated with the review for their steadfast refusal to give the same level of critical attention to the US as they gave to the USSR. Founded in 1934, *Partisan Review*

[2] Whelan, 'Emblems of his early adversity', 79; on the Sartre/Camus falling out, see John Foley, *Albert Camus: from the absurd to revolt* (London: Routledge, 2014), 108-40.
[3] Akenson did not record this essay in his bibliography.

started as a journal intended to criticise the American left from *within*. At that point, Stalinism was making significant strides among America's liberal intellectuals and *Partisan Review's* founders wanted to work from an 'independent Marxist' position to 'stop the rot', as Cruise O'Brien put it. He felt that the magazine performed this task admirably throughout the 1930s but lost its way during World War II. Its socialist commitment diminished, and, in Cruise O'Brien's words, its 'anti-Communism grew shriller'. Cruise O'Brien pinpointed Granville Hicks's article on 'The future of socialism' for specific criticism. Hicks urged his readers to 'become nay-sayers' if they did not 'wish to be swept along by the tendency of totalitarianism'. Cruise O'Brien commented that this was a 'sound' proposition but required a modicum of qualification. If, by 'nay-sayer', Hicks meant 'the opposite of yes-man', if he meant 'the man who votes "*Nein*" in the plebiscite when the instructions on the box say "*Ja*"', then Cruise O'Brien was all for it. However, he did not think this was what Hicks meant, nor did he feel that this was what *Partisan Review* did. The Irishman rather pithily summarised that journal's position in the following terms: 'Unfortunately, *Partisan Review*, taking up its stand in Astor Place, New York, and "naying" at the Kremlin, resembles nothing so much as Ilya Ehrenburg defying General Franco in the columns of *Pravda*'. To put this more explicitly, Cruise O'Brien felt that did not require any great degree of courage to criticize the problems of a distant society – Ehrenburg chastising Franco, in this example – while leaving the issues of one's own unexamined – Ehrenburg not speaking out against Soviet authoritarianism. Cruise O'Brien insisted that the way to prevent oneself from becoming a 'yes-man' was 'by criticising one's own society, not someone else's', and felt that *Partisan Review* failed on this score.[4]

Over the subsequent two decades or so, Cruise O'Brien restated this position even more emphatically. In 1963, he reviewed the tenth-anniversary anthology of articles and poems from the periodical *Encounter*, then considered the premier liberal intellectual magazine in the Anglophone world.[5] Cruise O'Brien's tangle with *Encounter* during the 1960s has been well-documented, but it remains central to any discussion of his thinking about the intellectual's role

[4] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Partisans about what?', *Irish Times*, 17 May 1947.
[5] Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British left and the cold war* (London: Routledge, 2013 [2003]), 262.

in society.[6] As historians Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte Lerg write, founded in 1953, *Encounter* was the anti-communist Congress of Cultural Freedom's prize intellectual journal and its flagship in the prosecution of the Congress's 'cultural cold war'.[7] Edited by Stephen Spender and Melvin J. Lasky, who replaced the founding editor Irving Kristol, the magazine featured writing from many of the world's most admired intellectuals, including Albert Camus, Raymond Aron, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Sidney Hook, and many others. According to the historian Hugh Wilford, *Encounter's* position among the non-Communist left reached 'hegemonic' proportions during the Cold War.[8]

Introducing the British edition of the *Encounter* anthology, the Cambridge don D. W. Brogan compared the journal to the nineteenth-century magazines like *The Edinburgh Review*, writing that the former kept alive this mode of criticism. In his view, *Encounter* possessed the same bias as its prestigious antecedents, namely that it was biased 'in favour of open controversy'.[9] Despite this supposed bias, Brogan contended that these reviews never sought 'neutrality' but were 'instruments of political warfare'. *The Edinburgh Review* was the organ of intellectual Whiggism. *Encounter* was the mouthpiece of Cold War liberalism.[10] According to Brogan, from its inception, it had 'been a *journal de combat*'. He lauded *Encounter* for publishing 'uncomfortable truths' in its unceasing 'protest against *la trahison des clercs*'. The Cambridge historian maintained that 'the average liberal intellectual' accepted Soviet propaganda willingly, as long as it emanated from an 'authorized source'.[11] Oddly, given his earlier emphasis on giving space to opposing ideas, Brogan defined *Encounter's* role as

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[6] See Akenson, *Conor*, 292-99; Regan, *Myth & the Irish state*, 253-88; Jason Harding, '"Our greatest asset": Encounter magazine and the Congress for Cultural Freedom', in Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte Lerg, eds, *Campaigning culture and the global cold war: the journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 107-25; F.S. Saunders, *Who paid the piper? The CIA and the cultural cold war* (London: Granta Books, 2000); Giles Scott-Smith, *The politics of apolitical culture: the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA, and post-war American hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2002); Hugh Wilford, *The mighty Wurlitzer: how the CIA played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[7] For more on the CCF, see Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte Lerg, eds, *Campaigning culture and the global cold war: the journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[8] Wilford, *The CIA, the British left and the Cold War*, 290.

[9] D.W. Brogan, 'Introduction', in Stephen Spender, Irving Kristol, and Melvin J. Lasky, eds, *Encounters: an anthology from the first ten years of Encounter magazine* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), xv.

[10] Brogan, 'Introduction', xv.

[11] Ibid., xxv.

'remind[ing] us of the realities behind the Iron Curtain'.[12] Cruise O'Brien seized on Brogan's introduction to eviscerate not just the volume under review but also what he viewed as *Encounter's* duplicitous positioning in the post-war cultural and political field.

Opening his review, Cruise O'Brien offered his thanks to Brogan for the clarity with which he exposed *Encounter's* 'basic and permanent preoccupation', which is to say its determination to combat Communism. In Cruise O'Brien's opinion, while Brogan's introduction was approving in tone, he lifted - however unwittingly - the veil of impartiality that *Encounter's* editors had draped over the magazine in its first issue. In its initial editorial, *Encounter's* editors claimed that the magazine would 'promote no "line", though its editors have opinions they will not hesitate to express'.[13] It seemed to Cruise O'Brien that Brogan's introduction rendered this claim untenable. In his estimation, the discrepancy between *Encounter's* avowed impartiality and Brogan's praise for its commitment highlighted the magazine's deceptive self-positioning. Here, he seized on Brogan's invocation of Julien Benda's concept of *la trahison des clercs*, which he saw as highly ironic. For the Irishman, the irony lay in the fact that the thrust of Benda's argument was that *les clercs*, whom he defined as 'all those whose activity essentially is *not* the pursuit of practical aims', should leave politics to statesmen.[14]

Cruise O'Brien maintained that insisting that one has no political commitments while publishing a magazine littered with such commitments was one way of perpetrating Benda's *la trahison des clercs*. It was hypocritical for *Encounter* to try to give 'the impression that its anti-communist and pro-capitalist propaganda [was] not propaganda at all, but the spontaneous and almost uniform reaction of the culturally free'.[15] Cruise O'Brien agreed with Brogan that there was much to criticise about Communism and the lack of 'intellectual honesty' in Communist states. Still, he did not think that an exclusive focus on the failings of the Soviet Union was sufficient. As he phrased it, 'clerks can betray in more than one way, and in our

[12] Ibid., xxvi.
[13] Editorial, 'After the apocalypse', *Encounter*, Oct. 1953.
[14] Julien Benda, *The treason of the intellectuals (La trahison des clercs)*, trans. Richard Aldington (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969 [1928]), 43; for an illuminating discussion of the reception and translation of *La trahison des clercs*, see Collini, *Absent minds*, 279-300; see also David L. Schalk, *The spectrum of political engagement: Mounier, Benda, Nizan, Brasillach, Sartre* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
[15] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Journal de combat', *Writers and politics*, 170.

culture the communist way is neither the most tempting nor the most rewarding'.[16] He argued that *Encounter* committed its 'treason' through the method its editors used to select the 'uncomfortable truths' it published. This method relied on a strict division along the Cold War axis. As Cruise O'Brien summarised it, 'Where the truth in question is uncomfortable for the Soviet Union it is promulgated; where it is uncomfortable for the United States it is mitigated.'[17] After combing the magazine's back-catalogue, he identified several 'uncomfortable' political situations - in terms of United States policy - when *Encounter* failed to stand up for its putative 'love of liberty' to support his contention. For instance, Cruise O'Brien found that *Encounter* had nothing to say about either the Cuban people's absence of liberty under the right-wing dictator Fulgencio Batista, nor did it shine a spotlight on black Americans' plight until it finally became impossible to ignore. This silence was also true concerning political crises in Latin America and Asia. From these selective silences Cruise O'Brien concluded that *Encounter's* supposed 'love of liberty' really equated to a hatred of Communism. He reckoned that the problems stemming from *Encounter's* political allegiances were not that unusual. His problem was with how *Encounter* sought to position itself, not least through Brogan's introduction to the anniversary anthology. Rounding off his review, Cruise O'Brien offered some sage advice:

> it is rash for Sir Denis Brogan to invoke, in tribute to a periodical so prone to these defects, the terminology of Julien Benda. Benda's point was that writers were not to cheat, for any side.[18]

Akenson makes it appear as if Cruise O'Brien was the only observer able to see through *Encounter's* facade, but the Irish critic was not alone in identifying political commitments in this journal.[19] *The Observer's* reviewer, Philip Toynbee, noted that *Encounter* was 'powerfully anti-Communist'.[20] In *Encounter*, Toynbee caught glimpses of 'professional anti-Communism', noting the magazine's reluctance to tackle subjects such as 'poverty in the United States' or conditions

[16] Cruise O'Brien, 'Journal de combat', 170.
[17] Ibid., 171.
[18] Ibid., 173.
[19] Akenson, *Conor*, 260.
[20] Philip Toynbee, 'A special relationship', *The Observer*, 24 Nov. 1963.

in Fascist dictatorships on the Iberian peninsula. Nevertheless, Toynbee thought these failings did not surpass *Encounter's* positive contribution.[21] Similarly, BBC producer Peter Duval Smith commented on the periodical's 'political flavour', which he described as 'committed to the point of being embattled', calling some features 'out-right counter-propaganda'.[22] Reviewing the volume for *The Listener*, T.R. Fyvel remarked that it failed to represent just how 'committed' *Encounter* was in its first decade.[23] An editorial in the *Times Literary Supplement* concurred with this assessment, stating that the commemorative volume presented the magazine as 'disengaged' and 'self-satisfied'.[24] What set Cruise O'Brien apart from other critics was the intensity and frequency with which he spoke out against what might be called the *Encounter* line.

'Journal de combat' was among the essays reprinted in the collection *Writers and politics*, and it received a significant portion of the critics' attention. Upon reading the essay in 1965, the liberal Indian intellectual Sadhan Kumar Ghosh proclaimed that Cruise O'Brien's was a voice for which 'mankind should be grateful'. However, as much as he appreciated the brutal way Cruise O'Brien debunked *Encounter's* positioning, Ghosh did not think there was anything altogether surprising that a journal backed by the Congress for Cultural Freedom should exhibit the characteristics Cruise O'Brien singled out.[25] Likewise, the English academic Anthony Arblaster applauded Cruise O'Brien for his 'clear and systematic exposure' of the Cold War's 'intellectual corruptions'.[26] Conversely, in the Australian conservative periodical, *The Bulletin*, Patrick Margan argued that Cruise O'Brien's viewpoint amounted to nothing more than an updated version of a 1930s fellow-traveller.[27] For the Communist turned conservative Alfred Sherman, Cruise O'Brien's criticism of *Encounter* evinced his 'bitterness'. Sherman accused him of being 'like a stage Irishman ... finding devilish Anglo-Saxon conspiracies everywhere'.[28] The

[21] Ibid.
[22] Peter Duval Smith, 'Well met', *Financial Times*, 12 Dec. 1963.
[23] T.R. Fyvel, 'The state of England', *The Listener*, 5 Dec. 1963.
[24] Derwent May, 'A moment of daydream', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 Dec. 1963.
[25] Sadhan Kumar Ghosh, '… about books', undated, URSC, Chatto & Windus papers, CW R/1/113.
[26] Anthony Arblaster, 'The sound of chipping', *Tribune*, 10 Dec. 1965, URSC, Chatto & Windus papers, CW R/1/113.
[27] Patrick Margan, 'The blarney of Mr Cruise O'Brien', *The Bulletin*, 23 Apr. 1966, URSC, Chatto & Windus papers, CW R/1/113.
[28] Alfred Sherman, 'Up (some) rebels', *The Spectator*, 17 Dec. 1965, URSC, Chatto & Windus papers, CW R/1/113.

English writer P.N. Furbank objected to Cruise O'Brien's use of Benda as 'a stick to beat *Encounter* with', claiming that the Irishman 'misquote[d] and vulgarize[d]' the Frenchman's ideas. Specifically, Furbank complained that Cruise O'Brien misquoted Benda as declaring that 'writers were not to cheat for any side'. Here, Furbank was inaccurate. At no point did Cruise O'Brien state or imply that this was a direct quotation. The allegedly objectionable phrase was, in fact, Cruise O'Brien's terse summary of Benda's argument, not a quotation at all.[29]

In the months preceding the initial publication of 'Journal de combat', Pantheon Books' Andre Schiffrin approached Cruise O'Brien's literary agent, Elaine Greene, about the possibility of publishing the Irishman's collected essays.[30] Greene recommended that Cruise O'Brien, then in his post as vice-chancellor of the University of Ghana, take the 'young egghead' up on his offer because it would be a good 'interim publication involving almost no work at all'.[31] Cruise O'Brien almost immediately started thinking about publishing strategies for the collection. He was eager not to give Hutchinson - *To Katanga and back's* publisher - the UK publishing rights, as he wanted to go with a more academic publisher. As he put it in a letter to his agent, 'I have a sensational past to live down and a sober academic future to look forward to, so Chatto & Windus would be more the thing than Hutchinsons.'[32] After several years of exchanges of correspondence between Legon (Accra, Ghana), London, and New York, and several attempts to exhume hard to find essays from defunct periodicals, Cruise O'Brien and Schiffrin produced *Writers and politics*. This process proved so arduous and acrimonious that Elaine Greene demanded a 'presentation copy of Writers and Politics bound in Schiffrin's skin'.[33] If Cruise O'Brien wanted to shed his 'sensational' image with *Writers and politics*, then he failed. As the *Belfast Telegraph's* reviewer put it, in this book, Cruise O'Brien, who had been 'in danger of exchanging the label "intellectual" for ... "controversial figure"', managed to combine the two to be both intellectual and controversial.[34]

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[29] P.N. Furbank, 'Plots and oscillations', *The Listener*, 27 Jan. 1966, URSC, Chatto & Windus papers, CW R/1/113; see also Schalk, *Spectrum.*
[30] Greene to Cruise O'Brien, 17 Sept. 1963, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/539.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Cruise O'Brien to Greene, 11 Oct. 1963, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/539.
[33] Greene to Cruise O'Brien, 11 Nov. 1964, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/539.
[34] Dennis Kennedy, 'The liberalism of Dr Cruise O'Brien', *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 Jan. 1966.

Writers and politics predominantly comprised essays written for English publics, mainly *New Statesman* and *The Spectator* readers, with a few pieces intended for Irish publics and African ones. The book itself, published in New York and London, was intended for an Anglo-American readership. In his introduction to the volume, Cruise O'Brien focused on what he took to be the liberal intellectual's proper role in the Western world. Looking at American and British intellectuals, Cruise O'Brien found them wanting. Given its principal theme, this short essay provides a significant insight into Cruise O'Brien's self-image as an intellectual in the Cold War. It seemed to Cruise O'Brien that his Irishness, or his involvement in the 'Irish situation', set him apart from other Western liberal intellectuals, causing him to value liberal concepts more highly than 'Anglo-Saxon' intellectuals did, meaning those associated with *Encounter*. As Cruise O'Brien portrayed it, the Ireland in which he grew up was on a par with other Catholic countries like Spain or Poland. As he saw it, these places had an unusual connection with liberalism, in theory and practice. From his perspective, people took liberalism 'more seriously' in these countries precisely because it was not the dominant strain of thought. He claimed that in Ireland, the 'liberal current of the national-revolutionary tradition' was dashed on the 'original Rock, the Catholic Church as a social force'.[35] The English historian E.P. Thompson, also writing in 1965, made a similar argument. He claimed that having the Catholic Church as a foil to react against meant that intellectuals in Catholic societies could perform their critical role with more 'panache' than their counterparts in Protestant countries.[36] Cruise O'Brien maintained that this contest with the Catholic Church meant that dissenting intellectuals, a group that included Protestant intellectuals and those from other religious minorities, developed characteristic tendencies. He wrote:

> Outsiders, and some insiders, have discerned in the Irish mind, as in the Polish and the Spanish, a tendency to anarchism, to rebellion for rebellion's sake. Where it exists, and it does among intellectuals, this tendency derives, I believe, from the necessities of individual intellectual survival in communities where correct thinking is assumed to be the province of a specialized caste. If we take

[35] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Writers and politics*, xv.
[36] E.P. Thompson, 'The peculiarities of the English', *The Socialist Register*, 2 (1965), 336.

> an intellectual to be a person who prefers to try to do his thinking for himself, even badly, rather than to delegate it to specialists trained to discharge this function with considerable subtlety, then we see that the intellectual, in a priest-led community, must develop strengthened means of defending himself. He acquires in the process special capabilities and special limitations, different from those affecting intellectuals in Protestant/agnostic countries.[37]

By contrast, Cruise O'Brien asserted that 'Anglo Saxon intellectuals' were more willing to swallow and propagate falsehoods based on utility than were intellectuals from Catholic countries. He alleged that they accepted 'the utility of a certain amount of hypocrisy as a form of social cement'. According to Cruise O'Brien, intellectuals raised in 'Catholic communities' made no such allowances. He insisted,

> To intellectuals brought up in Catholic communities – whether they accept or not the teaching and standards of these communities – the truth or falsehood of a given proposition is far more important than its social implications.[38]

Cruise O'Brien's claim about the exceptionalism of intellectuals from Catholic countries needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. In a later essay, for instance, Cruise O'Brien attributed many of these same qualities to George Orwell and credited 'a specifically English form of Protestantism' with instilling these virtues in the *Animal Farm* author.[39] Contradicting his *Writers and politics* introduction, Cruise O'Brien asserted that this English Protestantism rendered Orwell 'constitutionally immune' to 'Benda's "treason"'.[40] Indeed, in this same essay, Cruise O'Brien stated that French intellectuals were particularly susceptible to 'treason in Benda's sense'. Given that France was a predominantly Catholic country, this allegation did not chime with his theory that intellectuals in Catholic countries were less willing than those in Protestant ones to betray their calling.

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[37] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Writers & politics*, xvi-xvii.
[38] Ibid., xvii.
[39] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Thoughts on commitment', *The Listener*, 16 Dec. 1971.
[40] Ibid.

Cruise O'Brien positioned himself as 'chipping away' at the 'cultural and political edifices' erected in the US-dominated Western world in the introduction's concluding paragraphs. Taking a sideswipe at *Encounter,* Cruise O'Brien stated, 'the distortions and misleading facades' that the Western intellectual 'will most often encounter - I use this verb advisedly - are pro-American and anti-communist distortions and facades'.[41] Cruise O'Brien was under no illusion that such problems existed in the Communist world. Indeed, he reckoned that these were more glaringly obvious than in the Western world. However, he posited that the very blatancy of these Communist 'distortions and facades' made them less sinister than the more sophisticated methods employed in the West. Cruise O'Brien argued that the West's political power structure rewarded pro-Western views in a fashion that pushed writers, consciously or unconsciously, to conform to certain norms. He thought this was more 'insidious' than the brutal repressive measures taken against writers in Communist countries. He also thought it was more effective. His view on this issue recalls one of Cruise O'Brien's intellectual predecessors, George Orwell's statement: 'Circus dogs jump when the trainer cracks his whip, but the really well-trained dog is the one that turns his somersault when there is no whip.'[42]

Cruise O'Brien contended that as 'Socialist' governments prioritised utility over truth to an overwhelming degree, 'hypocrisy and sycophancy in their most grovelling forms have been encouraged and rewarded'. Consequently, he reasoned that in these countries, 'intellectuals, especially writers, have been distrusted and dragooned'.[43] However, Cruise O'Brien believed that they were fighting back in a way that their counterparts in the West were not. In his view, intellectuals behind the 'Iron Curtain' were 'chipping' away at the hypocrisies of the system in a way that Western intellectuals were not. The young British historian Roger Owen thought that Cruise O'Brien exaggerated this last point. Owen noted that Cruise O'Brien had been 'chipping away for years in some important Western journals' but maintained that 'he [was] not alone'. Owen believed it was a shame that 'in his assaults on some imprisoning illusions he [Cruise O'Brien] overlooked such fortifying truths as this one.'[44]

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[41] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Writers & politics*, xxi.
[42] Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds, *The collected essays, journalism and letters of George Orwell, volume III: as I please, 1943-1945* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), 181.
[43] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Writers & politics*, xviii.
[44] Roger Owen, 'Chipping away', *Commentary*, Sept. 1965.

Nevertheless, Cruise O'Brien argued that Polish intellectuals were in the vanguard of this fightback because Poland's strong Catholic tradition meant that intellectuals were unwilling to accept the Soviet 'lie-structure'. Cruise O'Brien was vague about what precisely the Poles had done to warrant such high esteem, merely declaring that they had restarted the 'currents of intellectual life which had long been blocked'.[45] However, in two essays in the collection, 'Re-enter the hero' and 'Generation of saints', both initially published in *The Spectator*, Cruise O'Brien lauded the work, and the intellectual courage, of the Polish writers featured in Pawel Mayewski's volume of essays, *The broken mirror.* This book was a collection in which the American literary critic Lionel Trilling introduced seven essays written by Polish intellectuals – namely poets, playwrights, scriptwriters, sociologists, and philosophers – and published in the Polish press. Trilling positioned the volume, published by Random House in New York, as 'an event', in the sense of 'a battle or an uprising'.[46] What made this 'event' so important, Trilling argued, was that each contributor had previously been either a Communist or a Communist sympathizer. By taking up the position they had 'in a Communist state, their relation to Communism being what it [was], they fulfil[ed] the function which we have come to think of as virtually definitive of the ideal conception of the intellectual'.[47] Critical comment on Communism was certainly not lacking in the Cold War West. What attracted Cruise O'Brien to these young Polish writers was that they criticised their society from within, unlike Western anti-Communists who threw stones at the Iron Curtain for a domestic audience's pleasure. For Cruise O'Brien, any culture's most significant criticisms emanated from within that culture, not outside it. This sort of self-criticism required a great deal more courage on the part of intellectuals. As he put it in an interview while he was promoting the book, he thought it was a 'safe and easy business' for Western thinkers to criticise the Soviet Union while leaving their own society unexamined.[48]

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[45] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Writers & politics*, xviii.
[46] Lionel Trilling, 'Introduction', in Pavel Mayewski, ed., *The broken mirror: a collection of writings from contemporary Poland* (New York: Random House, 1958), 1.
[47] Trilling, 'Introduction', 2.
[48] 'Conor Cruise O'Brien discusses politics and the book "Writers and politics: essays and criticisms" [https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/programs/conor-cruise-obrien-discusses-politics-and-book-writers-and-politics-essays-and-criticisms, accessed 25 Jan. 2020].

While *Writers and politics* was in production, Cruise O'Brien left his role as the University of Ghana's vice-chancellor to take up a richly endowed post at New York University. Back in Ireland, some commentators lamented the fact that Cruise O'Brien had opted to go to the United States rather than return home to Ireland. For instance, the journalist Proinsias Mac Aonghusa contended that as Cruise O'Brien was 'one of the most courageous men to come out of Ireland for many years', it was a shame that he was 'now lost to Ireland'.[49] In a letter recommending him for the post, literary critic I.A. Richards also touched on the theme of courage, positioning Cruise O'Brien as 'a man with the strongest sense of public duty, of great courage and tenacity'.[50] Cruise O'Brien was one of several academic 'stars', including Arthur Schlesinger Jr and the Nobel Prize-winning physicist C.N. Yang, recruited to hold a Schweitzer Chair in New York.[51] The problem of intellectuals in the modern world was the predominant theme of Cruise O'Brien's intellectual endeavour during his years in the US. In his teaching, Cruise O'Brien concentrated on 'the intellectual's political involvements, imaginative, intellectual, and active' and their 'political commitments, responsibilities, engagements, and disengagements'.[52] Cruise O'Brien separated 'commitment' from 'involvement', asserting that a commitment required 'deliberate choice' while an 'involvement' could occur 'willy-nilly'.[53] Likewise, in his statements to non-student audiences, Cruise O'Brien devoted significant attention to these questions.

In June 1966, the PEN Congress, the annual meeting of members of the literary organization PEN (Poets, Essayists, Novelists) International, brought more than 600 writers to New York University to contemplate 'common artistic problems' on 'politically neutral ground'.[54] The Congress's overarching theme was 'The writer as independent spirit'.[55] From 12-18 June, literary luminaries from over fifty countries, not including the USSR, listened to talks ranging from 'the influence of the social scientist on the writer' to editors and publishers' role

[49] Proinsias Mac Aonghusa, 'Straight from the shoulder', *Munster Express*, 25 Jun. 1965.
[50] Richards to Greene, 6 May 1965, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/100/209.
[51] Fred M. Hechinger, '"Stars" plague academia, too', *New York Times*, 27 Feb. 1966.
[52] Cruise O'Brien to Davin, 10 Jun. 1965, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/135; Cruise O'Brien to Caute, 25 Jun. 1965, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/135.
[53] 'Burke', New York University Archives (NYUA), Papers of the Albert Schweitzer Chair, RG21.1 5/8.
[54] Editorial, 'PEN comes to New York', *New York Times*, 12 Jun. 1966.
[55] Lewis Nichols, 'In and out of books', *New York Times*, 10 Apr. 1966.

in cultural production, and 'The writer as public figure'.[56] Framing this subject, the organisers asked 'whether "the donning by the writer of a public persona tempts him to live up to that role in disregard of his true creative impulse. A collateral question is: Do we read the classics because their authors took a stand in contemporary conflict, or rather because they illuminated the spirit of man?"'[57] The latter was, without doubt, the most controversial panel. According to the *New York Times's* correspondent, the political tensions that had been simmering throughout the week finally boiled over when the Chilean intellectual Pablo Neruda and the Italian novelist Ignazio Silone provoked a heated argument about writers' commitments.[58]

Several weeks before the Congress convened, Cruise O'Brien gave a public lecture at NYU during which he assailed PEN's framing of these issues. Cruise O'Brien published a contracted version of this lecture in *The Washington Post's Book Week* on the Congress's opening day. Notably, *Book Week* made several cuts to the manuscript Cruise O'Brien sent them, infuriating the Irishman. As he wrote to his friend Karl Miller, literary editor at *New Statesman*, Cruise O'Brien felt that these excisions, which qualified Cruise O'Brien's position relating to the 'Communist world', left him 'open to criticism for one-sidedness'.[59] It seemed to Cruise O'Brien that the Congress's organisers devised the panel title 'Writer as public figure' in a way that called for an answer that depreciated writers' roles. Using one of his favourite analogies, Cruise O'Brien reckoned that the 'Writer as public figure' played Mr Hyde to the 'writer as independent spirit's' Dr Jekyll. Cruise O'Brien felt that the organisers' real purpose was to 'recommend to the congress the following proposition: Writers should not take stands in contemporary conflicts - such as the war in Viet Nam - because if they do, their true creative impulse may suffer'.[60]

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Theodore Solotaroff, 'Editorial', *Book Week*, 12 Jun. 1966, Stanford University, Hoover Institute Library & Archives (HILA), Hook papers, 149/8.

[58] Harry Gilroy, 'Ideologies stir PEN delegates', *New York Times*, 18 Jun. 1966.

[59] Cruise O'Brien to Miller, 29 July 1966, The Keep, New Statesman Archive, SxMs60/4/3/1/15.

[60] Cruise O'Brien, 'Politics and the writer', *Book Week*, 12 Jun. 1966, HILA, Hook papers, 149/8; Akenson reprinted this article in his *Anthology* under the title 'The Homer Watt lecture', see Akenson, *Anthology*, 112-19; however, in 1971, Christine Brooke-Rose reproduced a lengthy quotation from the Homer Watt lecture that does not appear in the article Akenson so named, suggesting that the actual Homer Watt lecture was significantly different than the essay printed in Akenson's collection, see Christine Brooke-Rose, *A ZBC of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 254.

Cruise O'Brien argued that it was a fallacy that writers and other intellectuals did not, or should not, take an active interest in political and social affairs. As he saw things, the attitude that writers should not involve themselves in politics was a relatively recent development. If, for instance, modern intellectuals found the idea 'distasteful [and] associated with pomposity and falsity', nineteenth-century individuals like Victor Hugo would have had no such qualms. However, Cruise O'Brien reckoned that it was around Hugo's time when things started to change. As he interpreted the situation, since then, it was only with a 'degree of irony and self-disgust' that any 'important writer' accepted this sort of public role. Here he pointed to Yeats's vision of himself as a 'smiling public man', or Auden's jibe about 'private faces in public places' as evidence of the discomfort with playing a role in politics.[61]

Cruise O'Brien connected the diminution of the writer's role in politics with Julien Benda, whose little book he credited with popularising the image of writers as being completely apolitical. In 1927, Benda asserted that it had always been the case that 'men of thought ... remained strangers to political passions'.[62] The chief political passions Benda considered were 'racial passions, class passions and national passions'.[63] Cruise O'Brien demurred. To his mind, Benda minimised the role writers played in politics for polemical purposes against the French right.[64] He insisted that throughout history, the most significant writers, far from avoiding politics, had 'a high propensity ... to take stands in contemporary conflicts'.[65] It seemed to Cruise O'Brien that people who invoked the phrase *la trahison des clercs* did so to dislocate the writer from politics. Here, Cruise O'Brien exhibited a significant amount of 'golden age' thinking regarding the role of intellectuals in politics. In other statements he made on this subject around this time, he pushed the supposed 'golden age' even further back into the past, pinpointing the eighteenth century as the moment when things began to turn sour for intellectuals in politics.

Returning to Sir Denis Brogan's use of Benda's aphorism to introduce the *Encounter* anthology, Cruise O'Brien wrote that people who read Brogan's introduction, without the

[61] Cruise O'Brien, 'Politics and the writer', *Book Week*, 12 Jun. 1966, HILA, Hook papers, 149/8.
[62] Benda, *Treason*, 46.
[63] Ibid., 3.
[64] Princeton colloquium, undated, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/146.
[65] Cruise O'Brien, 'Politics and the writer', *Book Week*, 12 Jun. 1966, HILA, Hook papers, 149/8.

relevant context, could be forgiven for thinking that Brogan, Benda, and *Encounter* were all 'in the same sense, enemies of political commitment'. Cruise O'Brien asserted that, on closer inspection, this was not the case. Indeed, as he pointed out, the book that appeared under the title *La trahison des clercs* was itself a powerfully polemical text. According to Cruise O'Brien, Benda intended to defend a liberal position against the right, attacking right-wing intellectuals who threatened that position. Thus, Cruise O'Brien proclaimed, Benda made 'a stand in a contemporary conflict'. Although Benda's immediate targets were right-wing French intellectuals, the French man of letters insisted that he was more than willing to stand against attacks from the left. Cruise O'Brien saw a point of distinction here between the Frenchman and those who later invoked his name. He surmised that Benda would have been unimpressed with the deviation between *Encounter's* stated position - i.e., that it had no political 'line' - and the reality. As Cruise O'Brien saw it, the main thrust of *Encounter's* political position - a position it denied having - was to undermine the left, specifically the Communist left, and positively portray American policies and actions for a British readership.[66]

Of course, he had said all this before. He now had new evidence to support this contention based on the *New York Times's* reporting that the Congress of Cultural Freedom received funds from the CIA. According to the Irishman, *Encounter*, which he described as a 'skillfully-executed [sic] politico-cultural operation', published lesser writers - writers who could 'take a hint' - who wrote articles supporting US objectives. Then, in an elaborate subterfuge, the magazine covered this up by publishing writing by world-class intellectuals that had seemingly nothing to do with politics. As Cruise O'Brien viewed it, 'writers of high achievement and complete integrity were led unconsciously to validate ... the more purposeful activities of lesser writers ... engaged in a sustained and consistent political activity'.[67]

Cruise O'Brien asserted that one element of this activity was a movement to discourage writers from taking part in the political field unless they were writing to support the established order. Around this time, Cruise O'Brien elaborated on these matters in an interview with the American writer and broadcaster Studs Terkel. Terkel asked Cruise O'Brien for his thoughts on

[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

the notion that the intellectual's natural habitat was the 'ivory tower', suggesting that 'the ivory tower is also a position'.[68] Cruise O'Brien concurred with Terkel's argument and expanded on it. He rejected the idea that intellectuals belonged in an ivory tower, an idea Cruise O'Brien described as a 'very recent thing'. He asserted that the concept was 'a sort of post-French Revolution, western European thing', positing that in the decades following the Revolution 'a few intellectuals got themselves into this position'. Here, Cruise O'Brien was not implying that the ivory tower was a peculiarly French phenomenon, but he did think that the French Revolution had a bearing on its development. As he imagined it, the ivory tower represented an escape from the 'shock' resulting from the revolutionary upheaval, the reverberations from which were felt across Europe. Cruise O'Brien believed that 'people got frightened' and suggested that 'the ivory tower syndrome is one essentially of fright'. The corollary of this was that to abjure the 'ivory tower' and intervene in the public sphere required the courage to overcome this fright. Notably, he gave no concrete examples to support his contentions about the ivory tower, although he did note a similarity between the post-French revolution phenomenon and 'contemporary ivory towerism' in the US following the McCarthy era.[69] In Cruise O'Brien's view, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, as with the McCarthy era, intellectuals were frightened into silence.[70]

Examples of publicly prominent nineteenth-century intellectuals can be marshalled against Cruise O'Brien's claims. For instance, conservative intellectual figures such as G.W.F. Hegel rose to power and eminence in reaction to the radical democracy of the French Revolution, while to the left of the German philosopher thinkers such as James Mill, Victor Hugo, J.S. Mill, and Sigmund Freud grew to public prominence later in the century, belying the notion that intellectuals were too scared to take up public positions on contemporary affairs.[71]

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[68] 'Conor Cruise O'Brien discusses politics and the book "Writers and politics: essays and criticisms" [https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/programs/conor-cruise-obrien-discusses-politics-and-book-writers-and-politics-essays-and-criticisms, accessed 25 Jan. 2020].

[69] See M.P. Rogin, *The intellectuals and McCarthy: the radical specter* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967).

[70] 'Conor Cruise O'Brien discusses politics and the book "Writers and politics: essays and criticisms" [https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/programs/conor-cruise-obrien-discusses-politics-and-book-writers-and-politics-essays-and-criticisms, accessed 25 Jan. 2020].

[71] See Harold Perkin, *The rise of professional society: England since 1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); on Hegel's response to the French Revolution, see Richard Bourke, 'Hegel and the French Revolution', *History of European Ideas* (2022), 1-12.

Cruise O'Brien reckoned that, generally, 'intellectuals are people who get interested in things and excited about them'. He contended that if one were to compile a list of history's greatest writers 'from Greek times to the present you'd find that the great bulk of them have been involved in political struggle'. Cruise O'Brien proclaimed that before the eighteenth century, the very idea that a writer should not be interested in politics and society would have been 'a strange and a sort of incomprehensible idea'. For Cruise O'Brien, 'the apolitical, the anti-political idea is always as you know very well a conservative idea'. He noted that the sentiment was 'even written into the words of *God Save the King*' in the lyric 'confound their politics'. 'Their politics', Cruise O'Brien stated, 'being any politics that menace the status quo.'[72]

A couple of months after Cruise O'Brien's New York lecture, 'the strangely celebrated' - as one time *Encounter* editor Frank Kermode described him - Goronwy Rees used his 'R' column in *Encounter* to rebuke the Irish intellectual.[73] According to Kermode, the article made it into print without his knowledge.[74] Akenson deals with the article's libellous content and the subsequent legal dispute.[75] Rees's piece attempted to reverse the charge of *la trahison des clercs* and turn it back on Cruise O'Brien. For Rees, Benda 'was asking that even in politics, and as his particular contribution to politics, the intellectual should exercise the same critical intelligence, and the same commitment to reason, which was his distinguishing characteristic'. He then snidely declared that Cruise O'Brien 'could hardly claim to have satisfied this demand'.[76] In Cruise O'Brien's legal filing, he complained that this statement implied that 'as a writer and a teacher he [was] dishonest and untrustworthy'.[77] Cruise O'Brien's legal team called the article 'an undisguised attack on [Cruise O'Brien's] intellectual honesty and integrity'.[78] Not content to deal with Cruise O'Brien's most recent *Encounter* statement alone, Rees also disinterred Cruise O'Brien's *Writers and politics* introduction. Rees fingered the passage in

[72] 'Conor Cruise O'Brien discusses politics and the book "Writers and politics: essays and criticisms" [https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/programs/conor-cruise-obrien-discusses-politics-and-book-writers-and-politics-essays-and-criticisms, accessed 25 Jan. 2020].
[73] Frank Kermode, *Not entitled: a memoir* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), 231.
[74] Kermode, *Not entitled*, 233.
[75] Akenson, *Conor*, 296-9.
[76] R. 'Column', *Encounter*, Aug. 1966.
[77] 'Judgment in default' *Irish Times,* 14 Feb. 1967.
[78] Indecipherable [McCann, Fitzgerald, Roche & Dudley] to The Editor, *Encounter*, 5 Aug. 1966, HILA, Hook papers, 149/8.

which Cruise O'Brien argued for Western intellectuals to focus their criticism on their own culture rather than constantly harping about the Soviet Union. Rees detected insincerity in Cruise O'Brien's statement, alleging that it epitomised 'bad faith combined with moral elevation'. He portrayed Cruise O'Brien as being highly hypocritical given that his 'martyrdom' had earned him a 'richly endowed professorial chair', while Communist states imprisoned dissenting intellectuals. Rees twisted what Cruise O'Brien wrote to make it seem like the Irishman considered Communist oppression relatively 'innocuous'.[79]

Rees was not the only writer to take umbrage at this suggestion. The right-wing *Daily Telegraph* satirist Michael Wharton, who wrote under the pseudonym 'Peter Simple', regretted that 'Poor, futile Western writers' did not share the same luxuries 'Eastern [European] writers enjoy'.[80] Specifically, he meant 'that cosy feeling of relatedness which can only be had from being squashed under an immovable, though illusory heaving, slab of granite'.[81] At this time, literary critic M.M. Carlin raised similar objections in *New Statesman*. Cruise O'Brien responded to Carlin, emphasising that his point was not that writers in Communist countries had an easier time than their Western counterparts. Indeed, he had no qualms with proclaiming that being a writer in a liberal country was a 'much more agreeable' situation for intellectuals.[82] Cruise O'Brien's point of view had its defenders. The political sociologist Peter Nettl contended that in comparison to the American political system's indifference to protest, 'societies which imprison people for their opinions at least do them the service of ascribing influence to such opinions which seems almost flattering'.[83] According to Nettl, treating literature as political in Russia was a 'national rather than a communist tradition'.[84] Cruise O'Brien restated his position three years

[79] R. 'Column', *Encounter*, Aug. 1966.
[80] Wharton's style was heavily influenced by Myles na Gopaleen, see Christopher Howse, 'Wharton, Michael Bernard', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-97679?rskey=qeTUTY&result=1, accessed 17 Oct. 2022].
[81] Peter Simple, 'Way of the world: writers' camp', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 Aug. 1966.
[82] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Letter to the editor', *New Statesman*, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/162.
[83] Peter Nettl, 'Power and the intellectuals', in Conor Cruise O'Brien and Dean Vanech, eds, *Power & consciousness* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 27.
[84] Peter Nettl, 'Are intellectuals obsolete?', *The Listener*, 16 May 1968.

later, reaffirming his belief that as 'the evils of "totalitarianism"' had been well-documented, it was incumbent upon Western intellectuals to turn their gaze inward.[85]

Two years later, in a late 1968 review of *The collected essays, journalism and letters of George Orwell*, Cruise O'Brien tried to recruit Orwell's memory to his fight against *Encounter* and the Congress for Cultural Freedom.[86] As Cruise O'Brien stated, in the years after his death, Orwell became an icon of liberal anti-Communists.[87] John Wain's review of the same book in *Encounter* confirmed Cruise O'Brien's take on this subject. As Wain wrote of Orwell:

> As for his relevance: who can feel that the situation that faces free men has changed much from what it was in the '40s, or in the '30s, for that matter? The thing most to be feared is still a *trahison des clercs*: freedom still needs to be defended against those whom she most favours, whom she showers with advantages.[88]

Cruise O'Brien felt that this identification was somewhat misplaced. Cruise O'Brien did not deny Orwell's anti-Communism, but he contended that Orwell was more than just an anti-Communist. Indeed, Cruise O'Brien's Orwell closely resembled Cruise O'Brien's self-image, although the Irishman thought he was 'really a gentle quiet sort' compared to Orwell.[89] Cruise O'Brien's Orwell detested 'intellectual dishonesty' in all its guises, and it just so happened, on Cruise O'Brien's reading, that the predominant form of intellectual dishonesty extant in Orwell's later years was 'a pro-communist form'. Attempting to rescue Orwell's legacy from the clutches of the liberal but anti-Communists, Cruise O'Brien declared:

> He [Orwell] hated the communist literary Mafia in England, France and elsewhere. But had he lived to witness, through the Fifties, the rise of another

[85] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', in Cruise O'Brien and Vanech, eds, *Power & consciousness*, 1-2.
[86] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Honest men', *The Listener*, 12 Dec. 1968.
[87] See Gordon Beadle, 'George Orwell and the American Conservatives', *Syracuse Scholar*, 6 (1985), 1-10; on Orwell's politics, see David Dwan, *Liberty, equality, and humbug: Orwell's political ideals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[88] John Wain, 'Orwell & the intelligentsia', *Encounter*, Dec. 1968.
[89] 'Conor Cruise O'Brien discusses politics and the book "Writers and politics: essays and criticisms" [https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/programs/conor-cruise-obrien-discusses-politics-and-book-writers-and-politics-essays-and-criticisms, accessed 25 Jan. 2020].

> literary Mafia, this time of anti-communists "dedicated" to the unavowed service of United States policy, and standing in all essentials in the same relation to Washington as the crypto-communists had stood to Moscow, it is clear from the whole tenor of his writing that his disgust would soon have found vent. From the point of view of the "committed socialists and dedicated anti-communists" who took part in the complex and camouflaged manoeuvres of the Congress of Cultural Freedom, it was rather fortunate that Orwell died when he died. Had he lived, it might not have been so easy to claim him. As it is, it has been possible to claim him as a patron saint, and exploit his merits, by a sort of parasitic reversibility, in the service of some dubious activities.[90]

In another essay, this time on political commitment, Cruise O'Brien drew together Benda and Orwell to reprimand the writers centred around *Encounter.* According to Cruise O'Brien, Orwell was the least treasonous of intellectuals, in Benda's sense. Cruise O'Brien insisted that the Englishman's 'hatred for what he calls "the smelly little orthodoxies"' rendered him 'constitutionally immune' to *la trahison des clercs*. However, this immunity did not extend to British and American writers who, as Cruise O'Brien saw it, twisted his legacy to fit into 'the arsenal of Western, Cold War ideology'. Cruise O'Brien described this ideology as 'A smelly little orthodoxy, if there ever was one.' In Cruise O'Brien's view, the 'cultural freedom' rhetoric was effectively a 'Western dialect of Newspeak'.[91]

An intellectual in politics

In mid-December 1968, just after his Orwell essay appeared in print, Cruise O'Brien announced that he had agreed to become a candidate for the Labour Party at the next general election in Ireland.[92] A Labour spokesman described Cruise O'Brien's announcement as a 'big breakthrough' for the party, demonstrating that the party was open to 'minds such as that of Dr Cruise O'Brien'.[93] Party leader Brendan Corish stated that Cruise O'Brien's membership showed

[90] Cruise O'Brien, 'Honest men', *The Listener*, 12 Dec. 1968.
[91] Cruise O'Brien, 'Thoughts on commitment', *The Listener*, 16 Dec. 1971.
[92] 'Cruise O'Brien joins Labour', *Irish Times*, 13 Dec. 1968.
[93] Ibid.

that Labour 'embraced the university man and the humblest of the unskilled and unlearned'.[94] Under Corish, Labour rediscovered the language of socialism. As historian Niamh Puirséil notes, British Labour under Harold Wilson was influential in this regard.[95] The radical rhetoric and new vision of socialism appealed to Cruise O'Brien.[96] His decision to join the party caused a surge in excitement, particularly among 'younger Labour people'.[97] Former Labour member Proinsias Mac Aonghusa greeted Cruise O'Brien's arrival warmly, declaring 'that O'Brien is the most important single person to attach himself to a political party in Ireland since Eamon de Valera joined Sinn Fein'.[98] Mac Aonghusa, who upon being ejected from the party complained that 'One of the dirtiest words in Irish politics is "intellectual"', was excited at the prospect of witnessing Cruise O'Brien's charisma and disposition to take 'outrageous risks' in action.[99]

Just before Christmas, Cruise O'Brien spoke to a large Labour Party meeting at Dublin's Liberty Hall. *The Irish Times's* political correspondent reported that this meeting was effectively 'a public welcome from the party leaders' to the new recruit.[100] Recalling this meeting years later, Michael D. Higgins described it as a 'heady event'.[101] The excitement generated was so great that organisers had to book a larger hall at the last minute to accommodate all those who wanted to hear Cruise O'Brien speak.[102] Some even indulged in exaggerated talk about Cruise O'Brien's prospects of becoming Taoiseach in the future.[103] The influential political commentator Arthur Noonan attempted to pour cold water on the response. He asserted that pushing Cruise O'Brien into the Labour Party's front bench was undemocratic. According to Noonan, politicians should work their way up the party ranks rather than parachute in at the top.[104] Noonan reckoned the commentariat's reaction to Cruise O'Brien's announcement was

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[94] 'Corish welcomes "our newest recruit"', *Irish Independent*, 20 Dec. 1968.
[95] Niamh Puirséil, *The Irish Labour Party, 1922-73* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), 231.
[96] Michael McInerney, 'Cruise O'Brien addresses Labour meeting: 1969 is seen as the turning point in political history', *Irish Times*, 20 Dec. 1968.
[97] 'Dr O'Brien will stand for Labour', *Irish Press*, 13 Dec. 1968.
[98] Proinsias Mac Aonghusa, 'Straight from the shoulder', *Munster Express*, 20 Dec. 1968.
[99] Ibid.; idem, '"Intellectual" a dirty word', *Cork Examiner*, 20 Jan. 1967.
[100] 'O'Brien to speak on why he joined party', *Irish Times*, 18 Dec. 1968.
[101] Michael D. Higgins, 'Dr David Thornley, TD: an intellectual in Irish politics', in Iseult Thornley, ed., *Unquiet spirit: essays in memory of David Thornley* (Dublin: Liberties Press, 2008), 161.
[102] Michael Mills, 'Cruise O'Brien gave them surprise', *Irish Press*, 21 Dec. 1968.
[103] Arthur Noonan, 'Cruise O'Brien a future Taoiseach?', *Irish Independent*, 28 Dec. 1968.
[104] Ibid.

out of proportion with the event. He pointed out that the national media gave Cruise O'Brien more column inches than his party leader's statement on the "New Republic".[105]

Cruise O'Brien's address ranged across numerous areas from foreign policy to intellectual freedom, from Parnell to Josef Stalin - as the *Irish Independent* was quick to note.[106] As *Irish Press* correspondent Michael Mills reported, Cruise O'Brien peppered his speech with 'flashes of wit and ... a mordant turn of phrase'.[107] According to the *Cork Examiner*, Cruise O'Brien's speech was effective, even if it rehearsed 'old invective in a new guise'. That journal's editor, describing Cruise O'Brien as a 'widely travelled intellectual, an individualist who has espoused unpopular causes, and a man who has had the courage to stand up and be counted amongst those who took to the streets in support of a point of view', judged that he managed to position his new party as 'the only cure for present ills'.[108]

Cruise O'Brien also commented on the intellectual's place in Irish politics, specifically in the Labour Party. When Cruise O'Brien first publicly stated his decision to join the party, a radio interviewer put it to him that 'ordinary people distrusted intellectuals'. Cruise O'Brien wanted to challenge this perception. He argued that, although it was a common notion, it was highly misleading. Cruise O'Brien also pointed out that the discourse of 'intellectuals versus the rest' served the 'ruling classes'. The example he used to illustrate his argument was a large, privately-owned newspaper. Probably he chose this example because it evoked memories of the famous dispute between Jim Larkin's Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and William Martin Murphy, then owner of the *Irish Independent*. As Cruise O'Brien framed it, the narrative that intellectuals were separate from 'ordinary people' meant the manual workers who printed the paper and the executives running it were 'united by a common bond of sheer ordinariness against the intellectuals who write for the thing'. However, in Cruise O'Brien's view, this obfuscated the fact that the printers and writers shared a bond as the owners' employees. As part of his effort to unite intellectuals and workers, Cruise O'Brien quoted Stalin

[105] Ibid.
[106] 'Major shift predicted by Cruise O'Brien', *Irish Independent*, 20 Dec. 1968.
[107] Mills, 'Cruise O'Brien gave them surprise', *Irish Press*, 21 Dec. 1968.
[108] Editorial, 'Labour Party's new recruit', *Cork Examiner*, 21 Dec. 1968.

on the relation between intellectuals and the party. In a comment intended to be controversial, he declared:

> The late Josef Stalin, who said so many interesting things, once pronounced himself on the subject of intellectuals. He had been rather hard on these, and had sent off a good many of them to dig the White Sea canal. Then, he found that, after all, he needed their specific skills. He thought again. "We must not," he said, "discourage these comrades."[109]

Cruise O'Brien asked that Labour encourage intellectuals to join the party, pointing to the historical association between Ireland's 'leading intellectuals' and Irish workers. His case in point was the 1913 lockout when, as he put it, 'Jim Larkin received, and welcomed, the vocal and forthright support' of Ireland's notable intellectuals. While he did not name anyone in particular, Cruise O'Brien was referring to George Russell and W.B. Yeats's position on the lockout, which he wrote about in his long essay on Yeats's politics.[110] Yeats, for instance, wrote a fiery letter to Larkin's *Irish Worker* denouncing the workers' opponents, lay and clerical.

However, Cruise O'Brien viewed this episode as one of the high points of solidarity between intellectuals and workers in Ireland. Elsewhere, he highlighted the prominent role of intellectuals in the Irish nationalist movement at this time. In an interview with American author Studs Terkel, Cruise O'Brien described the Easter Rising as 'an affair of intellectuals'.[111] Since this period, he asserted, the 'alliance was weakened, forgotten or denied'. It seemed to Cruise O'Brien that for decades all Irish political parties were hostile to intellectuals. He contended that this antagonism led directly to a 'depression of intellectual life' for which the whole country 'suffered'.[112] Cruise O'Brien's claim was redolent of his mentor Sean O'Faolain's

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[109] McInerney, 'Cruise O'Brien addresses Labour meeting', *Irish Times*, 20 Dec. 1968.
[110] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Passion and cunning: an essay on the politics of W.B. Yeats', in A.N. Jeffares and K.G.W. Cross, eds, *In excited reverie: a centenary tribute to William Butler Yeats, 1865-1939* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 207-78.
[111] 'Conor Cruise O'Brien discusses politics and the book "Writers and politics: essays and criticisms" [https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/programs/conor-cruise-obrien-discusses-politics-and-book-writers-and-politics-essays-and-criticisms, accessed 25 Jan. 2020].
[112] McInerney, 'Cruise O'Brien addresses Labour meeting', *Irish Times*, 20 Dec. 1968.

assertion that Irish society held 'writers or intellectuals ... at arm's length'.[113] As with O'Faolain, Cruise O'Brien fingered collusion between bourgeois nationalists and the Catholic Church as the cause of this alienation. In Cruise O'Brien's assessment, the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland had 'contempt for intellectuals' and he claimed that during the state's early years the Church put pressure on political parties to distance themselves from intellectuals. As he put it several years earlier, political parties shied away from independent thinkers because 'the thing to be avoided at all costs … was "a sthroke [sic] of a crozier"'.[114] This is to say that most politicians acted in ways that would not upset the Catholic hierarchy. In the previously mentioned Studs Terkel interview, Cruise O'Brien judged that since gaining independence, Irish politicians had generally 'feigned an almost imbecilic conformity with what the stupidest cleric might conceivably think'.[115] He was confident that this situation was changing, mainly due to a generational shift in Irish society. He reckoned that the men and women of the younger generation were less deferential than their parents and were correspondingly more willing to challenge the authority of Church and state.[116]

Around the same time that Cruise O'Brien committed himself to the Irish Labour Party, he produced the edited collection *Power and consciousness* alongside the American scholar Dean Vanech. The book, which philosopher Mary Warnock described as 'important, though difficult', derived from the 'Power and consciousness' seminar series that Cruise O'Brien hosted at New York University.[117] As Cruise O'Brien stated, the book's subject was 'the pressure of power in society on society's consciousness, as that consciousness finds expression through intellectuals'.[118] The collection's contributors included the radical social scientist Noam Chomsky, historian Gabriel Kolko, the renowned English scholar E.P. Thompson, philosopher Stuart Hampshire, Cruise O'Brien's NYU colleague David Erdman, and Peter Nettl, who perished in a plane crash before the book appeared in print. In addition to having three other essays,

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[113] O'Faolain, *The Irish,* 118.
[114] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Writers and politics*, xv.
[115] 'Conor Cruise O'Brien discusses politics and the book "Writers and politics: essays and criticisms" [https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/programs/conor-cruise-obrien-discusses-politics-and-book-writers-and-politics-essays-and-criticisms, accessed 25 Jan. 2020].
[116] McInerney, 'Cruise O'Brien addresses Labour meeting', *Irish Times*, 20 Dec. 1968.
[117] Mary Warnock, 'Roles and reasons', *New Society*, 16 (1970), 413.
[118] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Power & consciousness*, 1.

Cruise O'Brien wrote the collection's introduction, which reads very much like a manifesto for an intellectual about to enter politics, especially when examined in conjunction with his valedictory lecture delivered in April 1969. Unlike most of Cruise O'Brien's work, mainstream critics did not widely review the book. Nevertheless, it remains an essential source for understanding Cruise O'Brien's ideas about the intellectual's role in politics.

Cruise O'Brien used Peter Nettl's essay on 'Power and the intellectuals' as a starting point and a foil to discuss the relationship between intellectuals and power. Nettl contended that intellectuals and power were incompatible bedfellows in the modern world. He thought that this discordance was a significant disability for intellectuals. Modern power, which he called bureaucratic power, was impersonal, systematic, and abstract. This form of power was implemented by bureaucrats, a category in which Nettl seemed to place civil servants and elected politicians. By contrast, he judged intellectuals to be 'voluntarist[s]', meaning that they believed in the individual's ability to influence events through argument and action.[119] According to Nettl, the dislocation between intellectuals and power was a comparatively recent historical development. Drawing on an idealized image of the nineteenth century, he argued that power was formerly exercised by a 'group of people who were intellectuals as well as politicians and administrators'. Nettl claimed that since that time, however, this previously 'undifferentiated group' had splintered, as 'distinct types of people' filtered into the different categories. He labelled the dichotomous categories the 'bureaucrat' and the 'intellectual'. For Nettl, this was the result of modernity, which forced intellectuals from 'the battlefield'. He believed that modern society replaced the generalist, authoritative intellectual with the specialist social scientist, calling the former the intellectual's 'mortal enemy'. Nettl was pessimistic about the future for intellectuals, ruefully pondering whether the intellectual might 'continue for a time as an attenuated shoot of an individual personality type, kept nourished in quaint survival in the hothouses of highly specialized cultural media, of little or no relevance to society as a whole'.[120]

[119] Nettl, 'Power and the intellectuals', 22; see Joan Cocks, 'From politics to paralysis: critical intellectuals answer the national question', *Political Theory*, 24 (1996), 525.
[120] Nettl, 'Power and the intellectuals', 32.

Cruise O'Brien preferred to think about Nettl's dichotomy in terms of a distinction between social roles than human types.[121] As Cruise O'Brien outlined, at various times, the same person could occupy both roles, as he himself had done. When he was a civil servant in the Irish foreign service, he occupied the bureaucrat's role, faithfully serving his political masters. As a university professor and political activist, he successfully performed the role of the intellectual. Cruise O'Brien had a rather unorthodox understanding of the differences between intellectuals and bureaucrats. In his opinion, fulfilling both roles was a challenging task, as 'successful bureaucrats usually take a different, and less fastidious, attitude toward the truth from that which is becoming of an intellectual'.[122] Cruise O'Brien reckoned that modern bureaucracies required intellectuals mainly to produce propaganda. Here, he was generalizing from his experience in the Irish civil service. As a civil servant, he held a post in the political section of the Department for Foreign Affairs, and a significant portion of his official duties involved producing propaganda for the Irish government.[123] According to him, since much of this sort of propaganda was 'untrue', 'the intellectual who engage[d] in modern politics' in this manner, jeopardised his reputation both as a politician and an intellectual. Here, Cruise O'Brien slipped from using the term bureaucrat, meaning an appointed official, to the word politician, referring to an elected representative or a candidate for elected office.[124] These concepts are not coterminous, but Cruise O'Brien needed to blur the distinction to make his case.

He tested Nettl's theory using a contemporary example. He chose Arthur Schlesinger Jr, an American intellectual who attempted to bridge the gap between practical politics and free intellectual activity. From Cruise O'Brien's perspective, Schlesinger was neither a 'pure' bureaucrat nor a 'pure' intellectual. Rather, he occupied a third category, which Cruise O'Brien called the 'political intellectual'.[125] He asserted that the political intellectual straddled the line between the bureaucrat and the intellectual. When his political allies were in office, the political intellectual performed the bureaucrat's role and when they were not in power, he

[121] Nettl was vividly aware that this was a question of roles, see Nettl, 'Are intellectuals obsolete?'.
[122] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Power & consciousness*, 7.
[123] See Akenson, *Conor*, 113-48; see also Whelan, *Violent notions*, 110.
[124] See Max Weber, 'Bureaucracy', in Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds, *Economy and society: an outline of interpretive sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 956—1005.
[125] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Power & consciousness*, 6.

operated in the role of the intellectual. Cruise O'Brien considered Machiavelli as the model for the 'modern political-intellectual', as he managed to serve power at one time and write honestly about it at another. In his discussion of Schlesinger, his chosen illustration, Cruise O'Brien did not seem clear on the bureaucrat's position in relation to politics. For example, even when his party was 'in', as a presidential adviser, Schlesinger was not a bureaucrat. He existed outside the strict 'hierarchical order of the public service'.[126] Regardless, in Cruise O'Brien's estimation, Schlesinger's case highlighted the difficulties this tension caused the modern political intellectual. We should note that in this case Cruise O'Brien was by no means a neutral analyst. Cruise O'Brien and Schlesinger's antipathy for one another was such that the American historian listed Cruise O'Brien among his 'enemies' in his private journal.[127] As Akenson shows, this animosity stemmed from their involvement on opposite sides of the *Encounter* scandal.[128]

By training, Schlesinger was a historian. Based on his political connections and his intellectual authority, he then became a key politically appointed adviser in the Kennedy administration. In that capacity, Schlesinger was involved in the Bay of Pigs debacle, perpetuating the cover story that the operation's object was to supply Cuban guerrilla fighters. In November 1965, *The New York Times*, noting the discrepancy between what Schlesinger told reporters at the time and his account in *A thousand days,* asked Schlesinger about his part in the dissimulation. He replied: 'Well, I was lying. This was the cover story. I apologise for having been involved in passing along the cover story.'[129] Although Cruise O'Brien misquoted Schlesinger as having said he 'must have been lying', he somewhat snidely described the American's role, despite his admission, as a 'praiseworthy attempt to reinstate the Machiavellian dualism'.[130] Returning to one of his favourite analogies, Cruise O'Brien contended that Schlesinger did not just perform two distinct roles but was, in a sense, two separate people: like the tragic characters in Robert Louis Stephenson's famous novel about a split

[126] Weber, *Economy and society*, 963.
[127] Andrew Schlesinger and Stephen Schlesinger, eds, *Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.: Journals, 1952-2000* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), 744-5; see also Akenson, *Conor*, 296.
[128] Akenson, *Conor*, 296-7.
[129] 'Schlesinger says he lied to *Times*', *New York Times*, 25 Nov. 1965.
[130] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Power & consciousness*, 8.

personality, the politician, Schlesinger-Hyde, and the intellectual, Schlesinger-Jekyll. As Cruise O'Brien framed it, the former was an 'unscrupulous' politician who did not baulk at using deception to succeed. Simultaneously, the latter was a historian in the mould of a 'modern Lord Acton' capable in his quest for impartiality even to the extent of 'classify[ing] Schlesinger-Hyde as a liar'.[131]

Cruise O'Brien suggested that the Jekyll and Hyde pathology might be a way around Nettl's problem of how intellectuals could be politically active as executive bureaucrats, although he did not advocate it as a solution. He judged it too heavily reliant on 'intermittence and schizophrenia' to be adopted consistently by modern intellectuals. Indeed, to Cruise O'Brien's mind, even his test case failed to live up to the model. He pointed to Schlesinger's involvement in the *Encounter* controversy, specifically during the 1966 debate between himself and Schlesinger.[132] The debate's subject was whether the Congress of Cultural Freedom received funds from the CIA. Shortly before the debate took place, Schlesinger, in his role as an intellectual, appeared to deny this connection in a letter to *The New York Times*. However, as Cruise O'Brien noted, the letter did not contain an explicit denial. During the debate, Cruise O'Brien challenged Schlesinger on this point. To his disappointment, Schlesinger prevaricated. According to Cruise O'Brien, the American refused to answer straightforwardly, choosing to say that he had known about the CIA's involvement 'when he was in government'. Cruise O'Brien mordantly surmised that Schlesinger's attempt to straddle both the political and the intellectual field required not only two personalities - Jekyll and Hyde - but also two memories. Given that the possession of two memories was unlikely, Cruise O'Brien stated that the Schlesinger who wrote the letter must have known what the Schlesinger who served in government had known. Therefore, he judged that the Schlesinger model suggested that Nettl was correct that intellectuals and power were incompatible. Yet, Cruise O'Brien found it awkward to accept fully the implications of his reasoning.[133]

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[131] Ibid., 9.
[132] Cruise O'Brien mistakenly claimed this debate occurred 24 Apr. 1967, see Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Power & consciousness*, 9; according to Akenson, the debate aired on 30 May 1966, Akenson, *Conor*, 296.
[133] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Power & consciousness*, 10.

On one level, he believed Nettl's proposition was 'profoundly true'. In the original draft of the introduction, Cruise O'Brien contended:

> It is required of the intellectual to be a kind of anti-politician: not in the sense that he is opposed to politics, or taking a stand on political issues, but that the intellectual sacrifices normally required by the pursuit, service and holding of political power in an advanced industrial society are inimical to his function and destructive of his character. He may make these sacrifices, for reasons which he considers adequate, but if he does he ceases, at least for a time, to be an intellectual; he will find it hard … to return to his old activity. Being the articulate part of society's consciousness he cannot be the spokesman of its power. For power imposes its own principles of selection, different from the principles of a freely-working mind.[134]

This argument was reminiscent of the German sociologist Max Weber's ethics of conviction and ethics of responsibility.[135] Although Cruise O'Brien did not explicitly refer to Weber, he admired him greatly and it is not implausible that these two Weberian ethics influenced his thinking about the subject of the intellectual in politics.[136] In the unpublished version, he strongly favoured the notion that intellectuals should follow an ethics of conviction and not permit their integrity to succumb to the pressures of responsibility. In the published version, Cruise O'Brien resiled from this position but he did not go over to advocating a pure ethics of responsibility. A striking element of his analysis was his total disregard for the duties that come with the occupation of public office.

In the interval between first drafting his introduction and the finished product, Cruise O'Brien joined a political party and became a candidate for elected office. In light of his new circumstances, he deemed 'on further reflection' that his original conclusion was inadequate.

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[134] 'Draft *Power and consciousness* introduction', NYUA, Records of the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, RG.21.1 8/1.
[135] See David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, eds, *Max Weber: the vocation lectures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004), 32-94.
[136] Undated notes on a conversation between Cruise O'Brien and Frank Callanan, Frank Callanan papers, privately held.

Now, he claimed that he could not countenance the implication that intellectuals should absent themselves from politics.[137] Cruise O'Brien insisted that intellectuals were made 'resistant to the pressures of power', by which he meant *political* power, by the character of their activity, namely 'in thinking and in saying and writing what he thinks and imagines'. From this perspective, an intellectual who succumbed to the pressures of political responsibility, as he claimed Schlesinger had done, abdicated his function and ceased being an intellectual at all. In the initial iteration of his introduction, Cruise O'Brien spelled out what this meant. He claimed that an intellectual who abdicated in this fashion became nothing more than 'a spokesman, and therefore a liar', regardless of whether he 'retains his Ph.D.'.[138] In the published version, Cruise O'Brien omitted this last part. He maintained that it need not always be the case that intellectuals abdicate their function when they engage in politics. He concluded that as long as 'power - or nearness to power' - was not the intellectual's principal objective, the intellectual could engage in politics without relinquishing his role as an intellectual. As an intellectual on the verge of entering politics, Cruise O'Brien closed his essay with the affirmation:

> Power presses on consciousness: if consciousness is to exercise a counterpressure on power, intellectuals must concern themselves with politics. And unless this concern works through active involvement in politics it will be less than fully conscious.[139]

In April 1969, during his NYU valedictory lecture, which took place during a series of events commemorating the quincentenary of Machiavelli's birth, Cruise O'Brien again devoted space to the question of the intellectual in modern politics, narrating his decision as an intellectual to enter Irish politics. *The Irish Times* reported on this lecture in a three-part profile documenting Cruise O'Brien's entry into the Irish situation. Later, Cruise O'Brien published his script as an essay in the first issue of *Irish University Review*. Although he started his lecture speaking about Machiavelli, he soon moved away from the Florentine and discussed his own

[137] For more on this theme, see Owen and Strong, eds, *Max Weber*, 32-94.
[138] 'Draft *Power and consciousness* introduction', NYUA, Records of the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, RG.21.1 8/1.
[139] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Power & consciousness*, 13.

experience as an intellectual engaged in public affairs. *The Irish Times* reporter found it worth noting that Cruise O'Brien was 'not afraid to concede ... that he "supposed" he himself [was] an intellectual', as if being an intellectual was something for which one should apologise.[140] To be fair to *The Irish Times*, Cruise O'Brien did frame his declaration quite sheepishly, stating: 'I am, I suppose, an intellectual or, if I am not one, I have been deceiving New York University, and the State of New York for some years.'[141] He reminisced about his various efforts to act as an intellectual in public while in the United States, ranging from speaking at anti-war protests to writing for cultural periodicals to appearing on television. Despite all his political commentary and activism, however, Cruise O'Brien stated that he 'spoke always as a stranger' in America. Due to his status as a 'resident alien', he claimed opponents questioned his right to speak about American political issues, such as the Vietnam War and racial politics. Of course, he disagreed with the idea that he should hold his tongue merely because he had the wrong citizenship. Nevertheless, he felt increasingly out of place as a '*foreign* intellectual'. Cruise O'Brien resented this position, feeling that although most politically engaged intellectuals were 'likely to be on the margin', the foreign intellectual was 'virtually floating in space'. As he related it, he began to lose confidence in the efficacy of merely exhorting public opinion as a means of affecting politics. Disillusioned, Cruise O'Brien reckoned that this sort of activity was merely a replacement for political action. According to Cruise O'Brien, addressing political meetings, writing essays and pamphlets, and taking part in protests amounted to 'an uncomfortable half-way house between action, the proper sphere of the political man, and analysis, the proper sphere of the intellectual'. Rhetorically, he asked his audience:

> Might it not be well for the political intellectual to try to separate his functions, to act in politics and analyse in his study, and eschew the dubious mean of analysis-action, the argumentative tract, the exhortation?[142]

Cruise O'Brien knew the answer to the question he posed. He thought it would be a good thing. The next problem was where was the appropriate place for the intellectual to act in

[140] 'An *Irish Times* Profile (3): Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Irish Times*, 14 Jun. 1969.
[141] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'What exhortation?', *Irish University Review*, 1 (1970), 48-61.
[142] Cruise O'Brien, 'What exhortation?', 57.

politics. Again, Cruise O'Brien had a fixed idea of where this should be. He argued that 'as far as political action was concerned, there is only one place where a man can work effectively and that is his own country'.[143] Cruise O'Brien, who had recently finished his edition of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, was heavily indebted to the eighteenth-century man of letters in his thinking on this matter. As Cruise O'Brien assessed the situation, modern liberals and socialists had lost sight of the importance of the particular in their quest for universal change. Burke, he stated, knew better. Here, Cruise O'Brien highlighted Burke's dictum that 'To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections'.[144] For Burke, this was the 'first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind'.[145] To Cruise O'Brien's mind, Burke's vision of political affiliation offered an attractive sort of rooted cosmopolitanism, or a cosmopolitan patriotism.[146] Cruise O'Brien argued that liberals and socialists, with whom he aligned himself politically, had abandoned their little platoons, by which he meant their nations. In his view, this handed possession of critical political concepts to their opponents. Specifically, Cruise O'Brien claimed that liberal and socialist intellectuals had left 'the nation and the tribe' to conservatives, or 'fascists', as he called them. Cruise O'Brien considered this a 'terrible mistake', as the nation, in his opinion, was one of 'the most powerful forces in human nature'.[147] He believed that intellectuals had a vital role to play within their own particular cultures. As he put it,

> The intellectual should not voluntarily forsake or despise his clan, tribe, or nation. He should be, if he can, among the antennae of his tribe, among their means of understanding their relation to other tribes and to the world.[148]

[143] Ibid., 58.
[144] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the revolution in France: and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event*, Conor Cruise O'Brien, ed. (Harmondsworth: Pelican Classics, 1968), 135.
[145] Burke, *Reflections*, 135.
[146] On cosmopolitan patriotism, see K.A. Appiah, 'Cosmopolitan patriots', *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (1997) 617-39.
[147] Cruise O'Brien found it hard to credit the notion that nationalism was an ideology, see Bourke, 'Languages'.
[148] Cruise O'Brien, 'What exhortation?', 60.

Not long after his valedictory lecture, Cruise O'Brien returned to Ireland to contest the June 1969 general election. He framed his involvement in the election as the intellectual's return to Irish politics. In his election material, he positioned himself as the candidate representing the interests of 'those who believe that the almost total exclusion of intellectuals from the public life of the country over a considerable period of years has been damaging to the interests of Irish democracy'.[149] His candidacy and those of several other intellectuals, such as the political scientist and broadcaster David Thornley and the Galway-based social scientist Michael D. Higgins, prompted significant public discussion about the intellectual in politics. In its pre-election profile on Cruise O'Brien, *The Irish Times* compared Cruise O'Brien's role in the Irish Labour Party to that played by Richard Crossman in the British Labour party, namely that of advancing the case for policy based on rational argument. According to the profiler, other names that cropped up when discussing Cruise O'Brien included George Orwell and Harold Laski. However, *The Irish Times* questioned whether intellectuals could successfully partake in politics, stating that 'the role of the intellectual in politics is usually awkward'. By contrast, the paper suggested that politics was usually the preserve of 'simple-minded and ill-informed creatures of instinct'.[150] Contrary to *The Irish Times's* profiler's concern, the *Cork Examiner's* political correspondent reported that 'With recruits like Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien and a selection of intellectuals', the Labour Party evinced a 'strong impression of vitality'.[151] Arthur Noonan, the leading political commentator for the *Irish Independent*, predicted that posterity would remember the June 1969 election as 'the challenge of the Intellectuals'.[152] Noonan produced several articles dealing with the intellectual in politics, none of which were overly optimistic that the experiment would work. Noonan's coverage leaned on numerous anti-intellectual tropes, such as the idea that intellectuals are somehow less in touch with reality than other people or are more immature and less responsible. However, he thought there was some benefit to intellectuals engaging in politics. Noonan suggested that by 'leap[ing] into the whirlpool', intellectuals would start to 'sound more real to real-life people'. In a comment that

[149] Draft for the *Irish Times*, 1969, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/175.
[150] 'An *Irish Times* profile (3): Conor Cruise O'Brien', *Irish Times*, 14 Jun. 1969.
[151] 'Electorate has wide choice', *Cork Examiner*, 4 Jun. 1969.
[152] Arthur Noonan, 'The challenge of the intellectuals', *Irish Independent*, 31 May 1969.

played into ideas that intellectuals were effeminate or immature, he asserted that this skirmish with reality would 'make a man of him [the intellectual]'.[153] In a separate column, Noonan insinuated that intellectuals were 'living in the clouds'.[154]

The Labour leader Brendan Corish was bullish about the impact the intellectuals would have on Labour's fortunes. Speaking at a campaign rally in Wexford, Corish extolled the virtues of bringing 'the third essential force which every Labour movement in every country needs, the force of Ireland's very best and most courageous thinkers, writers, artists, sociologists, doctors, and representatives of the new sciences' into the fold.[155] Corish was not alone in highlighting the courageous character of the intellectuals in his party. Cruise O'Brien's supporters actively tried to position him as a courageous individual. An appeal made in support of his campaign contended that

> One persistent weakness over the years in combating Irish Government policies at home and abroad has been the absence of courageous, clear-sighted voices from the Irish Parliament and from Irish politics left of centre, who could speak from these important forums on foreign and domestic policies and thus force governments to stand by traditional policies.[156]

The appeal claimed that Cruise O'Brien was the man to redress this absence. Likewise, the Protestant man of letters Hubert Butler wrote in support of Cruise O'Brien, arguing that all those who 'value[d] Dr O'Brien's courage, independence, and powerful mind, should support his candidature in every possible way'.[157] Butler stressed that Cruise O'Brien's decision to run for the Dáil involved significant personal sacrifices, namely the fact that he 'ha[d] given up an assured position with its material and spiritual rewards in order to work in Ireland'.[158] Butler concluded by declaring that these qualities were desperately needed in Irish public life.

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[153] Ibid.
[154] Arthur Noonan, 'Impressions of the nineteenth Dail', *Irish Independent,* 26 July 1969.
[155] 'Labour is writing epitaph of FF, says Corish', *Irish Times*, 16 Jun. 1969.
[156] Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien – Appeal, 23 May 1969, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/176/1.
[157] Butler to Sir, undated, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/176/4.
[158] Ibid.

Whether Labour's intellectuals had a positive effect on support is open to question, particularly in rural areas. A spokesman for rural Labour members from Monaghan, West Louth, and North-East Meath told the *Dundalk Democrat* that he believed the 'advent of the distinguished International Civil Servant and historian, Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien has greatly improved the image of the Party'.[159] *The Belfast Telegraph's* Dublin correspondent, Michael Devine, concurred with this assessment, stating that 'never before have so many men and women of high standing in the community and of proven ability come forward and committed themselves'. Specifically, Devine identified three intellectuals (his word), namely Cruise O'Brien, David Thornley, and the university professor John Kelly, who ran for Fine Gael.[160] In an interview with the *Kerryman*, a young woman named Marie McCabe 'admitted to being influenced by the influx of intellectuals'. She was sufficiently impressed with the 'calibre' of men like Cruise O'Brien and Thornley to change her vote to Labour.[161] Just after the election, several nationalist news outlets in Ulster ran a comment piece which stated that 'figures such as Professor Cruise O'Brien, Dr. Thornley … and Mr. Keating immeasurably improves the calibre of public representatives'.[162]

Despite this evidence that some voters outside Dublin were attracted to the intellectuals, after the election, when Labour did not perform as hoped, newspapers established the narrative that rural areas had rejected 'these intellectuals'.[163] *The Sunday Independent*'s political correspondent claimed that even though the intellectuals managed to win seats in Dublin, they were at fault for Labour's overall poor performance.[164] *The Connacht Sentinel* concurred with this assessment. According to its editor, the Labour leadership miscalculated the attractiveness of its slate of intellectuals to rural voters. The editor stated, 'They did not know that while Dublin was prepared to accept the intellectuals those people

[159] 'The Labour Party's conditions for coalescing with Fine Gael', *Dundalk Democrat*, 15 Feb. 1969.
[160] Michael Devine, 'State of the Republic', *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 Jun. 1969.
[161] Michael O'Sullivan, 'The young ones want a change', *Kerryman*, 14 Jun. 1969.
[162] 'The indestructibles', *Ulster Herald*, 28 Jun. 1969; also published in *The Derry People, Fermanagh Herald* and *Strabane Chronicle*.
[163] Editorial, 'As you were', *Cork Examiner*, 20 Jun. 1969.
[164] 'Labour lost through its winning men!', *Sunday Independent*, 22 Jun. 1969.

were going to be looked on with grave suspicion down the country.'[165] A *Meath Chronicle* journalist, Garrett Fox, insisting he was 'writing as an average countryman', rather pathetically maintained, 'I don't think I am alone in harbouring a certain distrust of intellectuals. They make me feel small.'[166] This narrative made its way across the Atlantic to the United States where the *Boston Globe* reported that 'Labour's legions were decimated in rural Ireland and only in the big cities like Dublin did the appeal of radical intellectuals like Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien … yield dividends.'[167]

Overall, although it won a greater percentage of votes than in the 1965 election, Labour lost a net of four seats, taking its tally from twenty-two TDs to eighteen. However, only three sitting TDs who contested the election lost their seats: Patrick McAuliffe (Cork North-East), Eileen Desmond (Cork Mid), and Thomas Anthony Kyne (Waterford). According to Puirséil, it was less the intellectuals that led to this disastrous result than the party's strategy of running at least two candidates in nearly all constituencies – under the single transferable vote system, which encouraged intra-party competition – that really damaged the party. Labour politician Brendan Halligan has pointed out that this strategy was so poorly implemented that Labour votes in Waterford managed to elect two Fine Gael TDs when transfers were accounted for.[168] Similarly, Mid Cork TD Eileen Desmond was a victim of the botched two candidate strategy. Nearly forty per cent of her Labour Party colleague's votes went to other parties, and she lost her seat by a small margin.[169]

In some quarters, there was concern at the influx of intellectuals into the Labour Party. Maurice Hickey, chairman of the National Union of Journalists' Dublin branch, commented on the anxiety regarding the intellectuals pushing aside the old Labour man. As he rather eloquently stated it, 'The cloth-cap image of the traditional Labour man, the horny-handed son of toil, disappears, to be replaced by the intellectual and the academic, the worker by brain and

[165] Editorial, 'Labour in the Dáil', *Connacht Sentinel*, 24 Jun. 1969; somewhat counterintuitively, the same editorial judged that 'the intellectuals … have much to contribute to the new Dail [sic]', predicting that 'it should be a better and perhaps livelier place because of them'.
[166] Garrett Fox, 'My Royal Meath album', *Meath Chronicle*, 28 Jun. 1969.
[167] 'Left's Cruise O'Brien wins Dublin', *Boston Globe*, 22 Jun. 1969.
[168] Puirséil, *Irish Labour Party*, 269.
[169] Patrick Maume, 'Desmond, Eileen (née Harrington)', *Dictionary of Irish Biography* [https://www.dib.ie/biography/desmond-eileen-nee-harrington-a9386, accessed 27 Apr. 2021].

not by brawn.'[170] Somewhat less generously than Hickey, the country's most influential pundit, John Healy, more commonly known as 'Backbencher', picked up on this concern. Summarising Labour's campaign, Healy acerbically wrote:

> The New New New Labour Party has been touting the scalps of the intellectuals as if the academic discipline somehow made the possessors superior to the men of little formal education in the Dail [sic]. Intellectualism was hawked as a new new super-package in Irish politics: Brendan and the lads of the old, old, old Labour Party had that servile respect of the cloth cap man for the mortar-board. If a man had a degree he was right: stick him in.[171]

At the level of political invective, Fianna Fáil seized on the negative associations of the noun 'intellectual' and targeted Labour's intellectuals for particularly harsh treatment. Commenting on this well-orchestrated campaign, *The Nationalist and Leinster Times* considered that Fianna Fáil had plumbed new depths in its efforts at 'character assassination'.[172] As *The Guardian* reported, the government party portrayed Labour as the plaything of 'pro-Cuban, anti-Christian intellectuals of the Far Left'.[173] In a speech broadcast on RTE News, Charles Haughey, who ran in the same constituency as Conor Cruise O'Brien, stated that it was Fianna Fáil's 'solemn duty and obligation' to warn Irish workers about 'what was in store for them if the extreme policies of the left-wing intellectuals of the Labour Party are put into effect'.[174] The party tried very hard to cast people like Cruise O'Brien as deviants. Fianna Fáil ministers, such as Mícheál Ó Móráin and Neil Blaney, branded the intellectuals as 'Left Wing political queers', 'Trinity Queers', and Trotskyites.[175] Blaney represented Labour's 'intellectuals, the doctors, the

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[170] Maurice Hickey, 'Labour Party and the unions', *Evening Herald*, 12 Jun. 1969; Brian Inglis recalled similar concerns being voiced when he tried to join the Labour Party in the 1940s only to be told that 'an influx of intellectuals would scare away the ordinary members', see Brian Inglis, *West Briton* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), 109.
[171] Backbencher, 'Inside politics: Jack does the trick', *Irish Times*, 21 Jun. 1969.
[172] Civis, 'Counterpoint', *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 27 Jun. 1969.
[173] 'Soldiers of Destiny win again', *The Guardian*, 21 Jun. 1969.
[174] RTE News, 18 Jun. 1969 [https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/688-elections/690-general-election-1969/287795-haughey-ryan-and-dunne-address-voters/, accessed 27 Apr. 2021].
[175] 'Thornley denounces Fianna Fáil', *Sunday Independent*, 29 Jun. 1969; Michael McInerney, 'Christianity and a united Ireland', *Irish Times*, 22 Oct. 1969; Noel Whelan, *Fianna Fáil: a biography of the party* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2011), 150.

university dons and the professional agitators' as imposing policy decisions on the 'old guard', pitching Fianna Fáil as the protector of the common people.[176] Blaney brazenly used scare tactics focusing on nightmarish representations of intellectuals. At a Fianna Fáil rally in Letterkenny, he asserted that Labour's 'pseudo intellectual Marxists, Maoists, Trotskyites and the like … have emerged from the sidelines like carrion birds to pick off the flesh of the Irish people'.[177] Speaking to an audience in Inchicore a fortnight before the 1969 election, a Fianna Fáil candidate drew on the old trope that Cruise O'Brien had warned about back in December 1968 regarding the gap between intellectuals and the common people. The candidate, Joe Dowling, trying to sway uncertain Labour voters, claimed 'that the intellectuals had never done a day's real work in their lives'. He suggested, correspondingly, that they would not look after the interests of 'the men on the workshop floor'.[178]

The Labour Party's performance in the general election did not match the expectations that the media had held for it, although many of the party's intellectuals, including Cruise O'Brien, managed to win seats. In an editorial, *The Irish Times* proclaimed its hope that although 'Intellectuals may not always make the best politicians', they might help raise the bar for Irish political discourse.[179] At the launch of *Conor Cruise O'Brien introduces Ireland*, which took place at the Abbey Theatre a week after the election, the young historian Owen Dudley Edwards, who edited the book, was optimistic about the future following the entry of people like Cruise O'Brien into the Dáil. Edwards hoped that it would signal a reconfiguration in the relationship between intellectuals and society. He proclaimed:

> The certain intellectuals and other leaders who are now in the Dail [sic] will make Ireland a totally new place for the intellectual, and there will be a significant change in the relationship between the intellectual and the country.[180]

[176] 'Coalition warning by Boland', *Irish Times*, 31 May 1969.
[177] 'Fine Gael haven't a pup's chance', *Donegal Democrat*, 13 Jun. 1969.
[178] 'Councillors charged with play-acting', *Irish Times*, 4 Jun. 1969.
[179] Editorial, 'The new Dail', *Irish Times*, 21 Jun. 1969.
[180] 'Resistance to change - Cruise O'Brien', *Irish Press*, 21 Jun. 1969.

Cruise O'Brien's entrance into Irish politics caused quite a stir, especially among the younger generations. As his political career progressed, this excitement dwindled, giving way to disillusionment when Cruise O'Brien did not adopt the radical positions his admirers had hoped he would. Many commentators rehearsed the anti-intellectual tropes that were so prominent during the 1969 election. *The Evening Herald* featured a heated correspondence during which Dubliner Donal McGregor accused Labour's intellectuals - and Cruise O'Brien in particular - of holding 'stuffy, narrow-minded, unworldly, intellectual views'. In McGregor's opinion, 'these "brilliant" academics' had 'never really learned what life with all its struggles, its hardships, its ups-and-downs, is to the men and women who have never visited ... university classrooms'.[181] Another Dubliner, Lorraine Dougan, took exception to McGregor's representation of Cruise O'Brien and the other labour intellectuals as 'a bunch of ivory-towered intellectuals', calling it 'egotistical introverted class rubbish'.[182] Dougan's rebuke did not deter McGregor from continuing to attack Labour's intellectuals. Months after this exchange, McGregor wrote again, deriding the Labour Party for bowing down before the intellectuals. He wrote: 'Today the Labour Party would be more suitably named the "Doctors' Party". There are so many doctors in its upper echelons ... [sic] doctors of literature, medical, [and] horse doctors'. He insisted that this situation had destroyed the party.[183] In 1976, a Dublin man named Stephen Quinn judged that Cruise O'Brien's career in politics was a spectacular 'flop', maintaining that Cruise O'Brien had 'an unusual capacity to fail in practical affairs'. In a letter to *The Irish Press*, Quinn put this lack of practicality down to the fact that Cruise O'Brien was 'an "intellectual" of a fairly high order, as the term "intellectual is understood by Europeans'. According to Quinn, Ireland had 'very few intellectuals' of this sort, and he claimed that by trying his hand at politics, Cruise O'Brien damaged his credibility as an intellectual. Quinn reckoned that it was 'a pity that Dr Cruise O'Brien ever descended into the market place of politics. He could have been an Irish Voltaire. In that role he would not look foolish.'[184]

[181] Donal McGregor, 'Words, words, words while the cost of living soars', *Evening Herald*, 7 Oct. 1971.
[182] Lorraine Dougan, 'Those "brilliant academics in the Labour Party"', *Evening Herald*, 19 Oct. 1971.
[183] Donal McGregor, 'Labour Party accused of hypocrisy', *Evening Herald*, 15 Mar. 1972.
[184] Stephen Quinn, 'Shadow of Dr Cruise O'Brien', *Irish Press*, 5 Apr. 1976.

In addition to disenchanted radicals, as an intellectual in politics, Cruise O'Brien received criticism from nearly all corners of public opinion. Religious conservatives, specifically Catholic conservatives, resented liberal figures like Cruise O'Brien for his stances on contraception, divorce, and abortion. In 1971, the Fine Gael TD Oliver Flanagan, a staunchly conservative Catholic politician, warned a party meeting about intellectuals' impact on Irish society. Flanagan beseeched Irish people to 'give serious thought to what the intellectuals of our Parliament have in store for them'. His statement on this issue represented conservative opinion very well. He declared,

> The demand for a change in the law about contraceptives is called for by professors, journalists, economists, and doctors of everything and nothing. They regard themselves as having a monopoly of brains, ability and intelligence ... But when it comes to real essentials of life they are the most ignorant bunch one could imagine.[185]

Flanagan concluded his denunciation of this class of people with the proclamation, 'God save Ireland from its intellectuals.[186]

Cruise O'Brien was Flanagan's main target. When the Dáil debated this issue in 1974, the *Irish Independent* reported that Flanagan was 'bitterly critical' of Cruise O'Brien, whom Flanagan classed as one of the 'intellectuals who had found themselves unexpectedly in high places'.[187] In a series of inflammatory sectarian outbursts, Flanagan accused the intellectuals in government of pushing a 'false, unchristian, anti-Godly and disastrous self-made theology'. Concerning Cruise O'Brien specifically, Flanagan lamented that the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, educated at the 'Protestant' Sandford Park and Trinity College, Dublin, 'did not secure a sound Christian education'.[188] As Flanagan depicted the situation, 'the intellectuals in the guise of the defenders of freedom of conscience, civil rights and civil liberties', had led an

[185] 'TD hits at newspapers on "pill" issue', *Sunday Independent*, 4 Apr. 1971.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Chris Glennon, 'Govt runs away from defeat', *Irish Independent*, 12 July 1974.
[188] *Dáil debates*, 11 July 1974.

assault on Christianity in Ireland.[189] He deemed these intellectuals a 'danger in public life'.[190] According to a *Kerryman* reader, Ireland's 'moral fibre' was 'being systematically destroyed by our so called intellectuals'.[191] Speaking to this same theme, Cork man Henry Lorton encouraged 'Doctors Brown [sic], O'Brien, and Fitzgerald' to realise that Ireland's 'ordinary Catholics' were 'not going to be codded or conned by super intellectuals (or whatever you are).'[192] *Sunday Independent* television critic, Peter Cleary, went so far as to state that applying the epithet 'intellectual' to a person like Cruise O'Brien was a contradiction. According to Cleary, a person who was 'sceptical about the existence of God cannot be described as an intellectual because it is a manifest sign that he has temporarily stopped thinking'.[193]

Cruise O'Brien also had critics in intellectual circles, north and south of the border. The strident position he took against the republican movement and his effort to encourage a revision of Ireland's dominant historical narrative earned him a great deal of hostility.[194] This position also led analysts to conclude that Cruise O'Brien had abandoned the 'cosmopolitan liberalism' and 'provocative intellectualism' of his career's earlier stages.[195] As historian Bryan Fanning writes, Cruise O'Brien became something of an 'intellectual *bête noire*'.[196] Reviewing Cruise O'Brien's *The suspecting glance* (See Chapter 4), Francis Young, a Northern Irish critic, accused Cruise O'Brien of committing *la trahison des clercs*. As he put it, 'O'Brien *was* [emphasis in the original] one of our best *clercs* - (and we have very few) - and now it seems he's blown it, taken his *trahison*'. In his vituperative review, Young, who admitted to having once been an admirer of Cruise O'Brien's, dismissed him as a 'jet-plane intellectual', a 'Neo-Irish Dandy', whose 'dandy parody of the Renaissance man ... degrades us'.[197] In mid-1973, the Cambridge-educated UCD lecturer Seamus Deane published an essay that was highly disapproving of Cruise O'Brien. Deane, a powerful voice in intellectual republicanism, censured

[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid.
[191] 'Contraception', *Kerryman*, 12 Apr. 1974.
[192] Henry Lorton, 'Church and state', *Irish Press*, 12 May 1976.
[193] Peter Cleary, 'Television', *Sunday Independent*, 29 Aug. 1976.
[194] See O'Callaghan, 'Revisionist position'.
[195] Brendan Clarke, 'The steeley image', *Irish Independent*, 17 Apr. 1976.
[196] Fanning, *Quest*, 11.
[197] Francis Young, 'Conor Cruise and the devil', *Fortnight*, 8 Jun. 1972.

Cruise O'Brien, alleging that he provided an intellectual veneer to southern Irish bourgeois prejudices. According to Deane, Cruise O'Brien's less than radical political career showed that 'the intellectual who commits himself to action has to learn that the only effective purifier of principle is compromise'.[198] Later that year, an irate correspondent wrote to *The Irish Times's* editor complaining about Cruise O'Brien. Noting Cruise O'Brien's comments on the relationship between intellectuals and power in *Power and consciousness* as a Jekyll-and-Hyde scenario, the letter writer, Peadar Mac Mághnais, wanted to know what had become of O'Brien-Jekyll. Mac Mághnais reckoned that O'Brien-Hyde had come so strongly to the fore that it was worth wondering if O'Brien-Jekyll was dead.[199] Cruise O'Brien's one-time mentor, Sean O'Faolain, regretted that Cruise O'Brien ever entered politics. In his review of *Writers and politics'* paperback edition, published in 1976, O'Faolain wistfully concluded that he 'often wished that Conor Cruise O'Brien could, as our Chomsky, our Marcuse, have devoted all his life to writing'.[200]

In 1977, the historian and senator John A. Murphy tried to explain why Irish people found Cruise O'Brien so hard to stomach. He did so in a feature for the *Sunday Independent* newspaper in which he provided a 'glossary of the biased words of politics'. As Murphy saw it, Irish people's dislike for Cruise O'Brien stemmed from their resentment of 'alien' influences in Irish life, particularly those associated with Britain. This antipathy manifested in words like 'shoneen' and 'West Briton', signifying 'an anglicised Irishman'. Murphy placed the noun 'intellectual' among this derogatory vocabulary. He postulated that these associations were why 'many people cannot comprehend Conor Cruise O'Brien'. Murphy contended that Cruise O'Brien 'bewildered' people, leading them to try to diminish him to make themselves more comfortable. As he put it, calling him names like 'The Cruiser' was an attempt to 'bring him down to size', to 'come to terms with the towering intellectual that he is'.[201]

When Cruise O'Brien lost his seat in the 1977 general election, 'Civis', a pseudonymous columnist in *The Nationalist and Leinster Times*, maintained that Cruise O'Brien probably would

[198] Seamus Deane, 'The position of the Irish intellectual', *Cambridge Review*, 18 May 1973, 135.
[199] Peadar Mac Mághnais, 'Dr Cruise O'Brien', *Irish Times*, 21 Dec. 1973.
[200] Sean O'Faolain, 'In search of truth', *Irish Press*, 16 & 17 Apr. 1976.
[201] John A. Murphy, 'The biased words of politics', *Sunday Independent*, 13 Feb. 1977.

have held onto his seat had he not 'committed the unforgivable sin, the Sin against the Holy Ghost of Irish politics, that of being an intellectual - and one with a Trinity accent to boot'.[202] However, even those who pilloried Cruise O'Brien during his time in politics were 'saddened by his enforced departure'. For example, the previously mentioned television critic Peter Cleary regretted that the Dáil had become 'a place sadly lacking in men of his intellectual calibre'.[203] In the same year, Seamus Deane pushed the other Derry Seamus – the poet Seamus Heaney - to condemn Cruise O'Brien's political approach. Heaney, however, insisted that Cruise O'Brien deserved credit for his contribution to public discourse in Ireland. As Heaney saw it, Cruise O'Brien almost singlehandedly forced 'intellectuals, politicians and ordinary people in the South' to re-evaluate their views on Northern Ireland, specifically about the Protestant community there.[204] Likewise, in the intellectual periodical *The Crane Bag*, the historian John A. Murphy praised the 'pungency and courage' with which Cruise O'Brien had tried to get people in the Republic of Ireland to reassess their thinking about Northern Ireland.[205]

An economy of truth

During his years in parliamentary politics, Cruise O'Brien quickly became aware of the impact that party affiliation had on his intellectual integrity and, as Arthur Noonan predicted, the brush with practical politics changed how he viewed the intellectual's role in that arena. For Cruise O'Brien, the tension between party membership and intellectual honesty came to a head during the 1972 referendum campaign concerning Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community. The Labour Party decided to fight against membership, advocating a 'No' vote in the referendum. As Puirséil argues, the Labour Party adopted its anti-EEC position with relatively little dissent from within its ranks. At the party's 1971 conference, a single party member, Cork TD Michael Pat Murphy, spoke in favour of joining the EEC.[206] In 1972, Cruise O'Brien explained that he was uncomfortable with the party's position on the EEC, being 'not

[202] Civis, 'Counterpoint', *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 1 July 1977.
[203] Peter Cleary, 'Television', *Sunday Independent*, 16 Oct. 1977.
[204] Seamus Deane, 'Unhappy and at home', *The Crane Bag*, 1 (1977), 64; see also Fanning, *Quest*, 34-5.
[205] John A. Murphy, 'Myself and "the Cruiser"', in English and Skelly, eds, *Ideas matter*, 57.
[206] Puirséil, *Irish Labour Party*, 287.

temperamentally "anti-European"'.[207] However, at the time, he did not publicly demur. Whatever he privately thought about joining the EEC, Cruise O'Brien spoke at multiple events around the country about the EEC's potentially negative implications for Ireland. He also made speeches in Dáil Éireann where he insisted the much-trumpeted economic necessity of joining the EEC would involve the 'symbolic sacrifice of identity' that rendered accession worthless.[208] As Labour spokesman on foreign affairs, he also represented the party internationally. At a conference of European socialist parties, Cruise O'Brien put forward Labour's objections to the Common Market, emphasising that they derived from anxieties about how Ireland, as an 'underdeveloped country', would fare in such a competitive market. At that same meeting, he registered the party's objections to a resolution calling for increased 'political integration', asserting that 'this would involve a complete abandonment of national sovereignty'.[209]

In May 1972, the Irish electorate voted convincingly to join the EEC. A month later, in *States of Ireland's* final chapter, Cruise O'Brien claimed that campaigning for a 'No' vote had been a miserable experience. He wrote that he felt about as happy as 'a dog being washed' but continued to follow the party line 'without exaggerated enthusiasm'.[210] In October 1973, an American academic periodical, *James Joyce Quarterly*, interviewed Cruise O'Brien - now the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs - and challenged him on his record as an intellectual in politics. The challenge centred on his assertion in *States of Ireland* that he had not fully supported the Labour Party's policy but advocated it anyway. The interviewer – anonymous, but probably the American literary critic Darcy O'Brien, who acted as guest editor for this issue - suggested that Cruise O'Brien had failed to live up to the high standards he had previously demanded of intellectuals who enter politics. Referring to his introduction to *Power and consciousness*, the interviewer compared Cruise O'Brien's 'lack of candor [sic]' regarding EEC membership to Schlesinger's deceptions concerning the Bay of Pigs debacle and wondered whether there was any difference.[211] Cruise O'Brien found it challenging to refute the

[207] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 292.
[208] *Dáil debates*, 24 Jun. 1970; *Munster Express*, 29 Jan. 1971; *Westmeath Independent*, 12 Mar. 1971.
[209] Gavin Gordon, '£26m boost in first year as EEC member', *Irish Press*, 30 Jun. 1971.
[210] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 292.
[211] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'An interview with Conor Cruise O'Brien', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 11 (1974), 201-209.

implication that he too succumbed to the tension between the role of intellectual and that of the politician.

In 1965, when Schlesinger admitted lying to *The New York Times*, the American explained that he propagated the Bay of Pigs cover story because 'he wanted to continue working with the Kennedy administration'.[212] In *Power and consciousness*, Cruise O'Brien was merciless in his denunciation of Schlesinger's actions. He went so far as to assert that an intellectual who prioritised power over integrity became 'an exintellectual [sic]'.[213] Confronted with his own failings, however, Cruise O'Brien adopted a similar argument to that which Schlesinger used to excuse himself. Initially, Cruise O'Brien argued that party politics relied on 'collective responsibility' and that by joining a political party, one necessarily gave up some 'outspokenness'. He maintained that as a party member, and even more as a cabinet minister, he had to accept majority decisions, which meant 'shutting up about reservations you may have about a position and accepting a certain discipline'. Yet, Cruise O'Brien himself admitted that he did not find this explanation wholly satisfactory. He insisted that the difference between himself and Schlesinger lay in the fact that whereas the American was involved in 'the actual fabrication of lies', Cruise O'Brien had merely pedalled the party line. He justified this in two ways. First, as he suggested in *States of Ireland*, he maintained that he did not campaign with any great enthusiasm, judging that he limited his contribution to explaining the Labour Party's case for a 'No' vote and highlighting where it diverged from other 'No' vote advocates, specifically Sinn Féin and both IRAs. His second argument was essentially identical to Schlesinger's justification, and as we shall see later, it borrowed some of its logic from Edmund Burke. Cruise O'Brien claimed that he went along with Labour's line on the EEC because, had he publicly dissented, he would have lost his influence over party policy in other areas, specifically regarding Northern Ireland. Although Cruise O'Brien insisted that there was a distinction between his own handling of these issues and Schlesinger's compromises, he admitted that his own lack of candour placed him on the same 'slippery slope' as the American historian. Cruise O'Brien pessimistically concluded: 'If you are engaged in politics, you are on a slippery slope.'[214]

[212] 'Schlesinger backs Cuba "cover story"', *New York Times*, 29 Nov. 1965.
[213] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Power & consciousness*, 13.
[214] Cruise O'Brien, 'Interview, 206-7.

The question of the intellectual's role in politics continued to preoccupy Cruise O'Brien throughout his tenure as a cabinet minister. As his political career developed, Edmund Burke became an increasingly important influence on his thinking on this subject. The best glimpse is provided by a piece not on Edmund Burke, but the French thinker Simone Weil, about whom Cruise O'Brien frequently lectured during the 1970s. During the 1975-76 academic year, he spoke at a symposium held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology dedicated to Weil.[215] In February 1977, Cruise O'Brien presented the same lecture at Trinity College, Dublin.[216] Subsequently, he published the paper in the *New York Review of Books* as 'The anti-politics of Simone Weil'. When G.A. White, who hosted the original symposium, republished the piece, which was marginally different from the *New York Review of Books* article, in 1981, Cruise O'Brien's essay carried the subtitle 'Patriotism and *The need for roots*'.[217] He focused his analysis mainly on Weil's treatise, *The need for roots*, written in response to France's fall to the Nazis. Weil scholars have variously characterized his perspective as 'sympathetically critical' and 'sensitive', on the one hand, and on the other, he has been called one of her 'fiercest critics'.[218] Certainly, Cruise O'Brien did not think much of Weil's ideal society as laid out in *The need for roots*, but other aspects of her thought attracted him, such as her distaste for the concept of a 'chosen people'.[219] One of the central themes that he brought out was the relationship between intellectuals and politics. Indeed, it was such a significant theme that the *New York Review's* editor advertised Cruise O'Brien's essay as 'Intellectuals and politics: Simone Weil' on the magazine's front cover. Cruise O'Brien's statements on the intellectual's role in politics in this essay suggests that his thinking on this issue had evolved drastically since *Power and consciousness's* publication in 1969.

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[215] G.A. White, ed., *Simone Weil, interpretations of a life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), x.
[216] Mark Patrick Hederman, '"The crane bag" and Northern Ireland', *The Crane Bag*, 4 (1980), 98.
[217] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Patriotism and *The need for roots*: the anti-politics of Simone Weil', G. A. White, ed., *Simone Weil, interpretations of a life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), 95-110.
[218] Lawrence S. Cunningham, 'Weil - interpretations', *CrossCurrents*, 31 (1981), 374-8; Michael Marrus, 'Simone Weil: an introduction to her thought', *Canadian Journal of History*, 18 (1983), 416; Jan-Werner Mueller, 'On the abolition of all political parties, by Simone Weil', *Irish Times*, 21 Mar. 2015.
[219] Weil's influence in this last respect is evident in Conor Cruise O'Brien, *God Land: reflections on religion and nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

In his Weil essay, Cruise O'Brien drew a connection between the French thinker and Edmund Burke. This comparison illustrated how Cruise O'Brien's thinking about intellectuals, 'truth', and politics had changed over the course of his career, centring around the idea that intellectuals in politics needed to exercise an 'economy of truth' to maximise their effectiveness. Towards the end of the second letter in his *Letters on a regicide peace*, Burke stated,

> Falsehood and delusion are allowed in no case whatever: but, as in the exercise of all the virtues, there is an economy of truth. It is a sort of temperance, by which a man speaks truth with measure, that he may speak it the longer.

While the context for Burke's statement was the French regicides, Cruise O'Brien took the concept of 'an economy of truth' as a valuable summation of how intellectuals ought to act in politics. As Cruise O'Brien employed the concept, Burke's economy of truth was the antithesis to Weil's vision of how intelligence should function. He argued that by his commitment to this idea, Burke positioned himself 'firmly on the "political" side of the line which separates the politician from the pure intellectual'. According to Cruise O'Brien, Weil, the 'pure intellectual', was well entrenched on the opposite side. He maintained that to Weil, people like himself and Burke - i.e., intellectuals who engaged in practical politics - were 'impure intellectuals'. It seemed to him that Weil would have characterized all 'intellectuals who seriously engage[d] in politics' and were therefore 'committed to the Burkian [sic] economy', as 'impure'. He claimed that Weil believed that this engagement led to the 'dimming both of their intellectual and moral sense'. The similarities between Cruise O'Brien's pre-1969 statements on the intellectual and politics and his summary of Weil's position were striking. Simone Weil, the 'anti-politician', as he called her, was the epitome of what Cruise O'Brien, before he ran for election in 1969, thought an intellectual should be. In his original, but unpublished, conclusion to *Power and consciousness*, Cruise O'Brien proclaimed that 'the intellectual [ought] to be a kind of anti-politician' to maintain a proper relation to politics. The anti-politician was not 'opposed to politics, or to taking a stand on political issues'. Instead, Cruise O'Brien asserted that true intellectuals, or anti-politicians, refused to make the 'sacrifices required by the pursuit, service

and holding of political power', as these sacrifices were 'inimical to his function and destructive of his character'.[220]

After eight years in politics, however, his views had altered dramatically. Now, Weil made Cruise O'Brien feel uncomfortable. As he wrote,

> The political intellectual ... will necessarily feel reluctant to accept her view about his predicament. He will wish to claim that, even though he practices an economy of truth, he still brings into circulation more truth than, without him, would be in circulation in a vital domain of social life.[221]

Previously, Cruise O'Brien would most likely have characterized these statements as examples of *la trahison des clercs*. Now, however, he argued that having 'fallen victim to the vertigo of intellectual purity', pure intellectuals made themselves ineffective in politics.[222]

Cruise O'Brien's positioning on the European debate and his acceptance of the wisdom of the Burkean concept of an 'economy of truth' became central to how he narrativized his understanding of the intellectual's role in politics. In April 1985, Cruise O'Brien took part in a forum on intellectuals at Skidmore College, a liberal arts college in New York. He participated as a discussant in three sessions. First, Cruise O'Brien responded to Edward Said's paper on intellectuals in the post-colonial world. Said spent most of his time discussing literature written during the colonial period through the lens of post-colonial cultural criticism rather than speaking about the actual position of intellectuals in the post-colonial world. Cruise O'Brien criticized Said for evading the advertised subject of the session. On the experience of intellectuals in the *post*-colonial world, Cruise O'Brien asserted that having been in the vanguard of the decolonization process, intellectuals in the post-colonial world were generally pushed aside once the colonial powers withdrew.[223] After a somewhat acrimonious exchange with Said, Cruise O'Brien then participated in a session regarding the 'responsibility of

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[220] 'Draft *Power and consciousness* introduction', undated, NYUA, Records of the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, RG.21.1 8/1.
[221] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The anti-politics of Simone Weil', *New York Review of Books*, 12 May 1977.
[222] Ibid.
[223] For more on the Cruise O'Brien/Said exchange see Howe, 'Cruiser and the colonist'.

intellectuals' alongside George Steiner, Leszek Kolakowski, and John Boyers. Finally, Cruise O'Brien, together with John Lukacs, responded to Larry David Nachman's paper on 'the intellectual in power'.

During the second session, on the intellectual's responsibility, an audience member asserted that the idea of joining the 'world of "real" politics' simultaneously troubled intellectuals and exerted a pull on them. The questioner, thinking especially of liberal American intellectuals, suggested that intellectuals in the United States had fought against the 'nagging thought' that they had a responsibility to engage in politics, opting to remain cloistered in their ivory towers. At the outset of his response, Cruise O'Brien questioned the existence of such a thing as a 'world of real politics' distinct from unreal politics. Despite his reservations about the formulation of the question, he understood the questioner to be referring to the realm of electoral politics. In his answer he drew on his experience as an intellectual in politics, arguing that with that experience in mind, American intellectuals troubled by the choice of whether to enter practical politics should consider themselves lucky that they did not have to engage with politics if they did not want to. It seemed to him that America's great advantage for intellectuals was that most were able 'to live quite contented lives without being involved in the political process', which had the potential to distract from their scholarly pursuits. Here, Cruise O'Brien exaggerated the imperative for intellectuals in other parts of the world to intervene directly in politics so that they could live contented lives. Indeed, Cruise O'Brien reflected that losing his seat in parliament was a liberating experience. Being 'liberated from the political process' meant that he was no longer under pressure to 'say things which I [Cruise O'Brien] didn't necessarily believe'. He insisted that he had been 'no more mendacious than was absolutely required', but even still, the deception that politics demanded had 'sickened' him. As a result, Cruise O'Brien claimed that leaving the political process had been a great relief.[224]

In the next session, Cruise O'Brien again used his political experience to reflect on the wider problem. He insisted that 'one can't get away from the fact that the intellectual, when he is engaged in politics, is obliged to be prepared to be dishonest if he is going to be effective'.

[224] Conor Cruise O'Brien *et al*, 'The responsibility of intellectuals: a discussion', *Salmagundi*, 70-71 (1986), 189-90.

Cruise O'Brien was a far cry from his *Power and consciousness* position, discussed above. To illustrate his contention, Cruise O'Brien provided two examples. The first being Arthur Schlesinger and the second being himself. In 1969, he had been somewhat less than charitable in how he depicted Schlesinger's *trahison des clerc*s, but now he reckoned that it was merely 'the sort of thing you find when the intellectual decides to enter politics'. Cruise O'Brien admitted that he might have been unfair in his condemnation, especially given his experience as a politician in Ireland.

Cruise O'Brien depicted his political career as 'an example of the rake's progress of the intellectual', meaning that he judged that he experienced 'progressive deterioration' in his status as an intellectual. When he joined the Labour Party, Cruise O'Brien became the party's spokesperson on foreign affairs, including Northern Ireland. In this post, he shaped the party's policy on Northern Ireland, and he became a powerful voice in the controversy relating to Irish reunification, strongly arguing that the push for unification exacerbated tensions in the North.[225] In this regard, Cruise O'Brien believed himself 'to be telling the truth as well as being engaged in politics'. However, as he noted, his situation became more complicated when the Labour Party took a policy decision in a different area that he did not support, namely in its opposition to Ireland joining the EEC. According to Cruise O'Brien, these circumstances required a pragmatic strategy at odds with his previous perspective on intellectuals' responsibilities in politics. He now characterized his earlier views on these responsibilities as 'self-righteous'. Cruise O'Brien, confident that he was propagating a profound truth concerning Northern Ireland, wanted to maintain his platform to expound on this issue to as broad a public as possible. As mentioned, Cruise O'Brien determined that if he broke with the party over the European issue, he would lose his influential position regarding Northern Ireland, a subject he 'cared about much more'. Cruise O'Brien calculated that he needed to 'say *publicly* what [he] didn't believe' to protect his ability to 'go on telling the truth' about Northern Ireland. Thus, Cruise O'Brien 'told a whopping great lie'. This description was a markedly different characterization than the one he gave to the *James Joyce Quarterly* a decade earlier. For Cruise O'Brien, the nub of this episode or 'confession', as he termed it, was not to imply that

[225] See Chapter 5 for more on Cruise O'Brien and the Troubles.

intellectuals should not go into politics. Instead, he wanted intellectuals to be less naive about the realities of practical politics. His message was, 'Don't go into politics unless you have a very strong stomach. Don't if you feel that as an intellectual your prime commitment must be to the truth.' Once more, Cruise O'Brien reaffirmed his commitment to Burke's dictum that politicians 'must practice an economy of truth that we may live to tell it the longer.'[226]

In 2000, Cruise O'Brien, now well into his dotage, spoke with the American historian Harry Kreisler on 'The power of ideas' as part of Kreisler's popular 'Conversations with history' series. When asked to explain the difference between 'the courage of a writer' and the 'courage of a politician', Cruise O'Brien revisited his Common Market parable. He claimed that even though toeing the party line allowed him to continue influencing Northern Ireland policy, it left him feeling 'sick' and caused him to think he would be better off out of politics. Here, Cruise O'Brien was not being particularly truthful. He did not leave politics for many years after the EEC referendum. Indeed, he stood for election to the Dáil two more times, served as a cabinet minister, and when the electorate threw him out, he immediately stood for, and was elected to, the Seanad. However, at this stage, Cruise O'Brien already had an established script for how the EEC debate affected his position as an intellectual in politics, and those details detracted from the story's impact as a morality tale. With that experience in mind, Kreisler asked Cruise O'Brien to reflect, as he put it, on the 'role that intellectuals should properly play in political life'. Cruise O'Brien replied:

> I think the intellectual, if he is to do his function honestly, either will have to be on the margin of actual practical politics or, having been in practical politics, as in my case, will have to move to the margin or beyond it. Because if you're immersed in politics you can't, as I found, tell the truth without hesitation. And you can become, as many politicians do become, a habitual and easy liar. You say what would serve the purpose of the moment as long as it serves that purpose, then you change the tune. You can't dismiss that altogether, it is part of practical politics and it's especially part of democratic politics ... I'm not knocking those

[226] Conor Cruise O'Brien and John Lukacs, 'The intellectual in power: a discussion', *Salmagundi*, 70-71 (1986), 260-61.

> who stay in politics for behaving in those ways, but I think there is a role for people who are outside. That should be the function of the intellectual, to think as best they can and say what they think they find, and modify that when they find the need to do it, not because of pressure but because of their own view of developing events. I think the intellectual in relation to politics is something like the Greek chorus, he's outside the action but he tells you quite a lot about the action.[227]

Conclusion

In the early 1990s, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman wrote that the relationship between intellectuals and the state was one where 'Suspicion and dissent constantly alternate with a powerful attraction – nay, fascination – with the power of the state'. Bauman contended that these forces vied with each other not only within intellectual communities, but also within the same individual.[228] The waxing and waning of Cruise O'Brien's career provides a powerful illustration of Bauman's claim. By the end of his life, Cruise O'Brien had effectively repudiated his entire career as a public intellectual. Unlike his ideas about historiography (See Chapter 2), his views on the role of intellectuals in public life underwent significant change – vacillation might be a more apt term – throughout his career. Cruise O'Brien wavered between thinking that intellectuals should remain aloof from politics so that they might hold politicians to account to arguing that without direct engagement in the political process intellectuals could not affect it. By 1968, he seemed to have arrived at the conclusion that intellectuals should absent themselves from practical politics, that they should be 'anti-politicians'. However, when he was presented with the opportunity to become a player in Irish politics, he swiftly changed his tune, justifying his decision to intervene by asserting that intellectuals could not hold politicians and state power to account unless they fully engaged with politics. Following his eight year-long brush with politics, which included a period as a government minister, Cruise

[227] Conor Cruise O'Brien interview: Conversations with history, Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley [http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people/OBrien/obrien-con3.html, accessed 25 Mar. 2021].
[228] Bauman, 'Love in adversity', 91.

O’Brien moved back towards his initial feeling on this question. Having failed to live up to his own demands of an intellectual entering politics, he decided that it was naïve to think that one could be a politician and still hold true to high standards of intellectual integrity. When he became involved in politics in Ireland, he pinpointed the revolutionary period in the early twentieth century as the ‘golden age’ of intellectuals’ involvement in public affairs. Here, he moved to position himself as the inheritor of the mantle of intellectual in politics that had been carried by such luminaries as W.B. Yeats and George Russell. Since that period, he claimed that intellectuals had been absent from Irish politics. Chapter 4 scrutinizes the extent of influence that intellectuals operating in this putative ‘golden age’ had on Irish politics, specifically through an interrogation of Cruise O’Brien’s answers to Yeats’s deathbed question about whether his artistic work had caused ‘certain men’ to participate in the 1916 Rising.

4

The Yeats question

"Did that play of mine
send out certain men (certain men?)

the English shot …?"
the answer is "Certainly not".

If Yeats had saved his pencil-lead
would certain men have stayed in bed?[1]

In his 1938 poem 'Man and the Echo', published in his collection *Last poems*, W.B. Yeats asked himself the now (in)famous question 'Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?'.[2] The play he referred to was *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, a one-act allegory co-written with Lady Gregory, first produced in April 1902 at St. Theresa's Hall on Dublin's Clarendon Street.[3] To the poet's delight, it played in front of packed houses and, such was the excitement it generated, crowds were 'turned away at the doors', and others 'stood at the walls'.[4] The play offered the audience an image of an ordinary, drab life disrupted by a call to self-sacrifice to regenerate Ireland. Arthur Griffith's nationalist newspaper, *The United Irishman*, greeted the production enthusiastically, declaring that it 'arouse[d] every noble emotion and rekindle[d] the fires of patriotism'.[5] Conor Cruise O'Brien, always interested in the link between aesthetics and politics, devoted a great deal of attention to Yeats's deathbed question, which in his view exemplified the problem of art's relationship with reality. In turn, historians have concerned

[1] Paul Muldoon, '7 Middagh St', *Meeting the British* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), 36-60.
[2] W.B. Yeats, *Last poems & plays* (London: Macmillan, 1940), 83-84.
[3] Stephen Gwynn, *Irish literature and drama in the English language: a short history* (London: T. Nelson, 1936), 156.
[4] Yeats to Newbolt, 5 Apr. 1902, in Wade, *Letters*, 369.
[5] *United Irishman*, 12 Apr. 1902.

themselves with the way Cruise O'Brien answered Yeats's question. This chapter sifts through Cruise O'Brien's responses to this question, revising previous interpretations that claim that his answers changed drastically as the Northern Irish 'Troubles' unfolded.

Diarmuid Whelan has argued that Cruise O'Brien offered three distinct reactions to Yeats's question, asserting that the differing perspectives demonstrate Cruise O'Brien's tendency to 'interpret away' evidence to fit his point of view. In fact, not only did Whelan maintain that Cruise O'Brien's answer to the Yeats question changed, but he also contended that it underwent a very sudden 'reversal'. According to Whelan, over eight years, between 1967 and 1975, Cruise O'Brien inverted his answer to the question as a reaction to the eruption of violence in Northern Ireland. The outbreak of violence caused Cruise O'Brien to begin a strident criticism of popular perceptions of significant historical events, such as the Easter Rising. This critique earned him plaudits from some corners for displaying moral and intellectual 'courage'.[6] In others, however, it provoked deep hostility. Whelan asserted that in 1967 Cruise O'Brien did not think there could be an answer one way or another to the question of whether Yeats's play had caused 'certain men' to go out and rebel in 1916. However, *pace* Whelan, in 1975, Cruise O'Brien was far surer that Yeats's play had indeed sent out 'certain men the English shot'. Finally, in 1989, in an article in *The Times* for the fiftieth anniversary of Yeats's death, Cruise O'Brien presented Yeats's question once more, this time declaring that 'I believe, not only that it clearly did, but that it is still sending them out.'[7]

Whelan used these three instances to illustrate his argument that Cruise O'Brien 'interpreted away' the 'great brute facts' of history. The 'reversal', or 'conversion', Cruise O'Brien underwent, Whelan argued, was linked to his changing historical perspective on the relationship between politics, specifically political violence, and literature conditioned by the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland. Whelan's account has proliferated due to uncritical transmission from other prominent intellectual historians, such as David Dwan and John M. Regan. As Regan puts it, 'O'Brien too asked Yeats's question, and as Diarmuid Whelan demonstrated, O'Brien's answer became an increasingly unequivocal "yes!".'[8] Dwan also

[6] Peter Lennon, 'Television', *Sunday Times*, 2 May 1976.
[7] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'An exalted nationalism', *The Times*, 28 Jan. 1989.
[8] Regan, *Myth & the Irish state*, 271.

reiterated Whelan's version of Cruise O'Brien's 'radical readjustment of position' on this question. However, the reality of Cruise O'Brien's replies to the question is more complicated than a 'hardening of attitude' in response to the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland.[9]

Moreover, Cruise O'Brien reflected on Yeats's question many more times than the three Whelan described, despite Whelan's claim that these formed the totality of Cruise O'Brien's interpretations. Between 1967 and 1975 alone, Cruise O'Brien examined this problem on no fewer than eight occasions. Beginning with his 'Foreword' to the edited collection *The shaping of modern Ireland* (1960) and ending with the publication of his *Memoir* (1998), Cruise O'Brien addressed this same question in one way or another on at least nineteen separate occasions, each time using different language. If slightly different language and somewhat altered cadences indicate a different interpretation, we must conclude that there were no fewer than nineteen distinct interpretations. This, of course, was not the case.

By addressing Yeats's question seriously, Cruise O'Brien engaged in a longstanding conversation about the nexus of literature and the revolution in Ireland, a conversation which includes the poet Paul Muldoon's sceptical contribution that forms the epigraph of this chapter in which he ventriloquises an imagined W.H. Auden. In recollections of the revolutionary period, *Cathleen ní Houlihan* features prominently. In her Bureau of Military History Witness Statement, Dorothy Macardle, a revolutionary woman of letters, stated that she was 'awakened to an awareness of Irish nationality, like so many others of my generation, by the poetry of Yeats, especially Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the Irish Legends collected by Standish O'Grady, Lady Gregory and others, the Abbey plays and all the writings of the Celtic Twilight School'.[10] In her 1937 republican polemic, *The Irish Republic*, Macardle claimed that Yeats's play inspired the 'dreams that were soon to take shape as deeds'.[11] The republican Robert Brennan recounted how he had been intensely affected by the experience of seeing Maud Gonne in the title role during that first run at St Theresa's Hall. He wrote:

[9] Dwan, 'Romantic nationalism', 742.
[10] Dorothy Macardle, Author of *The Irish Republic*, Bureau of Military History Witness Statements, BMH.WS457.
[11] Dorothy Macardle, *Irish Republic: a documented chronicle of the Anglo-Irish conflict and the partitioning of Ireland, with a detailed account of the period, 1916-1923* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), 62.

> The play's effect on the young men and women of the Gaelic League and Sinn Fein was profound. Many of them had already dedicated their lives to Ireland. Yeats and Maud Gonne brought into the forefront of their hearts the simple grandeur of that sacrifice. To the question which Yeats asked thirty-six years later:
>
> > "Did that play of mine send out
> > Certain men the English shot?"
>
> I can without hesitation answer "yes".[12]

The Jesuit-educated journalist Patrick J. Little claimed that he told Yeats not long after the Easter Rising that he would inform the authorities that his play was to blame for the rebellion. Little, a founding member of Fianna Fáil, was adamant that there was a causal link between *Cathleen ní Houlihan* and the Easter Rising and alluded to several other instances in which theatre had had a hand in fomenting revolution.[13]

Professor Liam O Briain, professor of romance languages in Galway, was less confident about the connection between literature and revolutionary action. He testified that 'even great pieces of literature like "Cathleen ni Houlihan"… though inspiring to our generation, seemed at the same time to put "rebellion" definitely out of the realm of material reality into the sphere of art.'[14] Likewise, Roger McHugh, professor of Anglo-Irish literature at UCD and a senator for the National University of Ireland, after seeking the opinion of a 'republican fighter of those days' about Yeats's puzzle, reported that the poet need not have been unduly concerned. According to McHugh's interviewee, 'Dying for Caitlín Ni hUllachain did not appeal to us, nor indeed going out naked against the foe like the hero in one of Pearse's plays. Believe it or not,

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[12] Robert Brennan, publicity department, Dáil Éireann, 1921, Bureau of Military History Witness Statements, BMH.WS0779; see also John Horgan, 'Government propaganda and the Irish News Agency', *Irish Communications Review*, 3 (1993), 35.

[13] P.J. Little, Irish representative, South Africa and Argentina, Bureau of Military History Witness Statements, BMH.WS1769; see Fearghal McGarry, 'Hard service: remembering the Abbey Theatre's rebels', in Richard Grayson and Fearghal McGarry, eds, *Remembering 1916: the Easter Rising, the Somme and the politics of memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 87.

[14] Professor Liam O Briain, Member IRB and IV, Dublin, 1912-1916, Bureau of Military History Witness Statements, BMH.WS3.

we wanted to *win*.' Yeats, he thought, 'should have slept'.[15] This chapter probes Cruise O'Brien's invocations of Yeats's question and demonstrates that he consistently positioned himself on the side of those who believed that Yeats was right to be disturbed by his feelings of moral culpability for the outbreak of political violence in Ireland.

Shaping modern Ireland

Cruise O'Brien first attributed moral accountability for the Easter Rising to W.B. Yeats during the late 1950s, over a decade before the start of the 'Troubles'. At this time, however, he claimed to have no more than a 'layman's knowledge - or condition of belief - regarding the Easter Rising'.[16] In January 1959, the British publisher Routledge & Kegan Paul agreed to publish the Radio Éireann lecture series 'The shaping of modern Ireland, 1891-1916' and asked Cruise O'Brien to edit the scripts for publication.[17] The lectures first aired in 1956 as the eleventh instalment of the Thomas Davis lecture series, a programme designed to bring the latest Irish scholarship to an 'intelligent non-specialist' public.[18] The series' subject matter was a somewhat eclectic selection of prominent public figures deemed significant players between the fall of Parnell and the Easter Rising. The 'Shaping of modern Ireland' series comprised seventeen half-hour lectures by some of the country's most notable intellectuals, including Cruise O'Brien. W.B. Yeats, illustrated by the English poet Donald Davie, was included among this group of 'leading Irishmen' (and they were all *men*, as Eugenio Biagini has pointed out).[19] Cruise O'Brien collected fourteen of these scripts for the Routledge project. As the editor, Cruise O'Brien contributed three essays: a survey of 1891-1916, a critical essay on the anti-Parnellite Home Ruler T.M. Healy, and a foreword to the volume. Of his contributions, the only one he wrote explicitly for the Routledge volume was the foreword. In a recent essay written in homage to Cruise O'Brien's survey essay '1891-1916', the distinguished historian and political scientist Paul

[15] Roger McHugh, 'The Rising', in Robert O'Driscoll, ed., *Theatre and nationalism in twentieth-century Ireland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 110.
[16] Cruise O'Brien to Silvers, 26 July 1963, New York Public Library, New York Review of Books records, RBS, 5/8.
[17] Cruise O'Brien to de Vere White, Jan. 1959, Boston University, Howard Gotlieb Archives Research Center (HGARC), de Vere White papers, B.14 F.7.
[18] Martin, 'The Thomas Davis Lectures', 277.
[19] E.F. Biagini and Dan Mulhall, 'Preface', in E.F. Biagini and Dan Mulhall, eds, *The shaping of modern Ireland: a centenary assessment* (Sallins: Irish Academic Press, 2016), xiv.

Bew claims that Cruise O'Brien wrote this essay in the late summer of 1959. However, Bew is three years off with his dates. Indeed, the essay that Bew reckons Cruise O'Brien drafted in 1959 was the introductory talk for the entire series. In addition to broadcasting the essay '1891-1916' on Irish radio in late January 1956, *The Irish Times* printed the essay in two parts in April 1956 under the title 'The shaping of modern Ireland'.[20]

In the same collection of essays as Bew's essay appeared, the editors state that Cruise O'Brien saw the period between 1891 and 1916 as 'a sort of crease in time' and a 'lull between storms' - they rightly insist that it is 'no longer possible to see it like that'.[21] However, the way in which the editors employ these quotations serves to distort Cruise O'Brien's meaning, which was in fact the same argument as the editors of the later collection were trying to make. Namely, that the period was one of great upheaval in Irish politics and cultural life. In the opening paragraph of the introductory essay, Cruise O'Brien declared his intention to revise the popular understanding of the period, which people learned at school. This 'summary historical retrospect' portrayed the era around the turn of the century as 'a sort of crease in time, a featureless valley between the commanding chain of the Rising and the solitary enigmatic peak of Parnell.' Cruise O'Brien did not endorse this view; in fact, his purpose was to overturn it. He stated:

> It was a time in which nothing happened; nothing except (as we find when we look into it) a revolution in land ownership, the beginning of a national quest for a lost language and culture, and the preparation of the two successful rebellions which were among other things, to tear Ireland in two.[22]

Thus, on closer inspection, Cruise O'Brien was looking to discredit the interpretation later critics have accused him of adopting.

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[20] Martin, 'The Thomas Davis lectures', 287; see Paul Bew, '1891-1916', in Biagini and Mulhall, eds, *The shaping of modern Ireland*, 2, 9.
[21] Biagini and Mulhall, 'Preface', xvi.
[22] Conor Cruise O'Brien, '1891-1916', in idem, *The shaping of modern Ireland* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 13.

There is an apparent discrepancy between Cruise O'Brien's 'Foreword' and his introductory essay '1891-1916'. In the introductory essay quoted above, on the one hand, Cruise O'Brien gave short shrift to the idea that nothing happened between these two dates. On the other hand, in the 'Foreword', written three years later, he appeared to recommend the notion that, politically, the period represented a 'lull of 26 years'. However, Cruise O'Brien then immediately argued that this ostensible lull was deceptive. The period represented 'not so much a lull between storms as an interval between a verdict and a sentence'. In Cruise O'Brien's view, people picked political sides as early as 1885. From that moment on, political allegiance was divided sharply between 'the great bulk of the country', which he described as 'nationalist', and 'Eastern Ulster [which] was anti-nationalist'.[23] Cruise O'Brien asserted that people lived their lives in anticipation of a 'political reckoning' with the teams so established.[24]

The authors originally produced their essays with a domestic audience in mind, but the publisher wanted the book to appeal to readers outside Ireland.[25] Cruise O'Brien's foreword, written in 1959, set the scene for an international, predominantly British readership. In this regard, Cruise O'Brien tied events of this period to the Suez Crisis, arguing that Ireland should have served as a model for British understanding of events in Egypt. As he put it, 'The emotions roused by the Home Rule crises were in the same line with those roused by Suez'.[26] The Suez Crisis was an inexact comparison, as the emotions stirred up by the Home Rule crisis were deeper and far longer lasting than those fostered by Suez.

Cruise O'Brien first commented on Yeats's question in 'Man and the echo' in this foreword. One of the foreword's central points was that modern Ireland did not assume the form that any of its shapers desired. For instance, concerning Yeats, Cruise O'Brien argued that the reception of the poet's work produced results he had not anticipated, which caused him a great deal of distress. In Cruise O'Brien's view, circa 1959, Yeats's legacy in this period and the legacy of the literary movement, in general, was to create the conditions for the cultivation of 'the sacrificial and heroic elements in Irish life'. A direct result of this development, he claimed,

[23] Cruise O'Brien, 'Foreword', in *Shaping of modern Ireland*, 1.
[24] Ibid., 2.
[25] Cruise O'Brien to de Vere White, Jan. 1959, Boston University, HGARC, de Vere White papers, B.14 F.7.
[26] Cruise O'Brien, 'Foreword', in *Shaping of modern Ireland*, 9.

was to pave the way for the events of Easter Week, 1916. Cruise O'Brien did not think that Yeats had envisioned or desired this course of events and in this regard, he quoted – or rather misquoted – Yeats's lines:

> What if words of mine sent out
> Certain men the English shot?

For Cruise O'Brien, these words indicated Yeats's acceptance of a measure of moral or cultural responsibility for the 'tragedy which he had not composed'. Despite dismissing any semblance of intentionality, he ended his discussion of Yeats by insisting that the poet had, indeed, helped 'To stir the boiling pot', another quotation from one of the poet's poems.[27] Whelan and others have insisted that only the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s caused Cruise O'Brien to see the connection between Yeats and revolutionary violence. Nevertheless, in 1959 he was making that very same point. No modern historian concerned with Cruise O'Brien's interest in Yeats's feelings of guilt has displayed any awareness of this early engagement with the question that plagued both Cruise O'Brien and Yeats throughout their lives.

Passion and cunning

In 1965, scholars, artists, and the broader public celebrated the centenary of W.B. Yeats's birth. Theatre companies performed his plays, magazines and newspapers brought out special issues, and scholars compiled edited collections of critical essays and appraisals. All this activity prompted several commentators to reflect on Yeats's nagging concerns about his complicity in the revolutionary violence of 1916. In an essay on Yeats and W.H. Auden, Richard Ellmann, the noted Yeats biographer, spoke about how the poet believed that poetry operated 'like a subterranean force to alter men's lives'. Ellmann pointed to the question posed in 'Man and the echo' as evidence of Yeats's conviction that poetry possessed 'an insidious, almost demonic power'.[28] The Jewish intellectual A.J. Leventhal concurred. He postulated that although Yeats

[27] Ibid., 4-5.
[28] Richard Ellmann, 'Gazebos and Gasfiouses: Yeats and Auden', *Irish Times*, 10 Jun. 1965.

was not a 'physical force man', the 'sincerity of the call to fall in and die for the daughter of Houlihan may well have sent certain men into battle, for many of those that died in 1916 were part of the small audiences that appreciated the Abbey'.[29] In a seminal essay, 'Passion and cunning: an essay on the politics of W.B. Yeats', written at the behest of Norman Jeffares, for his centenary collection *In excited reverie*, Cruise O'Brien added his voice to the debate.[30]

Written in late June 1964, while on a short excursion in the Ashanti region of Ghana, where he was vice-chancellor at the university, 'Passion and cunning' caused significant controversy.[31] As he wrote to his friend, the renowned literary critic William Empson, Cruise O'Brien reckoned that writers on Yeats made too many 'charitable assumptions' in their assessments of the poet's political outlook. Consequently, they tended to reduce his 'pronounced and enduring fascist tendencies' until they resembled nothing more than a 'passing flirtation'.[32] In 'Passion and Cunning', Cruise O'Brien argued forcefully that Yeats's interest in fascism was far more than a passing association. His argument left Empson grappling with the question, 'how could a good poet be so fascist?'[33] However, for this chapter, it is not the link between Yeats and fascism that is of interest, but Cruise O'Brien's assessment of the tie between Yeats's work and Irish nationalist politics.[34] Cruise O'Brien drew on the recollections of two men present at *Cathleen ní Houlihan's* first performance to support his case. Stephen Gwynn, a constitutional nationalist politician, wrote that he was unsure whether companies should perform plays such as *Cathleen ní Houlihan* 'unless one was prepared for people to go out and shoot and be shot'.[35] The revolutionary intellectual P.S. O'Hegarty, in an obituary for Yeats in *Dublin Magazine*, commented that for 'us', meaning Irish revolutionaries, Yeats's play was a 'sort of sacrament'. O'Hegarty stated that he doubted any other factor was 'quite so

[29] A.J. Leventhal, 'Yeats and the Abbey Theatre', *Irish Times*, 10 Jun. 1965.
[30] Published in a truncated form as Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Yeats and fascism', *New Statesman*, 26 Feb. 1965 and as Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Yeats and Irish politics', *Tri-Quarterly*, 4 (1965), 91-98.
[31] Cruise O'Brien, 'Passion and cunning', 40.
[32] Cruise O'Brien to Empson, 14 Aug. 1965, Harvard University, Houghton Library (HL), Empson papers, MS Eng 1401/311.
[33] John Haffenden, ed., *Selected letters of William Empson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 390.
[34] For a discussion on Yeats and fascism as well as an attack on Cruise O'Brien's assessment, see Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland, and fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1981).
[35] Cruise O'Brien, 'Passion and cunning', 221.

potent'.[36] We should note that Gwynn and O'Hegarty gave these accounts in the mid and late 1930s, respectively, looking back on the play's effect through the lens of the revolution. Thus, their testimonies smack of wisdom after the event. Developing on Gwynn and O'Hegarty's claims, Cruise O'Brien suggested that 'After the curtain fell on *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) it could be fairly said that Yeats's work for the Irish revolution had been accomplished.'[37] The Yeats scholar Elizabeth Cullingford has disputed Cruise O'Brien's assertion, but in doing so, she misses the point of his argument. While Cullingford uses this statement to place Cruise O'Brien in the camp of writers who *dismissed* the revolutionary potential of Yeats's play, Cruise O'Brien meant that by bringing *Cathleen ní Houlihan* to the public and causing people to feel such strong emotions, Yeats had indeed *contributed* to the making of the Irish revolution, and the Easter Rising in particular.[38]

Though Yeats himself retreated from nationalist politics shortly after putting on this 'piece of nationalist propaganda', the play's revolutionary message continued to percolate through Irish society, which was then, as R.F. Foster has argued, in the midst of a 'pre-revolution'. Cruise O'Brien contended that because of *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, Yeats's theatre became a sacred place for Irish nationalists.[39] As Cruise O'Brien viewed it, *Cathleen ní Houlihan* continued to course through the 'blood-stream' of committed Irish nationalists, even though its author refused to write further propaganda pieces for the revolutionary cause.[40] Thus, after the executions of Patrick Pearse, James Connolly, and the rest of the Easter Rising leaders, Yeats felt as if he had played a part in fomenting the rebellion. Cruise O'Brien asserted that his poetry in the aftermath of the Rising was given its force from the 'intensity of the emotions involved – the sense – which became explicit years after – of his own share in the "gestation" of the event'.[41] As evidence of the poet's sense of complicity, Cruise O'Brien, in a footnote, quoted –

[36] P.S. O'Hegarty, 'W.B. Yeats and the revolutionary Ireland of his time', *Dublin Magazine*, 14 (July-Sept. 1939), 23.
[37] Cruise O'Brien, Passion and cunning', 221.
[38] Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland, & fascism*, 53.
[39] Cruise O'Brien, 'Passion and cunning', 226, 227; R.F. Foster, *Vivid faces: the revolutionary generation in Ireland, 1890-1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), xvi.
[40] Cruise O'Brien, 'Passion and cunning', 228.
[41] Ibid., 238.

again inaccurately – the two lines from 'Man and the echo' that constitute the 'great Yeatsian "question"'.[42]

Imagining the Rising

In 1967, when he was teaching at New York University, where he held the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, Cruise O'Brien returned to this subject in the essay that Whelan cited as his first example. In his synopsis of Cruise O'Brien's position, Whelan contended that Cruise O'Brien came to the determination that 'Yeats's play could not have incited men to rebel'.[43] However, as will be demonstrated, this is not an accurate appraisal of Cruise O'Brien's position. Cruise O'Brien returned to the Yeats question because in late December 1965 William Irwin Thompson, an American historian and literary critic, wrote to him, asking him to read the manuscript of his thesis, *Easter 1916: a study of literature and revolution*, later published as *The imagination of an insurrection* (1967).[44] Thompson enclosed an abstract stating that his thesis explored the relationship between the literary revival and the Irish revolution.[45] Cruise O'Brien read this brief description with 'tremendous interest' and was keen to see more.[46]

Thompson, in the introduction to the published work, opened with an anecdote about contemporary American politics. Under President Kennedy, artists and other intellectuals were a regular presence at the White House. Kennedy even joked that 'the White House […] was becoming "a café for intellectuals."' Nevertheless, even though the Kennedy Administration welcomed and entertained them, intellectuals suspected their presence was a 'sort of window dressing'. Thompson thought most Americans would share this opinion, insisting that few Americans had any illusions that intellectuals 'had any *real* importance'. By contrast, for Thompson, Ireland was an 'elsewhere' in which people recognised the intellectual's significance

[42] Cruise O'Brien's footnote read: 'Did words of mine send out/ Certain men the English shot?'. The quotation should have read: 'Did that play of mine send out/ Certain men the English shot?', see Cruise O'Brien, 'Passion and cunning', 238.
[43] Whelan, *Violent notions*, 114.
[44] Thompson to Cruise O'Brien, 26 Dec. 1965, NYUA, Papers of the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, RG21.1 5/5.
[45] W.I. Thompson, Thesis abstract, Cornell University, 1966, NYUA, Papers of the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, RG21.1 5/5.
[46] Cruise O'Brien to Thompson, 14 Feb. 1966, NYUA, Papers of the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, RG21.1 5/5.

in politics. To illustrate this point, Thompson reflected on the question Yeats posed in 'Man and the echo':

> Did that play of mine send out
> Certain men the English shot?[47]

Initially, Thompson inclined towards dismissing the question as merely a product of 'Yeats's own notorious self-dramatization'. However, his view changed when he saw *Cathleen ni Houlihan* performed in Dublin during the Abbey Theatre's 1965 Yeats centenary celebrations. Thompson asserted that the audience's uncomfortable, shifting reaction to the drama, especially the response of 'those old enough to remember', convinced him that the correct answer to Yeats's problem was 'It did'.[48]

In a landmark article, '1916 – myth, fact, and mystery', the historian F.X. Martin called Thompson's work 'exceptional' and lauded it as a major contribution to scholarship.[49] By contrast, Cruise O'Brien, who appreciated Thompson's theme but was disappointed with its execution, expressed his misgivings about Thompson's interpretation of the revolutionary period and the connection he drew between literature and revolution in Ireland. Cruise O'Brien felt that Thompson lacked the necessary imaginative sympathy with the movements he studied to understand the ways in which they intertwined. He made numerous scathing criticisms, which must have left Thompson wishing he had never asked for the Irishman's thoughts on his work. However, for the sake of this chapter it is only the way Cruise O'Brien dealt with Thompson's articulation of the 'Yeats question' that concerns us. While Thompson contended that *Cathleen ní Houlihan* sent out 'certain men', Cruise O'Brien was more equivocal. He suggested that there could be 'no sure answer' to Yeats's conundrum. Despite this apparent caginess, Cruise O'Brien then set out his reasons for thinking that there *was* a genuine connection between Yeats's play and the Easter Rising. He maintained that the play 'did powerfully affect "certain men" who took part in the Rising of 1916', noting - inexactly - P.S.

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[47] The question appeared in the Irish press as well, *Evening Herald*, 11 Jun. 1965.
[48] W.I. Thompson, *The imagination of an insurrection, Dublin, Easter 1916: a study of an ideological movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), iv.
[49] F.X. Martin, '1916 – myth, fact, and mystery', *Studia Hibernica*, 7 (1967), 121-2.

O'Hegarty's statement on this point. Nevertheless, he argued that those upon whom it had such an impact were already well-disposed towards the 'appeal to romantic nationalism' for the simple reason they were 'already romantic nationalists'.[50] Cruise O'Brien wrote that he did not think *Cathleen ní Houlihan* could have had such a significant effect had it not been for the fact that it 'touched a "stock response"'. Whelan took this to mean that Cruise O'Brien did not accept the idea that Yeats's play contributed to the Rising, but Cruise O'Brien was saying precisely the opposite.

Although Cruise O'Brien did not depart too far from Thompson's conclusion, he did question some of Thompson's presuppositions about the link between the Irish Literary Renaissance and violence.[51] In *Imagination of an insurrection*, Thompson presented the writings of Yeats, *AE*, Synge, Gregory, and O'Casey as 'the literature of the Rising'. From Cruise O'Brien's point of view, however, the best work of these writers, the material that attracted the world's critical attention, could not be considered in this way. As he put it, 'The trouble with discussion of "literature and revolution" is always that the literature which most interests the literary is different from the literature which most interests the revolutionary.'[52] Cruise O'Brien argued that the 'real "literature of the Rising"' was

> Wolfe Tone's *Autobiography*; it was *Speeches from the Dock* and especially Robert Emmet's speech; it was the patriotic verse of Thomas Davis, "Speranza" (Oscar Wilde's mother) and, Fanny Parnell; it was John Mitchell's *Jail Journal*; it was Sullivan's *God save Ireland* and Ingram's *Who fears to speak of '98?*

As Cruise O'Brien wrote, 'The writings of the Irish Literary Renaissance had positive and political impact only when they inscribed themselves clearly within this tradition'.[53] Cruise O'Brien listed *Cathleen ní Houlihan* as an example of a work by one of the great writers of the literary revival that had such a 'positive and political impact' on revolutionary thought. Therefore, insofar as

[50] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Two-faced Cathleen', *New York Review of Books*, 29 Jun. 1967; for a critical discussion on the concept of 'romantic nationalism', see Dwan, 'Romantic nationalism'.
[51] To be fair to Thompson, he did qualify his position later in the book, but Cruise O'Brien did not raise this in his review, see Thompson, *Imagination*, 222-23.
[52] Cruise O'Brien, 'Two-faced Cathleen'.
[53] Ibid.

Cathleen ní Houlihan inspired people to rebel, it seemed to Cruise O'Brien that it did so because Yeats positioned it within this revolutionary tradition. Contrary to Whelan's assertion that the crux of Cruise O'Brien's 1967 position was that 'Yeats's play could not have incited men to rebel', Cruise O'Brien did think that *Cathleen ní Houlihan* played a role in forming the revolutionary mindset that led to the Easter Rising.[54]

Mother Ireland

After 'Two-faced Cathleen', the next instance Whelan and others discuss concerning Cruise O'Brien's Yeats question comes from 1975. However, before examining his 1975 position, this section explores how he addressed the matter in the intervening period. Between 1967 and 1975, he broached the subject on at least nine other occasions, in 1968, 1969, 1970, twice in 1971, three times in 1972, and then again in 1973.[55]

In 1968, Cruise O'Brien published a rather quirky book on the United Nations' inner workings, *The United Nations: sacred drama*. The book resulted from a collaboration between Cruise O'Brien and the Polish-born artist Feliks Topolski, who contributed pencil drawings to the enterprise while Cruise O'Brien wrote the text. In a text teeming with classical allusion, Cruise O'Brien's central argument was that the United Nations was a drama akin to ancient ritual drama, providing a space for 'playing out, instead of fighting out ... recurring conflicts'.[56] Though it was primarily concerned with sacred drama globally, Cruise O'Brien also devoted some space to the sacred drama in Irish politics.

In a section on the 'ritual possibilities' available to small nations at the UN, Cruise O'Brien noted that small nations often deemed inappropriate 'the full and solemn ritual of a resolution leading to a vote'. He asserted that the risks associated with a resolution frequently

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[54] Whelan, *Violent notions*, 113.

[55] See Conor Cruise O'Brien and Feliks Topolski, *The United Nations: sacred drama* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1968); Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Introducing Ireland', in Owen Dudley Edwards, ed. *Conor Cruise O'Brien introduces Ireland* (London: Deutsch, 1969); idem, 'Actors, roles, & stages', in W.S. Dillon, *The cultural drama: modern identities and social ferment* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974), 71-80; idem, 'Politics of poetry', *The Washington Monthly*, Mar. 1971, 46-53; idem, *The suspecting glance* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972); Conor Cruise O'Brien and Máire Cruise O'Brien, *A concise history of Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972); Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*; idem, *King Herod advises* (1973).

[56] Albert Bermel, 'A fit instrument of survival', *New York Times*, 4 Aug. 1968.

outweighed the possible benefits for small nations. Resolutions had the potential to worsen problems if they did not play out in the way envisaged. For instance, a negative result could embarrass a government in front of its domestic audience. Somewhat counter-intuitively, Cruise O'Brien insisted that governments also shied away from pushing for a resolution because they feared 'the vote would be *too* favourable'.[57] He claimed that a favourable vote could arouse 'hopes and passions ... leading to incalculable complications'. He illustrated this point with the example of Ireland. Cruise O'Brien contended that

> No group of men had a better grasp of the power of sacred drama than those for whom Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* had been, in the words of the late P.S. O'Hegarty, "a sort of sacrament". This was the play of which the dying Yeats asked himself: *Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?*

Cruise O'Brien held that the 'heirs of those men', meaning the Irish government, refused to submit a resolution to the strongly 'anti-colonialist' General Assembly on the 'injustice of partition' because they feared that a vote in their favour might rekindle political violence. Cruise O'Brien was able to speak with some authority on this matter, given that he had been a vital cog in Ireland's United Nations representation during the late 1950s. However, the grave implication of Cruise O'Brien's invocation of *Cathleen ní Houlihan* in this context was that this was an example of a sacred drama that paved the way for violence.[58] Indeed, later in the text, he put *Cathleen ní Houlihan* on a par with the Nuremberg rallies as an example of sacred drama as 'preparation for war'.[59]

In July 1968, while on a visit to his home in Ireland, Cruise O'Brien wrote his introduction to the Owen Dudley-Edwards-edited *Conor Cruise O'Brien introduces Ireland*, published in 1969 after Cruise O'Brien's election as a Labour TD. Although Edwards and Cruise O'Brien produced this book with an international readership in mind, its publication significantly impacted Irish

[57] Cruise O'Brien and Topolski, *Sacred drama*, 117.
[58] Ibid., 118.
[59] Ibid., 299.

intellectual culture.[60] The tone of Cruise O'Brien's introductory essay was somewhat 'tongue-in-cheek'. He likened introducing Ireland to presenting 'one's own mother descriptively to a roomful of strangers'.[61] He adopted the strategy to think of 'Mother' as a modern-day Cathleen ní Houlihan, describing the effects of her clash with modernity. His extended metaphor was simultaneously humorous as well as being dreary and mildly depressing. Mother still suffered the effects of an abusive relationship with her neighbour, who kept 'some property of hers'. However, she stopped talking about losing her fourth green field since 'she got the TV'. The absence of romance Cruise O'Brien detected in modern Ireland, symbolized by the arrival of television, was not a cause for celebration. As he put it, again not wholly sincerely, 'sometimes, you know, we miss the old days of ranting and roaring and Up the Republic'. He thought that this had had a vitalising effect on Mother. Now that the 'ranting and roaring' had subsided 'she seem[ed] to have faded somehow'.[62]

Cruise O'Brien's representation of Ireland as an ageing mother caused the poet Seamus Heaney, who described himself as 'another slightly embarrassed son', to remember one of his own mother's favourite phrases, "Whatever you say, say nothing" - a phrase he later immortalized in verse.[63] Not all of Cruise O'Brien's compatriots were happy with his portrayal of Ireland. On one side, the young republican intellectual Desmond Fennell was outraged at Cruise O'Brien's description, asserting that the 'salient elements' of his picture were 'ignorance, superstition, drink, unkempt appearance, idleness, extravagance and rough sex'. Fennell maintained that Cruise O'Brien's depiction lacked judgment and wisdom, meaning that even though 'Dr O'Brien is described as an intellectual', his ideas about the Irish people belied this title.[64] On the other side, *The Cork Examiner* carried a review which contended that the idea that 'intellectuals (still a not unsuspect category in Ireland) such as Dr O'Brien and Seán Mac

[60] For instance, F.S.L. Lyons heavily relied on *Conor Cruise O'Brien introduces Ireland* for the latter part of his monumental *Ireland since the famine*, see F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the famine* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971), 815-50.
[61] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introducing Ireland', 15.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Seamus Heaney, 'Celtic fringe, Viking fringe', *The Listener*, 21 Aug. 1969.
[64] *Irish Press*, 2 July 1969; *Irish Independent*, 4 July 1969.

Réamoinn are hardly representative of the generality viewpoint' was unsustainable.[65] James Delehanty, the editor of the *Kilkenny Magazine*, thought that despite the offence it had caused in certain quarters, Cruise O'Brien's introduction was 'as funny a piece of witty truth-telling as you ever read'.[66]

In *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, heroic songs played a crucial role in motivating patriotic action. Introducing modern Ireland, Cruise O'Brien dwelt on the relationship between ballad singing and politics in Ireland. He argued that for Irish people these songs represented a 'stirring of their history in themselves'. Recalling a recent experience in a local pub, Cruise O'Brien wondered at the emotion visible on a singer's face during the performance of a particular song, *Seán South of Garryowen*. Seán South was killed during an IRA operation on New Years' Eve in 1956 when he participated in a raid on Brookeborough RUC Barracks in County Fermanagh as a member of the Pearse flying column. The lyrics to *Seán South* originally appeared in the *Irish Catholic* newspaper less than a week after South's death.[67] The lyrics proclaim that in death South had

> gone to join that gallant band
> Of Plunkett, Pearse and Tone
> A martyr for old Ireland
> Sean South from Garryowen.[68]

Possibly, Cruise O'Brien mused, one might be able to disregard these words as nothing more than 'adding a bit of local colour to places of entertainment', but he did not concur with this gentle assessment. As he listened to the lyrics, observing the passion in the face of the young girl singing and witnessing the emotional reaction of the crowd, Cruise O'Brien's thoughts once again wandered to Stephen Gwynn's reflections upon seeing *Cathleen ní*

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[65] *Cork Examiner*, 24 July 1969; Sean Mac Réamoinn (1921-2007) was a broadcaster and journalist, see L.W. White, 'Mac Réamoinn, Seán', *Dictionary of Irish Biography* [https://www.dib.ie/biography/mac-reamoinn-sean-a9656, accessed 18 Oct. 2022].
[66] *Irish Press*, 19 July 1969.
[67] Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The lost revolution: the story of the official IRA and the Workers' party* (London: Penguin, 2010), 14-16.
[68] 'Seán South of Garryowen' [https://www.irishsongs.com/lyrics.php?Action=view&Song_id=327, accessed 20 Oct. 2022].

Houlihan for the first time. As previously mentioned, Gwynn had questioned whether it was responsible for a company to put on plays like *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, 'unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot'. In this instance, *Seán South* played the part *Cathleen ní Houlihan* performed in the early twentieth century. As Cruise O'Brien saw it, modern nationalists actively created national propaganda in the same way that the 'revolutionary generation' had constructed theirs. Cruise O'Brien asserted that to see his image of the 1968 Cathleen ní Houlihan in romantic terms was an impossibility. But, alluding to the influence of *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, he maintained that

> as the ballad singers know, there remains on the imaginative retina of all who would own to being Irish, that faint and dangerous shadow: "a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen."[69]

In November 1970, Cruise O'Brien participated in an 'intellectual festival' at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC at which scholars 'address[ed] themselves to large human concerns'. Opening the symposium, Cruise O'Brien spoke on the theme 'Actors, roles, and stages', a paper that developed some of the arguments he made in *Sacred drama*. A few months later, Cruise O'Brien published a version of the paper in *The Washington Quarterly* as 'The politics of poetry'. The cultural anthropologist Walter S. Dillon then published the original lecture in his 1974 edited collection, *The cultural drama*. Historians interested in Cruise O'Brien's responses to the Yeats question have overlooked this lecture, not included in Akenson's extensive bibliography of Cruise O'Brien's works, even though it contained the crux of the position he took in the more well-known paper, 'An unhealthy intersection'. Indeed, some controversial elements of the later lecture were lifted verbatim from the Washington paper. Moreover, it was the first time since the eruption of violence in Northern Ireland that Cruise O'Brien publicly addressed the question from 'Man and the echo'.

In Washington, Cruise O'Brien spoke at length on the relationship between Yeats's play and the Easter Rising. He began by posing Yeats's question. He then immediately discussed the

[69] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introducing Ireland', 20; for a discussion of music and Irish nationalism, see Richard Parfitt, *Musical culture and the spirit of Irish nationalism, 1848-1972* (London: Routledge, 2019).

'leading part' that Countess Markievicz played in the Easter Rising. This linkage between Markievicz and Yeats's question was an innovation for Cruise O'Brien.[70] Hitherto, he had relied on the *ex post facto* evidence of Gwynn and O'Hegarty's reminiscences to make his case for the revolutionary role of *Cathleen ní Houlihan*. In 1916, the state sentenced Countess Markievicz and the other leaders of the Easter Rising to death. Eventually, she had her sentence commuted. While in prison awaiting her fate, she wrote to her sister, Eva Gore-Booth, commenting on the importance to her of Yeats's *Cathleen ní Houlihan*. Given that Longmans, Green and Co. published Markievicz's prison letters in 1934, it casts doubt on Cruise O'Brien's knowledge of his historical sources that he was seemingly unaware of their existence before 1970. He now bolstered his case for the connection between Yeats's play and political violence by drawing on Markievicz's prison letters, which suggested a direct tie between *Cathleen ní Houlihan* and Markievicz's personal motivation for taking part in the Rising. Markievicz wrote:

> You remember "They shall be remembered for ever." What we stood for, and even poor me will not be forgotten, and "the people shall hear them for ever?" That play of W.B.'s was a sort of gospel to me. "if any man would help me, he must give me himself, give me all."[71]

In Cruise O'Brien's view, Markievicz's letters, which contained these three quotations from the play, combined with Gwynn and O'Hegarty's testimonies, meant that in answer to Yeats's question, the 'probable answer is: "Yes, it did."'[72]

This conclusion led Cruise O'Brien to think about the relationship between "fiction" and "real life", a connection he had previously teased out in *Sacred drama*. Concerning *Cathleen ní Houlihan* and the Easter Rising, he posed the question:

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[70] On Markievicz, see Lauren Arrington, *Revolutionary lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).
[71] Esther Roper, ed., *Prison letters of Countess Markievicz (Constance Gore-Booth): also poems and articles relating to Easter week by Eva Gore-Booth and a biographical sketch by Esther Roper* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), 155.
[72] Cruise O'Brien, 'Actors, roles and stages', 71.

> Can we say flatly that one is "fiction" and the other is "real life"; if participants in the "real life" action have taken in the "fiction" as a "gospel" or sacrament", is that a transforming spiritual agency?[73]

Cruise O'Brien argued that *Cathleen ní Houlihan* represented an episode in the Irish revolution in the same manner that the opening night of Beaumarchais's *Marriage of Figaro* was an event in the French Revolution.[74] From Cruise O'Brien's perspective, the only substantial difference between Maud Gonne's performance as Cathleen ní Houlihan in 1902 and Constance Markievicz's performance of the same role in 1916 was a legal one. By playing Cathleen ní Houlihan in the theatre, Maud Gonne had 'uttered words which were a summons to violent action'. Going into St Stephen's Green and initiating an armed insurrection as 'one of Ireland's children', Markievicz performed a similar action, albeit with more radical techniques. Cruise O'Brien reasoned that both performances were 'real' and 'symbolic'. However, Gonne's was also legal, while Markievicz's was not.[75]

Cruise O'Brien saw the Easter Rising principally as a 'symbolic sacrifice'. Some who were 'out' during Easter Week have challenged this perspective, insisting that they were not interested in sacrifice but 'wanted to *win*'.[76] Nevertheless, according to Cruise O'Brien, the Rising's chief directors' objective was not to defeat the British state militarily but to be "remembered forever". In being remembered, Cruise O'Brien claimed, 'their memory, like the play itself, should be an incitement to further sacrifices'.[77] Cruise O'Brien then adduced as evidence of the success of this sacrifice details of conversations he had with 'certain men' in Northern Ireland who, he alleged, wanted nothing more than to be 'remembered in this way'. Cruise O'Brien did not state who precisely these 'certain men' were, but throughout 1970, he communicated with many known members of the IRA, both Provisional and Official. It is likely that it was men from these organisations whom Cruise O'Brien had in mind. He claimed their

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[73] Ibid., 72.
[74] On the disputed connection between Beaumarchais's play and revolutionary action, see W.D. Howarth, *Beaumarchais and the theatre* (London: Routledge, 1995); see also C.A. Sainte-Beuve, *Portraits of the eighteenth century: historic and literary*, trans. K.P. Wormeley (London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1905).
[75] Cruise O'Brien, 'Actors, roles and stages', 73.
[76] McHugh, 'Rising', 110.
[77] Cruise O'Brien, 'Actors, roles and stages', 73.

goal was not political, despite what they said. In his opinion, the ostensible political objective, namely Irish unity, was less important than their desire to be remembered in the same way as the Easter Rising leaders.[78] This line of argument refused to acknowledge the rational basis of Irish republicans' political demands.

In late 1971, Cruise O'Brien, alongside Sean O'Faolain, who acted as editor, and Owen Dudley Edwards, contributed to a ten-part television documentary series on RTE entitled *We the Irish*. Modelled on Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* for the BBC (but not funded to anywhere near the same extent) and produced by Niall McCarthy, *We the Irish* was a 'prestige series' for the network and caused excitement among observers.[79] Cruise O'Brien wrote and delivered three of the programmes, speaking on the subjects, 'The Patriot', 'The Politician', and 'The Writer'. In his episode on 'The Writer', Cruise O'Brien was filmed at his home in Howth, delivering scripted answers to the questions of three young intellectuals: the political scientist Tom Garvin, the Irish language writer Eoghan O hAnluain, and the literary scholar Douglas Riach. According to *The Irish Times's* television critic Ken Gray, the production was amateurish, with the questioners interrupting Cruise O'Brien in the wrong places and Cruise O'Brien refusing to deviate from his script. Gray described the episode as 'polite chaos'.[80] A disappointed viewer, Diarmaid O Suilleabhain, also noted the awkwardness of the presentation, joking that the 'three gentlemen physically present gave one the uneasy feeling that a "Cead dul amach a mhaistir" [Permission to go out Master] was just around the corner'.[81] Cruise O'Brien's producers provided him with a list of issues to address, including the unimportance of writers in Irish politics. Cruise O'Brien rejected this premise, but the subject brought him back to the Yeats question and the 'super-patriotic' *Cathleen ní Houlihan*. On this occasion, Cruise O'Brien declared that 'The right answer is probably "Yes".'[82]

In his concluding remarks, Cruise O'Brien put forward the idea that this form of 'poetry hurt Ireland into madness: the madness of Kathleen ni Houlihan' and 'the cult of the blood-

[78] Ibid.
[79] Ken Gray, 'Good times coming', *Irish Times*, 27 Sept. 1971.
[80] Ken Gray, 'Mediocre Medicine Men', *Irish Times*, 25 Oct. 1971.
[81] Diarmuid O Suilleabhain, 'Irish Writing', *Irish Independent*, 27 Oct. 1971; this phrase was one that Irish school children were required to ask when seeking permission to go outside.
[82] 'Script for "The writer" - Conor Cruise O'Brien', UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/864.

sacrifice'. Contrary to the RTE producers' suggestion that writers did not play a role in contemporary politics, Cruise O'Brien insisted that writers who fit their interventions into this tradition remained significant. However, Cruise O'Brien desired that Irish writers would confront this 'cult' in the same way that Sean O'Casey did in the 1920s.[83]

Cruise O'Brien dealt with the Yeats question on three occasions in 1972 in his books, *The suspecting glance*, *A concise history of Ireland*, and his highly controversial and influential *States of Ireland*. The first of these was a collection of four essays, three written in 1969 and one in 1970. Barring the one written in 1970, he initially presented the essays as lectures at the University of Kent, which he gave at the Irish historian F.S.L. Lyons' invitation in December 1969. *The suspecting glance* centred on the interactions between the 'world of imagination' and the 'world of politics', examining four writers: Niccolò Machiavelli, Edmund Burke, Friedrich Nietzsche, and William Butler Yeats. His essay on Machiavelli's nationalism appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*. The Nietzsche essay came out in the *New York Review of Books* as 'The gentle Nietzscheans'. He published the one on Machiavelli and Burke in *Atlantis*, an Irish intellectual journal that Cruise O'Brien patronized for a short time. The final essay, discussing Burke, Nietzsche, and Yeats, remained unpublished until it appeared in this volume. In this essay, written in 1970, Cruise O'Brien stated that *Cathleen ní Houlihan* was Yeats's 'chief contribution to the literature of Irish nationalism', going 'straight to the hearts and heads of some of those who were to make the Rising of 1916'.[84] To bolster this statement, he referred, as he had done previously, to P.S. O'Hegarty's recollection that the play had been a 'sort of sacrament' and to Markievicz's prison letters. Based on this evidence, Cruise O'Brien reasoned that it was 'Small wonder', which is to say it was not very surprising, that Yeats felt a degree of culpability.

The second time in 1972 when Cruise O'Brien discussed Yeats's deathbed question came in *A concise history of Ireland*, which he wrote alongside his wife, the poet and Irish language scholar, Máire Cruise O'Brien née MacEntee. The beautifully illustrated *Concise history* was an introductory work. The division of intellectual labour that went into its creation is not entirely

[83] Ibid.
[84] Cruise O'Brien, *Suspecting glance*, 70.

clear, but it seems as if Máire Cruise O'Brien was responsible for the early period, while her husband wrote the latter stages of the text – portions of which had featured in his other books, chapters, and articles. It is the latter part of the work that is of concern here. Writing about the political climate following the death of the talismanic home rule leader C.S. Parnell, Cruise O'Brien contended that on the surface it looked as if Irish politics was settling down in comparison with the heightened political turmoil of the 1880s. He claimed that it seemed to contemporary observers as if 'Irish energies were going into channels which seemed politically harmless'. These channels included the Gaelic Athletic Association, the Gaelic League, the Irish Literary Society, and the Abbey Theatre. However, Cruise O'Brien did not concur with this perspective, which he named 'the Ascendancy point of view'.[85] These 'politically harmless' activities, he pointed out, had a profound political influence. The example he recycled to illustrate the political nature of these seemingly apolitical activities was Yeats's *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, especially the play's meaning for several people who became revolutionaries in 1916. Their contemporaries were blind to the political implications, however. The young nationalists, such as O'Hegarty and Markievicz, for whom Yeats's play had been an almost religious experience, were not considered a significant threat. When he posed the Yeats question in *Concise history*, Cruise O'Brien asserted that 'Contemporaries were more disposed to laugh than to shiver' at the prospect of armed rebellion. According to Cruise O'Brien, radical nationalists 'seemed more amusing than alarming' and looked as if they were engaged merely in 'the national pastime of play-acting'. Despite the contemporary condescension towards Dublin's future revolutionaries – in which Yeats fully partook, confident that he 'but lived where motley was worn' – Cruise O'Brien strongly implied that the question that disturbed the ageing poet was not grandiose.[86]

The final instance from 1972 in which Cruise O'Brien wrote about 'Man and the echo' was in *States of Ireland*. At several points in this 'discursive essay', Cruise O'Brien ruminated on the connection between literature and politics in Ireland, specifically on *Cathleen ní Houlihan's* place in the Irish revolutionary tradition. In *The Listener*, Keith Kyle, a British journalist and

[85] Cruise O'Brien and Cruise O'Brien, *Concise history*, 129.
[86] Ibid., 130.

academic at Chatham House, commented that the book was marked by 'the persistent undertow of [Cruise O'Brien's] love-hate relationship with W.B. Yeats'.[87] *Cathleen ní Houlihan* was such a key feature of Cruise O'Brien's argument in this book that the index entry is marked '*passim*.' Cruise O'Brien asserted that this play was the literary movement's 'most significant contribution to revolutionary feeling.'[88] His discussion led him to consider Yeats's feelings of responsibility for the Easter Rising yet again. He marshalled his familiar cast of witnesses who responded to the play: the constitutional nationalist Stephen Gwynn, the revolutionary P.S. O'Hegarty, and Constance Markievicz, one of the heroes of the Easter Rising. On this occasion, Cruise O'Brien went further, however, suggesting that Yeats's play inspired the *Proclamation of the Irish Republic* – read in front of Dublin's General Post Office at the beginning of the Rising. In the opening passage of the proclamation Patrick Pearse, the first president of the Irish Republic, stated:

> Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.[89]

Personifying Ireland was not a new departure. As Cruise O'Brien put it, 'The personification itself was a very old Gaelic literary tradition, but it was undoubtedly Yeats who made it come alive for those who lived in the first decades of the twentieth century.'[90] Cruise O'Brien argued that although Yeats withdrew from nationalist politics shortly after *Cathleen ní Houlihan* was first produced, he could not undo the effects of his highly emotive message. It seemed to Cruise O'Brien that though the play 'left her creator cold', the 'being he had created continued to beckon others'.[91] In a footnote in the final chapter of *States of Ireland*, Cruise O'Brien quipped that

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[87] *The Listener*, 12 Oct. 1972.
[88] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 69.
[89] *Proclamation of the Irish Republic,* 24 Apr. 1916.
[90] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 70; see Robert Tracy, 'His story, her story: the recent adventures of Cathleen ní Houlihan', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 8 (2002) 19-37.
[91] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 70.

> It doesn't seem to have occurred to the earlier audiences of Yeats's *Cathleen ní Houlihan* that there might be something unhealthy about a mother who shuffles round promising her sons that "they shall be remembered forever", provided they get themselves killed for mother's sake.[92]

King Herod advises

As well as being a historian, a journalist, and a literary critic, Cruise O'Brien also tried his hand at creative writing, producing several politically inspired plays, namely *Murderous angels* (1968 [1970]), *King Herod explains* (1969),[93] and *King Herod advises* (1973). He wrote another play, *Salome and the wild man*, that was never performed on stage, although students at the University of Canterbury did a public reading of it in 1972. In *King Herod advises*, first performed at Dublin's Peacock Theatre in 1973, Cruise O'Brien set the action at various points during the early years of the Northern Irish 'Troubles'. The play touches on issues relating to Marxism, nationalism, political violence, and religion in a highly critical fashion. *The Irish Times* theatre critic, David Nowlan, characterized Cruise O'Brien's play as a 'political tract of very considerable substance, wittily and entertainingly written'. Nowlan tempered his praise immediately when he pointed out that it could under no circumstances be called a play but was instead a 'sterile exhibition of intellectualism'.[94] Likewise, *Irish Independent* drama critic Desmond Rushe found the whole thing unconvincing, even though he thought its contents were 'provocative and largely true'.[95] Despite its local concerns, Noeleen Dowling, the Dublin theatre critic with *The Cork Examiner*, stated that Cruise O'Brien's play was not just about politics in the North, 'but about politics everywhere'.[96]

As the drama unfolds, three patients come to see Dr H.E. Rodd: a nationalist politician from the Republic of Ireland, a unionist soldier, and a Catholic priest, all seeking the doctor's

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[92] Ibid., 295.
[93] Cruise O'Brien incorrectly stated that 'King Herod explains' was first performed in 1971, see Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Herod: reflections on political violence* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1978), 158.
[94] *Irish Times*, 3 Apr. 1973.
[95] *Irish Independent*, 3 Apr. 1973.
[96] *Cork Examiner*, 28 Dec. 1973.

advice about the political situation in the North. As Cruise O'Brien described it in an interview with Brian Inglis, the psychiatrist's purpose was to 'unblock aggressive impulses, [and] to legitimise aggression'.[97] When the first of these patients, the Minister for Underground Development, arrives in the psychiatrist's office, Herod is reading a newspaper dated September 1969. The Minister is a thinly veiled caricature of the Fianna Fáil politician Charles J. Haughey, a man Cruise O'Brien despised.[98] In September 1969, Haughey served in the government when the Dáil voted to create a fund to help ease the crisis in the North. The Dáil allocated £100,000 to this pot. As Minister for Finance, Haughey was responsible for the fund, designated for humanitarian assistance for northern nationalists.[99] Haughey and his government colleague, Neil Blaney, used this money to purchase weapons and used their influence to ensure that arms shipments destined for Northern Ireland were not interfered with at ports in the Republic. What they also did, however, was use their control over the finances to ostracise the IRA's Marxist leadership, urging Republicans in the North to establish a northern command if they wanted to receive the money and weapons. This offer exacerbated a geographical rift in the IRA, ultimately leading to the creation of the Provisional IRA.[100] These were the issues Dr H.E. Rodd's first patient had to deal with in Cruise O'Brien's 1973 play.

In October 1971, on the floor of the Dáil, Cruise O'Brien and Haughey clashed over the recitation of lines from Yeats's 'Easter 1916'. In a lengthy speech condemning the government for its anti-partition rhetoric, which he linked to the increasing violence in Northern Ireland, Cruise O'Brien warned the chamber that the island of Ireland was on the verge of 'civil war'. Regretting this development, Cruise O'Brien remarked that in years past, before the crisis in the North began, 'It seemed as if we lived, as Yeats once said, where motley was worn and we did not have to mean what we said.'[101] A furious Haughey interjected to demand that Cruise O'Brien 'Finish the quotation' – Cruise O'Brien demurred. Upon being reprimanded for his interruption, Haughey apologised, but before surrendering, he declared, 'I do not like to hear

[97] *The Listener*, 23 Aug. 1973.
[98] On Cruise O'Brien's hatred for Haughey, see Akenson, *Conor*, 339.
[99] *The Observer*, 9 Dec. 1979; for a comprehensive account, see Hanley and Millar, *Lost revolution*, 136-48.
[100] Hanley and Millar, *Lost revolution*, 139.
[101] *Dáil debates*, 21 Oct. 1971.

the words of Yeats prostituted'.[102] This moment stuck with Cruise O'Brien, who referred to it on multiple occasions over the ensuing years in newspaper articles, parliamentary speeches, and in *King Herod advises*.

In the drama, the Minister strides arrogantly into the doctor's office, places his hands on the back of a chair, and recites the final two lines of Yeats's poem 'The Rose Tree': '*There's nothing but our own red blood/ Can make a right Rose-tree!*'[103] This poem takes the form of a conversation between the revolutionary leaders Patrick Pearse and James Connolly. The rose tree, which Pearse feels is dying, symbolises Ireland. The desperate Pearse asks Connolly how they can save the tree, and the two lines the Minister delivers was Connolly's answer. For Yeats's Connolly, the only way to save Ireland, the rose tree, is with their blood sacrifice. Having the Minister speak Yeats's words, Cruise O'Brien connected his character, Haughey and his Fianna Fáil colleagues, with what Richard Kearney calls the 'mythic cult of sacrifice'.[104] Although, Cruise O'Brien's Minister does not come across as a sincere patriot as Yeats's revolutionaries do. When Herod enquires whether he means to spill his '*own* red blood', the Minister, not keen on this prospect, replies, 'Well, *someone's'*. Later in their interview, as Herod tries to solve the Minister's problem with getting the 'freedom fighters in the North' to fight 'for freedom in the North', the Minister declaims 'They shall be remembered forever.'[105] These words, of course, were borrowed from *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, suggesting that at this early point in the 'Troubles' Cruise O'Brien felt that links existed between the play and contemporary political violence.

An unhealthy intersection

In the late 1970s, it became standard among a particular section of the Irish academic community to position Cruise O'Brien as someone who repudiated the connection between art and politics. Cruise O'Brien was viewed as an exponent of 'art for art's sake', mainly because of a lecture he gave at the Ilkley Literary Festival in 1975. Originally entitled 'Literature and

[102] *Dáil debates*, 21 Oct. 1971.
[103] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'King Herod advises', *Herod*, 216.
[104] Richard Kearney, *Transitions: narratives in modern Irish culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 218.
[105] Cruise O'Brien, 'King Herod advises', 219.

politics', Cruise O'Brien published an expanded version of the lecture under the more beguiling title 'An unhealthy intersection' in the British intellectual Ian Hamilton's cultural periodical *The New Review*.[106] Frequently, a writer's aphorisms outlive the substance of their argued positions. Concerning 'An unhealthy intersection', this is very much the case. In the pages of *The Crane Bag*, a cultural periodical started in the mid-1970s, the philosopher Richard Kearney and the literary critic Seamus Deane positioned Cruise O'Brien as an opponent of politically committed literature. Recently, David Dwan has endorsed a similar view, arguing that this lecture represented a break with his previous position about the link between politics and art for Cruise O'Brien.[107] However, Cruise O'Brien did not make such a drastic modification to his previous statements on the subject as these critics would have us believe. Indeed, much of what he said in 'An unhealthy intersection' had already appeared in print elsewhere years before.[108]

In the first issue of *The Crane Bag*, Kearney explored the relationship between art and politics. He asserted that Cruise O'Brien belonged to a collection of critics who believed that art had no place in politics. He wrote that this section of opinion felt that 'art must maintain a neutral and unadulterated aloofness from the strategies of political power'. In support of his positioning of Cruise O'Brien, Kearney highlighted Cruise O'Brien's statement that 'The area where literature and politics overlap has to be regarded with much suspicion'.[109] Likewise, Seamus Deane, while interviewing Seamus Heaney, asked the poet for his thoughts on 'Conor Cruise O'Brien's view that the link between art and politics constitutes an unhealthy intersection'.[110] Heaney concurred with Cruise O'Brien's position, as Deane represented it, which, however, was not Cruise O'Brien's position at all. From a different political bent, Edna Longley claimed that Cruise O'Brien 'call[ed] "the area where literature and politics overlap" an "unhealthy intersection"; because, "suffused with romanticism", it breeds bad politics –

[106] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'An unhealthy intersection', *New Review*, 2 (1975), 3-8; the lecture was published in two parts in *The Irish Times*, see Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Politics and the poet', *Irish Times*, 21 Aug. 1975 and idem, 'Eradicating the tragic hero mode', *Irish Times*, 22 Aug. 1975.
[107] Dwan, 'Romantic nationalism', 743.
[108] See Cruise O'Brien, 'Actors, roles, and stages', 71-80; see also Cruise O'Brien, 'Politics of poetry', 46-53.
[109] Richard Kearney, 'Beyond art and politics', *The Crane Bag*, 1 (Spring 1977), 9.
[110] Deane, 'Unhappy and at home', 62; see also Declan Kiberd, 'Culture and barbarism: Heaney's poetry and its recent critics', *Poetry Ireland*, 27 (1989), 29.

Fascism and Nationalism'.[111] However, these critics have misrepresented the general thrust of Cruise O'Brien's argument, making it appear as if he endorsed a blanket ban on politically committed literature.

In 'An unhealthy intersection', Cruise O'Brien's theme was the association between literature and politics. The lecture was wide-ranging, taking in the Roman empire, the Italian Renaissance, modern Italian thinkers, American conservatism, post-war French politics, Nazism, and Irish nationalism, among other things. As mentioned, Dwan contends that this lecture signalled a significant shift in position for Cruise O'Brien, from one where he held to Burke's maxim that '*Art is man's nature*' to the view that the coincidence of politics with imagination was 'dangerous'.[112] On closer inspection, Cruise O'Brien does not make such a stark transition. He continued to see literature and politics as inextricably linked. Moreover, he explicitly stated that he did not advocate any effort to disentangle the two. As Cruise O'Brien saw things,

> man's political life is more intimately an expression of the general quality of his imaginative life than we are in the habit of noticing: and those who are therefore concerned with the area in which his political concepts are shaped – are *shaped* – they do not shape themselves, but are shaped in his imagination, not only by mortal destiny and the metaphysical questions to which it gives rise, but also by particular contexts of nation, doctrine, class and race. By these forces, all of them together, the imagination and the politics of a man are both shaped and made to interact, and the study of one cannot be fully separated from the study of the other.[113]

When Cruise O'Brien spoke about an "unhealthy intersection", he referred to a specific connection *in Ireland* of 'a certain form of literature and a certain form of politics'. He called these forms 'Quixotic', by which he meant romantic or tragic. For Cruise O'Brien, the motivating force in this instance was generally a perception of history, or 'History', as 'an inspirational myth'. He judged that this kind of history drew people in with its promise of 'immortality'. In

[111] Edna Longley, 'Politics and poetry in Northern Ireland', *The Crane Bag*, 9 (1985), 26.
[112] Dwan, 'Romantic nationalism', 743.
[113] Cruise O'Brien, 'Politics and the poet', *Irish Times*, 21 Aug. 1975.

Ireland, the idea of history which fed this desire was the understanding that Irish history was a 'series of blood sacrifices enacted in every generation'. Cruise O'Brien fingered W.B. Yeats as 'the great propagandist of this notion', specifically through his play *Cathleen ní Houlihan*. He pointed out that that play ended with Cathleen's affirmation that those who sacrifice themselves for her 'shall be remembered forever'. At this point, Cruise O'Brien returned to Yeats's question, declaring that it was possible to answer this query with a relatively high degree of accuracy because of the evidence left behind by those who fought during Easter Week. Here, Cruise O'Brien reused the material from his 1970 Smithsonian lecture, ending with the assertion that the 'probable answer' to Yeats's question was 'yes it did'. Yeats, *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, and the 1916 Rising, Cruise O'Brien thought, represented 'a real and explosive relation that can exist between the workings of the imagination in literature and in politics'.[114]

Four years later, in November 1979, Cruise O'Brien elaborated further on this subject. He delivered a lecture to the Cheltenham Festival of Literature on the intersection of religion, politics, and literature, which he then published in *The Observer* the following month. In the talk, he argued that since the eighteenth century, western society developed in such a way as to decouple religion and politics and, as he put it, to liberate 'the written word from the tutelage of either'. However, he reckoned that this change left a vacuum in the western political imagination that religion once filled. Cruise O'Brien believed that people abhorred this vacuum and, consequently, sought to fill it with alternative forms of spirituality. As he saw it, nationalism was one form of secular spirituality that tried to plug the gap left by religion in the political imagination. Cruise O'Brien had a warning for those who desired to see the sacred element return to politics, arguing that it was not certain that this would be a 'benign and beneficent' development. He pointed out that throughout history religions had been associated with violence and bloodshed. Indeed, he noted that at 'times of the greatest intensity of faith' even Christianity demanded 'human sacrifices'. With this warning in mind, Cruise O'Brien cautioned readers that they might not like the 'rough beast [that] shambles in' to fill the void. He put forward Ireland as an illustration of what happens when literature and politics intersect at a time of 'the greatest intensity of faith'. For Cruise O'Brien, the link between the Irish

[114] Ibid.

literary revival, specifically *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, and the 'rise of political violence in Ireland' epitomized the bloody nexus of religion, literature, and politics. As he portrayed it, the old woman Cathleen 'goes round inspiring young men to fight and die for her, promising them immortality' if they did what she asked. As he had done many times before, Cruise O'Brien linked the play to later political violence, particularly the 1916 Rising, through constitutional nationalist Stephen Gwynn's belief that this sort of play should not be produced unless one 'were prepared to send out men to kill and be killed' and Constance Markievicz's invocation in her prison letters of Cathleen's line "They shall be remembered for ever".[115] Then, he recounted Yeats's question, and added the comment:

> In fact, 1916 was the enactment of the blood sacrifice for which 'Cathleen ni Houlihan' called. And that blood-sacrifice, in its turn, called, and still calls, for more and more blood. Both the play and the Rising were symbolic actions, the second involving the sacrifice of living victims. As Yeats wrote in another connection: "The script calls for freshly severed human heads."[116]

Until this point in time, Cruise O'Brien had refrained from explicitly indicting Yeats's play for influencing IRA paramilitaries in the conflict in Northern Ireland. Here, however, he did not shy away from suggesting that the play's clarion call to Irishmen to fight for Ireland's freedom was still a factor in contemporary political conflict.

In 1985, Cruise O'Brien seemed to recant this view. In a review of Mary Lou Konfeldt's study of Lady Gregory's role in the Irish literary renaissance, Cruise O'Brien criticized the writer for how she handled Gregory and Yeats's complicity in creating the conditions for political violence to thrive. In her book, Kohfeldt wrote of *Cathleen ní Houlihan*,

[115] Here Cruise O'Brien claimed that Gwynn's statement occurred in a diary entry, but the comment comes from his 1936 work *Irish literature and drama.*
[116] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'God knows what might fly into the spiritual vacuum', *The Observer*, 23 Dec. 1979.

> In *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Augusta [Gregory] and Willie [Yeats] were Judas goats,[117] making death for the cause appear attractive while they themselves had the wit to slip out a side door before the police arrived.

Cruise O'Brien considered this judgment to be utterly unfair to the two playwrights. As he put it, 'That is giving as nasty as possible an answer to the question which tormented Yeats on his death-bed: "Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?"' In contrast to his 1979 statement, Cruise O'Brien attempted to minimize the effect that *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, as a standalone piece of literature, had in encouraging the political violence of the 1910s. Although he accepted that 'the play may well have had that effect (14 years after it was first performed)', he sought to mitigate the playwrights' moral responsibility. O'Brien argued that neither Yeats nor Lady Gregory predicted that the play would encourage political violence.[118] At the time *Cathleen ní Houlihan* first played to a live audience, the dominant political expectation was that Ireland would gain Home Rule through peaceful democratic processes. Drawing on parallels between what transpired in Ireland around the turn of the century and episodes of decolonisation from the 1950s onwards, Cruise O'Brien maintained that rather than being an attempt to incite revolution, *Cathleen ní Houlihan* was part of a 'rhetorical competition' concerned with establishing who should be credited with 'pushing out' an imperial presence that was already believed to be in the process of leaving. For Cruise O'Brien, this 'rhetorical competition' was widespread among Irish nationalists, be they republicans or home rulers. He reckoned that nationalists were jostling to be able to 'take the credit' for precipitating the demise of British power in Ireland. For some, it was also about positioning themselves as the new political elite, but in Cruise O'Brien's opinion this was not the case with Yeats, Gregory, and other '"Ascendancy" writers'. Cruise O'Brien argued that for these writers it was more about securing an audience and an influence among the youthful nationalist intelligentsia. However,

[117] A Judas Goat is a goat trained to lead other animals to slaughter, see 'Judas, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* [https://www-oed-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/Entry/101874?redirectedFrom=judas+goat#eid40216559, accessed 21 Oct. 2022]].

[118] Yeats, however, did have an inclination that the play might be taken as advocating a certain political viewpoint, and on several occasions felt the need to deny that this was the case, see David A. Ross, *Critical companion to William Butler Yeats: a literary reference to his life and work* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 316.

Cruise O'Brien did not think that the two playwrights' motives were as cynical as this might suggest. He conceded that Lady Gregory and Yeats were just as caught up in the period's political excitement as their audience. Nevertheless, he contended that radical politics was so exciting and enjoyable in part because 'no real violence was expected'.[119]

In 1989, in an article published to mark a half-century since Yeats's death, Cruise O'Brien re-visited the poet's spasmodic nationalist politics, particularly as it manifested itself in *Cathleen ní Houlihan*. Focusing his attention on this play, Cruise O'Brien dwelt on Yeats's capacity to inspire 'Irish readers, both in his own day and later' to commit violent acts and Yeats's sense of moral responsibility for them. In answer to Yeats's question about whether the play was a significant factor in motivating the rebels of Easter 1916, Cruise O'Brien gave an affirmative reply. He proclaimed: 'I believe, not only that it clearly did, but that it is still sending them out.'[120] Towards the end of the piece, Cruise O'Brien expressed the same sentiment in more dramatic language, stating that 'Through that play, the poet doomed himself to a share in the Valhalla of his blood-thirsty Irish Valkyrie.'[121]

The evidence Cruise O'Brien cited for the play's having had an impact on the 1916 rebels came from Constance Markievicz's references to it in her prison letters. His evidence for its continuing influence on contemporary republicanism was less straightforward. Cruise O'Brien explained to his readers, a predominantly English set given that the article appeared in *The Times*, that Irish republicans were not merely 'mindless thugs' who 'would not know about a poet like Yeats'. By contrast, he argued that the republican movement had its 'fair share of intellectuals' who were *au fait* with Yeats's works. Here, Cruise O'Brien pointed to the IRA intellectual Daithí O'Conaill's invocation of Yeats's *Second coming* when questioned about the lack of success of IRA activity in Britain. According to Cruise O'Brien, O'Conaill illustrated his argument that communication issues were at the root of the group's failures with the Yeatsian line: *The falcon cannot hear the falconer*. Cruise O'Brien clarified that in this case O'Conaill was the falconer and 'the falcon represented the people O'Conaill sent out to blow other people

[119] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Willie and Augusta', *The Observer*, 19 May 1985.
[120] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'An exalted nationalism', *The Times*, 28 Jan. 1989.
[121] Ibid.

up'.[122] As far as Cruise O'Brien was concerned, what O'Conaill's reference demonstrated was that 'this IRA leader knew his Yeats'.[123] The second explanation Cruise O'Brien proffered involved his political nemesis, Charles Haughey. Cruise O'Brien employed Haughey's taste for Yeats's poetry to suggest that the poet's words continued to effect contemporary republican politicians, as he had done in his own play *King Herod advises*. For Diarmuid Whelan, this essay was the apogee of Cruise O'Brien's transition from believing that Yeats had no part to play in hastening political violence to judging the poet guilty not only of inciting the 1916 Rising but also for continuing to inspire militant nationalists in Northern Ireland. However, this was not the first time Cruise O'Brien had been so definitive in his judgment, nor was it his final word on the poet's moral responsibility for political violence in Ireland.

Ancestral voices

In January 1993, in a review of a new collection of letters between Maud Gonne and W.B. Yeats, Cruise O'Brien returned to asserting that it was merely probable that Yeats's 'manically nationalist' play inspired the leaders of the 1916 Rising.[124] After he delivered his answer to the question, Cruise O'Brien moved on to remark on the irony that a repeat performance of the play had to be cancelled on account of the Easter Rising, which he branded as 'the insurrection that the play had helped to foment'.[125] Similarly, in a chapter entitled 'Things fall apart' in *On the eve of the millennium* (1994), Cruise O'Brien's answer was appreciably less strident than in 1989. First presented as a keynote address to the International Society of Performing Arts Administrators at Sydney's iconic Opera House, Cruise O'Brien compared Yeats to the German composer Richard Wagner. He contended Wagner occupied a role in relation to Hitler's 1923 Beer Hall Putsch like that Yeats played in connection to the Easter Rising in Ireland. Specifically, Cruise O'Brien identified the politicization of Wagner's image of the *Dolchstoss* ('dagger thrust') as motivating Hitler's uprising. He wrote:

[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The talk of Dublin', *The Atlantic*, Jan. 1993.
[125] Ibid.

> His intensely nationalist play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, performed in 1902 with Maud Gonne in the title role, had been an inspiration for the generation of the rebels of 1916. This was a thought that troubled Yeats on his deathbed when he wrote:
>
> Did that play of mine send out
> Certain men the English shot?
> It probably did.[126]

If, as Regan has written, Cruise O'Brien's answer became 'an increasingly unequivocal "Yes!"', how are we to account for the fact that the answers given in these later works were significantly less emphatic than the answer given in his 1989 anniversary essay? The most plausible answer would seem to be that Cruise O'Brien's ideas about the link between aesthetics and politics did not undergo the dramatic 'conversion' Whelan claimed it did. Instead, there was an underlying consistency between his many utterances on this subject.

In the same year as Cruise O'Brien gave that lecture in Sydney, he published his most sustained treatment of the Yeats question in his extended essay, *Ancestral voices*, which he worked on with his daughter Kate, the literary editor at Poolbeg Press. It was launched at Buswell's Hotel in Dublin in late October 1994.[127] Subtitled 'Religion and nationalism in Ireland', Cruise O'Brien's thesis was that these two vectors combined to create what he termed 'sacral nationalism'. He asserted that this feeling was the driving force of political violence in Ireland. In Cruise O'Brien's view, by the 1990s, Catholicism and nationalism, which had experienced two centuries of varying states of closeness, were becoming increasingly unified.[128]

The book's critical reception was mixed, although even this description might be a little bit generous. On one side, the conservative journalist Paul Goodman thought *Ancestral voices* was 'deeply purposeful, [and] powerfully argued'.[129] Bruce Arnold, a former student of Cruise O'Brien's beloved cousin, Owen Sheehy Skeffington, was similarly upbeat, stating that Cruise

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[126] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Things fall apart', *On the eve of the millennium: the future of democracy through an age of unreason* (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1994]), 80-81.
[127] *Irish Independent*, 29 Oct. 1994.
[128] Cruise O'Brien, *Ancestral voices*, 15.
[129] *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 Nov. 1994.

O'Brien's exposition of his thesis was 'brilliant'.[130] An anonymous reviewer in the regional *Longford Leader*, while having a low opinion of Cruise O'Brien, declared that he was 'correct in what he writes about nationalism and religion' and asserted that 'the intelligent and unprejudiced reader will agree with its contents'.[131]

On the other side, an impressive body of critics lined up to attack, in Declan Kiberd's words, 'Ireland's most famous intellectual['s]' effort at 'futurology'.[132] In *The Sunday Press*, John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and one of the prime targets of Cruise O'Brien's censure, sneered that the book was a 'sustained essay in paranoia'. The publisher, Poolbeg Press, used this quotation in the book's peritextual apparatus when they reprinted the volume, proving that all publicity is good publicity when it comes to selling books. In a scathing review, the cultural critic Barra Ó Seaghdha contended that Cruise O'Brien's argument was so weak that he fell back on 'mumbo-jumbo about the Irish psyche' to hold it together.[133] More recently, Ó Seaghdha characterized it as a 'rambling, splenetic, unhistorical and ill-written work'.[134] The Cambridge historian and leading anti-revisionist Brendan Bradshaw eviscerated Cruise O'Brien's argument in *Review of Politics.* Bradshaw, a Marist priest in addition to being a Cambridge don, considered Cruise O'Brien's idea that a holy alliance between Catholicism and militant nationalism was the motive force of Irish history to be little more than a 'conspiracy theory'.[135]

Despite the predominantly hostile initial reception, Cruise O'Brien's thesis about the explanatory power of the link between religion and politics, specifically nationalism, for understanding Irish history has had a positive reception in scholarly circles. Distinguished historians, such as Richard English and Charles Townshend, have endorsed Cruise O'Brien's perspective. In their festschrift for Cruise O'Brien, English and his collaborator Joseph Morrison Skelly present Cruise O'Brien's arguments on this subject as one of his most compelling intellectual achievements. They contend that *Ancestral voices* provided 'invaluable insights' into

[130] *Irish Independent*, 12 Nov. 1994.
[131] *Longford Leader*, 23 Dec. 1994.
[132] *Irish Press*, 4 Nov. 1994.
[133] *Cork Examiner*, 12 Nov. 1994.
[134] Barra Ó Seaghdha, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien', *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 Apr. 2009.
[135] Bradshaw, 'Republican rebellion and Catholic fury', 215.

the blood-stained nexus of nationalism and religion.[136] However, Richard Bourke has comprehensively dismantled this scholarly consensus, highlighting several pitfalls into which Cruise O'Brien and his disciples fell. Most pointedly, he demonstrates that the evidence does not support Cruise O'Brien's assertion that Irish nationalism was a 'political religion'.[137]

Irrespective of its problems, *Ancestral voices* proves instructive for illuminating Cruise O'Brien's thinking about Yeats's question. However, historians and critics have ignored its relevance to this topic. Indeed, Diarmuid Whelan chose not to examine Cruise O'Brien's later work because he believed that by the 1990s Cruise O'Brien had become 'irrelevant'.[138] Beginning with the 1798 rebellion and journeying at a fast pace through the nineteenth century before arriving at the turbulent period around the turn of the twentieth century, Cruise O'Brien gave a prominent place in his story to the effect of *Cathleen ní Houlihan* on the revolutionary leader P.H. Pearse and the nationalist movement more broadly. He rehearsed some of his earlier arguments and supplied fresh evidence – fresh in the sense that it had not appeared in any of *his* essays as opposed to being hitherto undiscovered. Quoting Gwynn, O'Hegarty, and Countess Markievicz, as he had been doing for decades by this point, Cruise O'Brien concluded that in answer to Yeats's question as to whether his play inspired the 1916 Rising:

> On the evidence of the witnesses I have cited, (and others we shall consider) we can safely assume that it did. But then Yeats had been addressing himself to people whom he knew already to be wanting to hear a sacral summons brought out of the national past. He brought them the message they yearned for.[139]

As usual, O'Brien emphasised that Yeats himself turned away from nationalist politics while stating that, nevertheless, the poet's work continued to resonate with young nationalists. In the period between its first production and the 1916 Rising, Cruise O'Brien suggested that Yeats could 'be compared to Frankenstein, watching his monster get out of control'.[140]

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[136] English and Skelly, 'Introduction', 18.
[137] Bourke, 'Political and religious ideas during the Irish Revolution', 5.
[138] Whelan, *Violent notions*, xvii.
[139] Cruise O'Brien, *Ancestral voices*, 69.
[140] Ibid., 77.

The new evidence Cruise O'Brien documented related to *Cathleen ní Houlihan*'s effect on Pearse. First, Cruise O'Brien looked to Pearse's oration at Wolfe Tone's grave at Bodenstown Churchyard in June 1913 to demonstrate a link between Yeats's play and the leader of the 1916 Rising. Towards the end of that speech, Pearse, noting that it was common to pray at the graveside of the dead, encouraged his hearers not to pray for Wolfe Tone. Pearse stated, 'we do not pray for Tone - men who die that their people may be free "have no need of prayer."'[141] Cruise O'Brien pointed out that the final words of this statement were borrowed from the Old Woman in *Cathleen ní Houlihan*. Though, in a footnote Cruise O'Brien highlighted that Pearse had, in fact, misquoted the play. Despite the misquotation, Cruise O'Brien felt certain that Pearse's audience would have been aware of the reference.[142] Cruise O'Brien sourced another piece of evidence linking Yeats's play to Pearse's political imagination in the revolutionary leader's pamphlet, *The spiritual nation*. In this tract, published in February 1916, a month before the Rising occurred, Pearse spoke about how when he was a child, he believed in the physical existence of a woman named Erin. Further elaborating, he claimed that 'had Mr. Yeats's "Kathleen ni Houlihan" been then written and had I seen it, I should have taken it not as an allegory, but as a representation of a thing that might happen any day in any house'.[143] Cruise O'Brien employed Pearse's allusion to Yeats's *Cathleen ní Houlihan* to argue that the Old Woman of the play had made her way into the Proclamation of Independence. He wrote:

> The personified "Ireland" of the Proclamation, the mother who summons her children to come out and be killed, is identical with the Old Woman of Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.[144]

Thus, Cruise O'Brien imagined that through the proclamation, 'Cathleen ni Houlihan was summoning the elect among her children'. In a footnote, he added the caveat that the Cathleen

[141] P.H. Pearse, *Collected works of Padraic H. Pearse: political writings and speeches* (Dublin: Maunsel & Roberts, 1922), 62.
[142] Cruise O'Brien, *Ancestral voices*, 102.
[143] Pearse, *Collected works*, 300-301.
[144] Cruise O'Brien, *Ancestral voices*, 112.

in question was Yeats's Cathleen. However, he also stressed that this Cathleen ní Houlihan had been decoupled from the poet. As he put it,

> In Irish Republican terms, Yeats had become a drop-out, or sell-out, long before 1916 (since 1903 in fact, the year after that play). But the creature he [Yeats] no longer cared for had a life of her own, like Frankenstein's artifact.[145]

In his 1997 review of the first volume of R.F. Foster's landmark biography of the poet, Cruise O'Brien answered Yeats's deathbed question with the terse statement: 'It did.' He maintained that republican leaders, such as Pearse, had left behind sufficient evidence to make such a definitive statement. As Cruise O'Brien put it, 'The testimony is abundant about the enthusiasm which Patrick Pearse and other 1916 leaders felt for the "die-for-Ireland" message of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.' On this occasion, Cruise O'Brien did not document the evidence.[146]

Conclusion

At no stage in his career did Cruise O'Brien deny that Yeats's play, *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, had inspired people to commit violence in pursuit of a political cause. The responses he gave to the question existed within a narrow range, oscillating between it "probably" did and "clearly" did, and back again. It can no longer be held that the 'Troubles' provoked Cruise O'Brien into a sweeping modification of his views on the link between Yeats's play and revolutionary violence. As stated above, Whelan asserted that Cruise O'Brien's answers to the Yeats question exhibited his aptitude for 'interpret[ing] away' the 'great brute facts' of history through the manipulation of evidence. These phrases, which Whelan used as a stick to beat Cruise O'Brien, came from a reply to an interview question suggesting that history was 'largely a matter of interpretation'. Cruise O'Brien declared that

> Yes, but you wouldn't find any historians who would deny that a world war happened between 1914 and 1918. From then on they could start interpreting, but again it is a fact that one side lost and another won, and the consequences of

[145] Ibid., 114.
[146] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The politics of a poet', *Sunday Telegraph*, 9 Mar. 1997.

> that are there. The historian interprets, but there are great brute facts which he can't interpret away.[147]

By trying to connect Cruise O'Brien's reactions to the Yeats question with this statement about the 'great brute facts' of history, Whelan made a category error. The matter of Yeats's influence on republican revolutionaries and paramilitaries does not come under the banner of 'great brute facts' insofar as Cruise O'Brien understood the phrase. The 'great brute facts' under consideration were the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Northern Irish 'Troubles'. At no point did Cruise O'Brien deny the reality of the Rising nor did he refuse to accept that violence was a significant feature of Northern Irish politics. Yeats's influence on these events was open to interpretation and, based on what he took to be convincing evidence, Cruise O'Brien determined that Yeats had helped to foment an atmosphere in which political violence could occur. He stuck to this line consistently from 1959 until 1997 when he last posed Yeats's famous question. In the next chapter, this thesis digs deeper into Cruise O'Brien's engagement with political violence in Ireland, arguing that through his metaphorical use of language he mystified more than clarified the forces at work.

[147] Naim Attallah, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien' [https://quartetbooks.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/conor-cruise-obrien/, accessed 11 Feb. 2021].

5

Disease imagery and nationalism

When he had applied the fine surgical blade of his intellect to the body of Irish politics, he had found that the cancer of nationalism had contaminated all the cells.[1]

He has two models or scenarios for the future, which are worth looking at in detail, since part of Model "B" is already being acted out. One is "benign" the other "malignant" and it is highly possible that if the powers that be do no more than he suggests they should the cancer will grow.[2]

In November 2009, a group of scholars held a symposium at the Royal Irish Academy on the theme 'Public intellectuals at a time of crisis'. Introducing the essay collection arising from that day, sociologist Mary Corcoran put forward some thoughts as to the benefits which public intellectuals could bring to society. Public intellectuals, she asserted, 'communicate ideas and analyses that can illuminate and help people to deepen their understanding of the world around them', 'help us to understand the connections between our individual biographical narratives and the historical, social and economic forces that help to shape them', and, through 'clear-sighted insights offered without fear or favour can guide us as we attempt to come to terms with the present'.[3] Despite Corcoran's rosy picture, in practice, public intellectuals are

[1] Workers Research Unit, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien and the media: the decline of a liberal', *Belfast Bulletin* 9 (Spring 1981), 4.
[2] Barry White, 'This man sees Ireland divided – whatever occurs', *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 Oct. 1972.
[3] Corcoran, ed., *Reflections on crisis*, 2-3; on public intellectuals, see Helen Small, ed., *The public intellectual* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

just as likely to mystify the issues they address as they are to clarify them. This is well illustrated by Conor Cruise O'Brien's writing on Northern Ireland. Although Cruise O'Brien had a keen sense of civic responsibility and was an absorbing and often brilliant writer, his imaginative use of language led him to misdescribe political ideologies, religion, and political violence. One of the idioms he routinely employed was a medicalized vocabulary dependent on the use of illness and disease metaphors to speak and write about nationalism.

Later theorists of nationalism, like Ernest Gellner, have explicitly disputed this depiction of nationalism as an infectious disease spread by intellectuals. Gellner, who held that nationalism was a product of the evolution of modern industrial society, dismissed claims that nationalism was 'a virus' dreamed up by European intellectuals 'which then infects the masses' after said intellectuals 'injected it into the bloodstream of otherwise viable political communities'.[4] Cruise O'Brien's disease imagery was overtly polemical. Describing Irish nationalism as a disease was a way of vilifying those whose actions were guided by that ideology. His persistent and intentional use of disease imagery diminished the rational character of nationalism, reducing it to a problem requiring a cure rather than a set of political ideas and arguments that demanded substantive engagement. As we shall see, this pathologizing of a political ideology made it more difficult to understand its real causes and devise policies that might deal with it productively.

This lengthy chapter is divided into six sections, each scrutinizing Cruise O'Brien's persistent use of 'disease imagery' from a different vantage point. First, it looks at the roots of his use of disease imagery, exploring how Cruise O'Brien brought these metaphors into his early writing on Irish nationalism. Second, it investigates how Cruise O'Brien saw his role in Irish politics, inspecting the way in which he utilized oncological terminology in his intellectual interventions and arguing that he saw it as his duty to heal Irish society. Following on from this, the third section picks up the examination started in the Chapter 4 of his hitherto understudied dramas, specifically *King Herod advises*, a play which places an explicitly medical framing on the Northern Irish 'Troubles'. When Cruise O'Brien became a minister in the Irish government, he

[4] Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 70; idem, *Nations and nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 56.

applied this medical framing to his ministerial brief, approaching it as if he was a doctor to the body politic, tasked with ensuring no harm came to the Irish population. In the fourth section, the chapter throws light upon Cruise O'Brien's handling of his power as editor-in-chief of *The Observer*, particularly regarding his efforts to control the newspaper's coverage of the Troubles. The fifth section interrogates Cruise O'Brien's investigations into the 'pathological element' of Irish society, discussing his thinking about the extent of popular support for the IRA. The final section analyses Cruise O'Brien's ideas about contemporary strategies to end the conflict in Northern Ireland.

'The revolutionary infection'

Niall Meehan claims that Cruise O'Brien only came to think of republicanism as an infection after his political defeat in 1977.[5] However, throughout his career, Cruise O'Brien depicted nationalism, revolution, and even religion as infections, and disease imagery was central to how he wrote about them. Indeed, he spoke about many different areas of politics in this idiom. For instance, in the nineties, during the public debates on the Maastricht Treaty, he diagnosed the Irish government with 'Maastrichtitis and Deutschmark Infatuation', a disease that its victims contracted 'by inhaling the rhetoric associated with the Treaty on the European Union.[6] The use of medical terminology in political rhetoric was nothing new. What the pre-eminent 'New York intellectual' Susan Sontag called 'disease imagery' has long been a staple of political discourse, reaching as far back as Plato and beyond.[7] Thinkers like the Florentine writer Niccolò Machiavelli or the English theorist Thomas Hobbes, both of whom were key subjects in Cruise O'Brien's teaching at New York University, utilized this rhetorical device.[8] Moreover, Irish

[5] Niall Meehan, 'Arrested development', *History Ireland* (2009), 10-12.
[6] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'A success story that cost us billions', *Irish Independent*, 1 Feb. 1993.
[7] Susan Sontag, *Illness as metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 76; see also G.E.R. Lloyd, *In the grip of disease: studies in the Greek imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[8] Art and politics: reading list, NYUA, Cruise O'Brien papers, NYUA, Papers of the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, RG21.1 5/7; for more on Hobbes's use of this metaphor, see Andreas Musolff, 'Health and illness of the *Leviathan*: Hobbes's use of the commonplace metaphor of the body politic', in Kathryn Banks and P.G. Bossier, eds, *Commonplace culture in western Europe in the early modern period*, vol. 2: *consolidation of God-given power* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 175-91; on Burke's use of this language, see David Bromwich, *The intellectual life of Edmund Burke: from the Sublime and Beautiful to American independence* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 152; see also Cruise O'Brien, *Great Melody*.

intellectuals close to his heart were not 'immune' to the temptation to imagine political problems in a medicalized manner. Eighteenth-century Irish politician Edmund Burke leaned on disease metaphors in his *Thoughts on the cause of the present discontents* (1770), *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), and elsewhere. In 1797, the year preceding the United Irishman rebellion, Burke lamented that the revolutionary infection, which Irish Protestants had supposedly carried from France, had spread to his native Ireland. The Catholics of Ireland, Burke claimed, had managed to avoid 'being generally infected with the systems of this time', but he believed that contact with 'Jacobin Protestants' caused them to become 'more or less infected with their doctrines'.[9] The Victorian public moralist W.E.H. Lecky spoke in the parlance of disease and infection when he wrote on the state of public opinion in Ireland. Lecky reckoned that to the student of politics, Irish history was 'an invaluable study of morbid anatomy', meaning the anatomy of diseased organs.[10] Cruise O'Brien's father, Francis Cruise O'Brien, published an edition of the 'Clerical influences' section of Lecky's work with an introduction co-written with W.E.G. Lloyd touching on the role of disease imagery in Lecky's text (a copy of which Cruise O'Brien kept in his papers).[11]

Dating at least as far back as his 1949 essay on the French writer Georges Bernanos, Cruise O'Brien infused his writing with language and concepts taken from medical science. In that essay, later reprinted in his highly acclaimed first book, *Maria Cross*, he took aim at Bernanos's rendering of Faust. According to Cruise O'Brien, Bernanos had a dismal view of the modern world, seeing it as 'an organism in visible rapid decay' driven on by the 'existence and power of the Devil'.[12] The antiheroes in Bernanos's worldview are, as Cruise O'Brien noted, always 'distinguished literary men', whose 'intellect, turning on itself, devours itself'. These intellectuals, he argued, are the 'diabolical figures' whom Bernanos charges with making the

[9] Edmund Burke, 'A letter on the affairs of Ireland, 1797', in *The works of the right honourable Edmund Burke*, vol. 6 (London: John C. Nimmo, 1887), 419.
[10] W.E.H. Lecky, *Historical and political essays* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1910), 62.
[11] Francis Cruise O'Brien and W.E.G. Lloyd, 'Introduction', in Francis Cruise O'Brien and W.E.G. Lloyd, ed., *Clerical influences: an essay on Irish sectarianism and English government by W.E.H. Lecky* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., 1911), 8; see UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/870; despite keeping a copy in his collection, Cruise O'Brien, in his memoir, mistakenly stated that his father produced an edition of Lecky's *History of the rise and influence of the spirit of rationalism in Europe*, see Cruise O'Brien, *Memoir*, 7; David Dwan points out that Cruise O'Brien mistakenly referred to this book as the 'rise of nationalism', see Dwan, 'Romantic nationalism', 744.
[12] Donat O'Donnell, 'The Faust of Georges Bernanos', *The Kenyon Review*, 11 (Summer, 1949), 407, 409.

world 'sick'.[13] For Cruise O'Brien, Bernanos's central characters represented a 'Catholic Faust', 'Faust of the Collapse', just as Goethe depicted the 'Faust of the Enlightenment'. In Bernanos's writing, he wrote:

> The soaring pride of intellect, the spirit of scientific inquiry, the abstract Socratic love of truth for its own sake, are here reduced to a sinister and obscene curiosity. This itch for knowing, the essential Faustian characteristic, is a deadly infection carried primarily by a small group of the *élite* but spreading rapidly under certain conditions and finally causing a general paralysis of the whole community.[14]

Cruise O'Brien suggested that Bernanos's villains, like M. Ouine and Academician St. Marin, were pen portraits of contemporary French intellectuals, such as Anatole France and André Gide. Bernanos, he pointed out, did not obfuscate his disdain for these 'Faustian avatars', whom he deemed 'the carriers' of the 'deadly infection' destroying the world, causing Christianity to become 'cancerous'.[15] Somewhat ironically given the direction his own career was to take, Cruise O'Brien took issue with Bernanos's predisposition towards 'prophes[ying] disaster' and 'teach[ing] despair to a despairing people'. It seemed to him that in certain lights the Frenchman appeared analogous to 'a surgeon' 'who wantonly tears the wretched bandage from the spiritual wound and can administer no help'.[16] Turning the tables on the French writer, he surmised that Bernanos, at his best, was a poet in the mould of William Blake, 'who tries to use words to communicate a vision, or rather to infect others with the possibility of seeing a vision'.[17] Ultimately, Cruise O'Brien stated, Bernanos saw in rationality and intellect the nucleus of communism and fascism, both of which derived, he claimed, from 'the deficiency disease of the democracies … the unemployment of the heart', meaning emotion. Despite employing disease imagery in his essay on Bernanos, Cruise O'Brien did not concur with the

[13] O'Donnell, 'Bernanos', 409-10.
[14] Ibid., 413.
[15] Ibid., 413-14.
[16] Ibid., 418.
[17] Ibid., 422.

Frenchman as to what exactly constituted societal disease. As we shall see, rather than seeing the 'unemployment of the heart' as the great disease, the Irishman viewed its overemployment through nationalist fervour as the greatest risk to the health of a society.

In October 1965, Dieter Pevsner commissioned Cruise O'Brien to produce an edition of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as part of the Pelican Political Classics series.[18] Consequently, he immersed himself in Burke's writings, journeying to Sheffield to undertake original research in Burke's papers and to meet T.W. Copeland, the editor of Burke's correspondence.[19] Reading Burke alongside the German thinker Karl Marx, Cruise O'Brien argued that both thinkers had striven to come to terms with the French Revolution's underlying principles, albeit for opposite reasons and in completely different contexts. Whereas Burke wrote about the Revolution while it was still ongoing, Marx was looking back at the upheaval from the vantage point of the newly-industrialized nineteenth century. While Marx sought to comprehend the dynamics of the French Revolution to further a very different form of revolution, Burke did so, Cruise O'Brien contended, to prevent revolutionary principles 'from spreading and to destroy the focus of infection'.[20] As the English Liberal statesman and man of letters John Morley explained, Burke feared that the 'aims, principles, methods which he so misdoubted or abhorred in France were likely to infect the people of Great Britain' and Ireland.[21] As part of the series, Penguin encouraged contributors to relate their subject's intellectual histories to contemporary politics.[22] Cruise O'Brien criticized twentieth-century American conservatives' co-opting of Burke for ideological purposes, tracing this tendency back to British intellectual A.V. Dicey's 1918 essay 'Burke on Bolshevism'. At the time Cruise O'Brien was writing, the dominant political context was the Cold War, and the revolutionary infection at risk of spreading throughout the world was communism. Although he found it entirely predictable that counter-revolutionary ideologues would try to commandeer Burke for 'anti-

[18] Pevsner to Cruise O'Brien, 28 Oct. 1965, UBSC, Penguin Archives, DM1107/AC3.
[19] Greene to Pevsner, 27 May 1966, UBSC, Penguin Archives, DM1107/AC3.
[20] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction: "the manifesto of a counter-revolution"', in idem, ed., Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the revolution in France and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Classics, 1968), 11.
[21] John Morley, 'Edmund Burke', *Encyclopaedia Britannica: a dictionary of arts, sciences, literature and general information*, 11th edn, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 824-35.
[22] Pelican Political Classics, undated, UBSC, Penguin Archives, DM1107/AC3.

Communist purposes', Cruise O'Brien insisted that to do so was to corrupt Burke's positions. According to Cruise O'Brien, in the Cold War context, 'the prime nuclei of revolutionary infection', the Soviet Union and China, were inaccessible to modern American counterrevolutionaries. Consequently, he stated, all they could do was 'to prevent the infection from spreading to other lands'. Some territories, specifically the industrialised regions in Western Europe and Japan, possessed the capabilities to 'resist the infection on their own'. However, for those that were not able to do so, Cruise O'Brien argued that to prevent the spread of the infection, the United States had to do something which Burke 'did not favour: the extension of imperialism'. Thus, he pronounced, if the new counter-revolution led by the United States required the extension of imperialism (Cruise O'Brien suggested that the term 'aid' would substitute for the more provocative term imperialism), then Burke's political thought was inapplicable.[23] An example of the type of 'aid' that the Irishman equated with American imperialism was the Kennedy administration's 1961 Alliance for Progress, which flooded Latin America with over $10 billion to prevent the spread of communist revolution.[24]

While he denied American 'neo-conservatives' – this was Cruise O'Brien's term – the right to co-opt Burke, Cruise O'Brien incorporated Burke's conception of revolutionary infection into his work on Ireland. In April 1966, he opened his notorious essay, 'The embers of Easter', with the Burkean declaration 'All rebellion is infectious'. However, he contended that the 'infection' failed to spread throughout Ireland in 1916 because 'the conditions for the spread of the infection were less favourable than they were to become two years later', in 1918, when the government tried to introduce conscription towards the end of the Great War.[25] In 1967, in the scathing review of W.I. Thompson's book, *Imagination and insurrection*, discussed above (Chapter 4, above, pp. 166-69), Cruise O'Brien again employed disease imagery when he challenged the connection Thompson made between literature and revolution in Ireland - not because he did not think one existed, but because he thought Thompson misunderstood what constituted the 'literature of the Rising' (see Chapter 4, above, p. 168) - drawing on the same

[23] Cruise O'Brien, 'Introduction', *Reflections*, 66-67.
[24] See Andrew Preston, 'America's global imperium', in Peter Fibiger Bang, C.A. Bayly, and Walter Scheidel, eds, *The Oxford world history of empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1217-48.
[25] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Embers of Easter', *The Massachusetts Review*, 7 (Autumn 1966), 621-637.

metaphor as Burke had done nearly two centuries prior. Responding to Thompson's suggestion of a causal link between W.B. Yeats's *Cathleen ní Houlihan* and the Easter Rising, Cruise O'Brien wrote:

> There may well have been "certain men" who were moved by *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* at a crucial moment in their young lives; men who here contracted the infection that was to kill some of them in Easter Week, 1916. But it is overwhelmingly likely that, if their resistance to the revolutionary infection was so low that they succumbed to *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* they would have been fatally infected by something else, between 1902 and 1916, even if *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* had never been written, and if Yeats and Maud Gonne had never existed.[26]

The 'infection' in question was revolutionary nationalism. Cruise O'Brien reckoned that later in life, the increasingly reactionary Yeats came to believe that he had suffered 'a kind of contamination' through contact with "the contagion of the throng" during his years of political activism.[27] Throughout his career, Cruise O'Brien claimed, the poet suffered from occasional 'nationalist flare-ups', when the symptoms of the disease would intensify, such as in the wake of the Easter Rising. In turn, that event, in Cruise O'Brien's view, was initiated by men and women 'in whose blood-stream *Cathleen ni Houlihan* was still working', as if it was a type of blood disease.[28] Speaking at a Celtic studies conference in Canada in 1978, Cruise O'Brien argued that by perpetuating the 'means of carrying the revolutionary infection', the Irish state was culpable for its spread 'to impressionable young people in every generation'.[29] Following the revolution, the state continued to adhere to 'revolutionary traditions and slogans', such as claiming its right to the territory of Northern Ireland in the 1937 constitution, even though, according to Cruise O'Brien, it had ceased, in reality, to be revolutionary in any meaningful

[26] Cruise O'Brien, 'Two-faced Cathleen'; see also Chapter 4 for more on O'Brien's views on Yeats and Irish revolutionary politics.
[27] Cruise O'Brien, 'Passion and cunning', 225.
[28] Ibid., 228.
[29] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Revolution and the shaping of modern Ireland', in Robert O'Driscoll, ed., *The Celtic consciousness* (New York: George Braziller, 1982), 428-9.

way.[30] The historian R.F. Foster picked up on Cruise O'Brien's blood disease metaphors in a review of one of his later works, *Ancestral voices*. Foster described Cruise O'Brien as 'testing the national blood for the virus of "sacral nationalism".[31] Although *Ancestral voices* contained fewer disease metaphors than some of Cruise O'Brien's previous works, Foster argued that Cruise O'Brien deemed that 'the blood-supply of the Irish Catholic people at large was - as it were - Sacral-Nation-Positive'.[32]

'An electric shock to the Irish psyche'

Cruise O'Brien's most (in)famous book, *To Katanga and back* (1962), dealing with his experience as UN representative in Katanga during the Congo crisis (see Ch. 1, above, pp. 42-49), carried the subtitle 'a UN case history'. The medical implication of the term 'case history' was intentional. In his introduction to that volume, Cruise O'Brien noted that although the doctor, not the case, writes the case history, his book was 'indeed a case history'. He claimed he was holding himself to the standard of 'the doctor, who believes that the history of his case as a whole points to certain conclusions'. In this scenario, the Irishman stated, the doctor 'is obliged not to suppress mention of any symptoms which might seem to others to point to different conclusions, and not to heighten his description of those symptoms which tend to corroborate his diagnosis'.[33] By adopting the pose of a medical practitioner, Cruise O'Brien was trying to take advantage of the authority granted to doctors. As a memoir-writer, he felt that his epistemological position was open to scrutiny. His choices could be challenged. Assuming the mantle of the medical practitioner, however, Cruise O'Brien was attempting to convince his readership that he was being open about the evidence and about how his conclusions were linked to that evidence.

The construction of himself as a medical practitioner was a recurrent theme in Cruise O'Brien's life. In 1969, during his valedictory public lecture on Machiavelli at New York University (see Chapter 3, above, pp. 132-34), he spoke about the role of intellectuals, putting a

[30] Cruise O'Brien, 'Revolution', 428-9.
[31] R.F. Foster, 'Books of the Year', *The Independent on Sunday*, 4 Dec. 1994.
[32] R.F. Foster, 'Feeling the pulse of Irish sacral nationalism', *The Tribune*, 13 Nov. 1994.
[33] Cruise O'Brien, *To Katanga and back*, 10.

distinctly medical spin on the subject. In the lecture, 'What exhortation?', he likened intellectuals' efforts to address themselves to 'public opinion' by writing for literary magazines and '"quality" periodicals', to 'rubbing an embrocation into society's skin which will eventually warm the whole body'. In this image, the intellectual takes the place of the doctor, treating society's ills by administering a soothing balm to the diseased part of the body to 'remove or mitigate [the] disease'.[34] By his own assessment, while he was living and working in America, Cruise O'Brien's favoured method of addressing public opinion was this 'embrocation method'.[35]

Throughout those years, the disease with which he was concerned was 'American imperialism', which, he argued, 'threatened the life … of every human being on this planet'. Although he believed the United States was a sick society in many ways, commenting on the student protests that were in full swing in the late sixties, he declared that these disorderly demonstrations were 'manifestations of health'. He then took a long, deliberate pause.[36] When he continued, he proclaimed, in the words of the Macbeth family doctor, 'Therein the patient must minister to himself'. Now, he turned to speak about Ireland, which, as he put it, had 'its troubles too'. To the great amusement of his New York audience, Cruise O'Brien informed them, not without a hint of jocularity, that the previous day's *New York Times* contained an editorial 'pleasantly called "The Irish Disease"', by which the editorial board meant 'the exotic evils of violence and bigotry'.[37] Notwithstanding his apparent scepticism at the *Times*'s characterization of the political situation in Northern Ireland, in his approach to Irish politics, especially to the Troubles, Cruise O'Brien once more adopted the pose of the medical practitioner. However, this time he did not attempt the embrocation method, but rather saw it as his duty 'to administer an electric shock to the Irish psyche', electro-shock therapy then being a common treatment for mental illness.[38]

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[34] Cruise O'Brien, 'What exhortation?', 55; 'Embrocate, v.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* [https://www-oed-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/Entry/61027?redirectedFrom=embrocate#eid, accessed 21 Oct. 2022].
[35] Cruise O'Brien, 'What exhortation?', 57.
[36] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'What exhortation?', Apr. 1969, recording, NYUA, Records of the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, cuid4990A.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Akenson, *Conor*, 364.

It is noteworthy that in Chapter XXVI of *The Prince*, Machiavelli's concluding exhortation to the Medici contains a passage in which the Florentine describes Italy 'remaining almost lifeless, Italy is waiting for someone to heal her wounds, and put an end to the ravaging of Lombardy, to the extortions in the Kingdom of Naples and Tuscany, and to cure the sores that have been festering for so long'.[39] Metaphorically, as Quentin Skinner has claimed, this exhortation is an appeal for doctors, or *medici* in Italian, to save Italy's life.[40] In effect, by taking on this medical metaphor, Cruise O'Brien presented himself as the doctor who was needed to cure Ireland of its disease.

When it came to his reaction to violence in Northern Ireland, metaphors of health and illness played a vital role in how he wrote and spoke about the conflict. Elected as a Labour Party TD in June 1969, Cruise O'Brien quickly became the party's spokesperson on Northern Ireland. Cruise O'Brien's institutional position, combined with his global reputation, meant that he had a powerful platform from which to disseminate his ideas about the political situation in the North. However, his pronouncements did not always have the uniform backing of his party colleagues. For instance, Sean Russell, a member of the Howth Branch of the Labour Party, denounced Cruise O'Brien's determination to position the IRA as 'the root of all evil in N[orthern] I[reland] ... obscuring the fact that the IRA is merely an obstrusive [sic] symptom of a diseased society'.[41] This equation of the moral category 'evil' with the medical category 'disease' was not an uncommon one. As Susan Sontag illustrated, as used in modern political rhetoric, disease, metaphorically speaking, had become a 'sign of evil'.[42] This tendency was also evident in O'Brien's criticism of Bernanos.[43]

At the height of the 1970 'Arms Crisis', Cruise O'Brien denounced Fianna Fáil 'as a sick party', 'sick with a dangerous and infectious sickness'.[44] This infection, he went on, contained

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[39] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Quentin Skinner and Russell Price, eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 88.
[40] Quentin Skinner, 'Machiavelli: a very short introduction', Talks at Google [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKGuzJ6GwHM&t=547s, accessed 29 Oct. 2022].
[41] Sean Russell, 'O'Brien and Connolly', *Irish Press*, 26 Oct. 1972.
[42] Sontag, *Illness as metaphor*, 82.
[43] Ibid.
[44] *Dáil debates*, 8 May 1970; for detailed discussion of the Arms Crisis, see Michael Heney, *The arms crisis: the plot that never was* (London: Apollo, 2020).

'the germs of a possible civil war'.[45] Cruise O'Brien's Labour Party colleague Michael O'Leary also used epidemiological language, saying of the government, 'The contagion going out from this Administration will affect all the institutions of State unless we cleanse this House and replace the administration'.[46] O'Leary demanded an election to 'prevent this contagion spreading'.[47] Days later, at a public meeting at the Mansion House in Dublin, Cruise O'Brien developed on this theme, declaring it 'essential to isolate Fianna Fáil, to quarantine it as long as it is sick with Blaneyism'.[48] Speaking in the Dáil in late July 1970, Cruise O'Brien dipped into this metaphorical well-spring once more, asserting that the North's 'climate of violence', which political rhetoric in the Republic helped to foment, could not be 'contained in Northern Ireland', but 'inevitably spreads throughout the island'.[49] He maintained that the Fianna Fáil government's response to the upheaval in the six counties meant that 'almost every institution of the State became in some degree contaminated or at least exposed to serious danger of contamination'.[50] A year later, in August 1971, Cruise O'Brien again condemned Fianna Fáil as a diseased party. He described figures like Haughey and Blaney, who both continued to sit on the government's benches, as 'elements spreading the contagion of violence, hysteria and hate from the unfortunate people of the north, already racked by these things, to the rest of the country'.[51]

He returned to this theme several years later when Fianna Fáil restored Haughey to its front benches. Writing in April 1975, Cruise O'Brien argued that Fianna Fáil and the IRA 'shared a particular past', and without this 'common culture' he doubted whether the IRA in its 'new and virulent strain', meaning the Provisional IRA, would have evolved.[52] He asserted that the 'new strain of IRA' owed its existence not just to the local situation in the North, but also to the image of the situation 'as envisaged and acted on by the tradition in the Republic' spanning

[45] *Dáil debates*, 8 May 1970.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] 'Unite against fascism', *Irish Press*, 13 May 1970.
[49] *Dáil debates*, 29 July 1970.
[50] Ibid.
[51] *Dáil debates*, 6 Aug. 1971.
[52] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Shades of Republicans', *Herod*, 139.

Fianna Fáil and the republican movement.[53] While disavowing his ability to indict Fianna Fáil in its entirety, Cruise O'Brien insisted that he could 'note symptoms of serious illness in a political organism'.[54] 'These symptoms', he continued, 'declared themselves in Fianna Fáil in 1969', but after 1970, when the Taoiseach dismissed Haughey and Blaney, had appeared as if they were 'clearing up'. With Haughey's restoration, however, Cruise O'Brien was adamant that the symptoms of the disease had announced themselves once again.[55] Reporting on Fianna Fáil's Ard Fheis in 1983, he returned yet again to this subject. Fianna Fáil, he remarked, had 'turned a nasty shade of green'. He declared: 'The party led by Mr Haughey is sick with the Provisional Tendency. The electorate, if it values its own health, must now keep Fianna Fáil in quarantine.'[56] In 1990, Cruise O'Brien continued to press this point, stating that 'the sickness of Fianna Fáil infects every area of our public life. The focus of the infection of our public life, now as for the past two decades, is C.J. Haughey.'[57]

In autumn 1972, Cruise O'Brien published his controversial book *States of Ireland*, which sold out of its initial print run within weeks.[58] The book charted the evolution of the Troubles through a blend of history, family biography, memoir, literary criticism, and political analysis, and strongly encouraged Irish nationalists to question their beliefs about the possibility of political unity and the wisdom of pushing for it in such a febrile political climate. Towards the end of this classic 'revisionist' text, in a final chapter written in June 1972 after the others had already gone into proofs, Cruise O'Brien sketched an outline of two possible futures for the island of Ireland. Employing oncological terminology, he detailed two prognoses which he called '*The "benign" model'* and '*The malignant model*'. The former represented what Cruise O'Brien thought the likely course of events would be should the Provisional IRA cease its offensive definitively. The cause of this cessation, he suggested, would be due to the Catholic population refusing to support the Provisionals' agenda.[59] He supposed that this might happen

[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 140.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Genuine fully paid-up Irish', *Irish Times*, 1 Mar. 1983.
[57] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Doherty adds to GUBU image', *Irish Independent*, 31 Mar. 1990.
[58] *The Listener*, 26 Oct. 1972.
[59] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 298.

because, as he put it several years later, violent Republicanism was a 'disease [which] carrie[d] its own remedy'. The more prolonged and more widespread terrorist violence became, the more likely people would be to condemn it, especially when 'the booby-trapped car goes off in your own street'.[60] Borrowing Mao Tse Tung's image of guerrilla war as one in which the fighters, or 'fish', needed the people, or 'water', to sustain their war, Cruise O'Brien's benign model relied on 'the "water" poisoning the "fish"'.[61] The benign model included the release of internees, cross-community talks between elected representatives, local government reform, the withdrawal of the British Army from policing responsibilities, 'a massive reconstruction programme', and an end to religious discrimination. North-South relations would improve, and Dublin would abandon 'all "we must have unity" propaganda'.[62]

The 'malignant model' was how he saw things playing out if the Provisional IRA continued, or indeed escalated, its campaign. Cruise O'Brien's forecast in this eventuality was sufficiently bleak to justify clinical imagery. He expected to see a violent 'Protestant counter-offensive' resulting in the deaths of Catholics, precipitating a spiral of revenge killings. Next, Protestant groups would attack Catholic enclaves, and in the ensuing street battles the IRA would take on the mantle of 'defenders'. Eventually, the situation would degenerate to such an extent that the United Nations would intervene to establish a new border on the island. Consequently, he submitted, 'Ireland would be left, once more, with two States, but of even more virulent shades of green and orange than before.'[63] The word 'virulent', here, operates in several senses, including as it relates to wounds and ulcers notable for the 'presence of corrupt or poisonous matter', or diseases of 'extreme malignancy or violence'.[64] It might seem as if this is stretching the metaphor to breaking point. However, less than two months after the publication of *States of Ireland*, Cruise O'Brien indicated that this was no dead metaphor, writing, 'The virulent Provisional strain of the IRA has now been in existence for nearly three

[60] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Liberty and terror', *Herod*, 39.
[61] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 298.
[62] Ibid., 299.
[63] Ibid., 299-301.
[64] 'virulent, adj.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* [https://www-oed-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/Entry/223857?rskey=RNX3Xw&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid, accessed 21 Oct. 2022].

years.'[65] Days after that, in a speech denouncing C.J. Haughey in the Dáil, Cruise O'Brien accused the Fianna Fáil man of 'encouraging that split in the Old IRA which produced this new, most virulent and destructive strain'.[66] Cruise O'Brien also indicted the Catholic clergy for the role they played in the split, claiming that the clergy in Belfast helped to bring into being 'a more dangerous strain of the virus'.[67] He feared that, initially, the benign model might seem to win out, bringing with it peace and relative harmony, but that an 'outbreak', itself a word loaded with epidemiological significance, of violence, might cause a relapse, replete with the onset of the malignant model. He then drew on Albert Camus's warning about infectious diseases' ability to linger, 'dormant for years "in furniture and linen"', ready to return to "waken its rats and send them to die in a happy city".[68] We should note, however, that Cruise O'Brien refused to wrap things up on that dismal image. As he put it,

> The plague is a metaphor for conditions created by men and women, and men and women who have quarrelled can learn through suffering how to live together and apart, as France and Germany have learned. People can wake up in the morning and find an imprisoning myth no longer imprisoning but just plain silly.[69]

Several reviewers picked up on Cruise O'Brien's disease imagery in their commentaries. The noted British intellectual John Vaizey, writing in *The Observer*, suggested that the book contained a vital message for English readers. Vaizey asked 'who is there bold enough to feel that the bacillus of nationalism might not make the short passage across the St George's Channel and, perhaps, because the English have not been immunised by recent bouts, spread like the Black Death?'[70] The US edition of *States of Ireland*, which appeared several months after the UK and Ireland one, carried Vaizey's statement that the book was 'therapeutically

[65] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Mr Lynch's manoeuvres', *The Observer*, 26 Nov. 1972.
[66] *Dáil debates*, 29 Nov. 1972.
[67] Attallah, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien' [https://quartetbooks.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/conor-cruise-obrien/, accessed 11 Feb. 2021].
[68] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 303; see Bourke, 'Plague man'.
[69] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 303.
[70] John Vaizey, 'The voice of reason', *The Observer*, 8 Oct. 1972.

essential' on its front cover. In early 1973, Cruise O'Brien echoed Vaizey's belief in the healing benefits of a book like *States of Ireland*, arguing, that, in Ireland, 'Historical revisionism ... has become essential for our mental and political health - and indeed physical health too.'[71] In this scenario, revisionist historians like himself were akin to 'political physicians', a phrase Cruise O'Brien employed during the 1950s.[72] Journalist Barry White, a liberal, small 'u' unionist who wrote for the *Belfast Telegraph*, was disappointed with Cruise O'Brien's book because it failed to provide an adequate template for action. It seemed to White that 'if the powers that be do no more than he [Cruise O'Brien] suggests they should[,] the cancer will grow'.[73] Owen Dudley Edwards, a friend and collaborator of Cruise O'Brien's, stated his experience of reading *States of Ireland* was like 'prob[ing] one's own private wound'. Edwards compared the situation in Northern Ireland to Euripides' play *Orestes*, holding that like the characters in the drama, the factions in the North possessed 'a mentality diseased by fanaticism'. The disease in question, according to Edwards, turned 'idealistic heroes ... into ravening maniacs, glorying in slaughter with utter indifference to its victims, replete with specious arguments to justify anything'.[74] In the *Yale Review*, the Anglo-American historian of Ireland L.P. Curtis Jr described the 'Cruiseocentric' *States of Ireland* as an 'absorbing account of the sickness which afflicts his [Cruise O'Brien's] country'. Curtis concurred with W.E.H. Lecky's old assertion that Ireland provided the material for a vital study in 'morbid anatomy', and he stressed that the 'old morbidity' that the Victorian man of letters had identified had 'lost none of its virulence'. According to Curtis, the violence with which Cruise O'Brien's book was concerned was more dispiriting than that with which Lecky dealt because of the presence of 'the dread disease known as sectarianism'.[75]

[71] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Dying for bones', *New York Review Books*, 25 Jan. 1973.
[72] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Idolatries of revolution', 23 Mar. 1956, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/503/4.
[73] White, 'This man sees Ireland divided – whatever occurs', *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 Oct. 1972.
[74] Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Removing the sentimentalism from the nationalism', *New York Times*, 11 Feb. 1973.
[75] L.P. Curtis Jr., 'Anatomies of Irish melancholy', *Yale Review*, 63 (Oct. 1973), 137-146; for more on Curtis's position on disease imagery and Irish politics, especially during the Home Rule crisis and after, see idem, *Coercion and conciliation in Ireland, 1880-1892: a study in conservative unionism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 2, 201, 269, 371, 386, 429.

Doctor to the body politic

Cruise O'Brien's medicalization of politics was on full show in his 'Shavian' play *King Herod advises* (see also Chapter 4, above, pp. 180-83). First produced in 1973 at Dublin's Peacock Theatre, *King Herod advises* was the first play performed on a Dublin stage written by a government minister. The drama takes place in a psychiatrist's office. It examines the political situation in Ireland through Dr H.E. Rodd's [Herod the Great] consultations with three men who come to him to talk about their political problems: the unnamed, Yeats-quoting, Catholic Minister for Underground Development' in the Irish government trying to foment violence in Northern Ireland; an Ulster loyalist politician named Major Aughilly Aughrim of Ahoghill bent on eliminating the 'Roman virus' from Ulster's 'body politic'; and a left-wing Catholic priest worried about lending support to the IRA.[76] Herod, the notorious child-slayer, prescribes each patient with the 'cure' for their troubles. As Cruise O'Brien said in an interview with Brian Inglis in *The Listener*, the function of Herod's prescriptions was to 'unblock aggressive impulses, to legitimise aggression'.[77] He chose Herod the Great as his central character because like Herod, paramilitaries in Northern Ireland were guilty of slaying children. Herod diagnoses the first two patients with the same defect but notes that the 'symptoms are superficially quite different'. His diagnosis was that they suffered from 'Chronic inhibition of aggressive impulse due to the presence in the affected area of an inappropriate ideology.'[78] Asked by Major Aughrim, who was unsure what 'inappropriate ideology' meant, if this was a serious ailment, Herod affirmed 'Serious but not fatal. In the nature of the disease it is the *cure* that is fatal. But to someone else.'[79]

According to Herod, the ideology disturbing the Minister for Underground Development, a thinly veiled caricature of C.J. Haughey, and preventing the violence he wished to see, was Marxism 'of which the carriers were persons other than himself'. Here Cruise O'Brien was alluding to the fact that during the 1960s, the IRA leadership became decidedly more left-wing than it had hitherto been, a sore point for the Irish government. As the historian

[76] Cruise O'Brien, 'King Herod advises', 222-3.
[77] Brian Inglis, 'In search of morality', *The Listener*, 23 Aug. 1973.
[78] Cruise O'Brien, 'King Herod advises', 224.
[79] Ibid.

Henry Patterson has shown, elements in the Irish establishment were deeply concerned that 'northern republicans had been infected by the new politics of the IRA's national leadership'.[80] The prescription Herod gives to the minister read: 'Nationalism *plus* Catholicism *plus* money *plus* arms *minus* Marxism *equals* a solution.' Albeit, in this case, the doctor clarified that it was merely a 'provisional solution', a nod to the creation of the Provisional IRA.[81] In the case of Major Aughrim, unable to purge the body politic of 'the Roman Catholic presence' because the British Army was defending Catholics, loyalism was the inhibiting ideology. Thus, Herod prescribed a solution of 'Ulster Protestantism *plus* Ulster Nationalism *minus* British loyalism *plus* money *plus* arms equals the cure for your trouble!' Not being able to 'claim to be an intellectual', Major Aughrim is puzzled at first, but once he grasps the implications of his treatment, he accepts it with gusto. Before leaving, he proclaims, 'If the Army go on standing between us and the Fenians we'll make it hot for them till they get out and leave the Fenians to us. Then we'll teach them a lesson they won't forget.' He departs with a shout of 'Up Ulster!'[82]

Notably, political ideology was not the only infectious 'virus' touched on in Cruise O'Brien's play. Upon hearing that Herod's previous patient was a Roman Catholic, Major Aughrim queries whether such a condition would be 'catching'. Herod reassures the Major that while 'Catholicism, like the other forms of Christianity, can indeed be contagious under certain conditions', it was his professional opinion that the extremely bigoted Major Aughrim was 'adequately immunised against the Roman virus'.

Herod's third patient, Father Woolley, was sympathetic to the objectives of the republican paramilitaries but uncomfortable with the methods they used to achieve them. Herod tries various strategies, invoking ideas of a 'just war' and then of 'institutionalized violence', to try to convince Woolley that violence was an acceptable means to desirable ends. However, Herod finds the left-wing priest more difficult to manipulate than his previous patients and, in the end, he fails to persuade Woolley to accept his prescription that since violence exists in various forms throughout society there is no need to feel uneasy about

[80] Henry Patterson, *The politics of illusion: republicanism and socialism in modern Ireland* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 119.
[81] Cruise O'Brien, 'King Herod advises', 220.
[82] Ibid., 225.

terrorist violence. When Herod's third patient departs, the doctor's secretary, his granddaughter Salome, speaks directly to the audience. Standing in as the 'self-righteous' side of Cruise O'Brien's personality, Salome rebukes the Dublin audience for creating the conditions in which Herod's patients were operating. Salome chastises the crowd for their 'old nonsense that [they] only half pretend to believe in. That Fourth Green Field that you long for so much – In a pig's eye you long for it! You'd build a wall to keep it out if you could!'[83] This last sentence, building a wall to prevent the spread of violence, suggests that Cruise O'Brien reckoned that the people of the Republic of Ireland would like to quarantine the virus in the six counties. Cruise O'Brien was adamant about this point. At the beginning of the year, he noted that 'Concern about the beginnings of a spread of violence to the Republic is fairly widespread.'[84]

By the time of *Herod's* production, Cruise O'Brien held ministerial office in the Republic of Ireland's new coalition government as the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs. In this role, he was responsible for the media and public broadcasting. Cruise O'Brien laid great stress on implementing measures to prevent, in his words, 'the use of the State broadcasting system for propaganda on behalf of organisations attempting to usurp the powers of our democratic State'.[85] Predictably, these measures did not make him popular with journalists and broadcasters, who argued that his legislation was 'repressive'.[86] In April 1974, just as the news had broken about his intention to amend the Broadcasting Act, the National Union of Journalists refused to let Cruise O'Brien address its annual conference on account of his stance.[87] Speaking on the night of the conference, Cruise O'Brien argued from Machiavellian premises that banning those associated with the IRA from the airwaves was vital to maintaining the state. He also suggested it would protect the 'lives of citizens'. In this regard, Cruise O'Brien approached his brief like a doctor tasked with maintaining public health. He declared,

> In Ireland ... it [the IRA] has a potentially seductive power over some people, a kind of glamour which tends to affect certain categories of young people, as well

[83] Ibid., 234.
[84] Cruise O'Brien, 'Dying for bones'.
[85] 'O'Brien to introduce broadcasting amendments', *Irish Independent*, 26 Apr. 1974.
[86] Ibid.
[87] *The Guardian*, 25 Apr. 1974.

> as the more addled of the elderly... Irish broadcasting ... has to take account of the fact that some of its audience have a fairly low resistance to this form of infection.[88]

In late 1974, Cruise O'Brien introduced the Broadcasting Authority (Amendment) Bill. The most controversial element of his amendment concerned the changes he proposed to Section 31 of the 1960 Act, which gave the responsible minister the right to 'direct the Authority in writing to refrain from broadcasting any particular matter or matter of any particular class, and the Authority shall comply with the direction'.[89] Cruise O'Brien and his cabinet colleagues felt that this effectively gave the minister 'arbitrary power' with regard to what he could order RTE to refrain from broadcasting.[90] The amendment introduced more specific language, including the stipulation that

> Where the Minister is of the opinion that the broadcasting of a particular matter or any matter of a particular class would be likely to promote, or incite to, crime or would tend to undermine the authority of the State, he may by order direct the Authority to refrain from broadcasting the matter or any matter of the particular class, and the Authority shall comply with the order.[91]

The amendment also placed a twelve-month time limit on how long an order under the Act could remain in force. Although no organizations were named in the amendment, it was not in doubt that the principal targets of its power were the Provisional IRA and its associated spokespeople. In a lengthy speech to the Seanad at the second stage of its progress through the Oireachtas, Cruise O'Brien indicated that he believed that this infection spread by the IRA was an airborne one, transmitted through the airwaves. Before the growth of modern germ theory,

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[88] 'O'Brien to introduce broadcasting amendments', *Irish Independent*, 26 Apr. 1974; for the full text of Cruise O'Brien's speech, see Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'NUJ debate and Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act', 25 Apr. 1974, UCDA, Cruise O'Brien papers, P82/299.
[89] Broadcasting Authority Act, 1960 [https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1960/act/10/section/31/enacted/en/html?, accessed 28 Dec. 2022].
[90] RTE News, 24 Feb. 1974 [https://www.rte.ie/archives/2014/0224/506297-changes-to-broadcasting-act-1974/, accessed 28 Dec. 2022].
[91] Broadcasting Authority (Amendment) Act, 1976 [https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1976/act/37/enacted/en/print#sec16, accessed 28 Dec. 2022].

experts thought miasmas, meaning 'noxious vapours', carried infectious diseases.[92] In his view, a 'miasma of glamour' hung around the 'channels of communication' concerning the IRA leading to infections in the body politic.[93] Opponents of the broadcasting amendment positioned it as a move to limit freedom of expression and accused Cruise O'Brien of seeking to 'cleanse' the culture of the Irish media.[94]

The Fine Gael senator Alexis Fitzgerald responded to Cruise O'Brien's speech at length, arguing that the minister had not gone far enough in his effort to defend 'the authority of the State'.[95] Fitzgerald, a noted intellectual in his own right, proclaimed that more extraordinary measures were required 'in relation to curing the sickness which the Minister has so well diagnosed'.[96] Repression, in his eyes, was 'not enough'. The senator insisted that 'a social sickness' existed in Ireland, 'connected with the [violent] means used to establish this State'.[97] Fitzgerald asserted that 'repression, like censorship, is just about as good as an aspirin is for a man with a tumour in his head'.[98] This sickness, Fitzgerald went on, had been allowed to linger in the minds of republicans 'by failure to apply early enough the scalpel of criticism' to their core political beliefs. Fitzgerald identified Cruise O'Brien as one who had so wielded 'the scalpel of criticism', 'pre-eminently in the last few years'.[99]

'The killing strain'

Cruise O'Brien lost his parliamentary seat and his ministerial office in June 1977, when he received the third-highest amount of first preference votes in his constituency but lost out on a seat because of the transfer system. Towards the end of that month, at the annual Wolfe Tone commemoration at Bodenstown, republicans framed the general election result as a 'rejection of the Coalition policy articulated by Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien'.[100] Cruise O'Brien maintained that

[92] Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and colonial disease* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 30.
[93] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Broadcasting and terrorism', *Herod*, 122.
[94] Editorial, 'The O'Brien-Flanagan argument', *Irish Press*, 8 Sept. 1976.
[95] *Seanad debates*, 12 Mar. 1975.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] 'O'Brien stand "rejected"', *Irish Times*, 27 Jun. 1977.

this was not the case, arguing that the government fell because of 'the effects of a recession and of inflation'.[101] The outspoken *Times* columnist Bernard Levin likened Cruise O'Brien's ouster to King Lear's choice to disinherit Cordelia at the beginning of Shakespeare's tragedy, quoting Kent's rebuke 'Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow upon the foul disease.' Levin was livid that despite the 'courage, honesty, wisdom and consistency with which he ha[d] sought peace', the electorate decided that he was not fit to serve in the Dáil while a man like Charles Haughey was.[102] Shortly after his defeat, Cruise O'Brien ran successfully for election to a Dublin University seat in Seanad Éireann, topping the polls in his section. He made his stance on Northern Ireland and his opposition to the IRA the central pillars of his campaign. In December 1977, he took up the post of 'Editor-in-Chief', specially created for Cruise O'Brien, at the prestigious British weekly newspaper, *The Observer*.

Early in his tenure, his political stance on Northern Ireland caused further controversy. In October 1978, he altered Irish journalist Mary Holland's article for *The Observer's* colour supplement on Derry woman Mary Nelis, a republican political activist, because he felt that it unjustifiably presented Nelis as a victim. Two of Nelis's sons were participating in the H-Block 'blanket' protests in the Maze Prison, and Cruise O'Brien thought that Holland's sympathetic treatment would have been succour to the campaign. Nelis was a leading member of the Relatives Action Committee and had even gone 'on the blanket' herself.[103] She joined Sinn Féin in 1980, going on to become a councillor and later still a Sinn Féin member of the Northern Ireland Assembly.[104] In 2006, the Republican paper *An Phoblacht* described Nelis as 'an icon within modern republicanism'.[105] By the time Holland's article came to his attention, the magazine was already in print, but he insisted that it be 'pulped' and reprinted incorporating his changes.[106] Confronted about his actions during a questions and answers session at the University of British Columbia several years later, in 1981, he claimed he had wanted to stop

[101] Niall Kiely, 'Lynch does not want the British to withdraw from North, says O'Brien', *Irish Times*, 15 July 1977.
[102] Bernard Levin, 'Chill words of truth that have put the wrong man out in the cold', *The Times*, 21 Jun. 1977.
[103] Margaret Keiley-Listermann, *Sinn Féin Women: footnoted foot soldiers and women of no importance* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 113.
[104] Interview with Mary Nellis, *Tall girl shorts* [http://www.tallgirlshorts.net/marymary/marynelis.html, accessed 21 Oct. 2022].
[105] 'A lot done, a lot more to do', *An Phoblacht*, 28 Sept. 2006.
[106] Anon., *British media and Ireland: truth: the first casualty* (1979), 27.

the article altogether because it was his duty to ensure that 'misleading' information did not make its way into the magazine. However, owing to time constraints, this option was not available to him, as it would have resulted in discarding the entire issue, a move his bosses would not have liked. He insisted that he only 'made some small changes on factual matters' where Holland was 'wrong'.[107] Cruise O'Brien described Holland's piece as 'very very bad, very very misleading', and said he was 'very sorry indeed to have it appear in the magazine'.[108] His changes rendered the article more circumspect about Nelis's declaration that she was not associated with either the Provisional or Official IRA. Cruise O'Brien inserted the phrase 'Mary Nelis claims' into Holland's sentence, 'She is not involved with either wing of the IRA.'[109] Understandably, Holland was furious and protested to the Editor-in-Chief. After what Cruise O'Brien termed a 'somewhat acrimonious correspondence', neither Holland nor Cruise O'Brien backed down.[110] Consequently, Holland and *The Observer* parted ways. In 1997, Nelis, in a spiteful *An Phoblacht* piece, derided Cruise O'Brien's tenure at *The Observer*, claiming, somewhat spuriously, that the paper 'never recovered from his period as Editor'.[111]

During his bitter exchange with Holland, which Cruise O'Brien circulated to other *Observer* staff members, his viral imagery was once again on full display. Picking up on this disease imagery, Vincent Browne, the founding editor of the monthly magazine *Magill*, suggested that Mary Nelis could have taken legal action against Cruise O'Brien given the 'intemperance' of his side of the communication.[112] Cruise O'Brien cast doubt on the image of Nelis which Holland depicted. Without prior knowledge, and based entirely on Holland's evidence, Cruise O'Brien was unconvinced that Nelis was the 'good woman, hostile to violence, who and whose family have been and continue to be, victims of the events of the last ten years'.[113] He asserted that Nelis had successfully 'conned' Mary Holland.[114] His allegations that

[107] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The press and the world', 19 Oct. 1981 [https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/12708/items/1.0108922, accessed 21 Oct. 2022].
[108] Ibid.
[109] Anon., *British media and Ireland*, 27.
[110] Cruise O'Brien, *Memoir*, 373.
[111] Mary Nellis, 'Just Cruising along', *An Phoblacht*, 3 Apr. 1997.
[112] Vincent Browne, 'Is the Cruiser springing a leak?', *Magill*, 30 Jan. 1980.
[113] Cruise O'Brien to Holland, 30 Sept. 1978 printed in Anon., 'Conor Cruise O'Brien and the media', *Belfast Bulletin*, 9 (Spring, 1981), 8.
[114] Cruise O'Brien to Holland, 30 Sept. 1978, 8.

Nelis was a con-artist and that the Irish Catholic population contained 'some of the most expert conmen and conwomen' in Ireland, drew the ire of leading members of that community, such as the SDLP's John Hume and Seamus Mallon.[115] Cruise O'Brien refused to believe that it was mere chance that three of Mary Nelis's sons were serving time in prison for IRA activities. He suspected that Nelis, being their mother, was in some way responsible for their republican politics, insisting that Irish republicanism, 'especially the killing strain', was a hereditary disorder.[116] In his view, 'since the mother is most often the carrier ... a mother whose sons behave in this way has had something to do with what they believe and how they behave'.[117] It seemed to him that Nelis's participation in the 'H' Block protests clinched the argument.[118]

While Cruise O'Brien's remarks about Catholic conmen caused the immediate public controversy, his equation of republicanism with disease did not go unnoticed in the media. In the spring of 1981, the left-wing publication *Belfast Bulletin* carried a story entitled 'Conor Cruise O'Brien and the media' on its front cover. The Mary Holland dispute was a vital element in its polemic against the former Minister for Posts and Telegraphs. Indeed, the article contained images of his letter to Holland mentioned above. The anonymous author wrote derisively of Cruise O'Brien's self-image as an intellectual ('and an international intellectual into the bargain'), claiming that he constructed himself as 'the man of intellect, of reason' called upon to defend the country against irrational forces.[119] The writer then connected Cruise O'Brien's public persona as an intellectual with his tendency to deploy a medicalized language of politics, suggesting that he saw himself as a doctor to the body politic. Where this was most obvious was in connection with republicanism. As the *Bulletin* sardonically put it,

> When he had applied the fine surgical blade of his intellect to the body of Irish politics, he had found that the cancer of nationalism had contaminated all the cells. Nationalism had become synonymous for him with irrationalism, and he

[115] 'O'Brien – England's Irish jester', *Evening Press*, 29 Nov. 1979.
[116] Cruise O'Brien to Holland, 30 Sept. 1978, 8.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Anon., 'Conor Cruise O'Brien and the media', 4.

concluded that the whole of Irish society was so contaminated that there could be little hope of recovery.[120]

In a 2019 lecture on Cruise O'Brien given before the Howth Peninsula Heritage Society, the republican academic Niall Meehan linked Cruise O'Brien's statement in his letter to Holland with the language that the Nazis had used about Judaism, namely that it was 'a bacillus within Western civic culture'.[121] As Felicity Rash has extensively mapped out, metaphors of infection and disease were crucial to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, but his use of them was unoriginal.[122] As Rash shows, Hitler depicted Jews not only as the *cause* and the carriers of an infectious disease, but also as a *sickness* themselves.[123] By contrast, in Cruise O'Brien's view, it was the Nazis' 'triumphal nationalism' which constituted a disease, not Jews or Judaism. As he put it in an essay on the French writer Simone Weil's 'anti-nationalism', in her lifetime, Nazi Germany was the 'main contemporary carrier of that disease', meaning nationalism.[124] In his book, *The Siege*, a politico-historical study of Zionism and the emergence of the state of Israel, Cruise O'Brien characterized antisemitism as a 'disease', the 'malignancy' of which destroyed 'almost all the Jews of Europe'.[125] As noted above, Cruise O'Brien's invocation of a clinical vocabulary possessed a broader set of antecedents, most notably in the writings of Edmund Burke, than Meehan's framing permitted. Given that Cruise O'Brien regularly represented revolutionary nationalism and republicanism as a blood disease, his reference to mothers carrying the 'killing strain' of it puts his vision of it more on par with an image of Haemophiliac disorder than with the continuance of Judaism through the matrilineal line. Moreover, Judaism does not include a 'killing strain'.

[120] Ibid.
[121] Callanan *et al*, 'The Polariser', *Dublin Review of Books*, July 2019 [https://drb.ie/articles/the-polariser/, accessed 10 August 2022].
[122] Felicity Rash, *The language of violence: Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf* (New York: P. Lang, 2006), 169.
[123] Ibid., 130.
[124] Cruise O'Brien, 'Anti-politics of Simone Weil'.
[125] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The siege: the story of Israel and Zionism* (London: Paladin Books, 1988 [1986]), 37.

'The pathological element'

Over the course of 1978 and 1979, Cruise O'Brien gave a series of four lectures under the auspices of the Ewart-Biggs Memorial Trust, established in memory of the murdered British ambassador to Ireland, Christopher Ewart-Biggs. In 1980, Faber published the lectures as *Neighbours*. The book carried a blurb on the back cover that positioned Cruise O'Brien as a courageous opponent of political violence, stating 'As a writer and politician, Conor Cruise O'Brien has been acclaimed for wit, candour and courage. And courage above all he has needed in the face of Irish political violence.' The publisher asserted that in the series of lectures, Cruise O'Brien 'display[ed] these qualities once again'.[126] Trinity College Dublin hosted the first lecture of the series in January 1978. Cruise O'Brien set out to discuss what he termed the 'pathological element' in Irish attitudes towards Britain, of which Ewart-Biggs's assassination was 'symptomatic'.[127] The choice of the word 'pathological' points to Cruise O'Brien's medicalization of a political point of view with 'pathological' implying that the element of Irish attitudes towards Britain with which Cruise O'Brien concerned himself was 'characteristic of disease'. Colloquially, to use the term pathological about a person denotes that they display 'a quality or a trait to a degree considered extreme or psychologically unhealthy'.[128] He declared that, in Ireland, 'an unhealthy system of circumspection' had grown around the 'Anglophobes' and called on others to help him to 'break through that system ... shrinking the zone of pervasion'.[129]

Cruise O'Brien leaned heavily on survey data which the Jesuit social scientist Micheál MacGréil collected in 1972 for his attitudinal study, *Prejudice and tolerance in Ireland*, which shared the inaugural Ewart-Biggs Memorial Prize with unionist historian A.T.Q. Stewart's, *The narrow ground*. Although he was quite critical of some of the underlying assumptions of MacGréil's study and some aspects of his analysis, the figures fascinated Cruise O'Brien, who used the material on several occasions, including at the British-Irish Association (BIA) conference in September 1977 at Oxford. His usage of MacGréil's survey at Oxford caused quite

[126] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours: the Ewart-Biggs memorial lectures 1978-1979* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980).
[127] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 17.
[128] 'Pathological, adj.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* [https://www-oed-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/Entry/138800?redirectedFrom=pathological#eid, accessed 21 Oct. 2022].
[129] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 34.

a stir in the media, not least because by making his remarks public, Cruise O'Brien broke with the association's tradition that its proceedings be kept private. For instance, members of the SDLP who attended the event were furious that he permitted his comments to be publicized.[130] Cruise O'Brien revelled in the argument he provoked. Writing in *The Times*, he maintained that the discomfiture of the 'unity merchants' was a 'healthy' development.[131] Cruise O'Brien claimed that the responses to MacGréil's questionnaire, when read in conjunction with Richard Rose's 1968 'loyalty survey' published in his book *Governing without consensus* and a 1974 BBC poll, demonstrated that no majority for unity existed on the island of Ireland.[132] Father MacGréil, however, insisted that this was not the case, maintaining that Cruise O'Brien had 'erred in the application of my [MacGréil's] statistics'.[133] MacGréil argued that Cruise O'Brien's method of collating data from different surveys conducted at different times and under vastly different conditions was a harmful use of polling.[134] Nevertheless, Cruise O'Brien continued to make extensive use of MacGréil's survey throughout his Ewart-Biggs lecture series.

As stated, Cruise O'Brien's interest lay in what he called the 'pathological element' in Irish attitudes towards Britain. It seemed to him that this element lay primarily in the group of respondents who answered affirmatively to the statement 'I would be happy if Britain were brought to her knees'.[135] 17.1 per cent of those who took MacGréil's survey put themselves in this category. Cruise O'Brien characterized this attitude as 'Anglophobia'. Within this section there were some seeming inconsistencies which struck Cruise O'Brien as noteworthy. Just over 6 per cent of people said that overall, they considered British people to be 'pretty decent', but despite this would still be happy to see Britain on its metaphorical knees. Likewise, 4.4 per cent claimed that although they would be content to admit a British person to their family, they would be happy if Britain were 'brought to her knees'.[136] It is not clear whether this meant they wished to see Britain cease to be a political power in Northern Ireland or if it carried the

[130] *Irish Times*, 19 Sept. 1977.
[131] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Claim to a united Ireland', *The Times*, 4 Oct. 1977.
[132] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Ireland: myths and realities', *The Spectator*, 1 Oct. 1977.
[133] *Irish Press*, 20 Sept. 1977.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 20.
[136] Ibid., 23-4.

implication that they would be happy to see Britain cease to be at all. He claimed that in his analysis MacGréil put these seeming paradoxes down to 'post-colonial attitudinal schizophrenia', which Cruise O'Brien placed in quotation marks.[137] On closer inspection, however, MacGréil did not, in fact, use this phrase. He posited a relationship between the 'schizophrenia' his respondents displayed and 'post-colonial ambivalence' towards Britain.[138] This ambivalence, MacGréil stated, manifested itself in a tendency to simultaneously 'admire and hate' Britain. By employing the phrase 'attitudinal schizophrenia', MacGréil was playing into the common misunderstanding that people living with schizophrenia suffer from split personality disorder. In his response, Cruise O'Brien did not pick up on this imprecision nor did he point out the incoherence of MacGréil's analysis, which implied that it was not possible to like individual British people while also disapproving of the United Kingdom's power politics without suffering from schizophrenia.

Based on the post-colonial 'straw-man' he created, he challenged MacGréil's psychologizing, drawing on literary sources, specifically W.B. Yeats, to illustrate his point. In 'A general introduction for my work', Yeats wrote:

> No people hate as we do in whom that past is always alive, there are moments when hatred poisons my life and I accuse myself of effeminacy because I have not given it adequate expression... Then I remind myself that though mine is the first English marriage I know of in the direct line, all my family names are English, and that I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, speak, and write, that everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate.[139]

Having quoted this passage, Cruise O'Brien stated his scepticism as to how Yeats would have received the diagnosis that he was 'suffering from a simple case of "post-colonial attitudinal

[137] Ibid., 24.
[138] Micheál MacGréil, *Prejudice and tolerance in Ireland: based on a survey of intergroup attitudes of Dublin adults and other sources* (Dublin: College of Industrial Relations, Research Section, 1977), 375.
[139] Quoted in Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 24.

schizophrenia"'.[140] Moreover, employing the anti-colonial psychiatrist Frantz Fanon's vocabulary of *colon* and *colonisé*, Cruise O'Brien claimed that while Yeats was of *colon* stock, a great deal of English-speaking Irish people who fit the mould of the *colonisés* would concede that they shared 'similar symptoms', such as an admiration for the plays of Shakespeare and a recognition, however grudgingly given, that they thought, wrote, and spoke in the English language.[141] Mainly, Cruise O'Brien disputed the application to Ireland of the term 'post-colonial', which, to reiterate, MacGréil did not, in fact, use in the way Cruise O'Brien alleged he did. Cruise O'Brien asserted that the Irish political experience was too complicated and varied to reduce to labels such as colonialism or postcolonialism. To flesh out this argument, he contrasted the Irish experience of colonialism with that of the Ashanti people. The Ashanti encounter with the British began when the man who was their chief at the time Cruise O'Brien was writing had been only four years old and had ended within his lifetime. In Cruise O'Brien's words, a single Ashanti chief 'had seen the British come, and he had seen them go', meaning that British rule had been too short to leave a permanent legacy. The Irish colonial experience was significantly longer, and in his opinion, most Irish people would not regard it as 'anything *but* very different' to the Ashanti encounter.[142]

Here, he returned to MacGréil's survey for evidence. Notwithstanding the conspicuous discursive tendency to align the Irish with other oppressed peoples, in Africa and Asia, on account of a shared brush with British imperialism, Cruise O'Brien maintained that MacGréil's data demonstrated that Dubliners were more inclined to identify with the colonial masters rather than the oppressed. He illustrated this by pointing out that in the survey Irish people showed themselves far more prepared to accept an English person into their families than they were to receive a Nigerian, an Indian, a Pakistani, or a Zambian person. 87.3 per cent of respondents stated that they would accept an English person. In contrast, the other categories languished between 20 and 30 per cent with Indians being the most acceptable and Nigerians the least. Before unpacking his analysis of these statistics, it is worth noting that he did not consider race as a factor. In fact, he made no mention of racism and the only use of the word

[140] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 24.
[141] Ibid., 25.
[142] Ibid.

'race' throughout the entire lecture series came in a quotation that referred in nineteenth-century terms to Irish people as a 'race'.[143] He did not think that it was strange that the Irish would relate more to the English than other colonial subjects.[144] The Irish role in building and maintaining the empire, he argued, meant that they saw themselves as being 'among the rulers' as well as being among the ruled. Ireland's famed 'spiritual empire', for instance, was a significant element in the spread not only of the Gospel, but also 'Western education, in its Anglophone form', which it seemed to Cruise O'Brien was 'a crucial, though ambiguous aspect of the imperial task'.[145] He asserted that 'There is no other people which thinks - and has reason to think - of itself as an ex-colony which has played so large a part in colonising other lands, and in the management of a great empire.'[146] Therefore, he contended that to apply the term post-colonial to Ireland, one needed to be cognisant that it carried a 'double sense'. Ireland was post-colonial insofar as it had experienced colonial domination both from the side of the dominated and the dominator. Thus, this doubleness or 'schizophrenia' was more than 'just a *post-colonial* thing'. For him, it was a crucial aspect of Ireland's 'historical culture and inheritance'.[147] In his peroration, Cruise O'Brien proclaimed that to be able to 'love both Ireland and England is not to be a divided man. It is to be a whole man.'[148] Tellingly, his intellectual idol, Edmund Burke once wrote that it was not possible to be a 'genuine Englishman' without simultaneously being a 'true Irishman', and asserted that 'the same Sentiments ought to be reciprocal on the part of Ireland'.[149]

Controversially, Cruise O'Brien asserted that those who did not understand and accept this point of view were intellectually and emotionally child-like. He claimed that this was in part a legacy of the Irish education system, in which Irish children, notably Irish *Catholic* children, were taught to regard England as something 'hostile to [their] very identity'.[150] He contended that as Irish children 'grow up', most of them also outgrow these dichotomous ways of

[143] Ibid., 70.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid., 26-7.
[146] Ibid., 27.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid., 34.
[149] Cruise O'Brien, *Great melody*, 570.
[150] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 27.

processing the world. However, he asserted that MacGréil's figures showed that not all children manage to 'grow up' and leave behind their infantile delusions. He postulated that the 17.1 per cent who wanted to see England brought low missed out on the maturing process whereby 'the original Anglophobia diminishes and recedes'.[151] These people, Cruise O'Brien maintained, were 'either intellectually retarded or emotionally disturbed, sometimes both'.[152] Notably, in its reaction to his first lecture, *The Irish Press* seized upon this claim, and its frontpage report carried the sensational headline '"Retarded" Irish hate Britain'.[153]

The result of this 'Anglophobia' was that it imposed an improper image onto the political situation in Northern Ireland. Whereas in the Anglophobic imagination, Cruise O'Brien claimed, the British were maintaining the division of Ireland by force, he resolutely held that partition was a consequence of 'the basic facts of division and balance between local communities' in the North. Given that the data he was drawing on came from a study conducted in 1972, he expressed hope that the 17.1 per cent figure might have diminished in the intervening years, though he admitted that this might be wishful thinking on his part: 'one should not underestimate the capacity of those infected to transmit the infection to the next generation'.[154]

Several years before his Ewart-Biggs lectures, Cruise O'Brien discussed the means of this intergenerational transmission. The infection which dominated his 'viral imagination' spread inter-generationally through education. Speaking to the Institute of Race Relations at Chatham House in London in early spring 1972 alongside the historian Nicholas Mansergh, he confessed that he had been 'infected' during his education. He stated:

> Most of my education has been among both Protestant and Catholics but mainly Protestants. So I have been, as it were, affected (or infected) by both

[151] Ibid., 28.
[152] Ibid., 29.
[153] '"Retarded" Irish hate Britain', *Irish Press*, 18 Jan. 1978.
[154] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 33.

> inheritances in some degree, but as any Ulster Unionist will readily discern from what I am saying, more by the former than by the latter.[155]

In a speech on education, delivered in the Dáil in the immediate aftermath of the 1972 Aldershot bombings, Cruise O'Brien propagated the idea that some Irish schools were 'turning out little IRA [volunteers]', posing the rhetorical question, 'Were the seeds of Aldershot sown in an Irish classroom?' He insisted that Irish children were being infected with a 'narrow, fanatical view of history and of life, a foreign-hating view'.[156] Somewhat hyperbolically, he said, 'We saw what it [the teaching of xenophobic views of history] did to Germany in our own time and surely this is something we must avoid in our own society.'[157] He maintained that it was incumbent upon the Dáil to 'face up to the danger of this form of teaching, this form of infection through teaching'.[158] He thought that this 'infection through teaching' was passed on not just through 'hate England' history classes, but also in music lessons. In an interview with Brian Inglis, Cruise O'Brien suggested that music teachers passed on the infection through classes given over to 'patriotic ballads, organised in such a way that they came up from the 18th century to modern times in Northern Ireland – "The men behind the Wire" etc.'.[159]

When he became a government minister in 1973, as historian Terence Brown puts it, Cruise O'Brien 'set himself against all those aspects of Irish popular culture which carried an infection'.[160] In his speech to the 1976 Labour Conference, he spoke in favour of integrated education in Ireland, north and south, as a means of curing this infection. He declared that

> Opposition to integrated education is both a symptom of a disease and a means of carrying on the infection. That disease is sectarianism and is not confined to Northern Ireland. One of the best things we could do to help the people of

[155] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Northern Ireland: its past and its future: the future', *Race*, 14 (1972), 12.
[156] *Dáil debates*, 23 Feb. 1972.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Inglis, 'In search of morality'.
[160] Terence Brown, *Ireland: a social and cultural history, 1922-1985* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), 289.

> Northern Ireland would be to eliminate sectarianism from our life and legislation.[161]

He was not alone in thinking about sectarianism in terms of disease. The left-wing intellectual Seamus Deane, for example, had also given an account of sectarianism which relied on disease imagery, though he identified the problem in terms of social oppression, not what went on in the schoolroom. According to Deane, 'sectarianism [was] the dark side of our class structures. The working-classes who carry it from generation to generation like a haemophiliac germ, are its primary victims.'[162] Despite Cruise O'Brien's emphasis on the 'pathological element', one of his critics, John A. Murphy, insisted that the principal flaw in his position was that he portrayed the Provisional IRA as representatives of the 'dominant ideology of Irish nationalism', rather than 'being pathological growths thereon'.[163] He condemned Cruise O'Brien for portraying what he, Murphy, saw as a 'healthy national feeling' as 'a kind of xenophobia' more akin to 'English jingoism than ... Irish nationalism'.[164] Murphy advocated a 'national feeling' that was, according to his estimation, 'far removed from obsessive nationalist fever'. Intriguingly, despite his criticism of Cruise O'Brien, in the 'credo' he put forward, Murphy tilted at many of the same windmills as his senatorial colleague. For example, he admitted the close relationship between Catholicism and Irish nationality, a cornerstone of Cruise O'Brien's position, and asserted the need to break this link. Indeed, he used a medical metaphor to reinforce this point. He wrote, 'Above all, we must dismantle the scaffolding of Catholic nationalism and attempt the surgical task of separating those Siamese twins, faith and fatherland.'[165]

Several other prominent public intellectuals, such as Seamus Deane and John Hume, put forward arguments for a different section of opinion being the pathological element in Irish

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[161] 'British withdrawal "would open door to an Ulster Lebanon"', *Belfast Telegraph*, 22 Nov. 1976.
[162] Seamus Deane, 'An Irish intelligentsia: reflections on its desirability', *The Honest Ulsterman*, 46/47 (1974-1975), 31.
[163] John A. Murphy, 'Further reflections on Irish nationalism', *The Crane Bag*, 2 (1978), 157; Murphy also dealt with this subject in a review of Cruise O'Brien's *Herod*, see John A. Murphy, 'A nation indicted?', *Irish Times*, 24 Jun. 1978.
[164] Murphy, 'Further reflections, 159.
[165] Ibid., 162.

politics. In an interview with Deane, Hume proffered the diagnosis that Unionists 'suffer from the siege mentality', asserting that 'resistance to change combined with deep-seated insecurity [was] endemic to Unionism'.[166] Deane put it to the SDLP leader that – although he and his party had 'been accused of becoming Green Nationalists, thereby falling prey to the virus of Irish Nationalism' – Hume's position was that the 'real sickness in the North is Unionism'. Hume's views, according to Deane's characterization, was that 'Unionism [was] politically speaking, a pathological condition' comprising 'dependence on others for a guarantee, hatred of others on a mixture of theological and political grounds, the siege mentality, [and] the willingness to distort facts and the capacity to ignore them'.[167] Hume, viewed by most as the great 'peacemaker' and advocate of an 'agreed Ireland', concurred with Deane's summary of his perspective, suggesting that after facing this reality the next step was for 'someone to explain this condition – a post-colonial one – from what it arises and how it can be cured.'[168] Cruise O'Brien strongly disagreed with Hume's perspective. Indeed, for him, Hume, alongside Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams, went on to become the embodiment of the 'virus of Irish Nationalism'. In 1996, Cruise O'Brien wrote that around 1990 a new mutation of this disease had begun to infect the Irish state, 'the deadly Hume-Adams virus'. This referred to the prominent roles Adams and Hume played in the 'peace process', which Cruise O'Brien implacably opposed.[169]

Shortly before Cruise O'Brien's second Ewart-Biggs lecture, read at Queen's University, Belfast, the nationalist politician Austin Currie reviewed Cruise O'Brien's new collection of essays, speeches, and plays, *Herod: Reflections on violence.* In that review, Currie chided Cruise O'Brien for failing to pose what he, Currie, took to be the 'fundamental question' relating to Northern Ireland, namely the question of what were the structures that needed to be put in place to prevent a return to violence further down the line were paramilitary groups to lay down their weapons.[170] Cruise O'Brien felt impelled to answer this criticism in his second Ewart-Biggs lecture on the 'Northern connection in British-Irish relations'. He felt that the problem, as

[166] Seamus Deane and Barre Fitzpatrick, 'Interview with John Hume', *The Crane Bag*, 4 (1980), 40-41.
[167] Deane and Fitzpatrick, 'John Hume', 41.
[168] Ibid., 42.
[169] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The mandarins of Sinn Fein', *Sunday Independent*, 9 Jun. 1996.
[170] Austin Currie, 'Stimulating reading Dr O'Brien, but there is one question you haven't asked', *Belfast Telegraph*, 13 Jun. 1978.

Currie stated it, had no solution. There were no structures, he said, that could guarantee that no return to violence occurred in the future.[171] So long as groups existed in Northern Ireland who held passionate and mutually incompatible aspirations regarding the union with Great Britain, he believed the idea of a compromise was an '*illusion* [emphasis in the original]'. For Cruise O'Brien, this observation was obvious, even if people like Currie were reluctant to accept it as a fact. He contended that the refusal of 'men of goodwill', such as Currie, to accept 'bad news' produced 'a kind of intellectual paralysis where intellectual vigour is most needed'. Alluding to Yeats's 'Second coming', Cruise O'Brien declared that in the case of the North the 'worst' were, indeed, full of 'passionate intensity', but the 'best' had lost 'through compassion, the power to think'.[172] Consequently, they developed 'convictions of an irrational character', which he deemed inimical to finding a remedy.[173]

This condition was not limited to the Irish. Indeed, Cruise O'Brien contended that 'English men of goodwill ... [were] peculiarly susceptible to this disease'.[174] He pointed to the memoir of the former British ambassador to Dublin, Sir John Peck, as illustrative of a key 'symptom' associated with this 'disease'. This symptom involved suggesting solutions that either did not address republican demands or had previously failed to produce results.[175] In this case, Peck suggested the establishment of an Anglo-Irish council, which in Cruise O'Brien's view, stood no chance of mollifying the Provisional IRA whose objective, as he put it, was to 'break the connection' between the two islands entirely. Other manifestations of the disease included the desire to revive the failed 1973 Sunningdale Agreement, which established a short-lived power-sharing Executive that was brought down due to mass strikes on the part of unionist workers who viewed it as a stepping-stone to a united Ireland. This last symptom, he claimed, was common among well-intentioned Irish politicians like Currie. As Cruise O'Brien saw things, Sunningdale collapsed because unionist politicians could not sell it to their constituents, who despite their leaders' denials viewed it as leading the way to unification. Cruise O'Brien reckoned that nationalist politicians, particularly John Hume, and the 'Dublin media'

[171] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 47.
[172] Ibid., 48.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

undermined unionist leaders in the North and the agreement itself by stating in public their view that 'a step to unity was just what it [Sunningdale] was'.[176] Indeed, the Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave, Cruise O'Brien's cabinet colleague at the time, was one of those politicians who publicly stated that the Agreement paved the way for unification. These statements provided confirmation for unionist suspicions that 'Dublin is just a Sunningdale away'.[177] At the time of Sunningdale's demise, Cruise O'Brien wrote a long letter to Garret and Joan Fitzgerald reproaching both Irish politicians and people in the media for perpetuating the 'fantasy' of a united Ireland. For him, dropping the assertion that 'the national objective [was] the unification of the island' would make Ireland a 'healthier place'.[178] The 'men of goodwill' who yearned for a new power-sharing agreement, according to Cruise O'Brien, had not succeeded in learning the lessons which the breakdown of Sunningdale had to teach them.[179]

'Give direct rule a chance'

Rather than trying to establish new structures, Cruise O'Brien argued that the way forward was to "*Give direct rule a chance*", and to work towards reconciliation within the existing institutional framework. He insisted that even though neither nationalists nor unionists liked to admit it, direct rule from Westminster was the 'least intolerable of possible forms of government'.[180] In his final Ewart-Biggs lecture, at University College, Oxford, he noted that survey data supported this opinion. Cruise O'Brien felt that although direct rule was sub-ideal, it worked for two reasons. First, from a nationalist perspective, it dismantled the Protestant state and its concomitant discrimination against Catholics. Second, from a unionist vantage point, it protected the link with Britain. Cruise O'Brien's message to both communities was to forgo discussion of the constitutional status of the region and work on areas of common interest, such as the issue of unemployment. To encourage this dialogue, he suggested the creation of a

[176] Ibid., 49-50; on Cruise O'Brien's denunciation of Hume, see Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'The spiral into civil war', *The Observer*, 26 Aug. 1979.
[177] P.J. McLaughlin, '"Dublin is just a Sunningdale away"? The SDLP, the Irish government and the Sunningdale Agreement', *Twentieth Century British History*, 20 (2009), 74-96.
[178] Cruise O'Brien to Garret and Joan Fitzgerald, 17 July 1974, UCDA, Fitzgerald papers, P215/79.
[179] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 50.
[180] Ibid., 51.

cross-community Consultative Assembly, which was an idea the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had previously floated. In this way, direct rule could be a bandage for 'binding up the wounds of this gravely injured province', preventing 'a further airing to claims and counter-claims that helped to cause these wounds'. It would also help to fill what Cruise O'Brien termed direct rule's 'famous "vacuum" of democracy'.[181]

Sontag argued that the parallel drawn between disease and civil strife in political philosophy had the aim of promoting a 'more rational policy' among policymakers. Here she pointed to the words of Thomas Hobbes in Chapter XXIX of *Leviathan* to illustrate her argument.[182] In that section of his treatise, Hobbes claimed that 'if men had the use of reason they pretend to, their Common-wealths [sic] might be secured, at least, from perishing by internal diseases'.[183] In a similar vein, Cruise O'Brien, in his final Ewart-Biggs lecture, encouraged British and Irish policymakers and stakeholders to abandon 'wishful thinking', which, he asserted, made a dangerous situation even more perilous, and to face the political realities of the Northern Irish conflict.[184] Indeed, as one not uncritical commentator wrote, Cruise O'Brien's work 'help[ed] vaccinate against fuzzy thought'.[185]

As with his other lectures in the series, Cruise O'Brien adopted a methodology based on polling data. Unlike his previous presentations, however, this time he was able to use up-to-date opinion polling on attitudes in the Republic towards the North, which Dublin's Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) published a week before he was due to give his paper. Before moving on to discuss how Cruise O'Brien used this new data set, we should pause to examine the controversy surrounding the survey's publication.

Carried out by the ESRI's E.E. Davis and Richard Sinnott of UCD, the survey generated a great deal of debate in the Irish media, making the front page of most newspapers. As journalist Barbara McKeon noted, news bulletins and current affairs programmes were awash with reaction to the findings.[186] RTE even ran a 'Frontline Special', an edition of the broadcaster's

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[181] Ibid., 88.
[182] Susan Sontag, 'Disease as political metaphor', *New York Review of Books*, 23 Feb. 1978.
[183] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, G.A.J. Rogers and Karl Schuhmann, eds (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2003), 253.
[184] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 86.
[185] F.F. Ridley, 'Matters of life or death', *Irish Press*, 6 July 1978.
[186] *Irish Press*, 17 Oct. 1979.

leading current affairs programme, dedicated to the study in addition to its regular programming.[187] The headline figure to emerge from the ESRI report put support for the Provisional IRA's activities at 20.7 per cent of the population of the Republic. Despite the finding that an overwhelming majority did not approve of the Provisional IRA, the results, which revealed significant minority support for the IRA in the Republic, were a source of embarrassment for the Irish government.[188] Indeed, there was disbelief in official circles. A civil service memorandum stated that it was difficult to square this finding with 'the overwhelming response to the Holy Father's plea for an end to violence', referring to Pope John Paul II's message to Irish Catholics during his visit to Ireland several weeks earlier.[189]

As historian Brian Hanley has noted, the claim that the Provisional IRA held a modicum of popular support produced a series of 'vitriolic responses' in Dublin.[190] Across the board, mainstream political leaders in the Republic sought to repudiate the findings, almost 'tripp[ing] over one another' in their rush to do so.[191] Speaking at Dublin Castle, Taoiseach Jack Lynch repudiated the report's conclusions, pointing out that in the recent local government elections Provisional Sinn Féin only received 2.16 per cent of first preference votes.[192] We should note, however, that this figure tallied with the 2.8 per cent of respondents found to be 'strongly supportive' of the IRA's activities.[193] Fine Gael's Garret Fitzgerald dismissed the report, claiming that the authors were guilty of 'an intolerable abuse of language and an encouragement to bigotry'.[194] Similarly, Labour leader Frank McCluskey called them 'irresponsible', suggesting that the report would give succour to the Provisional IRA.[195] In an editorial comment, *The Irish Press* proclaimed that the survey would 'bring unalloyed pleasure to ... the Provisional IRA'.[196] Indeed,

[187] *Evening Press*, 16 Oct. 1979.
[188] *Irish Times*, 16 Oct. 1979.
[189] Memorandum on 'Attitudes in the Republic of Ireland relevant to the Northern Ireland problem', 15 Oct. 1979, NAI, Department of the Taoiseach (DT) 2009/135/722.
[190] Brian Hanley, *The impact of the Troubles on the Republic of Ireland, 1968-79: boiling volcano* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 166.
[191] *Irish Times*, 17 Oct. 1979; *New York Times*, 3 Nov. 1979.
[192] *Evening Press*, 16 Oct. 1979.
[193] E.E. Davis and R. Sinnott, *Attitudes in the Republic of Ireland relevant to the Northern Ireland problem, vol. 1: descriptive analysis and some comparisons with attitudes in Northern Ireland and Great Britain* (Dublin; Economic and Social Research Institute, 1979), 99.
[194] *Irish Times*, 17 Oct. 1979.
[195] Ibid.
[196] *Irish Press*, 16 Oct. 1979.

the president of Provisional Sinn Féin declared that the survey 'vindicated' his party's policy.[197] The Republican intellectual Danny Morrison contended that the reaction from political leaders indicated the level of 'insecurity and paranoia' about the Republican Movement in establishment circles.[198]

The results of the survey also caused controversy in the intellectual sphere. Political psychologist Ken Heskin, who had finished writing his book *Northern Ireland, a psychological analysis* earlier in the year, condemned the ESRI survey and alleged that its leaders had breached professional standards. He lamented the fact that such a 'defective piece of work' had received such a high level of publicity.[199] Likewise, a lecturer in statistics from Trinity College Dublin, Michael Stuart, rebuked Davis and Sinnott for the 'gross irresponsibility' of publishing 'carelessly' on such a 'highly emotive and sensitive area'.[200] The Irish Marketing Society (IMS), which represented Irish public opinion and market research organisations, even went so far as to demand that the ESRI withdraw the survey.[201] Controversially, nine of Davis's ESRI colleagues came out in the press to denounce his work.[202]

Drawing on Sinnott and Davis's published assessment of the response to their paper, Brian Hanley has contended that as with the political and media spheres, the academic one displayed marked consensus against the survey.[203] However, this view understates the level of support Sinnott and Davis received. The provocative public intellectual Desmond Fennell saw things differently, believing that the survey's findings were reasonably predictable. He judged 'that those politicians, Trinity academics and others, who have attacked the report with quite amazing vehemence ... have some extraneous reason for wishing to discredit it'.[204] In fact, the furious response to the ESRI report backfired, in that it garnered international academic attention, especially in the United States. The president of the American Sociological Association, Peter H. Rossi, weighed in on the controversy in defence of its authors. On a purely

[197] *Irish Times*, 17 Oct. 1979.
[198] *Irish Times*, 1 Nov. 1979.
[199] *Irish Times*, 29 Oct. 1979.
[200] *Irish Times*, 6 Nov. 1979.
[201] *Irish Press*, 26 Oct. 1979.
[202] *Irish Times*, 21 Dec. 1979.
[203] Hanley, *Impact*, 167.
[204] *Irish Times*, 12 Nov. 1979.

technical level, Rossi's professional opinion was that the survey demonstrated its authors' 'considerable skill [and] responsibility in interpretation'.[205] Robert E. Kennedy Jr, who specialised in the sociology of Irish emigration, stated that the political reaction had 'disturbed' him. He thought the study set a 'benchmark' for modern social science research in the Republic, and he was outraged at the IMS's attempts to quash the findings.[206]

In the political and intellectual context surrounding the results of the ESRI survey, deploying the findings was not a neutral act. In his discussion of it, however, Cruise O'Brien alluded only obliquely to the level of consternation its findings caused in the Irish public sphere.[207] Nonetheless, he thought that the survey reinforced his position relating to the size and lethality of the 'pathological element' in Irish society. As he saw it, political leaders in Ireland and Britain were prone to make inaccurate assessments about this pathological element.[208] On the one hand, he stated, there were those who loathed the Irish and believed they were all terrorists. While on the other, some 'leaders of public opinion', especially in Britain, held the 'starry-eyed assumption that almost all Irish people reject[ed] the IRA'.[209] Cruise O'Brien insisted that no one who read the report of the ESRI, that 'respected body', should have been shocked at the revelation that 20.7 per cent of Irish people supported the IRA in some way. He certainly was not. Somewhat triumphantly, he informed his audience that in his first Ewart-Biggs lecture the previous year, he had estimated Irish support for the IRA at around 20 per cent. Moving on from the figure which dominated press coverage of the survey, Cruise O'Brien highlighted the enormous gulf between support for Irish unity between people in the Republic and those in Northern Ireland. In the Republic, the surveyors found, 68 per cent of the population thought a united Ireland was the 'most workable solution'. However, most opted for this solution with little expectation of seeing it come to fruition.[210] By contrast, in the six counties, that figure was a mere 14 per cent. Most dispiritingly from a united Ireland

[205] *Irish Times*, 19 Dec. 1979.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 79-80.
[208] Ibid., 79.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Memorandum on 'Attitudes in the Republic of Ireland relevant to the Northern Ireland problem', 15 Oct. 1979, NAI, DT 2009/135/722.

perspective, only 39 per cent of northern Catholics listed a united Ireland as their preferred outcome compared with almost half who wished to remain in the United Kingdom.[211] In total, Sinnott and Davis estimated support for unification as a proportion of the entire population of the island to be somewhere between 48 and 52 per cent.[212] Cruise O'Brien argued that the absence of a clear majority for a united Ireland undercut the 'traditional case' for unification, predicated as it was on the '*assumption*' that a decisive majority supported it.[213]

Drawing on yet more polling data, this time from a Gallup poll which RTE commissioned regarding British attitudes towards Northern Ireland, Cruise O'Brien deplored the 'miserable' level of support for the North remaining a part of the United Kingdom. That poll found that a mere 25 per cent of Britons wanted to see the six counties remain. He argued that the most critical thing the British government could do to reduce the level of danger in the situation was to educate the British public about why Northern Ireland was in the United Kingdom, namely that most of the population there wanted it. He was sure that a large proportion of the British public were unaware of this fact. Fostering support in Great Britain for the British presence in Northern Ireland, Cruise O'Brien maintained, would be the most effective way to demonstrate to the Provisional IRA that it was 'not winning'. He urged all mainstream British political parties to commit to this agenda publicly, predicting that the attention such a statement would attract would have a 'benign effect'. Here, it should be noted that the use of the word benign had echoes of the 'benign' and 'malignant' scenarios Cruise O'Brien outlined in *States of Ireland*. Finally, he stressed the need for British leaders to explain to their public that a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland would result in 'civil war in Ireland' from which Britain 'could not be immune'.[214]

The critical judgement on *Neighbours* was that Cruise O'Brien had not managed to live up to his previous high standards. The poet and critic John Montague characterized the collection's tone as 'more hysterical than historical'.[215] The Yorkshire-born Northern Irish literary critic Tom Paulin skewered the book, asserting that it marked the completion of Cruise

[211] Davis and Sinnott, *Attitudes in the Republic of Ireland*, 55.
[212] Ibid., 62.
[213] Cruise O'Brien, *Neighbours*, 82.
[214] Ibid., 87.
[215] John Montague, 'Good neighbours', *The Guardian*, 24 Dec. 1980.

O'Brien's transformation into a loyalist, echoing John A. Murphy's argument made two years earlier.[216] In a broad deconstruction of Cruise O'Brien's body of work, Paulin advanced the argument that his overriding political commitment was to the maintenance of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In his view, the purpose of Cruise O'Brien's 'eccentric and self-regarding lectures' was to convince the British government to 'maintain that state'. Paulin derided Cruise O'Brien's method as a 'grisly comedy', describing his use of 'a brittle mass of statistics' as a sort of 'intellectual dereliction'.[217] *Irish Times* writer Dervla Murphy deemed Paulin's criticisms unjustified, calling his essay in the *Times Literary Supplement* 'a remarkable exercise in misinterpretation'.[218] She read *Neighbours* as signifying not the testament of convert to loyalism, but as the words of 'a weary man reluctantly accepting what he genuinely believes to be the least of several evils'. However, Murphy also found fault with Cruise O'Brien's take on his subject, which she felt was overly apocalyptic. She charged him with responsibility for 'the recent spread, in Britain, of a grotesque notion that any decisive move to release Northern Ireland from the impasse of Direct Rule must provoke all the people of that region to fall upon each other with knives'.[219]

As Murphy highlighted, an element of 'despair' had indeed seeped into Cruise O'Brien's analysis of Irish politics. In 1974, in the wake of the collapse of the power-sharing executive, Cruise O'Brien dismissed a call from an English legal student for repartition as a solution to political conflict, rejecting it as a 'solution of despair'. At that time, Cruise O'Brien stressed that while such a solution might appeal to people who were 'sick of the whole problem', the conflict could not 'be cured by some single drastic piece of "surgery".'[220] He judged that there could be 'no cure, unless the two main sectors of the population in Northern Ireland can agree on at least minimal forms of power-sharing, or working together in common institutions'.[221] However, by 1981, Cruise O'Brien considered that it was worth re-examining this proposal,

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[216] Paulin, 'Making of a loyalist'; see Murphy, 'Further reflections'.
[217] Paulin, 'Making of a loyalist'.
[218] Dervla Murphy, 'The O'Brien line', *Irish Times*, 6 Dec. 1980.
[219] Notably, in her work, Murphy, like Cruise O'Brien, constructed Northern Ireland as a sick society in which people suffered from 'infectious emotional diseases', see Dervla Murphy, *A place apart* (London: John Murray, 1978), 148-9.
[220] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'A solution of despair', *The Observer*, 9 Jun. 1974.
[221] Ibid.

especially in the febrile political atmosphere which followed the republican prisoner Bobby Sands' death while on hunger strike.[222] As he made clear in his Ewart-Biggs lectures, maintaining the *status quo* was his preferred option, but now he worried that the fallout from the hunger strikes would weaken British resolve to remain in Northern Ireland. Nationalist and Republican groups had called for the British Army to pull out of Northern Ireland for several years, arguing that 'the disease that is eating at this country' would not 'have a cure' until a British declaration to 'withdraw the IRA's recruiting agent, the British Army, from Ireland'.[223] For years, Cruise O'Brien maintained that a British withdrawal would have the effect of 'speeding up the progress of the disease, not healing it or bringing it under control'.[224] If the British government did decide to withdraw from Northern Ireland, Cruise O'Brien now advocated repartition as the best chance to avoid a full-scale civil war. He continued to believe that 'Repartition [was] major surgery', carrying all the attendant risks. Previously, he had maintained that these were risks not worth taking, but now, he argued, 'the patient's condition is such that perhaps only major surgery may save him'.[225] Commenting on Cruise O'Brien's article, the editor of the conservative, nationalist paper, *The Strabane Chronicle*, agreed that the time was ripe for exploring repartition. Echoing Cruise O'Brien's medical metaphors, the *Chronicle* declared: 'Desperate diseases do, after all, require desparate [sic] remedies.'[226] The unionist *Belfast Telegraph*, however, contended that Cruise O'Brien's '"cure" would be worse than the disease'.[227] In the Republic, all shades of opinion dismissed Cruise O'Brien's surgical solution.[228]

Not long after, during his 1982 *James Henderson Scott Memorial Lecture* at Queen's University Belfast, Cruise O'Brien recanted his verdict that this 'near-desperate piece of political surgery' was the only means of avoiding civil war.[229] He recanted not due to public pressure,

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[222] For a discussion of the politics of the hunger strikes, see Tom Hennessy, *Margaret Thatcher's battle with the IRA, 1980-1981* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2013).
[223] Editorial, 'The RTE sackings', *Irish Press*, 25 Nov. 1972.
[224] *Dáil debates*, 20 Nov. 1975.
[225] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Ireland: Can the border be redrawn?', *The Observer*, 31 May 1981.
[226] Editorial, 'The only option left?', *Strabane Chronicle*, 6 Jun. 1981.
[227] Editorial, 'Not the answer', *Belfast Telegraph*, 18 Jun. 1981.
[228] Anon., 'O'Brien plan for repartition criticised', *Irish Times*, 1 Jun. 1981.
[229] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Bloody well scared am I', *The fourth James Henderson Scott Memorial Lecture*, Queen's University Belfast, 4 May 1982, 14.

but because he thought that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland James Prior's April 1982 White Paper provided renewed hope that a solution could be found. Although the 'Prior Initiative' received a frosty reception from most interested parties, including his own cabinet colleagues, Cruise O'Brien embraced it because felt that the Secretary's 'creative proposals' for a new cross-community Assembly resembled the Consultative Assembly for which he had advocated in his final Ewart-Biggs lecture. Another reason why he welcomed Prior's proposals was that he considered that even if the Assembly became 'dead-locked', this would demonstrate that the inhabitants of Northern Ireland were unable to govern themselves and, therefore, would make direct rule look less like a colonial imposition and more like a reasonable policy option.[230]

Conclusion

One of the thinkers Cruise O'Brien most admired was the nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.[231] In the German philosopher's *Twilight of the idols*, Nietzsche depicted Socrates as presenting himself as 'a physician' offering the Greeks 'an apparent cure' for their 'disease'. The cure he offered to his 'patients' was rationality. Nietzsche ultimately upended this image, judging that Socrates far from being a doctor was merely another patient infected with disease.[232] Like Nietzsche's Socrates, Cruise O'Brien also presented himself as a political physician and like the great ancient Greek thinker, the cure Cruise O'Brien seemed to offer was 'rationality'. His admirers, mainly anti-republicans in Ireland and Great Britain, praised him for applying 'the scalpel of criticism' to Irish society, while his detractors, generally those who sympathized with the aims of the IRA, sneered at the clinical element of his self-image, rebuking him for 'peddl[ing] quack remedies'.[233] Despite the deficiencies in the way he represented the Northern Irish conflict, the criticisms he levelled at Irish nationalist political

[230] Cruise O'Brien, 'Bloody well scared', 15; for a discussion of the results of Prior's scheme, see Paul Hainsworth, 'The Northern Ireland Assembly election of 1982', *Electoral Studies*, 2 (1983), 177-83; for a historical account of the reasons why Prior's initiative failed, see Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: the war of ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 238-40.
[231] Aengus Fanning, 'Pearse's genius … by Conor Cruise O'Brien', *Sunday Independent*, 29 Nov. 1998.
[232] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the idols: or, how to philosophise with the hammer*, trans. A.M. Ludovici (London: T.N. Fouls, 1911), 9-16.
[233] *Irish Press*, 26 Sept. 1972.

culture in these years buttressed his reputation as a 'courageous' public intellectual. As the Labour Party politician Eamon Gilmore put it, 'He showed particular courage in confronting traditional attitudes towards Northern Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s.'[234] Indeed, scholars such as Tom Garvin have contended that it was his opposition to nationalism that in fact made him 'the most conspicuous Irish public intellectual of his time'.[235]

As Richard Bourke has argued, 'languages of conflict' all too often misrepresent that which they seek to explain. Here, Cruise O'Brien's pathologizing of nationalism stands as another example of a vocabulary that failed to capture the character of political violence in Ireland. Nevertheless, his underlying analysis of the prospects for Irish unity was perceptive and has stood the test of time, even if the language with which he represented his assessment was inadequate and misleading. The viral metaphors and disease imagery that pervaded Cruise O'Brien's utterances about nationalism only made sense as part of a political strategy to undermine that ideology rather than as a means of explaining it. As an analytical tool, they were methodologically unsound. Given that most of his writing on Irish nationalism took place in the context of his political engagement with the Troubles, it is understandable that he opted to pursue a polemical strategy rather than a coolly detached scholarly one. However, considering the expectations of the public intellectual outlined at the start of this chapter, namely that they should offer their insights impartially to help people navigate their social worlds, it is clear that 'Ireland's premier public intellectual' failed to embody the qualities looked for in people who assume this role. Of course, this might say more about the unrealistic expectations that are frequently heaped upon the idea of the public intellectual, than it did about Cruise O'Brien's actual performance as an intellectual in the public sphere.

[234] Fionnan Sheehan, 'Glowing tributes to a man of "immense political courage"', *Irish Independent*, 19 Dec. 2008.
[235] Garvin, 'Imaginary Cassandra', 430.

Conclusion

Few men, as Nietzsche said, have the courage to think even that which they know.[1]

When Cruise O'Brien died in 2008, former Taoisigh, government ministers, party leaders, intellectuals, and other commentators, tripped over each other to emphasise courage as his defining characteristic.[2] Even those who disagreed with his stances or doubted his wisdom bought into the notion that he had demonstrated political, moral, and intellectual courage. As one might expect, there were those who demurred, but they were a distinct minority.[3] The highlighting of Cruise O'Brien's courage above other traits points to the success of his long effort to position himself in public as a 'courageous' intellectual willing to stand up to defend his core values.

The central thread of the thesis lies in the positioning of Cruise O'Brien as a 'courageous' public intellectual. This positioning involved his own recurrent self-positioning and the frequent ascription to him by other agents of traits such as fearlessness, bravery, and courage. Indeed, the theme of courage was a constant refrain in contemporary coverage of Cruise O'Brien's public interventions.[4] As Erving Goffman has maintained,

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[1] Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 189; Nietzsche's aphorism is more faithfully rendered as 'Even the bravest of us only rarely has the courage for what he actually *knows* …', see K.A. Pearson and Duncan Large, eds, *The Nietzsche reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 456.

[2] For a representative sample, see Garret Fitzgerald, 'Distinguished writer and political meteor who illuminated our lives', *Irish Times*, 20 Dec. 2008; Deaglán de Bréadún, 'President praises breadth of O'Brien's career', *Irish Times*, 20 Dec. 2008; Fionnan Sheehan, 'Glowing tributes to a man of "immense political courage"', *Irish Independent*, 19 Dec. 2008.

[3] See Archon, 'Late Conor Cruise O'Brien intellectually brilliant, but was he that courageous?', *The Southern Star*, 27 Dec. 2008; Brendan O'Neill, 'The curious victory of Conor Cruise O'Brien', *Spiked*, 29 Dec. 2008.

[4] Examples of this second order positioning abound, for a small sample see O'Brien, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien', 210-22; Lewis Coser, 'World of opinion', *New York Times*, 31 Oct. 1965; Lyons, 'Home truths', *Irish Times*, 2 Dec. 1965; Patrick J. Murphy, 'Moral courage', *Irish Independent*, 23 Sept. 1971; John Silverlight, 'Conor Cruise O'Brien: Irishman Extraordinary', *The Observer Magazine*, Sept. 1973 quoted in 'Conor Cruise O'Brien joins The Observer', *The Observer*, 18 Dec. 1977; Mary Kenny, 'Conor Cruise wins media award', *Sunday Independent*, 21 Oct. 1979; Tom Dunne, 'Tom Dunne's comments on: Conor Cruise O'Brien', *Sunday Independent*, 22 Feb. 2004.

> A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized.[5]

The pattern of Cruise O'Brien's interventions illustrated his persistent endeavour to perform the role of the public intellectual. For instance, by shunning the so-called 'ivory tower', abjuring the label 'objective historian', and favouring instead to follow passionate engagement with contemporary public discourse, Cruise O'Brien performed the part of the *engagée* intellectual, rather than the 'professional' scholar. Decisions such as this caused commentators to label him as 'courageous', feeding into his own self-positioning. Similarly, his choice to enter Irish politics and the stand he made against the use of violence as a way of doing politics in Northern Ireland led to further endorsements of his positioning as a 'courageous' intellectual in politics.

In 1966, Cruise O'Brien wrote that the 1916 Rising represented a 'challenge to conscience and to courage'.[6] In a speech delivered to a meeting of the Irish Association for Cultural, Economic and Social Relations around the time of the publication of his essay 'The embers of Easter', he clarified that this challenge was not to acts of physical courage, but to 'moral courage'. This form of courage was a quality that Cruise O'Brien valued highly and urged others to cultivate in themselves for the sake of the public good. He put forward the leaders of the Rising as exemplars of the 'moral courage' needed to think critically about society and follow the logic of one's own conclusions, which he believed was required to 'cure' Ireland of its 'creeping conformism' and 'servility'.[7] It might be objected that the leaders of the Rising evinced *physical* courage rather than *moral or intellectual* courage, and that there were more obvious examples of moral courage that Cruise O'Brien could have named, such as his uncle, Francis Sheehy Skeffington. However, in the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising, invoking the names of the leaders of 1916 to encourage citizens to engage in their own critical

[5] Erving Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 75.
[6] Cruise O'Brien, 'Embers of Easter', 634.
[7] 'Dr. Cruise O'Brien talks of "creeping conformism"', *Cork Examiner*, 1 Apr. 1966.

examinations of the structures of power in Irish society was a powerful rhetorical move. Not only did it embed his message within a recognizable discourse, but it was also an attempt to undermine the political establishment's claim to ownership over the legacy of the Rising and its leaders. In 1969, several months after his election to Dáil Éireann, Cruise O'Brien spoke further about the need for courage in political life when he delivered the T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures at the University of Kent. In the first of those lectures, he discussed the Italian thinker Niccolò Machiavelli, highlighting the Florentine's ability to assess the requirements of a given political situation and not shirk unpleasant necessities required to solve political problems as a model for the intellectual in politics to follow. Not only had Machiavelli written extensively about the role of courage in political life, but he had also displayed civic courage in his own political career. For Cruise O'Brien, the lesson to be derived from Machiavelli was that politics required 'the courage of intelligence; the courage to look steadily at the block and the bloody knife, and try to think steadily through what they mean'.[8] Modern politics, in Cruise O'Brien's opinion, was in dire need of 'the courage, the creative imagination, and the candour which Machiavelli so dazzlingly exemplified'.[9] Given that Cruise O'Brien had just embarked on his own political career, the message here was that he was going to follow the model provided by Machiavelli.

Cruise O'Brien, however, felt that his own courage had failed him in the period immediately preceding the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland. Writing in 1972, he claimed that he had always suspected that the Civil Rights movement, which he had supported, had held within it the potential to provoke violent reactions and counter-reactions. He felt that he ought to have expressed this concern at the time, but, recalling what he later dubbed 'the scariest of all [Nietzsche's] scary aphorisms', he commented, 'Few men … have the courage to think even that which they know.'[10] Although he did not use the term 'civic courage', the courage that Cruise O'Brien variously labelled moral, intellectual, and political was equivalent to the concept of civic courage discussed by scholars such as Misztal as being a vital element to the functioning of public life and to the public intellectual's role therein. In *States of Ireland*, by

[8] Cruise O'Brien, *Suspecting glance*, 30; 'the block and the bloody knife' refers to Cesare Borgia's execution of Ramiro d'Orca in 1502, see Cruise O'Brien, *Suspecting glance*, 15.
[9] Cruise O'Brien, *Suspecting glance*, 31.
[10] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Survival, defence and freedom', *The Observer*, 6 July 1980; Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, 189.

quoting the Nietzschean aphorism that provides this conclusion's epigraph, Cruise O'Brien obliquely implied that at the time of writing he had finally summoned his courage and positioned the book's intervention as a courageous act. Thus, Cruise O'Brien represented the book as both an admission of failures, and an attempt to make atonement for his past lack of courage. In later interventions, such as the book *Neighbours*, Cruise O'Brien and his publishers explicitly exploited his reputation as a 'courageous' intellectual to help market his work.

In addition to enjoying a standing as a person with a history of intellectual attainment, being thought of as possessing a high degree of courage is a fundamental component of a public intellectual's cultural authority. Thus, successfully positioning oneself as a public intellectual requires the fostering of a reputation for 'courageous' interventions in the public sphere. Cruise O'Brien adroitly used his talent for publicity to cultivate such a brand, exploiting opportunities to enhance it as and when they presented themselves. Other actors in the public sphere also played a major part in this positioning, buying into and reinforcing it by routinely ascribing the trait of courage to his intellectual interventions, underlining the fact that positioning is not an individual venture.

The groundwork for this positioning was laid 'backstage' away from public view where Cruise O'Brien worked with editors, publishers, producers, and agents to prepare his performance as a public intellectual. This was a transnational operation with nodes in Dublin, London, and New York, places where Cruise O'Brien worked to develop strategic contacts who helped to smooth his entry into those important literary markets. That Cruise O'Brien had cultivated approving publics outside Ireland, particularly in Great Britain and the United States, meant that, even though he received immense criticism and opposition in Ireland, he was still rewarded for the positions he adopted with a regular flow of commissions, prizes, and fellowships. Thus, the networking, self-marketing, and self-promotion that he engaged in from an early stage in his career and continued to invest in throughout paid dividends in the form of a "safety net" that gave him the space to make controversial and unpopular interventions in public debates without putting his intellectual career in any real jeopardy.

While it would be inappropriate to accuse Cruise O'Brien of having performed the fabled *trahison des clercs*, he did fall into one of the many pitfalls that stand in the way of a person

seeking to perform the role of the public intellectual, namely that his intellectual interventions became ancillary to his political agenda and suffered as a consequence. Nonetheless, by several standards, he performed immensely well in the role of the public intellectual.[11] Not only did he win election to the Dáil, but he also became a government minister. Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, his ideas about the Troubles, particularly as outlined in his intellectual interventions, had a profound impact on the way Irish people, especially in the Republic of Ireland, conceptualized Irish nationalism and the desirability of trying to attain a united Ireland. Cruise O'Brien, himself, believed that it was in this way that he had had the greatest impact on Irish politics. Indeed, his insistence that the Republic of Ireland cease pushing for unification became the backbone of the Irish state's approach to peace-making in the 1990s. If we accept Misztal's argument that public intellectuals perform a social good when through their interventions, they compel people to reassess the foundations of their political allegiance, then it must be conceded that Conor Cruise O'Brien performed this role with aplomb.

[11] See Randall Collins, 'Who has been a successful public intellectual?', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 14 (2011), 437-52.

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