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Culture, Northern Ireland, and the Second World War

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A thesis submitted to the School of English, Trinity College Dublin, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2012
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Summary

This thesis explores the impact of the Second World War on literature and culture in Northern Ireland between 1939 and 1970. It argues that the war, as a unique interregnum in the history of Northern Ireland, challenged the entrenched political and social makeup of the province and had a profound effect on its cultural life. Critical approaches to Northern Irish literature and culture have often been circumscribed by topographies of partition and sectarianism, and it is striking how the Second World War seems to have created conditions for reconsidering the province within broader European and global contexts. These opportunities have perhaps been obscured by the amount of critical attention that has been paid to the impact of the Troubles on the culture of the province, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to focus on material produced before the flaring of political violence towards the end of the 1960s. I aim to recover submerged and neglected texts and artefacts which articulate the effect of the war on the province, with the hope of enlarging the sphere of its twentieth century cultural history. A central concern of the study is the tension between the cultural tendency to emphasise the local and the regional in Northern Ireland during the war, and the fact that the province became more susceptible to international pressures and influences at this time, from its involvement in the war itself, and from the influx of foreign troops and refugees. I hope to show that despite its comparative isolation, the war provided conditions in Northern Ireland which encouraged some transgressive and imaginative expressions of cultural identity. Whilst acknowledging the undeniably deeply traumatic events of the Belfast blitz and the experiences of many people in the province who lost family members or friends serving overseas in the armed forces during the war, it is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate that in many ways the Second World War had a positive impact on the cultural life of Northern Ireland.

The study is interdisciplinary and examines non-fictional, journalistic and non-textual sources as well as literary texts, exploring the impact of the war across overlapping forms of writing and visual art. Polyphonous journals such as *Lagan* and the Ulster numbers of *The Bell* published during the war have inspired and guided this approach. The fragmentary nature of some of the material, and the contingent or irregular ways in which works were published or appeared means that there is considerable cross-pollination between the otherwise generically organised chapters of this thesis. The first chapter addresses autobiographical fiction and memoir, considering
ways in which the stories of individuals have been integrated with known historical events. With reference to Brian Moore’s *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, it engages with what Holger Klein described in *The Second World War in Fiction* (1984) as the ‘embedding’ of creative texts within supposedly factual accounts, focusing on the use of passages from the novel by social historians. This is followed by an examination of Benedict Kiely’s *Land Without Stars* (1946), an autobiographical novel which is illustrative of how the war presented severe problems for nationalists in Northern Ireland. The second chapter explores the writing of poetry in the province during the war, appraising the influence of English poets of the 1930s on a much younger generation in Belfast, gathered around Queen’s University in the early 1940s, before considering the impact of the war on the work of two older poets, John Hewitt and W.R. Rodgers. The third chapter charts the effects of the war on visual art in Northern Ireland, and examines in detail the war paintings of three Belfast artists, Colin Middleton, Gerard Dillon and William Conor, tracing the impact of continental styles on art in Belfast and showing how boundaries between official and unofficial war art were somewhat porous at this time. The fourth and final chapter looks at politicised writing during and after the war, interrogating the ways in which the wider implications of the Second World War were translated into existing local political conflicts, and describing the interpenetration of the Northern Irish political and literary spheres at this time. Together the four chapters aim to recover the works of an eccentric collection of artists and writers during and after the war, and consider how the awkward position of the province in relation to the war is reflected in these works. The thesis seeks to address the effects of the Second World War on literature and culture in Northern Ireland by exploring publications and artefacts that have often remained submerged, sidelined, marginalised or avoided. I also hope that examining such material will allow new ways of approaching Northern Ireland’s role in the war to emerge.
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Introduction

On Friday 8 October 1999 a crowd gathered outside the City Hall in Belfast to witness the unveiling by the Lord Mayor of a memorial to James Magennis, the only serviceman from Northern Ireland to be awarded the Victoria Cross for service during the Second World War. Magennis was Catholic and from the Falls Road area of West Belfast, and the ways in which his wartime story has been celebrated, contested, forgotten, remembered and, most recently, memorialised in Northern Ireland in the years since 1945 illustrate the strikingly complex relationship, sometimes fraught and often muted, that has existed between the province and the Second World War.¹

Forty-four years earlier Magennis, a diver on a midget submarine, had carried out a daring and hugely physically demanding underwater raid on a heavy Japanese cruiser moored off Singapore.² His Victoria Cross citation came through from Buckingham Palace on 13 November 1945, while Magennis was stationed at a submarine base in Sydney, Australia, and the news broke in Belfast the same day. The Belfast Telegraph carried an interview with Magennis’s mother, said to be ‘the proudest woman in Ulster today’, and the following day ‘Heartiest congratulations’ were sent to the diver in a telegram by Prime Minister Basil Brooke. The celebrations continued on Magennis’s return to Belfast on 14 December. The next day he was mobbed by crowds outside the City Hall as he arrived at a reception given by the Lord Mayor and corporation. The Mayor, Sir Crawford McCullagh, told him that he had ‘added lustre to the annals of the British Empire’, and Magennis was later presented with a gift of £3,066 that had been collected by the people of Northern Ireland.³ Sectarian tensions do not seem to have surfaced in these civic responses to the hero’s return, but when Magennis visited his old school, the Catholic St Finian’s on the Falls Road, children

¹ Throughout this study I use ‘province’ as a synonym for Northern Ireland, not in its ancient Irish sense (the six counties of Northern Ireland being less than the nine counties of the ancient province of Ulster) but in broad terms to describe Northern Ireland as a ‘territory, region or subdivision’ or ‘administrative division’ (Oxford English Dictionary [hereafter ‘OED’],<http://www.oed.com.elib.tcd.ie/view/Entry/153460?redirected From=province#eid> [accessed 28 May 2011]). In common with Edna Longley in The Living Stream: Literature & Revisionism in Ireland (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994) and Gillian McIntosh in The Force of Culture: Unionist Identities in Twentieth Century Ireland (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999) I also use the term ‘Northern Irish’ on occasion, to refer to such persons, organisations, writings and artefacts whose origins may be traced to the post-partition province.
² The mission, carried out on 29 July 1945, is recounted in detail in George Fleming’s biography, Magennis VC (Dublin: History Ireland, 1998), pp. 150-160.
reportedly refused to stand to welcome the uniformed sailor. Magennis’s biographer George Fleming claims that:

It was clear that he was not wanted in Protestant Unionist East Belfast and neither was he wanted in Catholic Nationalist West Belfast. That uneasiness about a former pupil winning a high decoration for bravery in the British armed forces felt even by the teachers and pupils in his old school St Finian’s was hardening into something else, as attitudes in Northern Ireland themselves hardened. He was the little guy in the middle caught in a strange religious and political trap.

The revival of interest in James Magennis in the late 1990s seems almost entirely due to Fleming’s efforts: his letter writing campaign for the commemoration of Magennis’s achievement succeeded in attracting significant interest from newspapers in Northern Ireland. In February 1997 Belfast City Council voted to erect a monument, and the present memorial in bronze and Portland stone was unveiled two years later. Fleming’s biography also inspired at least two poems: ‘James “Mick” Magennis VC’ by Tom Paulin and Michael Longley’s ‘Ocean’, subtitled ‘Homage to James “Mick” Magennis VC’.

On the day of the unveiling Lord Fitt, former leader of the SDLP and himself a merchant seaman during the Second World War, told the Belfast News Letter that it was a shame that the tribute had taken fifty years to be erected. Sinn Fein councillors and assembly members boycotted the event. Almost all of the politicians present were unionist, but none on record addressed Fitt’s implicit claim that it was Magennis’s Catholic background that had delayed the civic recognition eventually granted to him. The convoluted post-war response to his story is perhaps symptomatic of an enduring reluctance within Northern Ireland to examine its place in the Second World War or to address the impact of the war on the province, and the physical awkwardness of the original underwater mission is echoed by later historical contortions.

Ireland north and south had to live under a new threat from outside the British Isles during the Second World War. In Northern Ireland sectarian divisions did not

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4 Ibid., p. 182.
5 Ibid., pp. 199-200.
dissolve in the face of this, but were temporarily reconfigured by external, global forces. In the aftermath neither side seems to have wanted to dwell on the war years: for nationalists to face the probability that but for Northern Ireland’s strategic geopolitical location, within the United Kingdom and on the edge of the Atlantic, the war in Europe would have had a longer and bloodier course is perhaps as unpalatable as it is for some unionists (and nationalists) to acknowledge the fact that significant numbers of Catholics from north and south of the border fought with distinction in the British army during the conflict. The Second World War occupies a seemingly irresolvable position in relation to the Troubles: Glenn Patterson’s novel *FAT LAD* (1993) notes the irony of British regiments who served with distinction in the Normandy landings being deployed in far more controversial circumstances in Northern Ireland a quarter of a century later. The post-war silence around James Magennis is demonstrative of a resignation to the probability that the province’s position during the war was too difficult either to appropriate or explain.

The subaqueous nature of Magennis’s mission also seems appropriate when considering the cultural history of Northern Ireland and the war, where the submersion of artefacts and paraphernalia is a pervasive theme of a discourse which itself has often existed in a submerged or sunken state. The most striking monuments to the Second World War in Northern Ireland are out of sight and underwater, and include dozens of German U-boats that litter the sea bed of the Atlantic Ocean off Malin Head. Like the Allied merchant ships and naval vessels they hunted, some sank during the Battle of the Atlantic, but many, following the surrender of their German crews, were deliberately towed from berths at Lisahally on the Foyle out to sea and scuttled. Some of the flying boats used to hunt these U-boats were also sunk, when they became surplus to requirements at the end of the war. On Lough Erne in County Fermanagh in 1947, six Royal Air Force Catalinas were towed into the middle of the lake, where Marine craft crew opened their sea-cocks and set about the bodies of the aircraft with axes, sending them to the bottom. Local historian Breege McCusker writes that ‘they soon disappeared from sight but not from memory.’

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7 Glenn Patterson, *FAT LAD* (London: Minerva, 1993), p. 120.
This study aims to recover submerged and neglected texts and artefacts which articulate the effect of the war on the province, with the hope of enlarging the sphere of its twentieth century cultural history. How well the war has been remembered in Northern Ireland is, perhaps, less clear than McCusker’s view cited above would suggest. In ‘Some Of Us Stayed Forever’, the penultimate poem of Frank Ormsby’s sequence ‘A Northern Spring’ (1986), the voices of the deceased crew of a crashed United States Air Force bomber that came to rest on the bed of a lough are heard. In its entirety:

Some of us stayed forever, under the lough
in the guts of a Flying Fortress,
sealed in the buckled capsule, or dispersed
with odds and ends – propellers, dogtags, wings,
a packet of Lucky Strike, the instructor’s gloves –
through an old world of shells and arrowheads,
dumped furniture, a blind Viking prow.
In ten years or a hundred we will rise
to foul your nets with crushed fuselage.
Our painted stork, nosing among the reeds
with a bomb in its beak, will startle you for a day.10

Unlike deliberately scuttled U-boats and Catalinas, Ormsby’s imagined sunken bomber is both a time capsule and a tomb, a repository that is destined to rise in Arthurian fashion from the water at some future date. Wartime artefacts (dog tags, American cigarette packets, a painted nosecone) have become embedded in a submerged material cultural history of the province, and, in the company of the medieval arrowhead or the Viking ship, have perhaps become equally remote from present day concerns. The juxtaposition of these objects, and the deliberately elastic timescale for the aircraft’s reappearance, shows how Northern Ireland’s experience of the war may be drawn into attempts to reconsider the province in a more wide-ranging historical context than its bloody late twentieth century history has tended to allow. Ormsby’s use of the word

‘startle’ suggests that the effects of the war on the province have perhaps been forgotten, but may be capable of making a surprising impact on future generations.

Another narrative of sub-aquatic awkwardness and survival may be found in James White’s bizarre science fiction novel *The Watch Below* (1966), in which, following a torpedo attack on a merchant ship during the Battle of the Atlantic, five survivors manage to remain alive below deck within an air pocket created in one of the ship’s empty tanks. As a result of this, the ship fails to sink completely but moves suspended beneath the waves, unable either to sink or to float to the surface. The tank dwellers manage to adapt to a severely constricted existence (and indeed to reproduce) in this dark, damp and claustrophobic environment for several generations over a period of 100 years: one survival technique is known as ‘The Game’, whereby memory is tested by trying to remember narratives of culture, history and science in minute detail through repetition:

‘And the opening questions and answers in the Children’s Catechism,’ Jenny broke in. ‘I can remember most of them without digging, even. It starts like this. Question: Who made the world...?’

‘Answer,’ said her husband. ‘Harland and Wolff...’

Despite the flippancy of this quip (which itself hints at Belfast’s prodigious wartime industrial output), and the idiosyncrasy of the novel itself, it is clearly possible to read *The Watch Below* as metaphorically resonant of Northern Ireland’s cultural remembrance of the war: submerged, suspended, darkened, surviving but adapting according to the pressures of constrained circumstances.

In concluding *Key to Victory* (1995), a short history of Derry at war, Richard Doherty briefly surveys the physical relics of the war around the city, including gun emplacements and aluminium Hawksley bungalows at the Cloughglass estate, produced by aircraft manufacturers to meet the post-war demand for housing and recycled from aeroplanes scrapped by the RAF.\(^\text{12}\) Implying that these are largely ignored, Doherty

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\(^{12}\) Tom Paulin engages with the recycling of wartime wreckage in ‘The Caravans of Lüneberg Heath’, which describes how his old school in Belfast was literally constructed from the wreckage of the war, ‘tacked out of hardboard / and scrap fuselage’, and divided into four sections named after the four Ulster Field Marshals of the Second World War.
notes that the importance of the city to the progress of the Second World War, in particular to Allied success in the Battle of the Atlantic, has not been recognised locally. He suggests a number of explanations for this, including its peripheral European location, its majority nationalist population or 'a collective application of what psychologists refer to as the forty-year block, a closing-out of awful experiences from the memory for a period of roughly four decades.' This latter explanation, implying that the corollary of collective memory must be collective amnesia, is clearly problematic in the context of Northern Ireland's post-war history of political violence and sectarian conflict: it would perhaps be simpler to say that other 'awful experiences' day by day in Derry and elsewhere in the province over the decades prior to 1995 served to obscure or outweigh the effects of the Second World War.

If there is a perceptible awkwardness and eccentricity to these diverse literary, historical and monumental Northern Irish responses to the Second World War, it might seem as though, paradoxically, such writings might fruitfully be recruited to a dominant and more general critical discourse of awkwardness in cultural or literary criticism of the period. The 1940s are widely, and perhaps over enthusiastically, acknowledged to be a 'critically awkward' phase of twentieth century writing. As a vast, heavily mechanised conflict encompassing almost the entire globe, which affected both combatants and civilians almost indiscriminately, the Second World War has proved resistant to theoretical critical frameworks and presents many difficulties for cultural

_Dill Alexander_

_Montgomery Alanbrooke_

they're crimped on my brain tissue
like patents or postcodes
their building's the hard rectangle
that kitted me out first
as a blue British citizen

Physically and nominally a product of the war, the school is seen to make a heavy impression on its post-war pupils, emphasised by the multiple implications of 'crimp' (to compress, crumple, slash, mould, or, in a military and naval context, to entrap or decoy (OED, <http://www.oed.com.elib.tcd.ie/search?searchType=dictionary&q=crimp> [accessed 14 September 2011])). The British Government's Ireland Act, passed in the year of Paulin's birth, declared that Northern Ireland remained a part of the United Kingdom, and he shows here how the war was used or misused as a means of reinforcing this British claim on Northern Ireland and its citizens: the resonance of the word 'partitioned' is clear, whilst 'tacked' suggests a clumsy and artificial construction. The school, condemned by Paulin as a 'flattened trashcan' is not only a physical and nominal reminder of the war but has a territorial function as a British educational establishment. (Tom Paulin, 'The Caravans of Lunenberg Heath', *Fivemiletown* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), pp. 55-66 (pp. 65-66)


historians and literary critics examining the period retrospectively, which echo those faced by artists and writers at the time. Phyllis Lassner has described how the modernist and postmodernist distrust of the 'historical' is challenged by the war, arguing that 'When history is invoked by both modernists and postmodernists what is meant are the ideologies that framed, perhaps shaped, and helped define historical events and periods, and rarely the events themselves', approaches that have tended to efface the 1940s from such critical attention, since the Second World War's 'material realities overwhelm any debates about uncertain hermeneutics or epistemology.' To this end, the opening lines of Donald Bain's poem 'War Poet' (reading 'We in our haste can only see the small components of the scene / We cannot tell what incidents will focus on the final screen') have sometimes been quoted by critics and historians, to illustrate the tendency of many artists and writers to limit the scope of their work during the war to that which they had personally experienced, thereby establishing a path subsequently followed by later commentators. On the British Home Front at least, much official and unofficial wartime culture seems to have revolved around the recording of personal experience, and the detailing of the minutiae of life as it was lived day by day. The dominance of the Mass Observation movement in cultural and social histories of this period has reinforced the impression that the Second World War created conditions whereby historiography became irrevocably indebted to personal testimony. The importance accorded these individual accounts has arguably aided the construction of the idea of the 'People's War' in Britain, a broad means of describing the dependence of the coalition government on the cooperation of all parts of society for the successful

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17 In such a vein Jed Esty has observed that:

With the engines of imperial (and industrial) expansion sputtering in the thirties, England was recoded, or seen to metamorphose, from a Hegelian subject of world-historical development to a Herderian object of its own insular history. One cultural index of this broader change is the boom in historical self-consumption in England, where the leisureed classes turned to insular sources of rural mystique and chthonic myth.

prosecution of the war, resulting in the fomenting of revolutionary attitudes and movements for social change.\textsuperscript{18} Whatever interest such accounts may hold for the historian, a perception that the incontrovertible historical and social importance of the Second World War was not reflected in the quality of its art and literature has persisted, however. As Patrick Deer has noted, many literary critics have tended to adhere to Malcolm Bradbury’s observation that: ‘The relative artistic silence of the period from 1939 till toward the end of the 1940s seems very comprehensible, until we recall that the First World War, quite as terrible, and with equal restrictions on artistic activity, was a major seedbed of modern artistic innovation.’\textsuperscript{19} The terms of this perception were arguably set during the war itself, when vocal and repeated demands in the press for war poets in the early years of the Second World War contributed to a lingering sense that its poetry compares unfavourably with that of the First World War: as Marina Mackay argues, little of the literature of the second war has ever ‘fully registered on the critical field of vision’ whilst the Great War ‘set the standard by which the literature of the second war was judged wanting’\textsuperscript{20}

This study is not driven by such value judgements: the material addressed in succeeding chapters is read with the aim of recovering forgotten ways of describing the place of Northern Ireland in relation to the Second World War, by examining the impact of that war on literature and culture in the province. Since the eccentricity and diversity of much of this material pose such a striking contradiction to the terms of recalcitrance and entrenchment in which Northern Ireland has so often been figured, this study, like others in the field, questions the continued relevance of a discourse of inferiority regarding the literature of the Second World War. In focusing on a body of work produced within a relatively small geographical area, this thesis might itself be said to follow a ‘components of the scene’ critical historical strategy, when its frame of reference and privileging of personal experience are contrasted with the vast scale of the war. This frame surely emphasises the complexity of the wider context, however,


and meanwhile allows a neglected area of Northern Irish cultural history to be addressed directly.

Recent years have seen several attempts to negotiate or overcome the perceived limitations and difficulties posed by British literature of the 1940s and the war. I have not tried to impose any of these critical approaches on works of art and literature in Northern Ireland, but this study does explore some of their concerns within that context. Adam Piette’s *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry 1939-1945* (1995), which charts the impact of the wartime isolation of Britain on the private imagination opens by addressing a ‘guilt complex’ in British culture, manifested in a reluctance to allow British poetry and fiction from the Second World War to take centre stage in cultural criticism in the face of the demands of European or world literature of the period. Since Piette’s study a number of critical works have focused on literature and culture in Britain during the war. Lyndsey Stonebridge’s *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture* (2007) also examines the effect of the war on the mind of the individual but is more explicitly theoretical in approach, exploring the traumatic impact on writers with reference to developments in post-Freudian psychoanalysis, whilst Mark Rawlinson’s *British Writing of the Second World War* (2000) develops a politicised argument that writers and artists, in avoiding representations of actual death or injury to the human body in their works, helped legitimise acts of military violence during the war. Piette’s interest in the transformative effect of Britain’s wartime isolation on the private imaginations of its writers and artists is reflected in one central concern of this study: the tension between the cultural tendency to explore the local and the regional in Northern Ireland during the war, and the fact that the province became more susceptible to international pressures and influences at this time, from its involvement in the war itself, and from the influx of foreign troops and refugees. However, where Piette’s conception of the wartime imagination ‘hollowed out by the relentless privations of the war’ and ‘invaded, dismantled and displaced’ is overwhelmingly negative, this study will show that despite the comparative isolation of the province, the war provided conditions which encouraged some transgressive and imaginative expressions of cultural identity

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in Northern Ireland. Piette’s description of the Welsh writer Alun Lewis’s ‘insular illusion’ that was ‘complicated by his Welshness; he had the capacity, reinforced by his culture, to distance himself from the propaganda of the British wartime government’ is germane to this study in so far as I attempt to show how Northern Ireland’s wartime culture was complicated by its Northern Irishness.

Others have addressed the complex relationship between the war and literary modernism. In *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (1999) Tyrus Miller argues that the end of modernism, and the transition between modernist and postmodernist art forms, have suffered considerable critical neglect. He suggests that following the First World War a modernist resistance to integrating with ‘extra-artistic institutions’ began to break down in the face of new cultural forms, and that by the 1930s late modernism ‘once again loosens the modernist dominance of form and allows a more fluid, dialogic relation with the immediate historical context.’

Ostensibly pursuing this line of enquiry, in *Modernism and World War II* (2007), Marina Mackay suggests that ‘the correlation between late modernism in England and the world-changing circumstances with which it overlapped amounts to more than a historical coincidence’. She argues that the war played a crucial role in the development of multilateral modernisms, marking ‘the moment when “making it new” could simultaneously be the rallying cry of experimental poetry, popular cinema and parliamentary politics’, contradicting the common perception that modernism was alienated from the rest of society and could be easily dismissed as ‘mandarin erudition admiring itself on the lofty transcultural heights’. Mackay does not make the point explicitly, but it is clear that for most artists and writers during the war any such detachment was impossible, due to the nature of the conditions under which they had to live.

This study is not an examination of modernism but is mindful of these concerns, as it explores the impact of the war on a cross-generic basis, across overlapping forms of writing and visual art. Mackay’s claims that ‘the nation’s minor status is the keynote of both the war’s literature and its subsequent discursive construction’ and that standing alone was Britain’s ‘master narrative’ at this time, in part accounting for the continuing

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23 Piette, p. 4, p. 7.
24 Ibid., p. 124.
27 Ibid., p. 20.
cultural significance of the war, provoke important questions in a Northern Irish context. If post-imperial Britain was coming to terms with its ‘minor status’, what were the implications of this shift for the status of Northern Ireland during and after the war? And if culture in Britain followed an isolationist narrative, how did artists and writers in Northern Ireland conceive of the province’s place in the war?

Like Mackay, Kristin Bluemel also argues for an inclusive approach to the culture of this time, in her conception and development of the critical term ‘intermodernism’. Bluemel has sought to resolve a perceived rupture between modernists and their antimodernist ‘others’ during the interwar and war years, and hopes to stimulate interest in lesser known and marginalised figures and works: in the Bluemel-edited *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain* (2009), Elizabeth Maslen’s essay on Storm Jameson, which makes much of the writer’s Whitby origins, exemplifies this approach, arguing that Jameson’s ‘intermodernist colours’ were shown in her ‘increasing insistence that matter – especially the matter of contemporary communities – and the manner of expressing it should not be seen as separate.’ In *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics* (2004) Bluemel suggests that ‘intermodernism’ provides a means of navigating uncertain or neglected territories, enabling the critic to address with new confidence a body of work that is neither modernist nor postmodernist, produced by working or working middle class writers outside traditional literary establishments, often working within a realist tradition and financially dependent on writing. However, her claims to be more interested in writing itself rather than in denoting a period are perhaps a little disingenuous. Although the temporal boundaries of intermodernism are never as clearly defined as the parameters of ‘the Second World War’, ‘World War II’, or ‘1939-45’, what seems to be of most concern to Bluemel and her followers is how writers responded to pressures and uncertainties which were peculiar to the war years and its preceding and succeeding decades. In so far as it requires the investigation of hitherto marginalised writers working outside traditional cultural coteries, Bluemel’s intermodernist project offers

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some support to this study, but writers in Northern Ireland at this time clearly faced different, perhaps more complex pressures and difficulties in their relations with such established literary groupings. Her outline of the four main concerns of intermodernist writers – work, community, war and documents – also reflects much of the material explored in this study, but again the approach must be refined, since the matter of ‘community’ is obviously far more vexed in Northern Ireland than in Britain.\(^\text{30}\)

The flurry of critical studies, including Kristine A. Miller’s *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People’s War* (2006) and Victoria Stewart’s *Narratives of Memory* (2006) questions whether it is any longer possible to claim that literature of the Second World War in Britain has been neglected. Bluemel’s intermodernist project aside, however, cultural historians and literary critics have tended to focus on a relatively limited body of work. Recurring across these studies are Elizabeth Bowen’s wartime short stories and her novel *The Heat of the Day* (1948), T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (1943), Henry Green’s *Caught* (1943), the shelter drawings of Henry Moore, the paintings of Graham Sutherland, the poetry of Dylan Thomas, the novels of Evelyn Waugh, and Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1941). Mark Rawlinson has warned of the ‘comforting familiarity’ of these names, comparing their recurrence to ‘the cast of the post-war British war movie, the literary analogues of John Mills, David Niven and Kenneth More’, but it is also worth remembering that many of these works refer directly only to London’s experience of the war.\(^\text{31}\) This perhaps reflects a contemporaneous and enduring Anglocentricity of British wartime mythmaking, where ‘England’ and ‘Britain’ were subject to considerable elision. As noted by Angus Calder in *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991), it is striking that London and the south east of England, geographically closest in Britain to the European theatre of war, also provided the setting for many of the events which dominate British wartime mythology of the early years of the conflict, such as the evacuation of Dunkirk, the Blitz in London, and the Battle of Britain.\(^\text{32}\) We might also consider the freedom with which Winston Churchill used the terms ‘Britain’, ‘the British Isles’ and ‘England’ in his wartime speeches, or George Orwell’s admission, some way into *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1940), of his own terminological inconsistencies within the essay itself regarding the interchangeability of ‘the nation’, ‘England’ and ‘Britain’, before claiming that ‘we call


our islands by no less than six different names, England, Britain, Great Britain, the British Isles, the United Kingdom and, in very exalted moments, Albion'. If Scotland, Wales, and the regions of England north and west of London were marginalised in both official and unofficial culture of the war, questions must surely also be asked about the place of Northern Ireland in relation to the British war effort: although the vexed term ‘British Isles’ would draw the province into such discourse, both ‘Great Britain’ and certainly ‘England’ would serve to exclude it. Apart from Calder’s *The Myth of the Blitz*, none of the critical studies I have mentioned so far have addressed themselves to Northern Irish writing or culture during the war. Given that the self defined remit of these studies has been ‘British’ literature and culture there is no reason why they should, but the swiftness with which a consideration of Northern Ireland disturbs or contradicts many of their arguments nevertheless suggests that new ways need to be found of approaching wartime art and literature in marginalised regions of Britain, and in Northern Ireland, where cultural Anglocentrism has had its own repercussions.

Introducing his study *Irish Poetry of the 1930s* (2005), Alan Gillis argues that Irish literary criticism’s neglect of the decade immediately prior to the Second World War reflects the ‘apparent Anglocentrism of Thirties literature’, and exemplifies a waning delusion that ‘Irish history ended in 1922, and did not begin again until either the opening-out of the economy in the late 1950s, or else the resumption of the Troubles.’ He writes that ‘The stereotype of the Irish 1930s, as insular and dour, is a strange inversion of the contemporary British scene. British poetry of the 1930s is highly regarded for its cornucopia of aesthetic achievement.’ He continues:

It would be absurd to underplay the way in which Irish historical experience, throughout the decade, was distinct from Britain’s. But, at the same time, Irish culture does not exist in isolation, and the historical forces that rampaged across the globe could not but be felt in Ireland, albeit in modified forms. Thus, without denigrating the specificity of Irish history, it seems clear that Irish culture can and should be perceived as part of the broader historical environment: a starkly conflictual arena in which pressures borne from drives


towards socialism, capitalism, ethnic essentialism, democracy, and despotism mangled and collided.  

Gillis explains that his decision to discuss Louis MacNeice first in his study reflects not only the poet’s acknowledged status as a ‘Thirties poet’ but also the fact that ‘his work explicitly pulls Irish historical contexts out of their apparent insularity, giving voice to acutely registered themes and circumstances that also affect his ‘more Irish’ peers’.  

Although Gillis’s focus is on the poetry of the preceding decade, his arguments are of clear relevance to the Second World War, especially in the case of MacNeice, whose wartime poetry repeatedly addresses the ‘apparent insularity’ of neutral Ireland.

This study develops some of these ideas within the specific context of wartime Northern Ireland, itself a ‘starkly conflictual’ arena, and explores the role of culture in drawing the province into the ‘broader historical environment’ of the time. It is no coincidence that MacNeice presides over much of the third chapter, which examines the effects of the war on poetry in Northern Ireland: if, as Gillis suggests, MacNeice’s work pulls Irish historical contexts away from their ‘apparent insularity’, I hope to show that an exploration of Northern Irish wartime art and literature at this time can similarly encourage a reconsideration of the cultural history of the province in more expansive terms. Here we may apprehend Edna Longley’s positive conception of a body of Northern writing that ‘overspills borders and manifests a web of affiliation that stretches beyond any heartland – to the rest of Ireland, Britain, Europe’ and of a province that functions as ‘a frontier-region, a cultural corridor, a zone where Ireland and Britain permeate one another.’

The works with which this study is concerned can be read as the fruits of such cultural permeation, reflected in the way that I have allowed literary and non-literary sources and documents to rub against and inform one another where previously they have not done so. A number of studies and essays have considered in isolation some of the artists, writers and publications I discuss over the four chapters of this study, but outside the various memoirs of the participants themselves there have been no attempts to describe the wider cultural atmosphere within which they operated during the war. This approach is not mere retrospective critical imposition: examination of the editorial

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 3.
line taken by the influential Dublin magazine *The Bell* during the war years suggests that Seán Ó Faoláin and others were drawn to consider Northern Ireland for these very reasons. As Nicholas Allen has noted, neutrality, censorship and the stifling effect of the Catholic Church combined to enhance the appeal of Belfast for artists and writers in Éire during the war, but Ó Faoláin’s attempts at enunciating an inclusive and mutually beneficial approach to culture north and south were not wholly admiring of the northern city’s cosmopolitan status. Although he wrote that ‘the great strength of the North is that she does live and act in the Now. Belfast has immediacy. Ulster has contemporaneity. Our southern curse is that we have never cut off the umbilicus’, he also warned that the obverse of ‘hyper-nationalism’ south of the border was ‘hyper-internationalism’ in Northern Ireland, and despaired at the diverging paths of literature north and south. While it is perhaps ironic that these arguments were made in the editorial of a specific ‘Special Ulster Number’ of *The Bell*, Ó Faoláin arguably displays a greater willingness to consider and conceptualise north-south cultural relations during the war than many literary critics and historians since.

Considering the freeness of Orwell’s comments regarding the interchangeability of ‘England’, Britain and ‘the British Isles’, it is easy to see how the London-led British war effort fomented peripheral resentment, resulting in some limited support for anti-war nationalist factions in both Scotland and Wales. Examining the cultural and social geographies of wartime Britain in *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945* (2003), Sonya O. Rose has described how scenic invocations of peculiarly English country scenes in wartime propaganda that purported to address Britain as a whole resulted in ‘tension between Welsh and Scottish identity, on the one hand, and understandings of Englishness and Britishness, on the other, [which] very overtly complicated the idea that the nation was an organic community even as the multi-nation was threatened from without.” Rose’s claim that ‘Britain as a nation [was] constituted as both a multiplicity of regions and as a cultural, if not political, ‘multi-nation’ composed of four distinctive ‘national’ cultures: Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and England’, arguably contributes to the Anglocentric

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40 ‘An Ulster Issue’, *The Bell*, 4.4 (July 1942), 229-231 (p. 231); ‘Ulster’, *The Bell*, 2.4 (July 1941), 4-11 (p. 5). Editorials in *The Bell* were unsigned.
discourse of elision and confusion, however, and she is explicitly reluctant to examine Northern Ireland at all. A footnote to her introduction reads:

I did not include a discussion of Northern Ireland because of its incredible complexity relative to Wales, Scotland, and England. The Government did not institute conscription in Northern Ireland, although there were recruits. Also the Ministries of Labour and Supply recruited workers from Éire, although Éire was neutral in the war. Complicating the picture as well was that the division of Ireland into the independent Southern Counties and the North, which remained part of Britain, was quite recent. The topic of British nationhood with respect to Ireland during the war is worthy of a book-length study on its own.

After a later reiteration of this, she adds that:

Because of these complications, especially the potentially explosive issue of Irish nationalism and Roman Catholic-Protestant discord, to have included Ulster in this study of national identity and citizenship in wartime Britain would have meant adding considerable length to an already long and complex chapter.

Rose’s reasoning provides a useful illustration of some of the problems and contradictions facing cultural historians. Leaving aside the well-worn misconception that ‘Ulster’ is equivalent to Northern Ireland, whether ‘the North’ (often a term associated with republicanism and anti-partitionism) remained ‘part of Britain’ is less a question of geography (clearly Northern Ireland is physically detached from the island of Great Britain) than a matter of political allegiance. However, it is undeniable that Northern Ireland was involved in and affected by a war in which Britain, or the United Kingdom, was a leading combatant nation and Éire was not. Rose identifies the lack of conscription and the recruitment of industrial workers from south of the border as complicating factors which have encouraged her avoidance, but Northern Ireland was unavoidably drawn into the British war effort through its military and industrial

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42 Ibid., p. 197.
43 Ibid., p. 28.
44 Ibid., p. 219.
participation. That the province’s involvement in this war effort was fraught, however, is evident from Gillian McIntosh’s account of the problems faced by the BBC during the war. In Britain, broadcast efforts to encourage national unity could be rooted in the non-controversial past, but in Northern Ireland ‘there was no common historical past to which BBC NI programme makers could hark back in an effort to create the image of a common cultural heritage’, leaving the corporation in an almost impossible position. Indeed, as a British institution it became a focus of the anti-Englishness that was characteristic of much unionist literature.45

The problems arising from such inconsistencies and contradictions were clearly felt at the time in Northern Ireland, within and beyond traditional sectarian divisions. One Mass Observer described his anger at the singing of a patriotic song at the conclusion of a concert and variety show at the City Hall in Armagh, in December 1939:

A man then sang ‘There’ll always be an England.’ This infuriated me – I think it is wrong to sing this song in Ireland. After all, although under British Rule, I and most Ulstermen quite naturally love our own part of the world best of all. Most of us, too, are very irritated by English people, whose manner and outlook seem very overbearing and humourless to us. There were some English soldiers there of course, but I think that the song should be altered to ‘There’ll always be a Britain’. This should satisfy everyone. Both the ‘Marseillaise’ and ‘The King’ were sung at the end.46

The song itself exemplifies the elision often made between England and Britain during the war: despite the claim made by its title, repeated in the chorus, the song’s lyrics also ask ‘Red, white and blue / What does it mean to you?’ and urges ‘Britons awake! / The Empire too / We can depend on you’, inconsistently applying the colours of the flag of the whole United Kingdom to England whilst encouraging Britain and the entire Empire to rise in some non specific defence of England and ‘Freedom’.47 Harrison’s

45 McIntosh, Force of Culture, p. 69-70.
46 Diary of S.J.C. Harrison (Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, MO5102), 7 December 1939.
47 The song premiered in Discoveries (1939), a British vaudeville film based on Carroll Levis’s popular radio show. Written by Ross Parker and Hugh Charles, ‘There’ll Always Be An England’ was performed as the film’s finale, sung by the Welsh boy soprano Master Glyn Davis surrounded by a vast chorus of bell bottomed sailors. Within two months of the outbreak of war 200,000 copies of the song’s sheet
resentment of the song reveals its own contradictions, however, as his irritation at the incompatibility of its lyrics with its Northern Irish performance setting and audience and dislike of an ‘overbearing’ imposition of Englishness are undercut by the scarcely credible assertion that altering ‘England’ to ‘Britain’ in the song’s title and lyrics ‘should satisfy everyone’ and his unquestioning acceptance of the singing of the national anthems of both France and the United Kingdom at the end of the night.

Despite the contested territorial status of Northern Ireland, artists and writers in the province were clearly subject to many of the same threats and privations as their counterparts in Britain. They were also surrounded by much of the physical paraphernalia which is by now almost indelibly associated with the British war effort, as air raid shelters were dug, barrage balloons raised in the skies, and a blackout imposed, whilst the building of airfields and military bases as thousands of foreign troops poured into Northern Ireland changed its rural landscape forever. The bombing of Belfast on Easter Tuesday 1941 killed 745 people and destroyed hundreds of buildings, and although Dublin also came under attack by the Luftwaffe during the war, the cumulative effect of these experiences inevitably opened up and accentuated differences between Northern Ireland and the southern state. If this study seems critically aligned more with British than Irish cultural history, this is explained by the fact that it charts the impact on literature and culture in Northern Ireland of a war in which Britain, unlike neutral Éire, was directly involved. In contrast with Britain, however, in Northern Ireland a significant proportion of the population were implacably opposed to the war. Denis Donoghue wrote in his memoir Warrenpoint (1991) that ‘I didn’t regard myself as at war: as a Catholic my loyalty was to Ireland, not to Britain, and I didn’t consider Northern Ireland as a part of Britain.’ Such loyalties meant that many Catholics felt at best lukewarm at the prospect of becoming involved in what was often figured as an exclusively British war effort, thereby implicitly accepting the legitimacy of partition. The novelist Brian Moore, convinced of the need to defeat fascism, nevertheless balked at the prospect of donning British army

music had been sold. (Stephen Seidenberg, Maurice Sellar, Lou Jones, You Must Remember This... Songs At The Heart Of The War (London: Boxtree, 1995), p. 29.)

48 For an account (and, indeed, an indictment) of these preparations see Brian Barton, The Blitz: Belfast in the War Years (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999), pp. 27-41; for a brief summary of the arrival of US troops and the subsequent construction programme see Brian Barton, Northern Ireland in the Second World War (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1995), pp. 98-101. This latter account should not be confused with John W. Blake’s book of the same title (Northern Ireland in the Second World War), edited by Barton for its 2000 reprint by the Blackstaff Press.

uniform and in the end joined the Air Raid Precautions civil defence organisation. Many nationalists felt that Britain's colonial history made a mockery of claims to be fighting a moral war, and graffiti appearing in West Belfast reading 'England's Difficulty is Ireland's Opportunity' revived memories of the Easter Rising during the First World War. Mr Burke in Moore's novel The Emperor of Ice Cream (1965) sums up these feelings, saying that 'when it comes to grinding down minorities, the German jackboot isn't half as hard as the heel of John Bull.' A more extreme example of anti-British nationalist feeling is that of Your Man Gallagher in the same novel, a former member of the IRA attempting to make an active contribution to a German war against Britain, keeping a flashlight in his overcoat to signal to the Luftwaffe. He 'no longer had great hopes of the IRA as a force to overthrow the British. He put his money on Hitler. When Hitler won the war, Ireland would be whole again, thirty two counties, free and clear.' The tone of much unionist rhetoric during the war years was also stridently myopic, exemplified by Prime Minister Lord Craigavon's wireless broadcast in 1940 declaring that 'We Are King's Men', which animated many other attempts to figure the war as demonstrative both of Northern Ireland's fidelity to the British crown and separateness from the southern state. In these ways the possibility of a People's War on British lines was either supplanted by loyalist dogma or fatally compromised by nationalist dissent.

The fourth chapter of this thesis will explore how political writing in Northern Ireland drew the Second World War into such antithetical and irreconcilable nationalist and unionist political discourses, but for the most part the artists and writers examined in this study worked outside this environment. Their concerns and debates themselves challenge and contradict both unionist political hegemony and the anti-partitionist and isolationist nationalist rhetoric prevalent at the time. Relative to the status of filmmakers, painters and poets in Britain in relation to the war effort, the lack of an

51 Paddy Devlin, Straight Left: An Autobiography (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1993), p. 26. Devlin, then aged fourteen, was a member of the republican youth movement Fianna Eireann when war broke out, and describes his branch being ordered by a superior at Sunday drill on the morning of 3 September 1939 to go out and paint the slogan on walls around Belfast. As Devlin tells the story, something was evidently lost in translation, since the next morning saw 'England's Difficulty is Ireland's Opera Tune' inscribed on gables all along the Falls Road.
53 Ibid., p. 61.
established cultural infrastructure and a longstanding resistance within Northern Ireland to many forms of artistic expression prevented artists and writers from entering mainstream political discourse, had they wanted to do so. Notwithstanding this eccentricity, it should be acknowledged that the terms of political debate in Northern Ireland were significantly enlarged beyond traditional sectarian boundaries both during the war and in the years that immediately followed. The war drew the province into an international context against which broadly socialist ideas were briefly able to prosper, both at the ballot box in elections to Stormont in 1945, and in a number of regular, irregular and one-off publications, demonstrative of the interpenetration of political, poetic and artistic spheres in Belfast at this time. However, it could also be said that the lack of cultural and political infrastructure, the dependence on unreliable or maverick figures, and the overt hostility of both nationalist and unionist discourse to internationalist or socialist ideas served as impediments to a lasting impact being made.

The awkwardness of Northern Ireland’s position in relation to the war perhaps explains the relative lack of manifesto-making by artists and writers in the province at this time, and may also account for their inability or reluctance to move in a concerted artistic direction, despite the strength of their personal friendships. Attempts were made, but in retrospect John Hewitt’s regionalism can hardly be said to have resulted in the body of work he hoped for, and Robert Greacen’s forays into New Apocalyptic poetry, whilst helping to draw important if overlooked links between the wartime literary worlds of Belfast, Dublin and London, today seem overwrought and symbolically leaden. These efforts might be contrasted with the brief success in Dublin during the war of the White Stag Group of painters in articulating a cohesive and distinctively modernist body of work, or, conversely, with the huge number of artists and writers recruited to the British war effort, who produced propaganda material, wrote for the BBC, or worked as official war artists.\textsuperscript{55} The paths taken by artists and writers in Northern Ireland at the time may seem in comparison eccentric and non-conformist. The Ulster Unit group of artists formed in Belfast in 1934 to evangelise a modernist aesthetic quickly fell apart after one exhibition, and the subsequent path taken by its leading painter Colin Middleton, as he switched between hugely divergent themes and styles, simply defies categorisation or explanation.\textsuperscript{56} Politically speaking,

the writings of the Protestant nationalist Denis Ireland, a former Captain in the British Army who served in the First World War, also exemplify the maverick tendency which, I will argue, was able to prosper in Northern Ireland during the war.

In acknowledging and exploring these eccentricities, this thesis avoids attempting to follow any overarching theoretical framework. Its course is determined by material often unearthed through archival research, a diverse body of work encompassing literary writing in poetry and prose, as well as historical, political and journalistic writing and works of art. In their introduction to *Across a Roaring Hill: The Protestant Imagination in Modern Ireland* (1985) Gerald Dawe and Edna Longley claim that 'the Ulster Protestant voice in prose often sounds most natural in less evolved structures, and in Belfast working-class accents', citing the anecdotal writings of Sam McAughtry and the 'more studied wit' of John Morrow. 57 I will not be limiting myself to writers of Protestant backgrounds in this study, but it does seem as though the predilection for unofficial or non literary forms and modes detected by Dawe and Longley in Northern writing coincided successfully with a wartime cultural atmosphere which encouraged 'less evolved structures' to emerge and gain acceptance. The impact of the Second World War in both practical and psychological terms on literary form, encouraging short fiction and poetry, and discouraging the writing of novels, has been much noted, and is discernible in the emergence in Northern Ireland as in Britain at this time of various little magazines and one-off publications. 58 This in part explains a temporal imbalance in the distribution of material between the chapters of this thesis – chapters on poetry, political writing and visual art concentrate on cultural activity during the war, but my chapter on memoir and autobiographical fiction explores post war writing and the memory of the Second World War. Although this thesis has been divided into these four generic chapters, I aim to show the importance of both published and unpublished 'less evolved structures' to the cultural climate in Northern Ireland by examining the cross-pollination between written and visual, literary and non-literary, official and non-official art forms at this time. Mengham and Reeve have described the 1940s as a time when much writing in Britain at least understood itself to be 'raw

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material to which later construction would bring a necessary finish', and to this end I will consider the 'raw material' of artists and writers – documents including unpublished diaries, letters and other literary and non literary drafts and ephemera – alongside their work in the public domain. Due to the interdisciplinary frame of this study, I do not propose to enter into formal discussions over whether a particular piece of writing or artwork is or is not modernist, late modernist or postmodernist, but to read these documents and artefacts in terms of what they can tell us about the cultural climate in Northern Ireland at the time.

As a result of the contradictions I have outlined, and in the context of attendant antagonisms and divisions of longer standing, the cultural and social history of Northern Ireland and the Second World War has arguably suffered considerable neglect. In their studies of the Home Front in Britain, neither Angus Calder nor Arthur Marwick devote any attention to the Northern Irish experience of the Second World War, nor do they consider the implications for the province of the election in 1945 of a Labour government in Britain. Marwick omits Northern Ireland altogether from his illustrated history The Home Front: the British and the Second World War (1976), and Calder affords less than two pages in his vast account The People's War (1969, rev. ed. 1992) to what he describes as 'a limb lopped off Éire in the aftermath of the Irish revolution and run ever since by a species of Protestant Mafia.' Calder's brief summary of events, cribbed, it seems, from John W. Blake's official history Northern Ireland in the Second World War (1956), serves only to remove Northern Ireland from his arguments and conclusion, and the flippancy of his final assertion that 'Ulster' had 'a decidedly Irish sort of war' is indicative of an unwillingness to engage with the Northern Irish experience of the war, even while acknowledging its singularity. In The Myth of the Blitz, however, Calder is willing to co-opt Northern Ireland into his debunking of wartime myths, writing that 'No inhabitant of Ulster, surely, can now believe that the Second World War had any healing effect on that society.' The argument that Northern Ireland's violent post-war history contradicts notions that the

59 Rod Mengham and N. H. Reeve, 'Introduction', in Mengham and Reeve (eds), The Fiction of the 1940s, pp. xi-xiii (p. xi).
61 Calder, People's War, p. 414.
62 Calder, Myth of the Blitz, p. xiv.
war had any lasting effect on the province, positive or otherwise, is important, and shows how the Troubles have displaced the Second World War in public, cultural and historical consciousnesses within and outside Northern Ireland, complicating the ability of historians to write the province into British or European narratives of the war. In this respect, Juliet Gardiner's recent volumes of social and cultural history are notable for her decision to consider Northern Ireland's experiences of the Second World War alongside those of wartime Britain.63

In accounts of Ireland and the Second World War, Northern Ireland has arguably suffered marginalisation in discussions which focus on Irish neutrality: the wartime elision of England and Britain might, indeed, be compared with the tendency to disregard or avoid making explicit the separate experiences of the war north and south of the border. Hinted at by Alan Gillis, this reticence derives in part from political and academic allegiances that have pervaded since partition and the foundation of the southern state. Edna Longley's attack on Seamus Deane's Field Day project provides a more vivid illustration of this, when she addresses the omission of both nineteenth century Ulster liberalism and twentieth century Ulster socialism from the anthology. Deane's problem, she suggests, is:

How to divide the century without dividing the country? British anthologies and literary histories generally take a break, whether justifiable or not, at the Second World War, but only Northern Ireland officially joined in that skirmish. Deane's autobiographical section, despite its martial emphases, includes memoirs of neither World War.64

Somewhat perversely, such omissions may have also been encouraged by the power and resonance of Louis MacNeice's indictment of 'The neutral island' in the poem 'Neutrality' written in 1942.65 If Churchill and others were able to use Great Britain's island status as a powerful metaphor of defiance and separateness during the war, the island of Ireland could conversely be conceived of as a symbol of isolation and introversion. Bernard Share uses 'Neutrality' (wrongly credited as 'The Closing

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64 Edna Longley, 'Introduction: Revising “Irish Literature”', in The Living Stream, pp. 9-68 (p. 43).
Album') as the epigraph for the intermittently whimsical and evasive *The Emergency: Neutral Ireland, 1939-45* (1978), whilst MacNeice’s phrase was adapted by Clair Wills for the title of her 2007 cultural history of Ireland at war. In the introduction to *That Neutral Island*, Wills addresses the problems of measuring neutral Ireland ‘against a chronology which isn’t really its own’, writing that:

The strange, ghostly existence of Ireland both in and outside the war has been replicated in the writing of this book. In focusing on the cultural repercussions of Ireland’s neutrality, I have written about the country in so far as it sought to respond to chains of events outside its control.66

Wills’s use of ‘country’ rather than ‘state’ here is demonstrative of her all-Ireland approach, which does not encourage consideration of the differing wartime experiences of Ireland north and south: in her introduction Northern Ireland is mentioned only once, in terms of civilians and soldiers stationed there enjoying cross-border trips south during the war, perhaps strangely when the introduction’s title ‘An Irish Theatre of War’ might most naturally be applied to the north-eastern part of the island. This is not to say that the book ignores Northern Ireland. Other matters addressed by Wills include republican agitation in Belfast during the war, the presence of American troops in the province, and its bombing by the Luftwaffe, but there is markedly less space devoted to Northern Ireland than its size, population, and direct experience of the conflict might be expected to demand.

*That Neutral Island* is the only lengthy cultural history of Ireland and the war to date, but Northern Ireland has also suffered some neglect in broader historical surveys of Ireland and the war. Terence Brown’s *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2001* (2004) largely avoids Northern Ireland during the war, and other all-Ireland studies have tended to marginalise or avoid comment on the unique nature of Northern Ireland’s war experience and its later cultural representations. In Joseph T. Carroll’s *Ireland in the War Years* (1975), and Tony Gray’s *The Lost Years: The Emergency in Ireland, 1939-45* (1997), the preoccupation with the question of neutrality and even the use of the term ‘the Emergency’ serve to emphasise the southern state’s experiences of the war at the expense of Northern Ireland. The contentious and divisive involvement

of Ireland in the First World War may also be considered as a contributory factor in the awkwardness of historians and others in accounting for its experience of the Second. Despite his claim that the Second World War resulted in a ‘definite outcome’ for Ireland, Geoffrey Roberts has suggested that the war’s implications have yet to be fully worked through:

The Second World War also posed a series of challenges to Irish identities. The difficult responses to these challenges in Ireland did not result in any great crisis nor any great rupture comparable to that of the First World War. But there was a definite outcome to the identity questions and issues posed by the war – an outcome that had an important bearing on the post-war development of the Irish state, politics and society. At the same time the diversity of responses to the identity question produced a series of political and cultural contradictions and tensions which are still evident 60 years later.67

The observations and anecdotes of Belfast journalist and raconteur Sam McAughtry relating to the differing perceptions of the war north and south of the border are particularly interesting in this respect. In On the Outside Looking In: A Memoir (2003) he recalls a barb from an Irish Times review of his earlier book The Sinking of the Kenbane Head (1977), a tribute to his brother Mart, who died when the freighter on which he was serving was sunk by a German battleship during the Battle of the Atlantic. The reviewer, Eileen O’Brien, wrote that ‘Mr McAughtry writes as well as the Belfast people talk, and that is very well indeed’ but that joining the Royal Air Force as McAughtry had done was ‘a waste of a young man who could have done great things in his own country instead’, comments that clearly angered the author.68 He also recalls an appearance on the Late Late Show on RTÉ television in Dublin, when he is struck by:

…the realisation that these people belonged to a different society from the one in which I had been reared. This was their television station, in their capital city. It was like being outside my Ireland, in another country. [...] For them there had

been no war, no Luftwaffe obliteration of city centres. Hitler had even compensated them for an accidental bombing by a Luftwaffe plane.\textsuperscript{69}

McAughtry’s actual involvement in the Second World War enabled him to discover hitherto unacknowledged or unexplored versions of Irishness, but here he identifies the war as instrumental in encouraging the sense of separation between southern state and northern province.

Of specifically Northern studies, Jonathan Bardon’s histories of Ulster and Belfast provide accounts of the Blitz, the social and industrial history of the period and the arrival of American troops in the province, yet pay little attention to literature or culture of the time.\textsuperscript{70} John Blake’s Stormont-commissioned official history is also bereft of commentary or analysis of contemporary cultural activities. It may, perhaps, be argued that the dominance of two such forceful and charismatic personalities as Eamon de Valera and Winston Churchill (and the concomitant lack of leaders of international stature in the Stormont government of the time) in any discussion of Anglo-Irish relations at this time is another factor that pushes Northern Ireland to the margins of the historical consciousness, its status as a potential bargaining chip following Churchill’s infamous telegram of 1941 of more interest than discussion of the province’s wartime role.\textsuperscript{71}

In addressing Northern Ireland and the war specifically, the work of Brian Barton (in \textit{The Blitz: Belfast in the War Years} (1989) and \textit{Northern Ireland in the Second World War} (1995)) and Robert Fisk (\textit{In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster and the Price of Neutrality 1939-1945} (1983)) remains unsurpassed, in Barton’s case for focusing solely on Northern Ireland’s experience of the war, and in Fisk’s for examining the political and social history of the province itself as part of his analysis of the neutrality of the southern state. However, it is also significant that both writers draw on a work of fiction, Brian Moore’s novel \textit{The Emperor of Ice Cream}, in their accounts of the hugely traumatic aftermath of the Belfast Blitz, reproducing passages of

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p. 54.

\textsuperscript{70} Jonathan Bardon, \textit{Belfast: A Century} (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999); \textit{Belfast: An Illustrated History} (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1982); \textit{A History of Ulster} (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2005).

\textsuperscript{71} The telegram was sent at 2 am the morning after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and read: ‘Following from Mr Churchill for Mr de Valera. Personal. Private and Secret. Begins. Now is your chance. Now or never. A Nation once again. Am very ready to meet you at any time. Ends.’ It has been widely suggested that this referred to the prospect of Irish unity should de Valera agree to Éire’s entry into the war on the side of the Allies. (John Bowman, \textit{De Valera and the Ulster Question 1917-1973} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 246)
description as though historical fact. Angus Calder’s only sustained exploration of Northern Ireland and the war in *The Myth of the Blitz* also stems from a reading of Moore’s novel, which could be said to have become the province’s ur-text for the war. I will investigate its privileged status in these historical accounts in the first chapter of this thesis, but would observe here that the repeated recourse to Moore’s novel in these works of cultural and social history, and the growing body of literary critical engagements with the book, highlight the relative scarcity of post-war fiction which examines the war in Northern Ireland. Barton and Fisk aside, it is independent researchers and local historians who have perhaps been most active in describing the province’s experience of the war. In recent years websites such as BBC News Northern Ireland and the Second World War Online Learning Resource for Northern Ireland have begun to collate first-hand memories of the war years, developing valuable, if potentially unreliable, sources for future researchers. The recreational nature of the pursuit of much local and family history and the anecdotal nature of the material offer further resistance to theoretical examinations of Northern Ireland’s place in the war, as the gathering of such stories returns the study of the Home Front to a matter of personal testimony, a retrospective, scattershot form of Mass Observation.

One source on which Brian Barton is particularly reliant is the Mass Observation diary of Moya Woodside, a surgeon’s wife living in south Belfast during the war, and one of only three Mass Observers in Northern Ireland at this time. The space and status accorded to her diary is comparable with the historians’ reverential treatment of *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, and the use of the diary and the novel together in such social histories (and in this thesis) is demonstrative of the extent to which literary and non literary, fictional and factual accounts of the Second World War can be seen to overlap. Barton’s extensive quotation from Woodside’s diary, and use in *Northern Ireland in the Second World War* of an account of a visit to Northern Ireland by the founder of Mass Observation Tom Harrisson is significant, drawing the province into the contested ‘People’s War’ narrative of the British Home Front, prevalent since the publication of Calder’s study of the same name, which similarly relied heavily on

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72 Moya Woodside’s diary (MO5462) is housed at the Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex. Amongst other Mass Observation diarists in Northern Ireland during the Second World War were Doreen Bates (MO5425), an English civil servant working in Belfast, and S.J.C. Harrison (MO5102), a student from Armagh who I have already cited above. The founder of Mass Observation Tom Harrisson visited Northern Ireland in 1944, and wrote of his (not entirely favourable) impressions in a two-part feature for the *Cornhill* magazine. See Harrisson, ‘Ulster Outlooks’, *Cornhill*, 962 and 963 (October and November 1944), pp. 80-91 and pp. 210-23.
the work of Mass Observers. Moya Woodside’s diary draws together many of the concerns that figure repeatedly in published writing both during and since the war: she served on a committee organising welfare for refugees, and was thus acutely aware of the influx of émigrés; she also travelled between Belfast and Dublin during the war, providing vivid descriptions of her impressions of the intense sensory contrasts between the two cities. Her account is notable not only for the richness of its detail but also for the intensity of its scepticism. The diary deconstructs and interrogates censorship and propaganda in government policy and in newspapers and newsreels, anticipating the work of later cultural historian and demonstrating how the idea of a People’s War was questioned contemporaneously in Northern Ireland. Kristine Miller’s approach to the contradictions within the People’s War is perhaps of some use here:

The fiction, film, and personal testimonies of the Blitz emphasise the freedom to disagree with others by demonstrating the individual freedom to contradict oneself. Containing within themselves conflicted views about social upheaval during the People’s War, these literary texts represent precisely that state of open-minded thought that was at stake for Britain in the fight against Nazi Germany.

If the People’s War can be positively conceived in this way, as a discourse permissive of diversity and debate, then through Northern Ireland’s wartime culture we might figure the province itself as a contradictory player within that People’s War. Without denying the specificity of the Northern Irish experience of the war, or the relevance of the pan-Irish historical context, a challenge may be posed to the idea that the People’s War, though British in origin, can be thought of as pertaining to Britain alone.

All of this undoubtedly leaves Northern Ireland in a complex and marginalised position, culturally and historically. Although the Second World War clearly had a considerable impact on the future of Northern Ireland as a geographical and political entity over the second half of the twentieth century, the amount of direct literary, cultural or historical engagement with the war is limited: Tom Paulin’s allusion in his poem ‘The Caravans of Lüneberg Heath’ to the war as a factor in the strengthening of

73 Woodside, MO5462, 16 September 1940, 1 February 1941.
the post-war British claim on Northern Ireland is strikingly rare in a literary context. Compared with the vast quantities of cultural material of all kinds relating to the Second World War produced in Britain and the United States, Northern Ireland’s contributions to this field appear limited, constrained, and eclipsed by its post-war history of political violence. The province’s experience of the war cannot easily be incorporated into a British or Irish narrative of the Second World War or ‘Emergency’, and, caught between the two, has often been omitted from both. The historian Derrick Gibson-Harries’s conception of ‘Ulster’ as ‘a huge unsinkable aircraft carrier and naval base’ during the war is illustrative of its contested and uncertain role. The metaphorical potential in conceiving of the province as a giant ship and mobile participant in the war is swiftly undercut, by the reference to a land-bound military installation and by the use of ‘unsinkable’, inevitably heavily freighted with irony in the context of ships and Northern Ireland.\(^76\) The tension between movement and stasis in Gibson-Harries’s metaphor echoes the contradiction, central to this thesis, between a perception that Northern Ireland was both literally and culturally isolated during the war, and the idea that at this time the province was invigorated by an influx of new ideas and external cultural personalities. The writings of the poet, critic and arts administrator John Hewitt frequently reflect this contradiction, poised between pride in the separateness and specificity of Ulster writing and an anxiety that art and writing in Northern Ireland should be demonstrably relevant to developments in Britain and Europe. This study argues that the war years saw unprecedented levels of positive cultural activity in Northern Ireland, but is mindful that in many cases the privations of war proved extremely challenging for artists and writers, and is wary of overstating the cultural impact made by the influx of refugees and troops where material evidence of this is patchy.\(^77\)


\(^77\) The importance of not overstating the impact made by outsiders is illustrated by a diary entry by Moya Woodside, reflecting on a visit to her house for supper by two Czech refugees:

> After they had gone, I thought how much life in this isolated provincial town has been enriched during the last 3 years by refugees from the Continent. People such as these, intelligent, charming, and really civilised, would be an acquisition to any society: and here in Ulster (where
The vagueness resulting from the inconsistent deployment of terminologies, and an Anglocentric perception that Northern Ireland was semi-detached from the war is reflected in the opening scenes of *The Soldier's Art* (1966), the eighth novel in English writer Anthony Powell’s sequence *A Dance to the Music of Time*. As noted by C.E.B. Brett, the opening scenes of the novel seem to take place against the backdrop of a Luftwaffe raid on Belfast in 1941, when Powell himself was stationed in the city as assistant Camp Commandant for Headquarters in the 53rd division of the British Army’s Welch Regiment. Brief fragments describing the physical environment of Powell’s anonymous fictional analogue suggest an attempt to evoke the surroundings of Belfast, named merely as a ‘provincial city’. These include the cityscape of ‘docks and shipyards’, the landscape around the fictional Divisional Headquarters, described as ‘hedgeless fields partitioned one from another by tumbledown stone walls’, the thud of guns ‘shuddering waves from the surrounding hills’ and the view from F Mess in which Nick Jenkins is billeted, where ‘From its windows in daytime, beyond the suburbs, grey, stony hills could be seen, almost mountains; in another direction, that of the docks over which the blitz had been recently concentrating.’ D.J. Taylor has identified a ‘timelessness’ in Powell’s fiction, part of a wider trend in English fiction of and about the war whereby ‘exactitude over dress, detail and atmosphere co-exists with a characteristically blurred chronology’, but what can more accurately be observed here is geographical non-specificity. Powell seems reluctant to concede that this opening section is set in Belfast or Northern Ireland, or indeed anywhere, and the evocation of the city through such vague reference points recalls the censorship of radio and newspaper reports in Britain and Ireland during the war, when the names of cities, towns, streets and buildings were omitted and the locations cloaked in euphemism. It had been wrongly thought by many that Belfast was beyond the range of German bombers, but Northern Ireland also seems to have remained peripheral to a British

Woodside concedes that not everyone shares her welcoming attitude however, and notes sadly that of four hundred or so refugees that she is aware of, all have been accused of being Nazis (Woodside, MOS4562, 30 November 1940).

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wartime consciousness: as Trevor Allen has observed, battles taking place at sea to the north and west of Ireland received far less space and attention in the British press than those in the sky over southern England.  

Győrgy Lukács’s argument that great historical novels offer a clear understanding of history as the concrete precondition of the present is evidently germane in considering British fiction that addresses the Second World War, but the extent to which the war can be seen as a precondition of Northern Ireland’s present is less clear. That the Second World War was an event of huge cultural, political and social importance is accepted almost unquestioningly in Britain, where the war continues to occupy considerable cultural space and has been hugely popular as the subject or background of innumerable novels, films, and television series. If Éire’s neutrality and consequent indirect role in the war complicate attempts to describe how the war affected cultural activities in the southern state, the awkwardness of Northern Ireland’s position during the war and its traumatic post-war history of sectarian political violence have obscured or discouraged efforts to evaluate the impact of the war on culture north of the border. This study argues that the war years encouraged greater participation in cultural activities in the province and also gave rise to a new and significant body of literature and culture in Northern Ireland, but concedes that, for the reasons I have already suggested, it has been hard to detect any lasting impact of the war on its culture. Louis MacNeice’s sense of the war in general and personal terms as an ‘interregnum’ could in many ways be applied to the place of his birth, and Winston Churchill’s much quoted derogatory evocation of the ‘dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again’ from the ‘deluge’ of the First World War, and complaint that ‘The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that have been unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world’, remain resonant in the context of the aftermath of the Second World War in the province. IRA and republican activity during the war was limited by the severe restrictions imposed by the governments on both sides of the border, and sectarian tensions do seem to have waned for the duration, symbolised perhaps by the temporary suspension of some rituals and traditions that had encouraged violence during the 1930s: Jonathan Bardon has claimed

that 'the horrors of the Blitz, by throwing together people from both communities [...] reduced sectarian animosity in the city to its lowest level since the founding of Northern Ireland.'\(^5\) However, although Orange Order Parades and Twelfth of July celebrations were cancelled for the duration of the war and replaced with religious services, the first post-war Twelfth in 1946 was reportedly one of the largest ever.\(^6\) Victoria Stewart's account of how attempts by writers during the war to use earlier conflicts (in particular the First World War and Spanish Civil War) as points of reference were 'problematized', when memories of the past were reconfigured by the experience of the present, is perhaps relevant here: in Northern Ireland the vast international impact of the Second World War might be seen to have displaced or modified the local sectarian conflict.\(^7\)

Strategically, the province provided an important base for Allied forces, during the Battle of the Atlantic and in the years leading up to D-Day. Over 300,000 service personnel passed through Northern Ireland during the war: in early 1944 120,000 United States GIs alone were billeted in the province, which had become an 'essential holding area and training ground for troops awaiting space in England'.\(^8\) Belfast was home to many of these, but the scale of the influx was perhaps more keenly felt in Derry, which had a much smaller population, and in rural areas. The crucial status of the naval base at Lisahally meant that a huge variety of outsiders passed through Derry during the war years: by April 1943, 149 ships of the Royal Navy, Royal Canadian Navy and US Navy were based there, whilst sailors from the French, Dutch, Norwegian, Australian, New Zealand, Indian and Soviet navies could also be seen on the streets of the city. Richard Doherty has noted that at one point in 1943 the number of service personnel based in the city almost doubled Derry's pre-war population of 48,000.\(^9\) The temporary influx of troops and foreign refugees undoubtedly challenged the binary social structures of the province. The fourth chapter of this thesis examines the use of the war by writers of both nationalist and unionist persuasions to reinforce these structures, but I also hope to show that the war years enabled new, non-exclusive

and transgressive expressions of identity. As Gillian McIntosh has observed, ‘war-time isolation encouraged the Northern Irish to rely increasingly on their own resources for entertainment. Moreover, the presence of so many outsiders in the state during the war had forced them to place a greater emphasis on, and gain a greater awareness of, their own identity.’ From Dublin Ó Faoláin warned of the dangers to the north of ‘hyper-nationalism’, where ‘it is not that there are no barriers – there is no sieve – everything comes flooding in on a people cut off from their roots and will as effectively smother them as our introversion will indubitably smother us if it continues’, but the chaos of war posed a threat to authoritarian unionist hegemony and challenged sectarian norms: in Moore’s fiction the Belfast of The Emperor of Ice Cream, located between the sectarian violence of the 1930s and the moribund austerity of the 1950s, is presented as a place of unprecedented positive cultural, economic and social exchange. In an article entitled ‘Belfast Goes Back To 1939’, published in the Dublin Catholic newspaper The Standard six months before the end of the war, a ‘Special Correspondent’ offers a gloomy prognosis of post-war life:

Belfast’s short day of wartime glamour is at an end. Every week now sees it return yet another stage nearer its pre-war way of life characterised by the ever-present problems of unemployment and religious bigotry. This inevitable but unwanted metamorphosis – with one foot in and one safely out, the Northern man-in-the-street enjoyed his position in relation to the war – is also taking place in every other city in Northern Ireland.

He goes on to predict the return of ‘the cankerous misery of unemployment’ and writes of a ‘sense of values’ gone ‘haywire’, concluding by asking provocatively: ‘Would the way be easier if North and South marched together? From here the expert must take over!’

In 2001 the Belfast Telegraph published an illustrated account of the Belfast Blitz which went so far as to claim that ‘War was welcomed by most of the citizens of

90 McIntosh, Force of Culture, pp. 93-4.
91 ‘Ulster’, The Bell, 2.4 (July 1941), p. 9.
92 ‘Special Correspondent’, ‘Belfast Goes Back to 1939’, The Standard, 12 January 1945, p. 6. The writer is described as ‘a Northern, at present resident in Dublin [...] with knowledge of life both sides of the Border’. It is possible that this may have been the later novelist Benedict Kiely, who worked (in one case infamously) as film critic for The Standard at this time. I explore that particular episode in the first chapter of this thesis.
Northern Ireland’: without forgetting the many victims of the war in Northern Ireland, the idea of the province’s ‘good war’ suggests another way in which it can be set at odds against Britain, or indeed the rest of Europe at the time. Through the upsurge in industrial production, the war was instrumental in alleviating the problem of unemployment in the province, at least in the mid years of the conflict, although to what extent is a matter of some dispute. Jonathan Bardon has outlined the contradictory nature of the experience:

The 1941 Blitz gave Belfast its first direct experience of total war and shattered the complacency of the authorities by laying bare the neglect of the two previous decades. If these years of war brought death and injury to many citizens and razed large areas of the city, they were also a time of positive change when suffering and later full employment blurred social and communal divisions, and decisive steps were taken to effect a permanent improvement in the condition of the people.

The war years seem to have offered an escape, opening a space where, like the diver Magennis in Tom Paulin’s poem, one could exist ‘inside history / and away far out of it’, and indeed, the ways in which Irish men from both north and south of the border, and of either Catholic or Protestant faith, were assimilated into the British armed forces are illuminating in this respect. Soldiers were referred to simply as ‘Irish’ and predominantly addressed as ‘Paddy’, regardless of their origins, constituting for many a negative and hierarchical imposition of identity. The blanket use of such apparently

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93 Bombs on Belfast (Belfast: Belfast Telegraph, 2001), p. v. John Wilson Foster has written that ‘almost everyone I know who lived through it in Belfast seems to have had a ‘good war’ and remembered it with affection. In my childhood, adult relatives seemed to wear the Blitz (never the more serious-sounding ‘Blitzkrieg’) as a badge of civic honour.’ (John Wilson Foster, ‘Was there Ulster literary life before Heaney?’, in Between Shadows: Modern Irish Writing and Culture (Dublin, Portland, Oregon: Irish Academic Press, 2009), pp. 205-218 (p. 209))


95 Bardon, Belfast: An Illustrated History, p. 234.


97 Exploring the use of ‘Paddy’ as an appellation for any Irish person serving in the British armed forces, Richard Doherty gives the example of the Dublin-born Battle of Britain fighter pilot Brendan Finucane,
derogatory terminology had curious repercussions for Northern service personnel, however, and these labels were positively reclaimed by Sam McAughtry, as he explains in his memoir *McAughtry's War* (1985):

I liked it. To be Irish is to be special and interesting. As far as I could see, other Northern Irish Protestants reacted in the same way. I was to see Antrim Protestants come out of themselves, begin to show a swash here and a buckle there within days of signing on, because the British expected it of them and because it offered a lovely release of the inhibitions, considering the times we were in.  

Later in a Lancashire pub he finds himself playing the stage Irishman, using phrases such as ‘Sure and be Jasus’ as he attempts to chat up girls. If McAughtry discovered his Irishness away from Northern Ireland, the possible impact of outsiders unaware of the nature of sectarian divisions as they arrived in the province should also be considered. The presence of American troops in the province during the war is generally described either as an external source of civic tension or as a glamorous, other-worldly influx, but their arrival also encouraged local self-examination, as McIntosh suggests. In a 1942 article entitled ‘The Ireland that Never Was’, the filmmaker Richard Hayward attributed the dissonance between the romanticised American ideas of how Ireland should be and the reality of life as it was lived as responsible for the failure of his film *The Luck of the Irish* in the United States, and expressed the hope that ‘the American troops now in Ulster will take back with them a reasonably sane idea of Ireland as it is.’ The guide to Northern Ireland for troops produced by the US Army sternly advised that ‘Religion is a matter of public as well as private concern in Ulster and you’ll be wise not to talk about it’, but it seems that the presence of the soldiers encouraged greater freedom of expression. In an unpublished

who served with distinction in the Royal Air Force until he was killed in action in 1942, and was known in the British press as ‘Paddy’ Finucane (Doherty, *Irish Men and Women in the Second World War* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), p. 51).

99 Ibid., p. 8.
100 Richard Hayward, ‘An Ireland that Never Was’, in *The P.E.N. In Ulster* (Belfast: Reid and Wright, 1942), pp. 8-9 (p. 9).
essay entitled ‘Life and Writing in North-East Ulster’, written during the war, the poet Roy McFadden wrote that:

Recent years [...] have witnessed a change. The Protestant middle-class is becoming more and more nationally conscious; the ceilidhe is no longer merely a Catholic rendezvous; the national language is growing. And, ironically enough, the Americans are telling the daughters of die-hard Orangemen what pretty colleens they are in troth and would they be able to say a word in Irish at all or maybe dance a jig or a reel. The first seeds of a new culture and a new literature are beginning to take shape in the 6 counties: a new literature which, while retaining an individual character, will fit in with the broad framework of the Irish pattern.  

Historians have tended to argue that Northern Ireland’s involvement in the Second World War cemented partition and deepened the sense of separation from the southern state, but McFadden’s essay suggests that, somewhat paradoxically, the arrival of the Americans in fact helped to push the province further into an Irish cultural sphere. A sense of tension between the local and the international is once again palpable here. The war incontrovertibly drew Northern Ireland into an international context, as it became involved in and affected by events of global consequence. Of Gavin’s experience of the Blitz in *The Emperor of Ice Cream* Brian Moore writes that ‘Tonight, history had conferred the drama of war on this dull, dead town in which he had been born.’ Similarly Emma Duffin, who volunteered with the St John Ambulance in Belfast during the Second World War, wrote in her diary the day after the Easter Tuesday Raid that ‘I could not help feeling, perhaps unjustly, enjoying a certain amount of satisfaction from being included in the drama and tragedy’, whilst the same day Moya Woodside wrote ‘What awful scenes met me as I proceeded. It looked like photographs of Spain or China, or some town in the last war’, her account immediately apprehending the

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102 Roy McFadden, ‘Life and Writing in North-East Ulster’, McFadden Papers, Special Collections Department, Queen’s University Belfast, MP5, p. 7. This is an undated essay, apparently written for an English audience – it certainly presumes their ignorance of the local political and social context, and describes life in Northern Ireland at a time when J.M. Andrews was Prime Minister (November 1940-April 1943).

devastation in its historical and international context. Maeve Boyle, who served in the Royal Navy in Derry during the war, recalled that: ‘I enjoyed myself during the war. You could go to the pictures and sometimes I’d make two dates in one day. It was difficult not to use the wrong name at times. But the whole experience broadened your outlook. The city was very insular in those days.’ Given that the ways of speaking about Northern Ireland have so often been circumscribed by the topographies of partition and sectarianism, it is striking how the privileged and vexed status of the province resulting from its involvement in the Second World War seems to have briefly offered opportunities for re-imagining it within broader European and global contexts. To this end, part of the fourth chapter of this thesis will examine the tendency in political writing of the time to draw comparisons between the situation in Northern Ireland and conflicts elsewhere in the world. Recalling the war forty years on, Robert Greacen wrote that:

We lived, I suppose, in a private world, to some extent a make believe world. Out in the streets the army lorries hurtled on their secret errands of destruction, whilst we behind the blackout curtains dreamed our dreams of the Just Society – even in Belfast, even in Wartime. The world at war, after all, was only an immense enlargement of our own tense province where a sort of apartheid existed between the two communities. At what point could theory be translated into practice?

Writers and artists often seem unsure of how to interpret the effects of the war on their work and the cultural life of the province. In 1943 Samuel Carr, a soldier stationed in Northern Ireland who described himself as a ‘deracinated’ Ulsterman, attributed ‘the cause of this flowering of literary talent’, to the fact that ‘Ulster writers are now confined to Ulster, and are no longer exportable as journalists or business men or in any other form to England’. He continued to ask ‘If this is partly an explanation of the revival, what will happen when peace comes. [sic] Is there a chance that Ulster will so have established itself by then in a cultural sense that the old temptation for writers and

104 Emma Duffin’s Diary, 16 April 1941, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (hereafter ‘PRONI’) D2109/18/19, p. 103; Woodside, MOS462, 16 April 1941.
105 Quoted in Doherty, Irish Men and Women in the Second World War, p. 268.
artists to migrate from it will no longer exist?' Answers to these questions may be found in Roy McFadden's prose of the war and post-war years, in which a demonstrable shift from optimism to uncertainty and regret can be observed. 'Life and Writing in North-East Ulster' not only describes his impressions of how the conflict has upended and inverted traditional allegiances, but foresees a positive future for culture in Northern Ireland in the long term:

This war has seen strange things. Enemies have become friends overnight; friends have become enemies; political colours have been turned and re-turned, and dyed many colours. [...] there is a growing feeling among intelligent people in the 6 counties that the near future will see a new Ireland, with Belfast once again 'the Athens of the North', a city of culture and progress.

He goes on to outline with some enthusiasm the possibilities for writers arising from the 'vivid material' of urban life in Belfast, and hails a generation of young poets (of which he is a member) at the heart of a literary renaissance. McFadden's youthful optimism contrasts with his later assessments of the effects of the war on Northern Ireland, which encompass regret, nostalgia and cynicism. By 1961 'the Athens of the North has become the Ah-thens of our youth': in an article for Threshold McFadden maintained that Belfast as a provincial town was rich in material but blamed a poor cultural climate for the lack of writing, complaining of a suspicious, uninterested or hostile community. He scorns the idea of 'Ulster Writing', arguing that one 'might as well talk of Ulster toothpaste', and talks of regionalism as the 'failure of the forties'. For McFadden the war years offered a brief period, seemingly entirely circumscribed by the length of the conflict itself, which allowed culture to assert its importance within Northern Ireland.

The perception that the early promise of a literary generation swiftly dissipated with the end of the war perhaps partly explains why literary criticism has also been reluctant or slow to address Northern Ireland and the Second World War. In an essay ironically entitled 'Was there Ulster literary life before Heaney?', John Wilson Foster

107 Samuel Carr, letter to John Boyd, 28 November 1943, John Boyd Collection, Linen Hall Library Belfast.
108 McFadden, 'Life and Writing in North-East Ulster', p. 6.
110 Ibid., pp. 32-3.
has noted that many students of Irish literature seem unaware of any Northern writing before Seamus Heaney, sensing a danger that the much-decorated poet could become as synonymous with Northern Ireland as W.B. Yeats is with the southern state. The international fame and accomplishments of Heaney and his contemporaries, and the political violence against which much of their most examined work was written, have arguably fostered this limited appreciation of the literature of Northern Ireland, foreclosing the possibility of considering writers whose work predates the Troubles, whilst discussion of 1940s literature in the southern state has tended to focus on the work of Seán Ó Faoláin and others involved with The Bell. As Foster observes, it may seem strange to future literary critics that for over twenty years Heaney wrote about his Derry boyhood without reference to post-war modernity or the Cold War. However, Heaney and his contemporaries, a generation born around the time of the Second World War, have produced work in recent years addressing both the Northern Irish experience of that war, and the long term impact of the conflict on the province. This study remains mindful of these delayed responses, but for primary source material I have limited myself to art and literature produced between 1939 and 1970, with the intention of uncovering the cultural impact of the war before this was obscured, overshadowed or displaced by that of the Troubles.

The war has manifested itself as a more prominent and vivid presence in Northern Irish autobiography and memoir. Here writers who were children during the war have often presented the war years as a time of formative and positive or even frivolous experience: the poet John Montague, born in 1929, wrote in retrospect that ‘I loved the war’, and Robert Harbinson has described how his experiences as an evacuee in rural Fermanagh challenged his sectarian prejudices. The war also made its mark on post-war generations. In My Mother City (2007) Gerald Dawe is notably unequivocal when writing that ‘the war was the centrepiece of our upbringing’, and echoes Bardon’s view that the war exposed deficiencies and encouraged progressive developments in the fields of education, health and housing, though he is clear that ‘the basic religious and political demographic fault-lines of the city’ remained in place.

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111 Wilson Foster, ‘Was there Ulster literary life before Heaney?’, Between Shadows, p. 205.
112 Ibid., p. 206.
113 I explore some of these briefly at the beginning of the second chapter of this thesis.
114 John Montague, ‘The War Years In Ulster’, in The Figure in the Cave and Other Essays (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1989), pp. 27-35 (p. 27). Montague qualifies this assertion later in the same essay, as I explore in Chapter One.
lengthy appraisal of the life and work of Van Morrison, which hints at the impact of the arrival of American troops during the war on the musical life of the city, casts Morrison as emblematic of a new energy, and frames his birth in these terms: ‘Born in 1945 in Belfast, as World War II ended and optimism and hope grew’.\(^{116}\)

If Protestantism was like the air one breathed, the ground one walked on was assumed to be British. Post-war Belfast was an emphatically British city. Belfast had a recent history in common with other British cities – from the war effort to the Blitz and the thousands of American GIs, to the Victory Parades and ration-books, while the city itself was marked with bomb sites and pre-fabricated houses.\(^{117}\)

Robert Johnstone also registers the physical impact of the war on Belfast, writing that:

Belfast had suffered like London in a just and victorious war, and evidence remained of that. I remember a small bomb-like object lay for years on our kitchen window-sill. It may have been a souvenir collected elsewhere, but I liked to think it had been dropped by a German Stuka and accounted for the small crack at the bottom of the window pane. Swastikas were the signs of revolt my schoolfriends chalked up on the telegraph poles.\(^{118}\)

The importance of the experience of urban destruction, held in common with cities in Britain, should not be underestimated in considering how the war strengthened bonds between Belfast and London, and further detached Northern Ireland culturally and politically from its southern neighbour. Dawe argues that ‘the shift towards a European self-consciousness that the Republic of Ireland managed during the 1970s and 80s, sits uneasily in Belfast precisely because of its historically intimate and highly-charged emotional ties with war-torn Britain of the 1940s and 50s.’\(^{119}\) Such memories and observations echo Sonya O. Rose’s argument that the ‘internal frontiers’ of individuals are threatened in parallel with the ‘external frontiers’ of nations:

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\(^{116}\) Ibid., p. 30.
\(^{117}\) Ibid., p. 35.
\(^{119}\) Dawe, *Mother-City*, p. 98.
As the bombs rained down on British soil, destroying British houses, British monuments, factories and ports, citizens of Britain understood at some very deep level that their personal lives and wellbeing were at risk only because of their national belonging. They shared at least that much in common with everyone, and this recognition of common jeopardy contributed mightily to making national identity particularly meaningful for individuals.  

Bombs also rained down on Irish soil of course, north and south of the border. However, the references by Dawe and Johnstone to bombsites, ration books and pre-fabs clearly draw Belfast into the cultural narrative of the British Home Front, whilst begging the question of whether Northern Ireland had its own specific wartime myths.

The topography and cityscape of Belfast during the war provides an interesting means of exploring the impact of the conflict on the city. During the Troubles the presence of troops and explosive devices on Belfast's streets alienated the city from those across the Irish Sea, but during the Second World War scenes of wartime bomb damage in Belfast, whether in photographs or the officially commissioned and hugely popular drawings of William Conor, served to align its scarred urban landscape with those of British cities. In visual and literary evocations of Belfast during the war, the City Hall may be seen to echo St Paul's Cathedral in London, in terms of the central location of both buildings, the similarity of their domes and towers, and the fact that both survived air attack at a time when surrounding streets were heavily hit. The poet Robert Greacen writes in his memoirs of a rumour in Belfast during the war of a bomb so powerful that if dropped on the City Hall it would destroy the entire city, whilst Gavin in The Emperor of Ice Cream, briefly exhilarated during the Blitz at the prospect of the collapse of so many of Belfast's industrial, political and religious symbols, urges destruction on the building from the roof of his ARP post. In Poems From Ulster (1942), selected and edited by Greacen, the City Hall appears in a woodcut frontispiece, in a central position at the base of the illustration, below a rising phoenix and between the flat roof of a factory and a church tower on the left, and a row of terraced houses and another commercial building opposite. Searchlights rise from the roofs, cutting through starry patches of night sky to form a cross behind the phoenix, above which a

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120 Rose, p. 11.
red hand of Ulster provides the only colour. The focal phoenix can be seen to symbolise a new body of poets rising from the destruction of the Blitz, or perhaps the survival of the city itself, but the central presence of the City Hall amongst buildings symbolic of the industrial and religious life of Belfast is demonstrative of its visual resonance at this time. The City Hall was at the heart of Belfast’s official VE day celebrations, and Gillian McIntosh describes the building as ‘the site for civic patriotism and a venue where the whole city could gather to remember and celebrate their collective survival’.

However, as Greacen himself observed, it is striking that this potent symbol both of hegemonic unionist rule and of the official war effort in the city was located immediately opposite Campbell’s coffee house, the centre of so much unofficial artistic and cultural life in Belfast during the war:

...one looks across at the City Hall erected in the full flush of Victorian prosperity by the Protestant bourgeoisie. Its statues and gardens I have known from childhood. The City Hall indeed, like the poor and the war profiteer, is something one puts up with. After the war, perhaps, change may come ... but will the war ever end?

Moya Woodside’s description of the scene outside the City Hall on a dismal day in December 1940 may also be read as a deflationary counter to McIntosh’s claims:

Passed the City Hall where a few dejected-looking groups of people were watching the progress of War Weapons Week on a scaffolding barometer. Loud-speaker van drawn up on pavement blared forth martial music to encourage the apathetic investor, but as a gale was blowing, little could be heard except directly opposite the van.

Scenes such as these not only cut across official versions of wartime collective endeavour, but should also act as caveats to this study: I believe that the recovery and analysis of this body of work should encourage a broader and more inclusive

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122 Poems from Ulster, selected and ed. by Robert Greacen (Belfast: W. Erskine Mayne, 1942).
123 Gillian McIntosh, Belfast City Hall: One Hundred Years (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, Belfast City Council, 2006), p. 123.
124 Greacen, Sash, pp. 120-1.
125 Woodside, MO5462, 6 December 1940.
appreciation of Northern Irish cultural history, but remain wary of overstressing the impact that these artists and writers made on the cultural life of the population at large.

Despite the evident visual echoes between bombed Belfast and British cities, there is little sense that, like the bombing of London, the Belfast Blitz could be converted into a mythical triumph. Wartime myths in Northern Ireland are on a much smaller scale, echoing the tendency of the war to be remembered through local, unofficial, and collaborative histories. The wartime mythology of Northern Ireland is complicated not only by sectarian divisions within the province, but also by the ways in which so many of the anecdotes themselves arise from the border with the southern state: in addition to the abundance of stories, many of them comical, of cross-border smuggling of goods in both directions, perhaps the most enduring myth of wartime Belfast is the involvement of the Dublin Fire Brigade in the fire fighting operation following the Easter Tuesday air raid. In the first chapter on memoir and autobiographical fiction I explore how the contestation of this myth in both fictional and historical writing exemplifies the contradictory nature of Northern Ireland’s place in the People’s War.

In addressing the cross-generic nature of wartime culture, this study seeks to plug the literary history of wartime Northern Ireland into that of Britain, where appropriate. As I describe in the second chapter on poetry, it is hard to disentangle the concerns of young poets in Belfast during the war from those of their counterparts in literary London, mainly due to their complex and unresolved relationships with English poets of the 1930s. This perhaps reflects Edna Longley’s view of the difficulty in drawing boundaries between the political climate of the ‘pan-Irish, British, and Northern Irish 1930s’.

John Wilson Foster has detected echoes between the behaviour of writers in Belfast whose ‘social heyday appears to have been the Second World War’, and the activities of both the Auden group during the 1930s and writers in Fitzrovia during the 1940s and 50s, noting that all three literary communities were known for their frequenting of coffee houses, exploration of left-wing political ideas and enjoyment of weekends in the country.

In this way Robert Hewison’s evocation in Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-45 (1988) of a concentrated group of artists and writers in London during the war, who benefited practically and

127 Wilson Foster, ‘Was there Ulster literary life before Heaney?’, Between Shadows, p. 209.
psychologically as a community from a sense of ‘mutual solidarity’ finds an echo in the Belfast of these years, albeit on a much smaller scale.\textsuperscript{128}

Hewison’s emphasis on the geographical smallness of the areas of Fitzrovia and Soho in which his cast of characters moved, a point impressed upon by his inclusion of a map of the district in the book, is echoed, and indeed exceeded, by the even greater concentration of the local cultural community in Belfast.\textsuperscript{129} Instead of the several pubs and drinking clubs described by Hewison, Campbell’s café is the only consistently present venue in accounts of the period, though Davy McLeans’s progressive bookshop in Howard Street also drew together left-leaning artists and writers. The concentrated nature of this artistic and literary world is reflected in this study by the recurrence of many of its characters across several chapters, emphasising the extent of cross-pollination across literary genres, journalism, political writing and visual artworks at this time. The war seems to have encouraged experimentation, as artists and writers attempted different roles: Colin Middleton was both poet and painter during the war years, and George MacCann, who served in the British army, experimented with both cubist and surrealist painting and also wrote short stories.\textsuperscript{130} In his administrative role in the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery John Hewitt was able to stimulate interest in contemporary visual art even as he developed his regionalist theories of culture in prose and produced his own poetry. Brian Moore’s \textit{The Emperor of Ice Cream} is evocative of this interpenetrative atmosphere. Within the text of the novel itself quotations from poems by W.H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Wallace Stevens and W.B. Yeats show the crucial influence of modernist and 1930s poetry on the wartime cultural environment, whilst in its extratextual life the book continues to exert a considerable impact on subsequent works of social history.

The path taken by Robert Greacen during the war, from Belfast to Dublin and then to London, traces an important link between three literary worlds. Indeed, his intermittently self-indulgent autobiographical writings on the war years sometimes read as attempts to write himself into the cast of characters described by Hewison, and later identified by Mark Rawlinson as comfortingly familiar. In an article published in 1976 entitled ‘Writing Through the London Blitz’, Greacen sketches a web of connections


\textsuperscript{129} Hewison, \textit{Under Siege}, p. 65.

between writers, editors and publishers: he recalls his encounter with Alex Comfort in 1942 after a lengthy correspondence, through whom he meets Wrey Gardiner, founder of the Grey Walls Press, and publisher of Comfort and Greacen’s New Apocalyptic anthology Lyra: an anthology of new lyric (1942). Through Gardiner he comes to know John Bayliss and Derek Stanford. He also describes being put up in a condemned cottage by the writer and publisher Reginald Moore, and encountering Tambimuttu and others: ‘There was the mandarin Cyril Connolly who asked me what the purpose of writing was and, when I hesitated, supplied the answer: “To write a masterpiece”. I remember Stephen Spender in his Hampstead flat wearing a fireman’s uniform, tall, kind, shy and with a Shelleyan intensity.’ Despite the glamorous patina to such vignettes, he concludes his recollections by denying that he intended the war years to sound enjoyable, claiming that they were ‘mostly dreary and occasionally dangerous’.  

One important way in which the artistic and literary environments in Belfast and London differed at this time was the lack of any meaningful aristocratic involvement in the arts in Northern Ireland. This study’s cast of characters were predominantly middle and working class, most of whom knew a trade or worked at a day job away from writing or painting: Middleton had trained as a damask designer in the linen trade, John Hewitt worked as a museum administrator, Gerard Dillon was a house painter and decorator, and Roy McFadden became a solicitor. Unlike London there was no body of artists or writers in Belfast at this time who could afford to do nothing else. Alan Sinfield has described British intellectuals finding in the Second World War ‘an unprecedented opportunity to be useful’, by working for the BBC or producing official war art amongst other activities: in this study the only such example is Louis MacNeice, included here as a result of the considerable influence of his writings on work by the younger generation of poets centred around Queen’s University Belfast.

From the tightness of these groups long lasting friendships and semiprofessional networks were forged, as can be seen from the correspondence archives of John Boyd, Robert Greacen and Roy McFadden, which suggest that later, on occasion, these writers felt a degree of nostalgia for the war years. This was a time when, despite the threats of aerial bombardment and invasion, and the restrictions and privations of

the war, a considerable amount of fun seems to have been had. The English artist Nevill Johnson describes life in Belfast after the Blitz of 1941:

People talk of the swinging sixties as a breakaway to licence, as a nose-thumb to convention, but even in the forties, in sturdily provincial Belfast, the seeds of revolt were pushing through the fabric. On the surface a polite society sat enthralled at young Menuhin or spellbound before the tragic mien of Rachmaninov. We attended, respectful, the musical soirees of Mrs Warnock. We visited Mount Charles, inhaling the culture and the avuncular tobacco smoke of John Hewitt, notable poet with a sharp ear for the cuckoo. We paid homage to Gilbert Harding, sonorous polymath.

But beneath this crust, in nests of anarchy and deviation, fanned and feathered by children of the manse, orgies took place and mayhem prevailed.133

The hints at sexual licentiousness in the cultural underworld sketched by Brian Moore in *The Emperor of Ice Cream* are the only other references to ‘orgies’ at this time that I have discovered, but Johnson’s recollections do provide a welcome antidote to a sometimes anxious and excessively earnest tendency in some prose of the war years. If John Hewitt’s writings on regionalism are sometimes dreary, or some of the cultural and poetic debates conducted through the pages of *The Bell* or the Queen’s University magazine the *Northman* seem repetitive and wearisome, it is worth being vigilant for the ‘seeds of revolt’ and ‘nests of anarchy’ lurking between the lines.

This study seeks to encourage a broader conception of Northern Irish culture by considering pre-Troubles art and literature, but also suggests that, during the war years, a geographical as well as temporal enlargement of its cultural sphere may be perceived, in the large number of non-native artists and writers who lived and worked in the province at this time. Their presence and work complicates what is meant by ‘Irish’, ‘Northern Irish’ or ‘Ulster’ literature and culture at this time. A letter from John Hewitt to the South African academic and historian Deborah Lavin in 1970, over the possible mounting of an exhibition of mid twentieth century Ulster art, outlines the problems and inconsistencies faced by those who would define Northern Irish culture:

Further, should all works have been executed within the period 1921-71? Should artists have been born within the Province, or lived here for an appreciable number of years? William Scott was born in Scotland, grew up in Enniskillen, went to the Belfast College of Art, but has not lived in Ireland since. I do not consider him Irish although his accent has persisted. And his style has no local reference and little if any influence. But what about Hans Iten whom you include on your list? He was Swiss but lived in Belfast from early manhood until his death, active with local art societies. And if Iten, why not Paul Nietsche? A German born in Russia, he had two long spells of residence and died in Belfast. If residence is the determining factor, then Scott is out and these two are in.  

The war undoubtedly brought people to Northern Ireland who otherwise would not have been there, and who would not normally be thought of in that context. Prince Philip, then an officer in the Royal Navy, was seen in Derry during the war, whilst captured German soldier and future Manchester City goalkeeper Bert Trautmann apparently spent time in a prisoner of war camp in Northern Ireland. Entertainers including Irving Berlin, George Formby, Bob Hope, Al Jolson, Glenn Miller and Merle Oberon paid visits to the province to entertain the troops. These injections of stardust caused considerable excitement, and such incongruities counter any perception of Northern Ireland at this time as insular and culturally moribund. There were new sights, sounds and spectacles to enjoy: the American troops brought jazz with them, demanded that cinemas open on Sundays, and baseball was played at Windsor Park. Drama and importance were also ‘conferred’ (to borrow Brian Moore’s expression) by the visits of Generals Eisenhower, Montgomery and Patton, Commodore Mountbatten, and Eleanor Roosevelt, amongst others. The war also brought a significant number of writers to Northern Ireland, of course. Often stationed with the British army, these men spent extended periods of time in the province: here too it is worth considering the incongruities between people, places and cultural activities, instigated and encouraged

135 Doherty, Key to Victory, p. 52; Barton, Northern Ireland in the Second World War, p. 139.
136 Francis, Lacey and Mullen, Atlantic War Memorial, p. 56; Ronnie Lambkin, My Time in the War: An Irishwoman’s Diary (Dublin: Wollhound Press, 1992), p. 93.
by the war. The presence of English novelist Anthony Powell in Northern Ireland exemplifies these peculiarities, and the idea of books being read or written in incongruous or strange places during the war is notably present in The Soldier’s Art, when a conversation between Nick and his divisional commander about the merits of Balzac and Trollope takes place during a training exercise. Powell’s time in the province seems to have left little imprint on his work, and he was less than enthusiastic about the places in which he was billeted – in his memoirs Portadown is described as ‘politically reliable, if scenically unromantic’, Newry as ‘shabby though less architecturally unprepossessing than Portadown’, and Belfast as a ‘city not famed for its charm; perhaps even rather unjustly disparaged, some of the University quarter being not without all distinction.’ However, the very fact of his presence clearly enables connections to be drawn between very different literary worlds in wartime England and Ireland. Crucially, these connections do seem to have been apprehended at the time: in his memoir Even Without Irene (1969), Robert Greacen describes how the presence of the English novelist and poet Rayner Heppenstall in Northern Ireland during the war provided a link to the world of George Orwell, Eric Gill and John Middleton Murry. Though it may not be possible to discern a direct consequential effect of such writers on the work of those in Northern Ireland, the enlivening effect of the presence of outsiders should not be underestimated.

The role of the war in widening the Northern Irish canon is demonstrated by an untitled and unpublished anthology of poetry edited by Roy McFadden, seemingly assembled during the 1990s. It is an unusually broad selection, and although the vast majority of the poets represented were born and brought up in Northern Ireland or Ulster, it is hugely significant that some non-native writers were included. Although no introduction to the anthology has yet surfaced (the contents pages do indicate that one had been planned), it seems likely that McFadden intended the work to gather together some of the poets that had largely been forgotten, or pushed to the critical margins: in 1995 he publicly expressed some irritation that he and his contemporaries had been

138 Powell, Soldier’s Art, p. 45-8.
141 I infer this from the fact that in the accompanying biographical notes on the contributors to the anthology, the last death of a contributor is recorded as occurring in 1989.
effaced from the Irish cultural landscape, such was the critical attention lavished on the younger generation of Heaney, Longley and Mahon. In any case, it is striking to find an anthology of Northern writing in which not one of the writers included were born after 1929, and where the oldest, John B. Yeats, was born in 1839. The latter alone among the writers is represented by prose, in the form of an unpublished letter to his son William, dated September 1918. The diversity of the collection is also notable. The poetic generation of which McFadden was a leading member is well represented, by John Boyd, Maurice James Craig, Robert Greacen and the editor himself, the next oldest generation of poets is represented by John Hewitt and W.R. Rodgers, and poems by the painters John Luke and Colin Middleton are also included. Much space is given to writers born in the nineteenth century, such as Lynn Doyle, Alice Milligan, May Morton, Forrest Reid, Richard Rowley, and Helen Waddell. The anthology encompasses unofficial poetic forms, including a selection of Belfast street songs collected by Hugh Quinn, and poems in dialect by Moira O’Neill. Émigré writers such as Padraic Colum, C.S. Lewis and Louis MacNeice are represented, and there are also poems by English outsiders such as Norman Dugdale, Philip Larkin, Freda Laughton, Patric Stevenson and Arthur Terry, and the aforementioned Ukrainian painter Paul Nietsche. The Second World War had a decisive impact on the composition of the anthology: McFadden includes poems which address the war obliquely by George Buchanan and Patrick Maybin, local writers who had served in the Royal Air Force and the British army respectively, and more direct poetry by John Gallen, a contemporary of Greacen and McFadden at Queen’s who served in the British army and was killed in the far east after the war’s end. Alex Glendinning, killed in Singapore in 1942 whilst serving in the RAF is represented by two short poems, and the poems ‘The Bombed House’ and ‘The Evacuees’ by Freda Laughton address the Home Front experience. Significantly, McFadden also includes poems by Drummond Allison, Sidney Keyes, Emanuel Litvinoff, and the Australian John Manifold, all of whom were stationed in Northern Ireland during the war. Keyes, who was killed in North Africa in April 1943, is represented by two poems, ‘Ulster Soldier’ and ‘The True Heart’, both signed with

142 Roy McFadden, ‘Corrigibly Plural’, *Fortnight*, 337 (March 1995), 41-2 (p. 41). I examine this further in the second chapter of this thesis.
143 Roy McFadden, unpublished untitled anthology, Private Collection, pp. 247-8.
144 Ibid., pp. 119-20.
some poignancy ‘Omagh, 15th April 1942’. In addition, a poem by Francis Stuart entitled ‘Ireland’ is signed ‘Berlin 1944’.

Although unpublished, McFadden’s anthology is notable in its inclusive approach to provenance and style, circumventing well trodden debates over what constitutes ‘Ulster’ writing and enabling the discovery of a web of historical, artistic and personal connections through the reading of both the poems themselves and the brief biographical notes on the contributors at the end of the collection. Considering the impact of the wartime little magazine *Lagan* retrospectively in 1961, McFadden saw the inconsistencies and uncertainties of the writing of the time in negative terms:

What *Lagan* did not do was to define what was meant by ‘Ulster Writing.’ Is Peadar O’Donnell an Ulster novelist? Is Patrick Kavanagh an Ulster poet?

*Lagan* did a service by suggesting that whatever we were as writers we were not English. The use of the word ‘Ulster’ was, I think, equivalent to letting X represent the unknown quantity.

Thirty years later, however, McFadden’s own anthology suggests that this ‘unknown quantity’ could be figured in more positive terms than merely ‘not English’. Writers such as Keyes and Litvinoff may not have had a discernible or long lasting impact on writing in Northern Ireland, but their inclusion alongside local writers encourages the conception of an expanded Northern Irish cultural sphere and helps to move the study of the province’s culture on from tiring dissections of national, political or religious identity. Through an examination of the literature and culture of the war itself and later responses occasioned by the war, this study aims to be similarly inclusive in approach. Although for reasons of space local writers and artists have been prioritised, I consider their work in the international and interdisciplinary context thrust upon Northern Ireland by the Second World War.

This study attempts to address an omission, but unfortunately in so doing necessarily makes its own omissions. Its gender imbalance is huge: apart from a few poems by Freda Laughton, Nesca Robb’s autobiographical account of her time in England during the war, and some examples of popular short fiction and poetry, I have

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145 Ibid., p. 114.
146 Ibid., p. 223.
found no women’s writing relating directly to Northern Ireland and the Second World War in the course of my research. The socio-historical reasons for this must be addressed elsewhere. I have largely avoided examining the theatre, or contemporary broadcasting in detail. The theatre in Northern Ireland at this time seems to have been dominated by commercial productions in the major towns and cities, although there is evidence that the amateur scene and travelling productions in particular thrived at this time. Of these productions, it is likely that many plays were staged simply to provide an escape from the war for their audience – Sam Hanna Bell recalls that the semi-amateur Ulster Group Theatre’s hugely popular production of St John Ervine’s *Boyd’s Shop* (1936), which ran on and off from September 1940 until the Luftwaffe raid of 14 April 1941, ‘reminded men and women of homely virtues reported missing if not already dead in those sombre early days and black nights of the War.’ The popularity of theatrical performances at all levels at this time shows how the war stimulated interest in the arts and participation in cultural activities, but, possibly due to logistical and commercial considerations, the conflict seems to have had a relatively limited impact on the nature of the plays themselves. The playwright Thomas Carnduff felt that the war had not encouraged serious drama, and bemoaned the dominance of popular entertainment: ‘You can put on any kind of show just now and be certain to make a profit. The people merely crowd into places of amusement, aimlessly, and without any choice.’ Bell found that ‘documentary material on the origin and development of the

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149 Michael Farrell, ‘Drama in Ulster Now’, *The Bell* ‘Special Ulster Number’ and *The Abbey Theatre*, 2.4 (July 1941), 82-8 (p. 85, p. 87); Jack Loudan, ‘Address given to Belfast Rotary Club in Grand Central Hotel on 19th March, 1945’, unpublished and unpaginated typed manuscript, Jack Loudan Collection, Linen Hall Library. Loudan describes the work of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) in bringing theatre to more than twenty towns in Northern Ireland, and claims that ‘the demand for plays in rural Ulster far exceeds the supply.’

150 Sam Hanna Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster: A Survey of the dramatic movement in Ulster from 1902 until the present day* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), p. 70. Sean McMahon’s account of the Belfast Blitz includes information on some of the plays that were running in Belfast around the time of the attacks. In Holy Week 1941 the Savoy Players performed Jerome K. Jerome’s *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* (1908) at the Grand Opera House. The following Easter week was interrupted by the first air raid on Belfast on the night of 14 April. At this point the Opera House was the venue for the farce *It’s a Boy*, based on the 1934 British film of the same name, whilst *Boyd’s Shop* ran at the Ulster Minor Hall, and the Mayo-born singer Delia Murphy performed in the main Ulster Hall. See McMahon, *The Belfast Blitz: Luftwaffe Raids in Northern Ireland, 1941* (Belfast: Brethon Press, 2010), p. 64.

151 Thomas Carnduff, *Life and Writings*, ed. and introduced by John Gray (Belfast: Lagan Press / Fortnight Educational Trust, 1994), p. 52. These lines are quoted in Gray’s biographical introduction, but I have not been able to establish their original provenance. In 1942 Carnduff reportedly told his wife Mary that he was ‘sketching out a Belfast/Dublin play showing a blitzed out Belfast family who go to Dublin and are killed along with their Dublin friends’ but no trace of this has been found (Carnduff, *Life and Writings*, p. 51).
Ulster Group Theatre [was] of the scantiest’, and relied for his account on the reminiscences of members recorded for a BBC documentary in 1965.\(^{152}\) My own archival research in this regard has been similarly fruitless. This study in any case concentrates on books, documents and artefacts that the war has left behind: in this context past theatrical performances are hugely difficult to examine on similar terms, whilst homegrown radio and cinema in Northern Ireland at this time were severely limited and have already been comprehensively covered by existing cultural histories.\(^{153}\)

As I have outlined, the fragmentary nature of some of the material under consideration, and the contingent or irregular ways in which works were published or appeared, means that there is considerable cross-pollination between the otherwise generically organised chapters of this thesis. The first chapter addresses autobiographical fiction and memoir, considering ways in which the stories of individuals have been integrated with known historical events. With reference to Brian Moore’s *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, it engages with what Holger Klein described in *The Second World War in Fiction* (1984) as the ‘embedding’ of creative texts within supposedly factual accounts, focusing on the use of passages from the novel by social historians.\(^{154}\) I also examine Benedict Kiely’s *Land Without Stars* (1946), an autobiographical novel which is illustrative of how the war presented severe problems for nationalists in Northern Ireland. The second chapter explores the writing of poetry in the province during the war, appraising the influence of English poets of the 1930s on a much younger generation in Belfast, gathered around Queen’s University in the early 1940s, before considering the impact of the war on the work of two older poets, John Hewitt and W.R. Rodgers. The third chapter charts the effects of the war on visual art in Northern Ireland, and examines in detail the war paintings of three Belfast artists, Colin Middleton, Gerard Dillon and William Conor, tracing the impact of continental styles on art in Belfast and showing how boundaries between official and unofficial war art were somewhat porous at this time. The fourth and final chapter looks at politicised writing during and after the war, interrogating the ways in which the wider implications of the Second World War were translated into existing local political conflicts, and

\(^{152}\) Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 61.
describing the interpenetration of the Northern Irish political and literary spheres at this time. Together the four chapters aim to recover the works of an eccentric collection of artists and writers during and after the war, and consider how the awkward position of the province in relation to the war is reflected in these works. The thesis seeks to address the effects of the Second World War on literature and culture in Northern Ireland by exploring publications and artefacts that have often remained submerged, sidelined, marginalised or avoided. I also hope that examining such material will allow new ways of approaching Northern Ireland's role in the war to emerge.
Chapter One

‘His story was confirmed by others’: Autobiographical Fiction and Memoir

Perhaps more than any other war, the sheer scale of the Second World War presents significant challenges for writers of autobiography and memoir who wish to describe their experiences of the conflict. Autobiographical writing is overtly concerned with the development of the self and the individual, but war is, by its nature, a communal activity, which in the case of the Second World War consisted of a series of known episodes, experiences and ordeals undergone by hundreds, thousands and millions of people at once. This is the basis of Holger Klein’s argument that:

Like that of the First World War, fiction of the Second World War is embedded in other prose literature: histories, biographies and autobiographies detailing not what could be true, but what is true in the sense that it can be documented as fact or vouched for by specific persons. This is an immediate, likewise immense context to our subject, meriting close consideration. In the war, fiction shares with other literature a general subject as dramatic – or traumatic, as exciting, in many respects as hair-raising as anything a writer could conceive.¹⁵⁵

Just as action in realist war fiction has to be positioned within the action of the war, and in relation to factual accounts of the conflict, demands are also made on the autobiographer: writing autobiographical fiction or memoir which addresses the Second World War can also require the marshalling of vast quantities and layers of contextual detail, at the same time as managing the expectations and prior knowledge of the intended reader. Alan Munton suggests that novelists have to ‘clear a space within a period already heavily defined by other means, particularly by readers’ knowledge of history’, but autobiographical writers face a similar task.¹⁵⁶ In the heavily documented context of the Second World War, the story of the individual subject becomes less personal, and the writer is afforded less autonomy, than might otherwise be the case, as the narrative often has to be set against the greater historical reality of the war in order to be credible. Munton argues that:

The reader, reading forwards, anticipates or finds satisfying the resolution offered by a known historical moment; he may feel even more confidently situated in present time because his knowledge of the past - of how it 'worked out' - confirms his present experience of the narrative. For the author, working backwards, history can be a constraint. Unless the work is a fantasy, fictional events must be related to or must confirm actual occurrences known to the readership.\textsuperscript{157}

For readers of autobiographies and memoirs which deal with the Second World War, questions of how the subject’s story relates to known and familiar episodes (or ‘actual occurrences’) are perhaps even more important: if an English writer should begin to describe their life in late August 1939, for example, they would inevitably encourage the expectation of an imminent description of their experience and memories of the beginning of the war. To avoid referring to this would appear to the reader to be a deliberate omission from the narrative. As we shall see, in Northern Irish autobiographical writing, the relationships between such expectations and omissions in the context of the Second World War are more complex and fraught. By ‘known episodes’ I mean those historical events that have been identified and textualised, dated and described by a number of sources, and that can easily be recruited into a variety of cultural forms, even if the details of their genesis and development are matters of historical debate. From a British perspective on the Second World War, chief amongst these would be the episodes prominent in the ‘People’s War’ narrative, the Dunkirk evacuation, the Blitz in London, the Battle of Britain and VE Day.

The importance of relating personal experience to such known episodes can be observed in the structure of Stephen Gilbert’s often overlooked \textit{Bombardier} (1944), an autobiographical novel written and published during the war, which describes the author’s experiences in France in the British Expeditionary Force, from the winter of 1939 until the evacuation of Dunkirk.\textsuperscript{158} Gilbert’s fictional analogue is Peter Rendell,

\textsuperscript{157} Munton, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{158} Stephen Gilbert was born in Newcastle, Co Down in 1912. He was schooled in England and Scotland, but returned to Northern Ireland to work on the \textit{Northern Whig} between 1931 and 1934. He served in the 3rd Ulster Searchlight Regiment during the Second World War and was awarded the Military Medal following the Dunkirk evacuation of 1940. He produced a small number of strange novels, including \textit{The Landslide} (1943) which described the appearance of a jungle in the west of Ireland and \textit{Ratman’s}
who, like Gilbert, is from a middle-class Northern Irish Protestant background and a Lance-Bombardier serving in the 3rd Ulster Searchlight Regiment. *Bombardier* is notable for its dissension from official depictions of British Army life and the Dunkirk evacuation in particular, and its attention to the experiences of Irish and Northern Irish soldiers in the army at this time.

The main text of the novel is preceded by three organising pages. There is a contents page which divides the book into nine sections, all but one of which is given the name of a French town, or area in north-eastern France, around which the action takes place. This culminates in the penultimate ‘Dunkirk’ and final section entitled ‘England’.\(^{159}\) The following page carries two headings: ‘Scene’, under which the locations ‘Parts of Northern France’, ‘The English Channel’ and ‘The South of England’ are listed, and ‘Time’, with corresponding seasons and years.\(^{160}\) There is a ‘List Of Principal Persons In Order Of Mention’ on the next and final organising page. The various components to this preamble constitute an overt acknowledgement on Gilbert’s part that he is operating within a constrained context provided by readers’ expectations and their knowledge of recent history.\(^{161}\) *Bombardier* was published in October 1944, when the ultimate outcome of the war in Europe was all but assured: in providing readers with the chapter titles ‘Dunkirk’ and ‘England’ before the main body of prose, Gilbert signals not only that the novel will engage with one of the pre-eminent known episodes of that ongoing war, but also hints that it is likely that its central character will emerge successfully from this. Some of Peter’s thoughts on the possible progress of the war appear at an early stage of the novel:

He wondered how long the war would last. If people asked him he always said ten years – and everyone laughed. They said there'd be starvation in Germany before that. The Germans couldn't win - yet obviously they had only gone into the war because they thought they *would* win, but how. The Maginot line was impregnable and the Belgians had a similar line.\(^{162}\)

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\(^{160}\) Ibid., p. 6.

\(^{161}\) Munton, p. 21.

\(^{162}\) Gilbert, *Bombardier*, p. 23.
By 1944 the futility of the Maginot line was legendary, and the dramatic irony in these lines is clear. *Bombardier*’s narrative is thus largely dependent on how the impregnability of these defences is disproved in the novel, how Peter is personally affected by these known historical episodes, and how this personal experience diverges from familiar and much repeated official accounts.

How far to integrate the life of the subject with known historical events is a question for autobiographical writers of many epochs, of course, and, as Liam Harte has observed, is of particular relevance to the Irish nationalist autobiographical tendency to identify progress of the self with that of the nation. Moving on from this tradition he cites later twentieth and early twenty-first century autobiographical works by authors such as Ciaran Carson and Michael Cronin, who attempt to ‘write the self as the performative subject of space, showing how identities and social relations are defined not only by the palimpsestic accretions of time, but also by a spatialised landscape of mundane objects and activities.’ Harte also claims that ‘for all their hyper-vivid materiality and sensuously imagined specificity, these works also strive towards typicality in the way that they continually collapse personal biography into collective history’, citing Cronin’s use of the second person and avoidance of the first to show how these works draw the Irish reader into a narrative of common belonging. The balance of power may be shifting, but the combination of a politicised tradition and a strong sense of collective memory mean that Irish autobiography continues to be dominated by its relationship with history. It is clear that the events of the twentieth century place the idea of an pan-Irish autobiographical tradition under considerable strain, since distinctions between the experiences of individuals north and south of the border must inevitably be drawn when considering the Second World War and the later eruption of the Troubles.

The works discussed in this chapter show how attempts to integrate subject and historical event in Northern Irish autobiographical writing provoke questions of identity that exist, at best, on the margins of Irish and British socio-historical or literary narratives of the war. Writers of a nationalist background addressing the war have sometimes occupied an uneasy space somewhere between the Irish nationalist autobiographical identification of subject and nation and the British People’s War

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164 Ibid., p. 11.
narrative of collective endeavour, as can be seen in Brian Moore’s autobiographical novel *The Emperor of Ice Cream*. Éire’s neutrality, combined with deep seated nationalist antagonism towards Britain, precluded or problematised nationalist involvement in the British war effort, and Benedict Kiely’s contortions in the autobiographical novel *Land Without Stars* and two further volumes of memoir show how the war and its legacy caused severe problems for nationalist life writing which addressed the period. Conversely, writers from Protestant and unionist backgrounds have been more likely to describe the war’s formative effects on their identity and their perceptions of others in a positive light: as I noted in the introduction, the journalist Sam McAughtry, a navigator in the Royal Air Force during the war, shows in his memoirs the flexibility of Northern Protestant identity within the British armed forces. Notable for their topographical and spatial awareness, Robert Harbinson’s boyhood memoirs *Song of Erne* and *Up Spake the Cabin Boy* describe how his wartime experiences, first as an evacuee in rural Fermanagh and then in industrial Belfast, challenged his nascent loyalist dogmatism and cured him of sectarian prejudice.

Patricia Craig states in her biography of Brian Moore that he himself always agreed that *The Emperor of Ice Cream* was ‘the most directly autobiographical’ of his novels.\(^{165}\) It describes the passage from boyhood to manhood of Gavin Burke, a seventeen year old from Catholic West Belfast, who to the various horror and amusement of his family leaves school to join an Air Raid Precautions Unit: the novel opens with him pulling on his (tellingly) ill-fitting and uncomfortable British uniform for the first time. Gavin no longer believes in God or the Church, but remains ‘unreasonably in dread of God’s vengeance for the fact of this unbelief’, a dread seemingly manifested in the figurine of the Divine Infant of Prague which stands on the dresser in his bedroom, giving voice to his conscience by reminding him of his various sins, sloth, smoking and masturbation.\(^{166}\) In addition, he contends throughout the novel with the conflicting advice of a pair of personal guardian angels, the Black Angel and White Angel, the former subversive and anarchic, dedicated to self satisfaction, the latter careful and conservative. During the ‘phony war’ the freedom afforded by his new nocturnal job allows him to immerse himself in the excitingly alien worlds of bohemian socialist

\(^{165}\) Craig, *Brian Moore*, p. 74.

\(^{166}\) Moore, *Emperor*, p. 10.
theatre and seedy Belfast night life, in so doing falling foul of his overbearing and
dictatorial father. On the first night of the Belfast Blitz, however, he is thrust into the
midst of appalling human carnage when he works a long stretch at the temporary
morgue in the city sorting through bodies, a mentally and physically exhausting and
sickening experience, which seems to shock him into manhood almost overnight.
Following the air raid he is reunited with his father, who recants his Nazi sympathies in
the bomb-damaged family home. The novel clearly draws on Moore’s own experiences
as a young man in Belfast (also in ARP) during the early years of the war, and Patricia
Craig and Denis Sampson’s respective biographies include interviews with Moore in
which he openly discusses the similarities between his younger self and Gavin
Burke.\footnote{Craig, Brian Moore, pp. 74-86, Denis Sampson, Brian Moore: The Chameleon Novelist (Dublin:
Marino, 1998), pp. 45-51. Moore himself tried to join the Irish army in the summer of 1940, but when he
realised that Eire was likely to remain neutral for the duration of the war returned to Belfast and joined
ARP (Craig, Brian Moore, p. 75).}

I do not intend to recapitulate these comparisons at length here, but rather to
read The Emperor of Ice Cream in terms of what it reveals about the complex
relationships between autobiographical fiction and known historical moments, and its
role in writing Northern Ireland into the history of the Second World War.

In a Freudian reading which concentrates on the use of symbolism in the novel,
Jeanne Flood writes that ‘the book is flawed by Moore’s use of the techniques of
narrative realism when he no longer has a view of the world which can be expressed by
such a convention’.\footnote{Jeanne Flood, Brian Moore (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University
Press, 1974), p. 69.}

Flood claims that the title of The Emperor of Ice Cream, taken
from the Wallace Stevens poem of the same name, is indicative of a shift on Moore’s
part from the realism of his first four novels to a perspective where the imagination is
‘at last accepted as legitimate’.\footnote{Ibid.}

She is somewhat dismissive of the historical content
of the novel, arguing that the novel’s main concern is with Gavin’s desire to be
recognised as a man:

Gavin gets it by the destruction of a city, yet the scenes of disorder in the
bombed city, indeed all of the big scenes in the book, are emotionally empty.
Moore is clearly interested in writing a timeless fable of testing and
reconciliation which has particular significance for himself as an artist. But
Moore’s fable gets tangled with the trappings of a realistic novel: a very large

\footnote{Ibid.}
cast of characters, careful description of the physical terrain of Belfast, and location in a specific and limited historical period.¹⁷⁰

Flood concludes by stating that the realistic elements of the novel ‘exist only as background for the testing of the hero and they lose validity.’¹⁷¹ I disagree profoundly with this analysis, a more extreme companion to Patrick Hicks’s later claim that Moore uses a ‘historically questionable’ version of the Belfast Blitz merely as a ‘vehicle’ to bring about Gavin’s adulthood.¹⁷² Flood’s reductive emphasis on the symbolic at the expense of the historical content of the novel is misguided: Gavin’s passage from the naivety and nihilism of youth to manhood, rendered textually in the novel in the shift from his internal conflicts to more dispassionate descriptive passages, can occur only because of his experiences in the aftermath of the air raid when he volunteers to work in the morgue. It also seems unlikely that Moore conceived this clearly autobiographical work of fiction, based on his own early experiences of the Second World War, as a ‘timeless fable’. The historical episodes referred to and described in the novel are not mere ‘background’, since the action of the narrative depends on Gavin’s role in these episodes. Through The Emperor of Ice Cream, whether consciously or unconsciously, Moore has written Belfast into a more secure place in the history of the Second World War.

Perhaps due to the sensitive and traumatic nature of the Blitz material, until relatively recently critics have shied away from questioning the accuracy of Moore’s account: indeed, as will be seen, the novel has been deployed by historians in supposedly factual accounts. However, in an interview for Hicks’s article, ‘History and Masculinity in Brian Moore’, Moore himself agreed that he had conflated the first two air raids on Belfast for narrative effect: ‘Yes, I think so. I was present of course at both raids and took part in them but it’s funny I seem to remember the first raid as the really big one where all these people were killed and there were firebombs and all sorts of things and that the second raid was less dangerous.’¹⁷³ This is verifiably not the case. The first raid on the city, on April 7 1941 resulted in 13 deaths, and the destruction was concentrated mainly on the docks. The second raid, on April 15, hit the residential north

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 70.
¹⁷¹ Ibid.
¹⁷² Patrick Hicks, ‘History and Masculinity in Brian Moore’s The Emperor of Ice Cream’, Canadian Journal of Irish Studies, 25 (1999), 400-413 (p. 400).
¹⁷³ Hicks, p. 408.
of the city hard, and according to the Ministry of Public Security killed 745. Denis Sampson has also remarked on Moore’s tendency to conflate moments in his own life in interviews, describing ‘his frequent ascribing of key experiences to the year in which he was eighteen, in particular his discovery of the works of James Joyce, the extensive bombing of Belfast that destroyed the house on Clifton Street, and the death of his father.’ Moore’s conflations in *The Emperor of Ice Cream* exemplify what Klein describes as the ‘embedding’ of war fiction in other prose literature, as distinctions between novel, autobiography and eyewitness collapse partly perhaps due to Moore’s status, burnished by later historians, as intermediary for the authentic wartime experience.

Gavin’s recklessness in leaving school, and his willingness to antagonise his parents by joining what is seen as a branch of the British army, amount to much more than the rebellion of the youthful subject against his progenitor, familiar to readers of the Irish bildungsroman. The novel is written in the third person but incorporates intense passages of free indirect discourse, the longer of which occur over the opening pages, and the prose is also interrupted by quotations from poetry that has dominated and shaped Gavin’s imagination. Here, as he struggles into his uniform and argues with his brother over his decisions, he takes strength from the knowledge that he has the poets on his side:

The poets knew the jig was up; they knew the rich and famous would crumble with the rest:

You cannot be away, then, no
Not though you pack to leave within an hour,
Escaping, humming down arterial roads . . .

Or MacNeice, an Ulsterman:

We shall go down like palaeolithic man
Before some new Ice Age or Genghiz Khan.

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174 Fisk, pp. 416-33. For a more detailed account of the air attacks on Belfast during 1941 see Brian Barton, *The Blitz: Belfast in the War Years*.
175 Sampson, p. 43.
Yeats said it too:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world . . .

It was all prophetically clear. Hitler was Yeats’ ‘Second Coming.’ He was the rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouching towards Bethlehem to be born. Yeats knew what nonsense it was, in this day and age, to talk of futures and jobs. But how could you explain that to Owen, who had read nothing for pleasure since his Boys’ Own Weekly days? How could you tell him that, for you, the war was an event which had produced in you a shameful secret excitement, a vision of the grown-ups’ world in ruins? It would not matter in that ruined world if Gavin Burke had failed his Schools Leaving Certificate. The records would be buried in the rubble. War was freedom, freedom from futures. There was nothing in the world so imposing that a big bomb couldn’t blow it up.¹⁷⁶

Gavin justifies the chaotic trajectories of his own life by identifying himself with literary imaginings of the imminent apocalypse: Moore thus embeds the personal narrative within a greater political historical reality, just as Gavin’s academic records are buried in the rubble. The appearance of W.H. Auden’s ‘Consider this and in our time’ here certainly suggests that Gavin’s personal story should be seen in the context of the global conflict at this early stage, since the poem counsels the need to develop a considered view of current world events, and is alert to the possibility of air attack in its mention of a ‘helmetted airman’ which points to the novel’s traumatic denouement. The poems quoted here and elsewhere in The Emperor of Ice Cream were all included in the Michael Roberts-edited The Faber Book of Modern Verse (1936), a largely modernist, anti-Georgian anthology containing several political contributions by Auden and his contemporaries, and a volume that would seem to offer to Gavin at this point a more

¹⁷⁶ Moore, Emperor, p. 11.
secure belief system than the Bible. However, the passage also mocks Gavin’s pretensions, as can be seen from the contrast of Yeats’s high art with the meaningless cliché (recalling perhaps his mother’s diction) ‘in this day and age’ and of ‘ruined world’ with the more prosaic ‘Schools Leaving Certificate’, but the overall tone is ominous. Chekhov’s gun here becomes a ‘big bomb’: the reader is surely already aware of the devastation wrought on Belfast by the Blitz, predating the narrative to an extent on how Gavin’s story is aligned with this known historical episode. In this way the anticipation and dread of the reader must be managed, rather than created. The ‘vision of the grown-ups’ world in ruins’ is crucial to Gavin’s progress, as becomes apparent when the ‘freedom’ which he believes destruction will bring is later undercut by the horror of the human cost hidden amongst the ruined buildings of his home city, in another echo of Gavin’s lost documents. The fact that Gavin seems to fit into the larger historical narrative with greater ease than he does into his Catholic community in Belfast is also indicative of his progress. There is no chance of establishing any secure identification between Gavin and his nation or religion as in other nationalist autobiographical works: Moore’s sceptical and ironic vision and the awkwardness of Northern Ireland’s position in the Second World War preclude this. Gavin’s preoccupations circumvent the sectarian conflict, and though his ramblings here are naïve, perhaps even juvenile, his concerns are worldly.

By contrast, Irish nationalism in the novel is seen to have been displaced and discredited by the war, through Gavin’s family and father in particular. Moore’s initial portrayal of the Catholic nationalist community in the novel is of a blinkered and bigoted group, for whom hatred of unionists, the British, and other perceived threats to their religion overrides all other considerations even at this time of cataclysmic European upheaval. Gavin’s father adheres to the strict doctrine that England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity, gleefully welcoming British defeats in the early years of the war over the breakfast table each morning:

...his father read the newspaper as other men played cards, shuffling through a page of stories until he found one which would confirm his in his prejudice. A Jewish name discovered in an account of a financial transaction, a Franco

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177 Patricia Craig describes the Faber collection as ‘a book which showed [Moore] a whole new side to W.B. Yeats, and, even more importantly, brought him face to face with Eliot and Auden, and thereby gave him a taste for poetry which stayed with him for the rest of his life.’ (Craig, Brian Moore, p. 76)
victory over the godless Reds, a hint of British perfidy in international affairs, an Irish triumph on the sports field, an evidence of Protestant bigotry, a discovery of Ulster governmental corruption: these were his reading goals.\(^\text{178}\)

There seems to be little chance of escape from such attitudes: the ‘reading goals’ could very easily become ‘reading gaols’, a Wildean pun describing sectarian incarcerations of the mind. One of Gavin’s colleagues at the ARP post, the nationalist Your Man Gallagher, along with his neighbours on the Falls Road ‘considered it a point of honour to leave a light shining in their upstairs windows at night in case any German bombers might come over the city.’\(^\text{179}\) Having lost faith in the IRA Gallagher supports the forces of Nazi Germany, albeit on a pragmatic rather than ideological level, as more likely to succeed in overthrowing the British and uniting the thirty two counties again. Liam Gearon has noted the irony of the colonised minority allying itself with one imperialist power in the hope of overthrowing another: a more emphatic critique is provided by the unsparing if contrived retribution visited upon Gallagher at the end of the novel. He is seen standing with flashlight in hand, lamenting the loss of his wife and children in the bombing of the Falls. As Gearon has also observed however, Moore’s inclusion of the story of the Dublin Fire Brigade’s night mission to Belfast in the aftermath of the raid helps to defuse the potential for reading the novel as any kind of loyalist critique of the nationalist minority.\(^\text{180}\)

An injured Heavy Rescue worker told them he had seen the engines of the Dublin Fire Brigade, pumping away in the York Street area, their peacetime headlamps blazing. His story was confirmed by others, and, soon, the hospital nuns, very pleased by this news, were telling patients how the Dublin Fire Brigade, God bless them, their peacetime headlamps blazing, had driven one hundred and thirteen miles, crossing the border from neutral Eire, to help with the conflagration.\(^\text{181}\)

\(^{178}\) Moore, *Emperor*, p. 36. Moore’s own father was a surgeon, who worked throughout the Blitz tending the wounded and ‘took immense pride in his son’s behaviour at this appalling moment.’ (Craig, *Brian Moore*, p. 81)

\(^{179}\) Ibid., p. 61.


\(^{181}\) Moore, *Emperor*, p. 228.
The words ‘His story was confirmed by others’ are ironically resonant, given the ways in which this episode has been contested in historical accounts of the Blitz, and the importance of *The Emperor of Ice Cream* to those same accounts. Here Moore piles on the clauses to convey the excitement and urgency of the spreading rumours, and as the register slips swiftly from the demotic (‘God bless them’), to the propagandist (‘their peacetime headlamps blazing’) and to the historian’s attention to detail (‘one hundred and thirteen miles, crossing the border from neutral Éire’), he describes in one sentence how the incident was rapidly appropriated and mythologised. The fact that immediately a ‘loyal pro-British patient’ in the hospital responds to the news with the counterclaim that the ‘English had loaded fire engines on ships in Liverpool and that those ships were already on their way across the Irish Sea’ further dramatises the way in which this most crucial of known episodes of the war in Northern Ireland was contested even as it happened. An entry in Moya Woodside’s diary a few days after the Easter Tuesday raid conveys the confused and conflicting reactions to the arrival of the southern fire brigades in strikingly similar terms:

An action like this does more for Irish unity than any words from politicians. I hear that the brigades were wildly cheered in towns and villages in Ulster, as they passed through going back. The arrival, too, of a large detachment of A.F.S. from Glasgow, complete with equipment, makes us conscious of a comforting solidarity with Britain.\(^{182}\)

Like S.J.C. Harrison’s reaction to the playing of ‘There’ll always be an England’ in the early months of the war, Woodside’s entry here evokes the contradictory permutations of Northern Ireland’s experience of the war, as ‘Irish unity’ and ‘solidarity with Britain’ are asserted in successive sentences here in seemingly equally positive terms.

Exactly how the involvement of the southern fire brigades came about is unclear: their arrival in Belfast provoked much comment at the time and has proved to be of enduring interest.\(^{183}\) Historians offer differing accounts of whether the Minister of Public Security John MacDermott called Dublin directly to ask for help or if he first asked Northern Prime Minister Sir Basil Brooke for his consent, and the time in the

\(^{182}\) Woodside, MO5462, 18 April 1941.
early hours at which this happened is also unclear. At some point however, Eamon de Valera was woken, and having quickly agreed to provide assistance, fire engines from Éire arrived in Belfast at around 10am.\textsuperscript{184} Robert Fisk describes the unreliability of many accounts of this:

The episode was to be turned into legend by the people of Belfast, many of whom still swear that the Irish firemen arrived in the city proudly flying Tricolours from their vehicles – which is untrue – and that the Irish crews spent their time bravely fighting fires for the Protestants in the Shankill Road, which is also untrue. But such stories were inevitable, for even today the facts of this extraordinary affair are still obscure.\textsuperscript{185}

Fisk himself arguably contributes to the mythmaking with his own dramatic account, as he describes MacDermott’s call: ‘there, crouched on the floor as his home vibrated to the explosions outside, MacDermott did something that no Northern Ireland Government Minister had done for his province before or would ever do again: he called Dublin and asked for help.’\textsuperscript{186} Some newspaper reports at the time also sought to emphasise the momentous nature of the episode. The \textit{Belfast Telegraph} hailed the ‘magnificent spirit’ of the southern fire brigades, and claimed that ‘This is the good neighbour policy in action, worth months of speeches and assurances. Suffering can be the great leveller, cutting clean through all petty prejudices.’ The \textit{Irish Times} saw the episode in more elevated terms, proclaiming that ‘Humanity knows no borders, no politics, no differences of religious belief. Yesterday, the people of Ireland were united’ and asking ‘Has it taken bursting bombs to remind the people in this little country that they have a common tradition, a common genius, and, above all, a common home?’\textsuperscript{187}

An article by Harry Craig published in the Dublin magazine \textit{The Bell} over two years after the raid contrasted continuing sectarian intimidation by forces under the direction of the Stormont government with anecdotal evidence that the experience of the Blitz at

\textsuperscript{184} For conflicting accounts of this episode see Barton, \textit{Blitz}, p. 129, and Fisk, pp. 421-22. One helpful source of information is Sean Redmond’s \textit{Belfast is Burning 1941} (Dublin: IMPACT, Municipal Employees Division, 2002), which draws heavily on interviews with surviving Dublin Fire Brigade employees of the time.

\textsuperscript{185} Fisk, p. 421.

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., p. 420.

a local level, in particular the arrival of the southern fire brigades, had challenged longstanding hostilities:

The bombs that fell on Belfast made little distinction between the Catholic and his Protestant neighbour. Out of flaming homes a new comradeship was forged. Women who, a few weeks before, would have gleefully scorned each other cooked now on the same range. Suffering united the city. Dublin fire brigades, flying the Irish flag, met cheering people on the roadside.188

Here it is as though the levelling discourse of the British People’s War has been applied to Northern Ireland, as the supposedly collapsing British social divisions are reconfigured in terms of the potential transformative effects of the war on sectarianism and partition. Others have adopted such a discourse to describe the effects of the war with very different ends in mind: John Blake, commissioned by the Stormont government to write an official history of Northern Ireland and the Second World War, which sought to secure the province’s vital role in the British war effort, described a mass funeral of 150 people killed in the Easter Tuesday raid ‘when Protestants and Roman Catholics joined in prayer’ and wrote that people in Ulster will long remember the ‘cheering sight’ of the arrival of southern fire engines.189 The novelist Sam Hanna Bell recalled in 1980 that in the aftermath of the Easter Tuesday raid that “‘Catholic” and “Protestant” sectors hastened to each other’s assistance. It was a remarkable time.’190 More recently Juliet Gardiner has written:

The ‘blitz spirit’ of unity and endurance had been strong during the raids as Protestants from the Shankill Road area crammed into the Clonard Monastery with Catholics. Women and children sheltered together in the crypt, and at one point, when it looked like the chapel would be hit, one of the priests, Father Tom Murphy, donned a tin hat and offered absolution to all present.191

188 Harry Craig, ‘A Protestant Visits Belfast’, The Bell, 7.3 (December 1943), 236-244 (241).
190 Sam Hanna Bell, contribution to ‘The War Years in Ulster: A Symposium’, Honest Ulsterman 64 (1979-1980), 11-62 (p. 13). Hanna Bell’s recollections are historically dubious however, claiming of that same raid that it ‘left two thousand dead or injured’ (Ibid.).
191 Gardiner, Blitz, p. 303.
It is indeed possible that the Second World War may be increasingly explored as a way of establishing a semi-official shared history, cutting across sectarian boundaries by emphasising both the cross-community common experience of (crucially) externally inflicted devastation and highlighting the cross-border cooperation of the fire crews. As Richard Doherty has noted in his history of Derry and the Second World War, however, attempts to emphasise the common experience of war face considerable difficulties. Though Doherty is keen to assert that ‘the contribution of Derry Catholics was as important as that of the city’s Protestants and death was no respecter of religious affiliations’ he also acknowledges that there is little interest locally in remembering the war perhaps due to the fact that ‘the nationalist majority population had no wish to remember being such a vital part in Britain’s war effort and [...] survival.’

Angus Calder has argued that *The Emperor of Ice Cream* itself constitutes an attempt to utilise the mythology of the Second World War to ameliorate sectarian divisions:

Though this literally deals only with an individual’s development and one father-son relationship, the novel pushes us to see this ending as prophetic of the future of Ulster. Protestants and Catholics have been bombed indiscriminately.

The young IRA supporter who flashed a light deliberately to guide the bombers has been seen repenting bitterly. Moore has seized hope from the Irish Blitz experience and brought Belfast under the umbrella of the Myth. Just as in London, class differences were reportedly subdued, so in Belfast sectarian feeling is chastened.

Moore published his novel in 1965, when prospects for harmony in Ulster seemed good. By the end of the decade they would be in ruins. For all the quality of the writing, *The Emperor of Ice Cream* seems betrayed and

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192 Moves in this direction were perhaps hinted at by an exhibition mounted by Belfast City Council at the City Hall in 2011 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Blitz, which displayed one of the Dundalk-based fire engines used in the mission, and south of the border in a documentary for RTÉ radio, which used eyewitness recollections to attempt to piece together the experiences of the fire crews themselves. See ‘Blitz Fire Engine From Irish Republic in Belfast’, BBC News website, 14 April 2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-13065528> [accessed 25 May 2011] and ‘Documentary on One: Hidden Heroes of the Belfast Blitz’, RTÉ Radio One (16 April 2011) <http://www.rte.ie/radio1/donconne/radio-documentary-ww2-hidden-heroes-belfast-blitz-republic-firemen.html> [accessed 25 May 2011].

193 Doherty, *Key to Victory*, p. 81.
diminished by Moore’s attempt at a closure which would relate the Blitz to the sixties and beyond.  

I do not believe that *The Emperor of Ice Cream* can be incorporated into British wartime mythology in this way: Calder’s disjointed efforts to do so are contradicted by the hierarchical idiocies of Gavin’s ARP post, and the unsparing grimness of the graphic and distressing passages describing scenes in the temporary morgue following the Blitz, whilst one wartime myth specific to Northern Ireland, the arrival of fire engines from Éire, is notably given a sceptical treatment in the novel. Indeed, the disagreement between the patients in the hospital over the provenance of the fire engines shows that even in the midst of the devastation sectarian arguments continued, even if ‘chastened’. The novel does of course show that Protestants and Catholics were bombed indiscriminately (as Gavin tells Gallagher, “‘They didn’t hold back just because the Falls Road is Catholic’”), and the war is seen to give occasion to more interaction between the communities, but to compare the stratified English class system with sectarian divisions in Belfast risks effacing the unique position of Northern Ireland during the war. It may be interesting to consider whether *The Emperor of Ice Cream* might have developed differently had it been written ten or fifteen years later, as Belfast was being torn apart by bombs of a different kind, but it is hard to see how the traumatic climax of the novel might be translated into an optimistic prognosis for mid 1960s Northern Ireland. If Calder’s assertions outline the dangers of attempting to draw the province into British cultural historical narratives, they should encourage consideration of the relationship between Northern Ireland and the People’s War in Britain, and how this may be seen in Moore’s novel.

Like much British fiction of the Second World War *The Emperor of Ice Cream* is a heavily social novel and is similarly driven, especially in scenes situated in and around the ARP post, by juxtapositions of disparate characters, thrown together by an accident of history and forced into communal existence as they face a common threat. Much of the novel is deliberately comic in its observation and dissection of character, and exploitation of situations peculiar to the war. Moore’s evocation of the ARP post early on in the novel can be read as a mocking critique of the People’s War in Belfast.

In addition to Your Man Gallagher, Post 106 is staffed by a disparate collection of misfits:

‘...This is Wee Tommy Bates.’

Wee, he was. Almost a dwarf, Gavin decided. He sat hunched over the fire, all prognathous jaw, monkey forehead and protruding teeth. ‘And the big man here is Frank Price,’ Soldier said. Frank Price nodded gently. He was sad and stout and ludicrous in battle-dress.

‘And this here’s Jimmy Lynan.’ Who was bald and who hawked, spat in the fire, and offered his hand.

‘And Hughie Shaw.’ A clerkly little man, who was filling his pipe from a flat tin box filled with cigarette butts.  

These Dickensian grotesques could be seen to function as caricatures of an archetype familiar within the context of the ‘People’s War’: the image of the plucky, scruffy British Tommy, as depicted in recruitment posters, Giles cartoons and newspaper photographs, is disfigured and scarified by this sketch of the motley crew manning Post 106. In joining ARP Gavin himself is also presented as a figure of fun, ridiculed as ‘Charlie Chaplin’ by his sister Kathy when he first dresses in his ill-fitting uniform. In joining ARP Gavin himself is also presented as a figure of fun, ridiculed as ‘Charlie Chaplin’ by his sister Kathy when he first dresses in his ill-fitting uniform. In the background the semi-sophisticated patrons of a nightclub (presumably the Plaza Dance Hall), dressed in suits and evening wear, look on with mocking smiles. In Post 381: The Memoirs of a Belfast Air Raid Warden (1989), James Doherty expresses a degree of irritation with subsequent comic portrayals of the civil defence forces:

I have said that the wardens were the Cinderellas of the service. They were the targets for comedians and cartoonists, and the comedy certainly added colour to

195 Moore, Emperor, p. 19.
the drab life of the war years. Unfortunately, a lot of the comedy stuck and the warden became a Keystone Cop type of character. Some of the old jokes are still in circulation and continue to entertain audiences or television viewers.\(^{198}\)

Later in his account, Doherty acknowledges that comical situations did arise, and that the ARP counted among its ranks 'misfits' and 'characters', but insists that 'Contrary to the false image created, most wardens were a collection of dedicated men and women who were proud of the service.'\(^{199}\) Although Moore's portrayal of the dissipated ARP workers may satirise official or idealised representations of civilian heroism, in the aftermath of the Blitz both Bates and Lynan are seen stretching the dead into the morgue.\(^{200}\) There is a sense of common purpose in the scenes following the climactic air raid that suggests the Blitz has uncovered a will to cooperate in the face of a greater external threat.

In a Belfast context such social juxtapositions inevitably give rise to specific and symbolic tensions which distinguish the novel from its British counterparts, but as Alan Munton has argued, war fiction of any kind requires the consideration of collective behaviour:

War is a social activity. Men go out in groups to kill each other, and they die together. People being bombed in their homes or shot in the streets also die together. Out of such events there inevitably arise social changes with widespread effects. It is because people fight wars collectively that writers of war fiction must find ways of recreating collective experience, often undergone in situations of chaos whose meaning remains uncertain. The critic, following after, must find ways of ordering material so varied in content and so massive in quantity that at first sight it may appear unmanageable.\(^{201}\)

Munton tackles his study of English fiction of the war with the help of the cultural historical term the 'People's War', developed by Angus Calder in his eponymous account of the British Home Front. Calder argues that governments during the Second


\(^{199}\) Ibid., p. 6.


\(^{201}\) Munton, p. 1.
World War were forced to depend on the cooperation of the ruled, upon ‘scorned and underprivileged sections of society, manual workers and women’, that the established social structure of Britain was challenged by the vast mobilisation of workers during the war, and that public dissatisfaction with the running of the war between 1940 and 1941 fomented widespread revolutionary attitudes. The Labour victory in the British general election of 1945 certainly seemed to demonstrate a desire for change on the part of the electorate, but despite the subsequent programme of social reform Calder claims that the forces of ‘wealth, bureaucracy and privilege survived [the war] with little inconvenience.’ The subversive cultural underbelly described in The Emperor of Ice Cream may loosely reflect the revolutionary and socialist attitudes identified by Calder: in the novel these are directed against Northern Ireland’s entrenched binary political system, and its hegemonic and repressive unionist government. In this respect, the fact that the deranged and brutal Post Officer Craig in charge of Post 106 shares a surname with the Prime Minister of the province from 1921-1940 is significant.

In addition to the potentially illusory political exchange of demands and policies, in cultural terms the idea of a People’s War also evokes ideas of community and cooperation familiar from any survey of British wartime art, literature, journalism or photography, where the role of the civilian population is stressed in official and unofficial cultural depictions of the response to the crises and privations of the Second World War, often such known episodes as the Dunkirk evacuation and the London Blitz. These formed the basis of much government propaganda during the war, which stressed the resilience and good humour of the public in the face of the external threat whilst effacing the fatal, injurious and traumatic effects of the conflict, or indeed the coercive means deployed to recruit civilians to the war effort. With reference to propagandist novels written in this vein during the war, D.J. Taylor has argued that the People’s War ‘is by now an historian’s cliché, and so intimately bound up in the fabric of novels written to support the conflict that it is difficult to prise the two apart and establish whether literature was an impetus or a vehicle.’ Works of cultural historical scholarship, even those such as Calder’s which have sought to criticise the ideological coherence of the People’s War, have perpetuated the binding together of historical moment and literary response, in the space and status accorded to works of fiction

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202 Calder, People’s War, p. 17.
203 Ibid., p. 18.
204 Taylor, After the War, p. 9.
within their accounts. As well as socio-historical documentary sources Calder also refers to works of fiction, such as war novels by Elizabeth Bowen and Evelyn Waugh, to support his thesis. Conversely, *The People’s War* today stands as a valuable resource for writers striving for contextual authenticity in their own fictional renderings of the war. Calder’s work thus stands between ‘experienced’, often autobiographical war fiction written by writers alive during the war, and ‘researched’ novels by writers too young to remember it.205

It is striking how the major historians of Northern Ireland and the Second World War have used *The Emperor of Ice Cream* in their accounts of the aftermath of the Belfast Blitz. Robert Fisk, in *In Time of War*, and Brian Barton, in *The Blitz: Belfast in the War Years*, both quote, word for word, the same passage from Moore’s novel, describing the harrowing scenes in the temporary morgue at the Mater hospital:

...stink of human excrement, in the acrid smell of disinfectant, these dead were heaped, body on body, flung arm, twisted feet, open mouth, staring eyes, old men on top of young women, a child lying on a policeman’s back, a soldier’s hand resting on a woman’s thigh, a carter, still wearing his coal sacks, on top of a pile of arms and legs, his own arm outstretched, finger pointing, as though he warned of some unseen horror. Forbidding and clumsy, the dead cluttered the morgue room from floor to ceiling...206

Given the uncompromising nature of its content, it is perhaps unsurprising that neither Barton nor Fisk attempt to interrogate this passage: it is allowed to stand, and the account moves on. That it is an extract from a work of fiction is barely acknowledged. Fisk introduces the passage by referring to Moore’s ‘semi-autobiographical novel’ and Barton merely attributes it to ‘Ulster author Brian Moore’, although in an earlier chapter he does refer to ‘novelist Brian Moore’ whilst introducing another quotation from *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, and in *Northern Ireland in the Second World War* refers to the novel as ‘autobiographical’.207 More recently Juliet Gardiner has also used this passage in accounts of the Belfast Blitz in *Wartime: Britain 1939-1945* (2004) and *The Blitz: The British Under Attack* (2010). She also fails to make clear that the

205 Munton, p. 9.
description is taken from a novel: in the former book it is attributed to ‘the novelist Brian Moore, who was then an ARP officer attached to the Mater Hospital’, and in the latter the quotation is credited to ‘novelist-to-be Brian Moore’. It is only in the footnotes and bibliography of Gardiner’s books that the title of the novel appears, and even then its ostensibly fictional status is not acknowledged. In Sean McMahon’s *The Belfast Blitz: Luftwaffe Raids in Northern Ireland, 1941* (2010) the passage appears once more, preceded by McMahon’s assertion that Moore’s ‘description of the shame, the pity and the meaninglessness of such slaughter remains the best summary of the Wednesday morning after the raid’. The historians accord the descriptive passage the same unquestioned status as other supposedly factual eyewitness accounts. Furthermore, in an earlier paragraph of *In Time Of War*, Fisk’s description of the Luftwaffe’s use of flares immediately prior to the Easter Tuesday raid of April 15 integrates Moore’s description of this in the novel as ‘beautiful, exploding with a faint pop in the sky above them, a magnesium flare floated up in the stillness, lighting the rooftops in a ghostly silver’ with quotes from eyewitness interviewees including the journalist James Kelly (whose memory of the flares as ‘like a giant candelabra spreading out across the city’ is no less lyrical) and IRA volunteer Paddy Devlin. Use of quotation from Moore’s autobiographical novel in this way locates *The Emperor of Ice Cream* between the ‘experienced’ and the ‘researched’: the novel has become a key text in factual accounts of the Belfast Blitz, and has itself become a source of known episodes, despite Moore’s acknowledged tendency to conflate or truncate, or treat ironically some of these episodes for his own fictional devices.

Patrick Hicks has claimed that the descriptions of the morgue ‘could easily describe’ scenes from a Nazi concentration camp, citing Moore’s later role as Port Officer in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), when he witnessed Auschwitz-Birkenau after its liberation. Hicks also refers to the troubling use of the word ‘holocaust’ earlier in the novel, arguing that this is

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210 Not all writers have found the passage impressive, however. John Cronin wrote in 1971 that ‘One would hope that, in those tremendously horrifying scenes during the air raids and in the morgue, even Brian Moore may have sweated off all his local resentments and may now be able to approach an Irish theme with truly effective authorial judgement.’ (Cronin, ‘Prose’, in *Causeway: The Arts in Ulster*, ed. by Michael Longley (Belfast: Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Gill and Macmillan, 1971), pp.72-94 (p. 77)) The implication of Cronin’s aside is that the Belfast Blitz is not a suitably ‘Irish’ subject for a novel, an accusation which provides further illustration of the problematic place of the Second World War in Irish history.
211 Fisk, p. 418.
premonitory of the later devastating scenes in the aftermath of the bombing. It is worth interrogating Moore’s use of the word, which does undoubtedly complicate further the place of the novel in relation to the historical episodes it describes. Here, on an afternoon when his on-off girlfriend Sally has rebuffed both fumbled sexual advances and a declaration of love, Gavin is left on the slopes of Cave Hill in a state of panic and fury:

In the afternoon silence above him, a growl of engines. From a corner of the sky they came, great grey planes of a sort he had never seen before. He stood staring, sure that they were bombers crossing the mountain, bearing down on the city. They roared overhead, rough beasts, their hour come round at last, slouching towards Belfast to be born. Here on the mountainside he would see it all, the explosions, the flames, the holocaust. From here, he would run down to rescue Sally, then on through the smoke and rubble to a hero’s job in the First Aid Post. There they go, groaning over the city in the afternoon sunlight, they must be Germans, they must be.

But the planes droned on over the Lough, turning in formation as they went out to sea, towards England, towards Europe, far away to that faraway war. German or English, they ignored Belfast. He was left alone on the mountainside.

Thus ends Chapter Seven, with an ambiguous and uncomfortable combination of irony and prophecy. The aeroplanes here are a source of mystery. Historically, it seems unlikely that the planes were German – the first Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft did not pass over the city until late November 1940, and Gavin and Sally ascend Cave Hill immediately prior to the Dunkirk evacuation of late May and early June 1940. Their provenance is unknown to Gavin, and instead he sees the planes in symbolic terms. Disappearing into the distance, they seem to embody frustration that his home city remains detached from rest of the world, that even though the war in which he has actively sought to play a part has begun, events continue to ignore Belfast. Co-opted into his Yeatsian vision, they appear initially to Gavin as harbingers of the impending

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212 Hicks, p. 410.
213 Moore, Emperor, p. 116.
214 Fisk, p.410; Moore, Emperor, p. 109.
apocalypse to which he looked forward in the opening scene of the novel – where once Hitler was the ‘rough beast’, this term is now applied to his growling machines of war (later, as the bombs begin to fall, Gavin has a vision of the dictator smiling ‘in glee’ in the Reich Chancellery, watching charts of the planes’ progress). However, the nature of Gavin’s projected apocalypse has changed. No longer willing destruction from which nothing but an unspecified ‘freedom from futures’ will survive, he now desires a theatrical setting in which he can act out a hero’s rescue, saving his girlfriend and, it is implied, other citizens of Belfast. This shift perhaps mirrors Moore’s own adaptation and truncation of known episodes in Belfast’s war history in the interests of developing a narrative which will impel Gavin towards adulthood, but the use of a definite article and lack of a post-war capital letter in the reference to ‘the holocaust’ certainly complicates this passage. *The Emperor of Ice Cream* was published twenty years after the war, from a post-Holocaust perspective: considering the reader’s post-war awareness and given Moore’s personal experience in UNRRA it is hard not to view Gavin’s prophecy in terms of the Nazi Final Solution, rather than through its non-specific pre-war meaning of a sacrifice, or consumption by fire, despite the relevance of these meanings to the Blitz that is to follow. By referring to the Holocaust Moore casts Belfast’s experience of the war in relatively insignificant terms, just as the size of the city itself appears diminished by Gavin’s elevated vantage point. This view is echoed by James Doherty in *Post 381* where his descriptions of scenes at another temporary morgue at the Falls Road Baths also make for harrowing reading:

Hundreds of bodies brought in from scattered incidents were lying all around us. They were men and women, young people, children and infants. How could anyone have visualised seeing so many broken bodies in one place? No text books, no training pamphlets could have prepared us for the grim task we were about to undertake. Some were whole and others hardly resembled human beings. The scene could only be compared in a small way to the pictures

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216 Ibid., p. 11.
217 *OED*, <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50107252?query_type=word&queryword=holocaust&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=nGqM-cMx7Bd-2538&hilite=50107252> [accessed 22 May 2011].
released some years later of the mass graves at Belsen and other German death camps.  

Faced with almost incomprehensible scenes in his home city, Doherty resorts to a comparison with the Holocaust, qualified by the acknowledgement that Belfast’s experience was not commensurate.

The depiction of Gavin’s initial excitement at the air raid also makes for uncomfortable reading, given the human misery that the reader knows is about to follow. Rather than feeling anxiety, sadness, or fear at the destruction, he is gripped by an ‘extraordinary elation’ and enjoys the bombing ‘as though it were a military tattoo, put on for his benefit’: awkward parallels might be discerned between Gavin and the imagined Hitler smiling ‘in glee’ in the Reich Chancellery. From the flat roof of Post 106 Gavin and his older friend Freddie Hargreaves will destruction upon the landmarks and leaders of the city:

‘Yes, and blow up St. Michan’s,’ Gavin shouted, prancing in his war dance on the roof.

‘Blow up City Hall.’
‘And Queen’s University.’
‘And Harland and Wolff’s.’
‘Blow up the Orange Hall.’
‘And the Cathedral and the dean.’

The socialist and the teenager see the bombing as an exhilarating revolutionary force, exploding the oppressive physical and moral fabric of Belfast, as embodied by its political, academic, industrial and ecclesiastical buildings. Their initial excitement is soon extinguished by practical considerations, however, as they descend to street level and are immediately returned to their ARP duties, helping an injured elderly woman to reach the hospital before volunteering to work sorting bodies at the morgue. This abrupt end to the episode parallels the shift in narrative of the People’s War, where the ‘revolutionary attitudes’ identified by Calder are put to one side as individuals resolve

218 James Doherty, Post 381, p. 52.
220 Ibid., p. 203.
to work together to perform their allotted tasks. This shift is prefigured by the maverick socialist cleric Reverend McMurtry’s earlier assertion that despite the iniquity of an ‘imperialist war’ it is ‘marvellous news’ that Churchill has taken over – here again Moore evokes the contradictory nature of the discourse of the Second World War in Belfast.221

The ‘war dance’ of Gavin and Hargreaves reflects the much noted enlivening effect of the experience of air raids and their aftermath on writers and artists during the war, seemingly as keenly felt in Belfast as in Britain.222 Robert Greacen’s semi-fictional fragment ‘Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!’, published over the winter of 1941-42, also describes the Easter Tuesday air raid on the city:

The first bomb was a bit of a surprise. We didn’t believe it – you remember about the nice old lady and the giraffe? It couldn’t happen here. Naples, Rotterdam, London, Potsdam, Coventry ... yes, yes, of course, but it couldn’t happen here! Soon the whole city was tingling with the fall of bombs – big bombs, small bombs, medium bombs, H.E. Bombs, fire-bombs, followed by aerial torpedoes, land mines and all the rest of the mixed bag of splendid Guy Fawkes flashes and fun and fervour unlimited. That was the night, Joxer, that was the night!223

Whether ironic or not, the excitement of this passage, written by Greacen at the age of twenty-one, foreshadows Gavin’s conviction on the rooftop that ‘The world and the war had come to him at last’. Moore also shows how the war has invigorated Belfast in very much more than destructive terms: when he writes of Gavin that ‘Tonight, history had conferred the drama of war on this dull, dead town in which he had been born’ he suggests that the global historical consequence of the raid was apprehended even as it happened.224 More bluntly, Moore said in an interview in 1981 that ‘Belfast finally became important when the Germans paid attention to it.’225

221 Ibid., p. 97.
222 I shall explore this further in the third chapter of this thesis. See also Piette, Imagination at War, pp. 39-44 and Rawlinson, British Writing of the Second World War, pp. 76-77.
For Brian Moore the war was a time when his personal literary, cultural and political horizons were expanded. The socialist Freddy Hargreaves was modelled on Teddy Millington, an itinerant who passed on the *Faber Book of Modern Verse* to Moore and encouraged him to read more modernist and non-provincial literature. Millington also introduced him to socialist bookshops and drama groups, and in addition to working in ARP Moore also socialised with Protestants for the first time during the war, often in Campbell's café opposite the City Hall, frequented by most of the artists and writers with whose work this thesis is concerned. In the post-war Belfast of Moore's earlier novels, however, any cultural invigoration that the war might have given the city seems to have dissipated. In *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955) the brother of Miss Hearne's landlady, Mr Madden returns from 'humming' New York to find a 'dull city where men made money the way charwomen wash floors, dully, alone, at a slow methodical pace', and 'clerkly men wrote small sums in long black ledgers.' Eamon Maher writes of Gavin Burke's progress that 'This is the first time that a Moore character who is born and bred in Belfast manages to shed the shackles of religious oppression': significantly this takes place not merely against the background of the Second World War but because the city was drawn into the conflict.

In binding together personal and historical narratives, *The Emperor of Ice Cream* has played a decisive role in connecting Northern Ireland's provincial history with the global history of the Second World War. Although Moore maintains an ironic distance from the British People's War, he emphasises the culturally liberating effects of the war on the city and is unsparing in his condemnation of the moral bankruptcy of some Irish nationalist discourse, whilst the novel's shifting registers and varied cast of characters encourage the consideration of the contradictory and often contested nature of Northern Ireland's place in that war.

The rural Northern Ireland we see in Benedict Kiely's first novel *Land Without Stars* (1946) is far less affected by the Second World War. The town in which much of the action of the novel unfolds is strictly divided along religious lines, and there is no sense that the war can effect any change, positive or otherwise, on the nationalist community.

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226 Craig, Brian Moore, p. 76.
with which Kiely is concerned. Here the partition of Ireland, rather than the distant war, is the insistent motor driving the novel’s narrative. Protestants and unionists are repeatedly cast as alien, and tend to be physically absent from the action of the novel: notably the first protestant voices to be heard are those of a constable and two specials who come to search the home of the two brothers central to the story; later a ‘thin Presbyterian voice’ is heard only from behind a curtain.\(^\text{229}\)

Patrick Kavanagh refers somewhat dismissively to Kiely in the cantankerous poem ‘Yeats’ as a trader of ‘literature on the margin’, but as Thomas O’Grady has pointed out, Kiely’s recourse to his home town of Omagh, Co Tyrone, in early fiction and later in non-fiction, could well be seen as adhering to the older writer’s own famous preference, expressed in the 1952 essay ‘The Parish and the Universe’, for parochial rather than provincial literature.\(^\text{230}\) In the sonnet ‘Epic’, written in 1951, Kavanagh confidently declares that ‘I have lived in important places’, and asserts the universal importance of rural life in Monaghan in ‘the year of the Munich bother.’\(^\text{231}\) By contrast, Land Without Stars engages uneasily with events of global consequence, and is illustrative of the awkward position of Irish nationalism in relation to the Second World War. Considering the novel alongside Kiely’s later volumes of memoir Drink to the Bird (1991) and The Waves Behind Us (1999), and taking into account a preface written for the 1990 reprint of Land Without Stars, it can be seen that his writings remained intermittently troubled by defensiveness and guilt regarding the Second World War.

Published only a year after the war, without the sense of historical perspective that characterises The Emperor of Ice Cream, the novel opens with two brothers, Peter and Davy Quinn, returning for Christmas 1939 to their family home in a small, unnamed town in Northern Ireland, the spires of which confirm it as a fictional double of Omagh. Peter comes from a seminary in Dublin, Davy returns via Derry from Glasgow, where (his toolbox suggests) he is engaged in manual or industrial work of some kind. Despite this apparent involvement in the British war effort Davy is a fiercely idealistic republican, given to strident and abrasive articulations of his political


views. These eventually draw him into a risky involvement in a botched bank robbery with the local outlaw Dick Slevin, after which he goes into hiding and is eventually shot dead by police as he attempts to evade capture. Peter Quinn steadfastly opposes his brother’s idealism but also suffers from an unquiet mind, finding himself tempted by women and alienated from those around him. Losing the belief in his vocation, he soon leaves the seminary forever to return home. Both brothers compete for the affections of the same girl, Rita Keenan. The novel is loosely autobiographical, in so far as Kiely was from Omagh and entered a seminary in County Laois in 1937, but following a lengthy convalescence after the flaring of an old spinal complaint from 1938-39, decided that he was unsuited to the religious life and left the institution. However, compared with *The Emperor of Ice Cream* and other autobiographical works referred to in this chapter, *Land Without Stars* is less consistent in approaching the locality in which it is ostensibly set: although Kiely maps out the landmarks and architectural features of Omagh in considerable detail he is reluctant to give actual names to the streets or places described. The novel is structurally polyphonic: of the seven chapters, one each is related in the first person through Davy and Peter, and other chapters written in the third person slip frequently into free indirect discourse, most often to reveal the inner thoughts of Peter. The instability resulting from these textual shifts contributes to the considerable difficulty of resolving the place of Kiely’s writings in relation to the Second World War.

The title of *Land Without Stars* is taken from lines by the Irish language Munster poet Aodhagan Ó Rathaille, on whom, as Kiely explains in *The Waves Behind Us*, he was writing an essay over Christmas 1944. Translated, the lines read ‘A land without produce or thing of worth of any kind / A land without dry weather, without a stream, without a star.’ Kiely recalled:

I was trying to write about young brooding men in political trouble in the Six Counties that the Partition of Ireland by England (Government of Ireland Act, 1920) had so woefully established as a sort of limbo under the odd and not quite accurate title of Northern Ireland.

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234 Ibid.
The implicit claim that *Land Without Stars* should be read as a nationalist novel, bound through its title and thematic concerns to the sense of loss engendered by partition, is more complex than is immediately apparent. As it turns out the young men in the novel are in ‘political trouble’ of a very loose description: they are pursued by the authorities after a misconceived bank robbery ends in a shooting, whilst Slevin, the leader of the mission, is openly scornful of Davy’s republican beliefs.\(^{235}\) Although Kiely mocks the ‘odd and not quite accurate title’ of Northern Ireland, with reference to the familiar quirk that one can look north from Derry on the northern side of the border to Malin Head in the southern state, the observation is undercut by his inaccurate description of partition, and the Government of Ireland Act (1920) as an action of ‘England’, rather than the British Parliament, or Britain. As we shall see, such faux naivety, often amplified and problematised by the deployment of seemingly irrelevant pieces of detail and the deliberate unravelling of arguments through the use of non sequiturs, is characteristic of his writing about the war years. Such tendencies suggest that the Second World War presented the moderately nationalist Kiely with a problem, of how to reconcile his awareness of the pervasive effect of the war on his locality (and the colossal effect on the world at large) with his belief in a united Ireland. The uneasy co-existence of these ideas in Kiely’s writings is indicative of a growing sense that events in Ireland have been overshadowed and overtaken by developments in mainland Europe and elsewhere in the world. The idea that Ireland can exist apart is debunked in the opening pages of the novel as Davy returns home:

The darkness had followed him from Glasgow, the great clanging city, mother of ships, where thousands of people waited, tense, sullenly nervous, for the bursting of the storm. All over Europe the same darkness. A broken Poland. Great hordes of men moving east and west. The darkness spreading, west to Ireland, spreading through the streets of the little town, blackening the windows of his own home.\(^{236}\)

By contrast, the second chapter written through Davy’s voice is a forceful articulation of the detachment felt by those nationalists who found they had become, through economic necessity, unwilling participants in the British war effort:

\(^{235}\) Kiely, *Stars*, p. 70.
\(^{236}\) Ibid., p. 2.
God knows if it wasn’t for the Gaelic classes, the light and the cheery company, a fellow would go mad in this town. We’re in the war and we’re not in it, neither fish nor flesh. We’ve got the blackout and rations. The streets are full of soldiers. No honest enthusiasm anywhere. The Orangemen want their jobs and their domination. I want my job. I have to live. I help to build huts to house British soldiers, the army of occupation. Then I go home, take off my dungarees, listen to the German radio and believe every word of it. God, what a life!237

Kiely’s use of the first person plural suggests that Davy views himself as representative of the nationalist community, who, as a result of partition and the consequent awkwardness of Northern Ireland’s position in relation to the war, find themselves ‘neither fish nor flesh’. Davy sees no ‘honest enthusiasm’ for the war effort into which, due to financial circumstances, he has been forced: as well as war work in Glasgow he has helped to build the huts in Tyrone that house British soldiers billeted in the province since the beginning of the war. Here, however, they appear in their historically Irish role as an oppressive ‘army of occupation’. At this stage, the war seems merely inconvenient, as the blackout, the road blocks and rationing are observed under sufferance. Later the local shopkeeper Mr Keenan laments the conflict only to the extent that there is ‘No money to be made, except at smuggling.’238 Divisions between nationalists and unionists have continued regardless of the external threat, and there is no sign of even the uneasy voluntary cross community cooperation of Moore’s ARP post. Keenan’s terse ‘hope to God’ that Hitler will be denied victory is rooted in a fear that his cloth trade will be hit.239 For Davy, events and developments outside the island of Ireland are seen in relation to the ideal of a thirty-two county Republic or dismissed altogether, and his German sympathies, such as they are, exist solely in relation to his hatred of Britain. Like Mr Burke in The Emperor of Ice Cream, Davy reads the papers avidly for news of British defeats and Axis triumphs:

237 Ibid., p. 34.
238 Ibid., p. 28.
239 Ibid.
May came. Davy’s face was radiant. ‘My God they rise early,’ he said. ‘They’re in Belgium and Holland.’

The streets of the town were vibrant with the news. Laden soldiers tramped to the railway station and were rolled off into the unknown. Luckier soldiers still slung along in irregular ranks, banging mugs and plates, cheerfully whistling German military music. ‘Haven’t even tune of their own,’ said Davy. The grey Calvinistic houses came to life. The sons of those houses drilled and dressed in uniforms, built strange, awkward barriers of sandbags at the most impractical points on all the roads leading from the town into the fresh, flowering countryside. Walking with Jim Carson along one of those roads in the May dusk Peter watched a regiment new to the town march in from the station. They sang and shouted. A small crowd gathered and cheered. Girls waved their hands. Carson said: ‘God help us. Irish girls wave to the army of occupation.’

‘That was the voice of my brother Davy,’ said Peter.

‘It’s the truth.’

‘Maybe. Can we blame them? Men are scarce. What those girls feel is more powerful than nationality. It was before the nations of Europe were heard of. Deirdre or red Grainne would have waved to any man going into battle.’

Kiely describes the relationship between the divided town and the soldiers stationed there during the war in typically ambiguous terms. The soldiers are seen as the kin of the Protestant and unionist residents of the town, but their Britishness is questioned by the curious singing of German songs, and Peter’s cynical view that the female attraction to soldiers transcends fidelity to nationality questions the idea that the province is eternally and uniquely riven. Davy’s primary hatred of the English or British is accompanied by a broader xenophobic distrust of foreign influence, which he views as a threat to indigenous Irish culture. Berating his brother for choosing to see a Hollywood film instead of attending Irish class, he asks ‘if the clergy don’t stand by the language, who will?’ and argues that ‘your native language is a good in itself.’ This blinkered idealism is tempered by a grumbling pessimism. Searching for the footpath in the blackout he asks rhetorically ‘under God what self respecting German, would bomb

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240 Ibid., p. 57.
241 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
this place? He wouldn’t have much to crow about back in the beer-garden.¹²⁴² Davy’s obsession with a united and independent Ireland is expressed negatively, dependent on a denial that the island exists in an international context, and a belief that aside from the potential removal of the British army from the Six Counties, the war can mean nothing for Ireland.

Kiely’s short preface to the first 1946 edition of *Land Without Stars*, ‘To The Reader’, immediately sets the novel in this politicised context:

No character in this book is based on or bears any resemblance to any real character or any real person living or dead. The incidents are entirely fictitious, nor can any actual locality or existing institution mentioned in the story – except in so far as there is an island called Ireland, divided by a political boundary into two fragments, the smaller of which is misnamed Ulster, the larger misnamed Éire. More natural boundaries divide the island into thirty-two counties in which counties live about four million people, none of them appearing in these pages.²⁴³

Like his 1999 explanation of the novel’s title, this is wilfully disingenuous. As Kiely attempts to efface the novel’s autobiographical roots and highly specific setting, the emphasis here on the partition of the ‘island called Ireland’ sidesteps the contextual background to the narrative of the Second World War, which had its own implications for Ireland, and arguably for partition.²⁴⁴ Perhaps tellingly, the preface was removed and replaced for the 1990 reprint of the novel — although as we shall see this later ‘Retrospect’ itself presents a number of problems. Unlike *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, there is no point in *Land Without Stars* at which a known historical episode of the Second World War exerts a direct impact on the narrative, but there are several references to ongoing events in Europe, such as the invasion of the Low Countries and the Dunkirk evacuation, whilst the increased numbers of British troops billeted in the locality, the blackout, and the searchlights combing the sky at night confirm that the town in which the majority of the action is within the Home Front. Even when the brothers travel to a Irish language summer school in the remote Rosses of Donegal the

¹²⁴² Ibid., p. 7.
war remains an intermittent presence in conversation and Peter's thoughts, conveyed through the sounds of marching feet and of planes heard at night, presumably British aircraft heading west on Atlantic patrol. Moving the action to County Donegal could be read as a nationalist challenge to partition, in that the characters remain within the ancient province of Ulster but cross the border, barely twenty years old, between Northern Ireland and neutral Éire. Such a reading is undoubtedly problematised, however, by the sonic military interruptions. Freed from the contextual paraphernalia of the Home Front imposed on Peter's home town, in this section the war appears in sounds, thoughts and fragments of conversation rather than material, physical or visual reminders.

That the planes passing overhead are British is assumed in *Land Without Stars*, but, like the 'rough beasts' in *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, they are perhaps anomalous: permission was not granted to the RAF for the use of the Donegal air corridor until January 1941, yet in the novel the planes fly over southern territory at some point around the time of the Dunkirk evacuation, which was completed by June 3 1940. De Valera's concession of the air corridor did not emerge until after the war, although its existence was apparently known well before this: in his memoir of a wartime childhood, *Eleven Houses* (2007), the dramatist and director Christopher Fitz-Simon recalls his grandfather telling him after seeing Catalinas, Lancasters and Sunderlands passing over Bundoran that the pact between de Valera and Churchill was common knowledge. The soldiers Peter sees through the shadowy dusk crossing the bridge are also ambiguous. It must be assumed from the geographical location that they are members of the Irish Local Defence Force, but here they appear as symbols of the militarisation of the entire planet:

The sound of their feet went back through the centuries to the sea rovers working in unison to haul their boats zig-zagging upwards out of reach of the tide. The sound of their feet went out over the whole world, Germany, Britain, France, Poland, Italy, Finland, Russia, Japan, marching and singing songs to the sound of their own feet.

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248 Kiely, *Stars*, p. 104. Kiely appears to revisit this scene in *Drink to the Bird*: 
The appearance of these soldiers refutes Davy’s idealised conception earlier in the novel of the Rosses as a place of ‘Peace and freedom and no soldiers’, although at the time this is swiftly undercut by a troubling image: ‘The war washes past under the rough ocean. Sometimes a piece of driftwood or a dead body, washed in to be buried in peace, comes up out of the sea.’

The Battle of the Atlantic resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of sailors, many of whose bodies were washed up on beaches and rocks along the west coast of Ireland during the war. Lost in a nationalist reverie, Davy avoids the uncomfortable truth of how the driftwood and the corpses have come to be there, in a passage that echoes the closing lines of Louis MacNeice’s ‘Neutrality’, written in December 1942:

But then look eastward from your heart, there bulks
A continent, close, dark, as archetypal sin,
While to the west off your own shores the mackerel
Are fat – on the flesh of your kin.

Kiely avoids such explicit condemnation of the wilful ignorance of those who have chosen to look away, but Davy’s casual reference to ‘driftwood or a dead body’ as though their appearances on the strand were natural phenomena provides a grisly illustration of the chilling permutations of idealistic and isolationist nationalism. Davy sees the sojourn in Donegal as an opportunity to reclaim the physical reality of an Irish speaking Ireland of ‘Peace and freedom’. Peter is more withdrawn, and feels that that the location of the Rosses on the geographical margins, ‘neither in Europe nor in

One day I watched and listened – to a platoon, or whatever, of them marching down the slope that led in from Enniskillen and Bundoran and the western ocean. They were singing that there would always be an England. Their singing was as awkward as their marching. They may have had sore feet. Anyway, a boozzer is the place for singing. Not a cold, damp roadway in an alien town. They were young men torn away by war from home and on the road to God Knows Where!

(Kiely, Drink to the Bird: A Memoir (London: Methuen, 1991), p. 17) In this case the young soldiers are clearly English, and clearly on the Northern side of the border. Again Kiely can be seen to reconfigure his impressions of the effects of the war on Ireland in retrospect.

Kiely, Stars, p. 35.

MacNeice, ‘Neutrality’ Collected Poems, p. 224. MacNeice’s poem was written in September 1942 following the death of his friend Graham Sheppard, who had drowned in the Atlantic after a German U-boat attack. For a detailed account of the discoveries of bodies on the beaches of the West of Ireland during the Second World War see Wills, That Neutral Island, pp. 136-146.
America’ gives him ‘a vantage point above the woes of Europe and the woes of men. It was escape.’\textsuperscript{251} This ‘escape’ would seem to be illusory, however, as ghostly yet insistent reminders of the war intrude on land, from the sea and in the air.

Despite these intrusions, however, there is no sense in \textit{Land Without Stars} that the war has effected any great changes on its rural setting or the lives of its characters: Davy would have been pursued and shot by the authorities regardless of the war in Europe, and Peter’s loss of faith in his vocation results from an internal struggle that, if conscious of the war, is not driven by it. The removal of a significant proportion of the novel’s action to the Rosses perhaps symbolises a wilful desire on the part of some nationalists to disassociate themselves from the war (and, crucially, the British-directed war effort), but Kiely clearly acknowledges that the possibility of such detachment has been threatened by global and technological advances in warfare.

In a foreword to the 1990 reprint of \textit{Land Without Stars} entitled ‘Retrospect’, published forty four years after the novel first appeared, Kiely addresses the perceived innocence of its characters:

The young people in this novel seem to be so innocent. More innocent, even, than I was when I wrote the book. Was it, then, a more innocent world? Or has the world never been any better or any worse? The young I.R.A. men of that time read “Mein Kampf” because Hitler was against England. But their world was still innocent of the full implications and sideshows of the Hitler war, of the revelations of Belsen and Katyn Woods, of Hiroshima, of napalm in Viet-Nam, of the Abercorn Restaurant, and Derry’s Bloody Sunday and Belfast’s Bloody Friday, and the Chicago murders, nor of Charley Manson and the slaughter of Sharon Tate.

The moon was still a virgin, that orbéd maiden with white fire laden, and not an ash heap. Most Irish rivers ran clean. The streets were not constipated with motor cars. Nor did you breathe carbon monoxide on O’Connell Bridge. No, no, nothing worse than the homely body-odour of Anna Livia Plurabelle.\textsuperscript{252}

This is a deeply troubling passage, but one to which Kiely himself would seem to adhere or attach some importance, as he recycles the passage in near identical form in

\textsuperscript{251} Kiely, \textit{Stars}, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{252} Kiely, ‘Retrospect’, \textit{Stars}, unpaginated preface.
his 1999 volume of memoirs, *The Waves Behind Us*.\(^{253}\) Acknowledging the possibility that a late twentieth-century readership’s greater historical perspective could adversely affect perceptions of the behaviour of Davy and others in *Land Without Stars*, he seeks here to exculpate the actions of young Republicans during the Second World War by contrasting their naivety with a series of violent and traumatic episodes in twentieth century history. The historical conflation attempted in this diverse and perplexing litany, gathering together the ‘Charley’ Manson murders and the Vietnam War with events of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and seemingly ascribing all of these to an unspecified post-war moral malaise, is, however, clumsy and unconvincing. The ambiguities resulting from Kiely’s apparent ambivalence are compounded by the melange of colloquial and literary imagery which follows the list of tragic and terrible events. The ironic appropriation of Shelley’s description of the moon as an ‘orbéd maiden’ and the folksiness of the Joycean Liffey’s ‘homely body-odour’ sit uneasily in immediate succession to references to the concentration camps, and Kiely’s various laments relating to Ireland’s decline in the second half of the century (these continue to encompass the length of girls’ skirts and the disfigurement of Ballyshannon in Donegal by the construction of an electrical generator) seriously hinder the development of an argument.\(^{254}\) However, in broad terms Kiely does seem to divide twentieth century Ireland into pre and post-war states of being, and acknowledges that the Second World War created severe problems for traditional nationalism, by denying the possibility of an idyllic and isolated rural, Irish-speaking Ireland in the face of these new global horrors. His unwillingness to argue this directly is perhaps illustrated by his tendency to refer to the Second World War as the ‘Hitler War’ or ‘Second Big War’ rather than by

\(^{253}\) Compare with the passage from *The Waves Behind Us*:

> Was it a more innocent world? Or has the world never been any better or any worse? The young IRA men in the 1930s read *Mein Kampf* because Hitler was against England. But their world was still innocent of the full implications and sideshows of the Hitler war. Of the revelations of Belsen, or Katyn Wood, of Hiroshima, of napalm in Vietnam. Of the Abercorn Restaurant and Derry’s Bloody Sunday, of Belfast’s Bloody Friday, of the Chicago murders, of Charley Manson and the slaughter of Sharon Tate. The moon was still a virgin, that orbéd maiden with white fire laden, and not an ash-heap. Most Irish rivers ran clean. The streets were not constipated with motor cars. Nor did you breathe carbon monoxide on O’Connell Bridge. No, no, nothing worse than the homely odour of Anna Livia Plurabelle.

(Kiely, *Waves*, p. 67)

its American or British appellations or by the neutral Irish term ‘The Emergency’. A similar evasion occurs in Land Without Stars itself when Peter recalls a German priest who came to speak at the seminary, an ‘exile’ whose religious order were removed from their house in Austria ‘by polite local officials who were never responsible but who acted under orders from other men who were exceedingly polite but still were not responsible’, without Nazi religious persecution ever being referred to directly.

The palpable awkwardness of Kiely’s writing when attempting to relate events elsewhere in the world (the Holocaust in particular) to the Irish experience of the war years, may stem in part at least from an episode in his own career as film critic in Dublin towards the end of the war, when in a review of the Noel Coward film In Which We Serve, published in the Catholic weekly newspaper The Standard in June 1945, he expressed reservations about newsreel footage of the concentration camps, then being shown in cinemas after the lifting of censorship restrictions. Clair Wills has accused Kiely of succumbing to the ‘standing temptation to transform neutrality into a superior moral condition’, in advising film-goers to ‘Take (the newsreels) always, not with the proverbial pinch of salt, but with a detached comprehensive charity’, and stating that ‘neutrality does not mean cowardly shrinking from the truth, but a genuine compassion for all suffering’. His review concluded with the advice ‘for heaven’s sake, keep the children at home.’

Irish neutrality does not emerge as a major concern of Land Without Stars, but an exchange between Rita and Peter, as they flee in a rowing boat over a lake from the house where Davy and Slevin have been hiding out, is significant:

‘Peter, are you a coward?’

‘I often wonder. Nowadays a man doesn’t get a chance to find out. We’re too civilised. We’re too neutral.’

‘We’re not neutral here in the Six Counties.’

‘In spirit we are. Except a few Orangemen. And in practice they’re as neutral as Switzerland. They don’t want any serious fighting. Anyway, war doesn’t prove a man’s courage. It’s a mass hysteria. The bravest man I ever

255 Kiely, Bird, p. 28; Kiely, ‘Retrospect’, Stars. Patrick Kavanagh also refers to the ‘Hitler war’ in ‘The Parish and the Universe’ (Kavanagh, Pruse, p. 281).
256 Kiely, Stars, p. 46.
heard of was shot as a coward during the last war. Didn’t like killing people. He
died for his convictions.\textsuperscript{258}

Coming as it does towards the end of the novel, these pronouncements have an air of
finality about them, but as with much of Kiely’s writings around the war the boldness is
illusory. If the claim of neutrality ‘in spirit’ aligns Northern Ireland with the neutral
southern state, this contradicts the earlier section of the novel in which sights and
sounds of the war encroach on remotest rural Donegal: again Kiely’s equivocations
frustrate attempts to fix the place of Ireland in relation to the global conflict.

Thomas O’Grady has suggested a reading of the novel as a ‘prophetic parable of
forces more powerful than sibling rivalry’, in which Peter and Davy embody two
branches of nationalism, intellectual and cultural and militant and political, which in the
aftermath of partition competed ‘to woo and win the elusive spirit of Ireland,
conventionally feminized’ in Rita Keenan.\textsuperscript{259} O’Grady’s allegorical analysis might,
indeed, be extended to take in the desiccated, childless and deformed old men Pete and
Jacob, who offer shelter to Davy and Slevin, as emblems of an older nationalism that
has failed.\textsuperscript{260} Such allegories are compelling, but fail to acknowledge the elusive yet
disruptive impact of the war on the novel, which surely problematises attempts to read
it as a nationalist parable. The Second World War does not affect its characters directly,
and in a sense \textit{Land Without Stars} is itself a neutral textual zone, critiquing Irish
nationalism against the background of the conflict. However, with the historical
perspective offered by hindsight and perhaps contrary to Kiely’s original intentions, the
war can be to complicate and contribute to this critique. As he implied in his 1990
‘Retrospect’, the relatively petty actions of Davy and Slevin have been overshadowed
by the global conflict, whilst the discernible backpedalling in that preface suggests that
Kiely was aware that some elements of the novel had been reframed from without.

By 1991, Kiely’s memoir \textit{Drink to the Bird} acknowledges the importance of the
Second World War to his early life in Omagh in a much more open fashion: the war is a
recurring presence in this rather rambling collection of memories and anecdotes about
his childhood and young adulthood. Though he describes his home town as a ‘garrison

\textsuperscript{258} Kiely, \textit{Stars}, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{259} O’Grady, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{260} As Kiely notes in \textit{The Waves Behind Us}, Peter and Jacob also appear in his short stories ‘Homes on
the Mountain’ and ‘A Journey to the Seven Streams’, whilst Dick Slevin also appears in ‘The Wild Boy’
(\textit{Waves}, p. 68).
town' and an integral part of the British Empire, where in the 1930s 'soldiers came and went between Omagh and Aldershot and India', Kiely is careful to acknowledge the Irishness of many of those soldiers. He makes repeated reference to those from the town who fought in Europe and died at Dunkirk or in the D-Day landings, and writes of the barracks in Omagh that 'There were a lot of Irishmen in there, too, and later on, and on far foreign fields, and some of them old friends of mine. Nor were they compelled nor conscripted.'

Bugles from the military barracks divided the day as do bells in a monastery. The barracks stood like a medieval fortress on a high, walled place above the loops of the Strule. The original building still stands more or less on the same place, but Adolf Hitler provoked the extension of the barrack buildings across the river to cover a place once called Pumphill. On the Sunday before the digging machines broke the first sod on Pumphill a great meeting was held there to protest against the partition of Ireland by British tyranny. We were always hell for irony, had a special gift that way.

References to the barracks' elevated location and the 'division' of the day by the bugles emphasise the army's often oppressive presence in the town and role in maintaining partition, but a joke is also made here at the expense of nationalists, who protest against British tyranny in the form of soldiers who are themselves preparing to engage in battle with the tyrannical Nazi regime. Kiely then notes that the first military action against the barracks was taken not by the Germans but by the Provisional IRA, who blew up the septic tank, whereby 'inevitably the action was described as Shitty-Shitty-Bang-Bang'. In sharp contrast with Land Without Stars, here Kiely finds the war a permissible source of earthy anecdote and comic reminiscence, where humour is clearly directed at naive young IRA members. This episode is incompatible with Land Without Stars' altogether more serious critique of young republicans, and the passage of time, along with the more informal style of the memoir seem to have allowed Kiely to describe the impact of the war on the province with greater freedom.

261 Kiely, Drink, p. 86.
262 Ibid., p. 17.
263 Ibid., p. 84.
264 Ibid.
Several writers in Northern Ireland have acknowledged the formative effect of the war on their boyhood. An essay by John Montague recalling his wartime childhood states in uncompromising fashion that ‘I loved the war. It was a spectacular background to my small existence from the age of ten to sixteen’, whilst Dennis Kennedy has written that ‘Despite the black-out, rationing and something called austerity, growing up in the war was not dull.’ The idea that the war had such an enlivening and positive impact on the growth of the male youth is pervasive, driving the narrative of works of memoir by Robert Harbinson and Will Morrison amongst others. Montague recalls that his interest in and excitement about the progress of the war was unrestricted by his Republican origins:

Like a commanding officer, I had a map, and moved pins to mark the progress of the German armies as they pushed through northern France and on to Paris. My letters to my cousins in Longford were full of war plans, and signed in true army style, Captain or Lieutenant or General (later, Field Marshal) Montague. I was neither pro-British nor Republican, just a boy living on the edge of a giant historical drama.

The experiences of children on the British Home Front, and their attested enjoyment of the disruption the Second World War caused to the repetitious patterns of school and home life, have been widely explored in sources as diverse as Richmal Crompton’s *William Does His Bit* (1941) and John Boorman’s autobiographical film *Hope and Glory* (1987). Such a tradition may also be discerned in Northern Ireland. The Belfast-born journalist and academic Dennis Kennedy, three years old at the outbreak of war, recalled in his memoir *Climbing Slemish* (2006) how he and his friends during the war had their own favourite Soviet Marshals, being familiar with these personages from the newspapers which they eagerly devoured:

Mine had been Timoshenko, baldheaded and ruthless, but unfortunately he fell from favour and was not in the top three who were leading the charge. My

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265 Montague, ‘The War Years In Ulster’, *The Figure in the Cave*, p. 27; Dennis Kennedy, *Climbing Slemish* (Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford Publishing, 2006), p. 218.
266 Ibid., pp. 27-8.
brother had already picked Zhukov, so he was out. I preferred Rokossovsky to Koniev – much more Russian sounding – and almost daily we plotted on our maps the progress of their respective armies. In the end I came third, while my brother celebrated Zhukov’s triumph. Still, we both knew it was Montgomery who had really won the war.267

John Montague’s description of a damaged flying boat as ‘an enormous prehistoric creature, a pterodactyl with folded wings’ shows how the new and exotic patterns and objects which appeared on the Home Front proved stimulating to young minds; he also evokes the ways in which far-away battles were assimilated into games and play, describing the Allied progress through Holland in terms of a Wild West cowboy chase.268 However, Montague’s essay closes with an adult reassessment of his original, seemingly uncompromising opening statement: ‘I began by saying I loved the War, but that small boy has had to deal with its implications ever since. It is probably why, although I am a republican, I do not believe in physical force except as a form of resistance.’269

Such writers are doubly dislocated from their wartime childhoods, and must find ways of describing the specific experiences of their younger selves from a peacetime perspective, and of conveying their detachment from adult civilian life during the war, accounts of which have inevitably dominated accounts of the Home Front. Christopher Fitz-Simon’s recollection in Eleven Houses of being taken through the streets of Belfast in the immediate aftermath of the Blitz is demonstrative of this:

We turned into High Street and that was what my mother must have meant when she said it would not be very pretty – but it was really quite exciting. You could see into the buildings in the way you could look into a doll’s house. It seemed as if their fronts had just been opened up to the street so that everything inside became visible. There were living rooms over the shops with their furniture just sitting there, quite neat and normal, and bedrooms on the higher

267 Kennedy, Climbing Slemish, p. 222.
268 Montague, ‘The War Years In Ulster’, The Figure in the Cave, p. 27.
269 Ibid., p. 35.
floors with the beds made up as if someone was about to get into them for the night.²⁷⁰

Will Morrison's *Between the Mountains and the Gantries* (2006) is a memoir of his life in North Belfast, and, once evacuated, the Armagh countryside, as a boy during the war. The entire third chapter of the book takes the form of an extended diary, kept by his eight-year-old self and describing his experience of the Belfast Blitz:

But here's a quare geg, and we had a great laugh when we saw it. Our blinkin' school got hit. Yes. A parachute mine fell into the field next door and wrecked one side of it, and left a huge crater almost as deep as the quarry up the Horseshoe Road. Herbie and Bobby weren't half as excited as me. I was fair jumping. 'Lucky dog, Marrisen,' they said. They thought we should go over to the Oldpark Road to see if their school got hit.²⁷¹

Reverting to the demotic speech patterns of his childhood, the re-imagination of his younger self's voice allows him to convey his joy at the destruction with greater immediacy than conventional prose would permit. The young Morrison's delight here could be compared with that of Moore's Gavin Burke on the roof of Post 106, and, like Burke's joy, it is quickly deflated by having to face the appalling human cost of the air attacks. In strikingly similar terms to Fitz-Simon, Morrison describes in detail the scenes of urban destruction following the Easter Tuesday raid, recalling 'whole fronts and sides ripped off houses so that you can see tables and chairs in the kitchens and beds in bedrooms', but the sense of loss is most acutely conveyed in his recollection of empty desks in school the following week:

It's hard to sleep after being back at school, if you know what I mean. I didn't think we'd have to go since it was half blown up, but our classroom was in one piece. Not everybody was present. Anyway, our teacher, Miss Hutchinson, told Bertie Bigger to fill up the inkwells in all the desks, and she fistled with the roll

²⁷⁰ Fitz-Simon, p. 130.
book after she called our names. Maybe the absent ones didn’t know school had started again.\textsuperscript{272}

Morrison closes the chapter with a contextual ‘Epilogue’, stating that after the fire raid of May 4\textsuperscript{th} 1941 the Luftwaffe never attempted another attack on Belfast, and that Russia’s entry into the war two months later saved Britain and Northern Ireland from further heavy bombing. He also states that the civilian death toll reached over nine hundred after Easter Tuesday and mentions the shooting of animals in Belfast zoo, lest they be a danger to the public in the event of escape during further bombing.\textsuperscript{273}

Morrison’s epigraph, Kierkegaard’s ‘Life is lived forwards and understood backwards’ is apposite: the overt synthesis of historical researched material with personal history (rendered in this instance in the intimate form of the imagined diary) is demonstrative of the need on the part of a writer addressing the war, also seen in Moore’s \textit{The Emperor of Ice Cream}, to open a space within a known historical event to enable the successful telling of a personal story.\textsuperscript{274}

The first three books in Robert Harbinson’s four volume memoirs, \textit{No Surrender} (1960), \textit{Song of Erne} (1960) and \textit{Up Spake the Cabin Boy} (1961), describe his growth from boyhood to adolescence during the 1930s and war years in very different terms. These volumes of memoir are less concerned with Harbinson’s experience of known episodes of the Second World War in Northern Ireland than with the day to day texture of wartime life and its impact on his personal development.\textsuperscript{275} He writes in \textit{No Surrender} that the war initially meant little to him, but that inevitably it began to seep into his life ‘like water on the sides of a damp cave’, whilst in school ‘Martyrs burning at the stake during history lessons, now had to make elbow-room for Nazi’s victims. And religious instructions never passed without some cruelty of the Germans being placarded for our edification.’ Recalling that ‘Hate for Germans puzzled me. Had they not produced Martin Luther who ranked next to King Billy? The

\textsuperscript{272} Ibid., p. 31, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{273} Ibid., p. 40.
\textsuperscript{274} Ibid., p. 6.
\textsuperscript{275} However, and like Brian Moore, Harbinson does admit to exercising some chronological freedom: in an ‘Author’s Note’ which follows a glossary of ‘Local Terms’ and precedes the main text of \textit{Song of Erne}, he admits ‘I have taken an author’s privilege of telescoping time. Some things which, in fact, occurred up to 1946, have been regarded as happening during 1940-42.’ (Robert Harbinson, \textit{Song Of Erne} (London: Faber and Faber, 1960; repr. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1987), p.11) All subsequent references to ‘Harbinson, Erne’ are to the Blackstaff edition). Harbinson was born Robin Bryans in 1928, and died in 2005. He also published travel literature, volumes of poetry, a novel and some short fiction.
hate loomed so disproportionately large in the adult world”, Harbinson focuses on the immediate impact of the war on local concerns, conflicts and assumptions, a recurring theme in the following volume *Song of Erne*.\(^{277}\) He also emphasises the beneficial economic repercussions of the war, writing that ‘Belfast reacted swiftly to the coming of war, its streets vibrated with energy, everyone was working – even me’, and recalls how the Harbinson home in East Belfast soon filled up with lodgers, as people poured into the city for war work: ‘Besides bringing the breath of a wider world into our house, the lodgers also brought a higher standard of living. We could have sausages and fried potato bread for tea more often.’\(^{278}\)

Harbinson’s memoirs are perhaps most notable, however, for the ways in which they describe the relations between urban and rural environments in wartime Northern Ireland. In his introduction to Harbinson’s *Selected Stories* (1996), John Keyes claims that Belfast ‘more than any city’ has country connections, citing an influx at the end of the nineteenth century of country people who left behind relatives in rural areas, meaning that many citizens have family in the country.\(^ {279}\) He also argues that ‘With Harbinson, the country and the city are almost the same. So closely intermeshed are they that it is difficult to separate one from the other’.\(^ {280}\) However, in *No Surrender* and *Song Of Erne* it is often the navigation of divisions between town and country that are shown to be vital to the growth and development of young Robbie, as Harbinson refers to his younger self. In *No Surrender*, which describes his early life in Belfast during the 1930s, he recalls being drawn by a ‘clarion’ to the country, making many trips to Lough Neagh. Town and country are presented as exactly coterminous (Harbinson writes that where the ‘walls stopped, the fields began’) but physically and spiritually antithetical.\(^ {281}\) Despite his fidelity to home and to his mother, in *No Surrender* Harbinson is lyrical in his loathing of the urban landscape of the city of his birth:

Mill chimneys, caked under their black lichen of smoke, phallic obelisks pointing in mockery up at heaven; the streets where lived thousands of sweated labourers, ranged in fearful geometry, row upon wretched stillborn row, and an outcrop of crude civic buildings, bloated into ugliness by the so-called city

\(^{277}\) Ibid., p. 207.  
\(^{278}\) Ibid., p. 215, p. 214.  
\(^{280}\) Ibid., p. 21.  
\(^{281}\) Harbinson, *No Surrender*, p. 166, p. 165.
fathers of the last century; these were the core of Belfast. To decaying Protestantism, Belfast was a place of pilgrimage, a Mecca of Orangemen. Misery and darkness for the many; quick money for the few. Unloved children, old women rotting in dirt under their shawls, I knew as Keats and Hippolyte Taine knew. Since they wrote of the city’s horrors times had changed little. Festering scab are words which described it well enough.\textsuperscript{282}

His frequent pre-war trips to the countryside, either for the day or to camp overnight with his ‘gang’ are a form of escape, but it is his evacuation to rural County Fermanagh at the very end of this volume, the account of which takes up the entirety of the succeeding \textit{Song of Erne}, that makes the greatest impression.

The train journey from Belfast into the west at the beginning of \textit{Song of Erne} reveals a welter of insecurities and prejudices, some inculcated and some the product of wartime rumour:

\ldots someone told us we were about to cross the border. Of course, no one believed it. A train-load of us Protestant children being taken across the border into the Free State to be massacred? Things had not quite come to that, even if all the German spies that ever existed were hiding down in Dublin.

My alarm over this was not so intense as in some children. I thought myself widely travelled. Had I not already been in four of Ulster’s six counties? [...] 

Being so worldly-wise, I gave it as my considered opinion that despite authority’s announcement we were not at the border. Where, I asked, were the battlemented walls, the moats and the vast palings with cruel iron spikes which separate the dirty Free State from our clean and righteous Ulster.\textsuperscript{283}

In the ironic reference to ‘four of Ulster’s six counties’ Harbinson vividly conveys the fidelity of his younger self to the post-partition province, where the sense of physical and moral separation from its southern neighbour has been accentuated by the advent of war. To begin with the young Robbie does not take to his new surroundings, and makes

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid., p. 165.
\textsuperscript{283} Harbinson, \textit{Erne}, p. 17.
a number of plans and abortive attempts to escape, but much of *Song of Erne* describes the rapid dismantling of his insular and defensive attitudes:

Seldom a day went by now without some new breaking free from the past. The young plant was shooting out new tendrils which gripped ever more firmly on other stems around it. Fears and superstitions that dogged in the city shadows dispersed as I found new horizons, new friends, new ambitions, and new longings to please people and be loved in return. I wanted desperately to belong, and be absorbed by the life I found in the west. Never for a moment now was the escape route back to Belfast contemplated.\(^{(284)}\)

Harbinson’s application of ‘the west’ in general terms to rural Fermanagh (a few pages earlier, indeed, the county is described as ‘the far west’) is perhaps significant, given the iconic importance of the west of Ireland to nationalist culture at this time as the most authentic, rugged or wild part of Ireland, least affected by British rule. The rural west was much explored by writers and artists of the Celtic Revival during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and romanticised versions of the west remained important in the culture of the southern state during the 1940s and 50s. Although Harbinson’s ‘west’ is of course the west of Northern Ireland rather than the west of Ireland, in *Song of Erne* rural Fermanagh functions in similarly mythical terms, as a refuge from the oppressively industrial city of Belfast. His usage serves to emphasise the extent of his remove in cultural and psychological, as well as geographical terms.

Perhaps the most striking change which Harbinson plots in his young self is in his sectarian assumptions, repeatedly challenged by his relocation: in Enniskillen he is amazed to discover Catholic and Protestant churches on either side of the same street.\(^{(285)}\) Later he shares a room with a Catholic farmhand, Paddy, of whom he is initially wary: ‘He was not [...] an Ulsterman but actually came from the Free State. Surely he must be a spy for de Valera, whom we burned in effigy once a year.’\(^{(286)}\) His impressions change rapidly the following day, however, after witnessing the man’s extreme physical strength, demonstrated by holding open the mouth of a horse while

\(^{(284)}\) Ibid., p. 43.  
\(^{(285)}\) Ibid., p. 47.  
\(^{(286)}\) Ibid., p. 72.
the farmer put his arm down its throat to administer medicine. Had Paddy relaxed his grip, the farmer would have lost an arm: ‘What responsibility for the black-haired Paddy – and him a Fenian.’ Elizabeth Grubgeld has argued that Harbinson’s autobiographical works lack ‘self referentiality’ being ‘related in the simple past tense without overt distinctions between past self and present narrator or writer’, and the use of sectarian terminology here is demonstrative of this. Use of the term ‘Fenian’ and the patronising tone of Harbinson’s appraisal of Paddy’s strength here dramatise and ridicule the retrogressive attitudes of his younger self, but in contrast with Will Morrison’s memoir these are fully integrated into the text, without separate retrospective comment from the point of view of the adult. Such a fluid and unstable literary form also problematises attempts to view the books as war memoirs: there is little sense in these volumes that Harbinson is part of any greater historical drama, or even, like Dennis Kennedy or John Montague, that he existed on the margins of one, and the series focuses on the development of the subject often to the exclusion of the wider world at war. In Song of Erne the pastoral setting of Fermanagh alienates the young Robbie from the war, as Harbinson describes his return to Belfast immediately after the Blitz, worried that his family have perished in the bombing:

I had grown used to the open country with woods and rivers, and a sky never dull even when overcast with rain. But here the streets were like shut boxes, the air smelt dirty, and out of the windows were not apple trees but lamp-posts without children swinging on them as before the war.

I saw clearly what I would have lost by running back to the city. Even during the unhappiest times in the country, escape was possible to the beauty of Fermanagh’s meadows and hills. But from here there could be no escape. Even the first novelty of war held no more magic. I knew that I had returned to be cooped up, I would no longer have found interest in the silver barrage balloons swaying in the weak sunlight or waiting for nightfall to study the geometric pattern of searchlights combing the sky.

287 Ibid., p. 74.
289 Harbinson, Erne, pp. 107-8.
Here the urban landscape appears strange in the context of his experience of the rural environment, and the paraphernalia of the war is thoroughly eclipsed by his newly acquired natural sensibility. A passage in *Up Spake the Cabin Boy* further implies that his impression of his home city has been permanently altered by his time in Fermanagh, as he describes his first job as cabin boy on a reclaiming vessel moored on Belfast Lough:

> From the deck I could look out at the Lough to where, beyond it, the Cave Hill rose up. Terror and mystery these caves held for me as a child. I used to imagine their floors and the bones littering them – the pathetic remains of Protestant children kidnapped by the Fenians. Obviously enough, I had never dared go near the caves. My two years, however, in Fermanagh had put all such nonsense from my head.  

The role of this boat, on which Catholics and Protestants work side by side and from which Harbinson is struck by his new conception of the mountain, could, in this context, be seen as symbolic. As he explains, the function of the ship, moored off the ‘sloblands’, and connected to these by a long pipe, ‘was hardly romantic – it sucked up mud brought by the barges from the dredgers, and then pumped it through the long ant-eater snout to the shore, gradually building up the lost swamp land.’ The reclamation of this ‘flat and deserted’ landscape is a mechanical and industrial process, but echoes Robbie’s own reconfiguration of the Belfast landscape in the light of his rural awakening. Indeed, the flocks of marsh birds that populate the mudflats prompt him to write ‘I felt like being on this ship would be almost like living in Fermanagh again, with the added thrill of being at sea.’

Harbinson’s behaviour when he first arrives in Fermanagh is unruly, and his tendency to get into trouble initially results in a peripatetic existence, moved on by a series of exasperated hosts after each infraction. It is made clear at the beginning of *Song of Erne* that his evacuation will be temporary and finite in duration: it is planned that in just over a year, at the age of fourteen, Harbinson will return to Belfast to

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291 Ibid., p. 45, p. 46.
292 Ibid., p. 46.
become a shipyard apprentice. However, a love of learning he develops at the various country schools he attends threatens to change this:

The greatest revolution in my life was that the bad old days of school in Belfast were over and done. I found that learning was not a war waged by heavily-armed teachers trying to find the slightest flaw in a child’s make-up as an excuse to cane. Nor was it the biggest obstacle in parent’s way – parents who were forever wanting to get the school-leaving age lowered, so that the few shillings of a message-boy’s packet might be added to the family wage.

The young Robbie is encouraged to sit a scholarship exam for Portora Royal School in Enniskillen (alma mater of Samuel Beckett and Oscar Wilde), but on returning to Belfast to obtain the necessary signature from his mother to allow him to sit the exam, Harbinson recalls that ‘The scholarship papers were put in the fire – such nonsense, I did not belong to those kind of people.’ Here country and city are established as polar sites of learning and labour, of intellectual ambition and philistinism, and, in the context of the Blitz, of growth and destruction.

Though his formal educational ambitions seem to peter out after this setback, his growing literary awakening makes a clear impact on the text. Song of Erne’s prose is intermittently interrupted by fragments of verse, and the changing nature of these interruptions is illustrative of his own personal development. The first three such quotations are of clear Protestant or loyalist origin. Early on in the memoir, as the train threatens to take the proudly loyal children over the border into ‘Free State’ territory, the infants respond to the perceived threat by singing the anti-papist song ‘Dolly’s Brae’, a verse of which is quoted on the page. Later, as he prepares to leave Enniskillen, a verse of the loyalist song ‘The Enniskillen Dragoons’ appears at the end of the chapter. Then in a description of a raucous fireside sing-song, around a third of the way into the volume, a verse of the Orange favourite ‘The Protestant Boys’ intrudes on the prose. As Robbie’s interest in books grows, however, during his longest and most successful billet with smallholding siblings Maggie and Christy, the text is irregularly broken up by quotations of a much greater variety of provenance and form.

293 Harbinson, Erne, p. 15.
294 Ibid., pp. 103-4.
295 Ibid., p. 107.
Fragments of Shakespeare, John Donne, the 121st Psalm, traditional country songs, mumming songs and a charm all appear, as do pieces of Harbinson's own juvenilia: the volume closes with his own poem 'Song of Erne'.

Discovering the poetry of Louis MacNeice was particularly important to the young Robbie's imaginative development. Towards the end of the volume Harbinson describes happening upon a soldier, Tom Williams, who is stationed nearby, lying in a field reading Louis MacNeice's Selected Poems. Williams lends the boy the volume, which has a profound effect on him:

...unlike others Louis MacNeice was not only not dead, but had been born in Belfast – my own town! At first this seemed impossible, but the truth of the matter slowly dawned on me. Poems were something for now. I listened agog as Tom read:

*I was born in Belfast between the mountains and the gantries
To the hooting of lost sirens and the clang of trams.*

The poem 'Carrickfergus' which transfixes the young Robbie describes MacNeice's early childhood and memories of the First World War in Ulster: read and invoked in the context of the Second, many of the references to sugar rationing, camouflaged steamers and huge army camps are easily transferred. The poem also serves to restate Harbinson's own urban origins, reminding him of his birth on the dockside 'facing the blue mountains of Antrim' and signals that his time in Fermanagh is finite. Harbinson's evacuation inverts one of the tropes of nineteenth century nationalist autobiography, as it is described by Sean Ryder:

In nationalist autobiography the journey is often one from the country to the city, or an educational journey from the province to the metropolis and back, or sometimes a journey through the country itself by which the hero is forced to

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296 Ibid., p. 208.
297 Ibid.
transcend his or her own class or regional limitations and become truly national in perspective.\textsuperscript{298}

By contrast, \textit{Song of Erne} describes a journey from the city to the country and back again, moves that enable Harbinson to overcome inculcated sectarian prejudices and to broaden his literary horizons. Similarly, Robbie’s trips across the border by bicycle allow him to become ‘truly national’, without becoming nationalist, in perspective:

The first time we went over, I was surprised to find it no different from our own Protestant side. Grass and trees were just as green, the river just as cool. Even the people looked like people, and no dirtier than our own. None of them tried to kidnap us, not even when we went apprehensively into Catholic churches to blow out votive lamps in our excess of Protestant missionary zeal.\textsuperscript{299}

Once Robbie has returned to Belfast, however, he is unable to revisit his formative rural experiences. Bored by shipboard life in \textit{Up Spake the Cabin Boy}, he describes returning to the country, slipping away from the boat and retracing his initial train journey to Fermanagh. Having successfully threaded his way through the shipyard in Belfast without being apprehended, and having avoided being questioned by police in Fermanagh, his joyful reunion with Maggie and Christy is swiftly threatened by an administrative problem: his lack of a ration book:

This unforeseen snag upset the careful concealment of my escape. I too had overlooked the ration book problem. Even here in the depths of the country, far from the belching war chimneys of Belfast, body and soul could not be held together without red-tape.\textsuperscript{300}

After a month he returns home to face the wrath of his mother. At this point Harbinson’s wartime Fermanagh attains an almost Edenic resonance: once the young Robbie has left he may never return. In \textit{Song of Erne} the country occupies an interstitial place in space and time, where Christy ‘could exist with no difficulty in the ancient


\textsuperscript{299} Harbinson, \textit{Erne}, p. 112-3.

\textsuperscript{300} Harbinson, \textit{Up Spake}, p. 85.
inherited world of a half-magical Ireland as well as in the modern one”, but here it is seen to be subject to contemporary rules and regulations, and is, as such, at war.301

The writers whose works I have examined in this chapter provide widely differing responses to the question of how far to integrate the life of the subject with the contextual background of the Second World War. Through Gavin Burke’s (and Brian Moore’s) active role in the relief operation following the Belfast Blitz, _The Emperor of Ice Cream_ has helped to write the city into a more secure place in the history of the war. This gesture and inscription has been reified by later historians and their use of the novel. By contrast, the war fails to exert any direct influence on the lives of the characters of _Land Without Stars_, in which the conflict exists as an unresolved presence in the background, troubling and complicating the narrative whilst highlighting the untenable nature of isolationist nationalism in the face of global events. Illustrative of the awkward position of Northern Ireland in relation to the Second World War, the books I have considered correspond neither to the dominant tradition of Irish autobiographical writing identified by Liam Harte, nor to the discourse of the People’s War prevalent in Britain. Moore’s novel is clearly less antagonistic to the idea of a People’s War than Benedict Kiely’s _Land Without Stars_, but Robert Harbinson’s thoroughly transgressive autobiographical writings cannot be incorporated into any such model, despite the fact that in _Song of Erne_, as in Moore’s novel, the war occasions great changes in the young protagonist’s outlook. The scale of the war and its effects have proved disruptive to generic boundaries, and the afterlife of _The Emperor of Ice Cream_, in particular, speaks of the instability of distinctions between social, cultural and literary history in the face of the conflict.

301 Harbinson, _Erne_, p. 179.
Chapter Two

‘An angry wind strumming the wires’: Poetry and the Second World War

Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, three poets who have tended to dominate accounts of cultural life in late twentieth century Northern Ireland, have all produced significant poems addressing the Second World War. This group, described collectively by Fran Brearton as the ‘Northern Ireland Renaissance’, were all born just before or during the war: Heaney in April 1939, Longley in July 1939, and Mahon in November 1941. Many of Heaney’s Second World War poems describe childhood memories, and reflect on the impact that the war had on the rural landscape around his home. These are mostly found in his later work (several appear in the 2006 collection District and Circle), although some references to the war can be found in earlier collections: prose poems ‘England’s Difficulty’ and ‘Visitant’ were published as early as 1975 in Stations. The Second World War poems of Longley and Mahon are perhaps more international in scope. Longley’s two line poem ‘Terezin’ from Gorse Fires (1991) describes a photograph of a room of hanging violins, confiscated from Jews at the concentration camp of the same name and collected to be distributed to children of Nazi parents. In its entirety: ‘No room has ever been as silent as the room / Where hundreds of violins are hung in unison.’ Here as elsewhere in Longley’s war poems, the poetry is simply in the pity. Mahon’s engagements with the war are perhaps more complex: in ‘The Home Front’, the opening section of the long poem ‘Autobiographies’, he describes the ‘frozen armies’ gathering at the gates of Leningrad at the time of his birth, drawing together his own early years in wartime Belfast with contemporaneous events elsewhere in Europe.

The Second World War is a more palpable and significant presence in works by the next generation of Northern poets, as can be seen from Ciaran Carson’s The Irish for No (1987), Frank Ormsby’s A Northern Spring (1986), and Tom Paulin’s Fivemiletown (1987) and The Invasion Handbook (2002). Poems by this later

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generation have also inked Northern Ireland on to the map of a European and global war, and show how its experience of the Second World War allows connections to be drawn between the province, so often figured as isolated and its problems as intractable, and the wider world. In ‘The Caravans of Lunëberg Heath’, the long poem which closes Fivemiletown, Paulin describes how the buildings of the poet’s school were literally constructed from wreckage left over from the war, and writes of ‘provincial world history’ where ‘one tight thread / links Lüneberg Heide / to the Clogher Valley’.\(^4\) In Carson’s ‘Dresden’ from The Irish for No a Second World War veteran of RAF Bomber Command, who had flown missions over the eponymous city, keeps the shattered remains of a china shepherdess with his war medals in a biscuit tin and is troubled by the imagined memory of china ornaments collapsing and shattering in ‘a thousand tinkling echoes - / All across the map of Dresden’.\(^5\) Ormsby’s ‘A Northern Spring’, a sequence of thirty six poems, offers a polyphonic and fragmentary account of the experiences of American soldiers and airmen stationed in County Fermanagh during the build up to the invasion of Normandy, and during the invasion itself. Robert Greacen’s recollection in 1979 that ‘The world at war, after all, was only an immense enlargement of our own tense province where a sort of apartheid existed between the two communities’ perhaps anticipates this poetic discourse, and indeed one aim of this chapter is to show how some of the concerns and debates which preoccupied later generations of northern poets and critics were foreshadowed in works by Greacen and his contemporaries during the war itself.\(^6\)

Many of the works I have referred to thus far were published since the mid 1980s, forty years or more after the end of the Second World War. It may be that this delayed engagement can be partly attributed to the impact of the Troubles on Northern Irish poetry, but it is also possible that the various commemorations of the fortieth, fiftieth and sixtieth anniversaries of the D Day landings and VE and VJ Days during the mid 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, all extensively covered by the media, awakened an interest in this sensitive and awkward episode in the province’s history, or indeed simply that the passage of time allowed interest to build. In the introduction to his anthology Earth Voices Whispering: An Anthology of Irish War Poetry 1914-1945

(2008), dedicated, significantly, to the memory of Robert Greacen, Gerald Dawe notes that although the Troubles have ‘occupied considerable political, cultural and poetic space, public and private reaction to the wars of the first half of the twentieth century have not been as widely considered, even though the cost in human and political terms was much greater.’ For poets born in the 1930s and 40s, Dawe observes that ‘war is tangential, something overheard or witnessed from afar, etched in the lives and words of family members and neighbours, and found in the childhood landscapes of their poems.’ An enduring sense of a postponement, or of keeping the war at a distance, is alluded to by Heaney in an interview published in 2008, when he talks of the recurrence of the Second World War in his later poetry as ‘a matter of coming to terms with reality’ and, more obliquely, as ‘A matter of things once taken for granted being granted too casually their sombre significance’. I have discussed in the previous chapter how writers of Catholic and nationalist backgrounds have sometimes betrayed unease over the Second World War, and Seamus Heaney’s war poems in *District and Circle* perhaps reflect such unease, as he questions the extent of the impact of the war on Mossbawn, despite the unavoidable and incongruous presence of the American military and its machines in the area. In ‘The Aerodrome’ he writes that ‘Wherever the world was, we were somewhere else, / Had been and would be’, echoing the first section of his autobiographical essay ‘Mossbawn’ (written almost thirty years earlier) when he describes how ‘The American bombers groan towards the aerodrome at Toomebridge, the American troops manoeuvre in the fields along the road, but all of that great historical action does not disturb the rhythms of the yard.’ Heaney seems to remain unconvinced that the war had any lasting impact on Mossbawn or on his rural upbringing. The Northern Irish countryside was physically altered by the construction of airfields and military bases, by the influx of evacuees and refugees, and by the blackout, but rural areas were not targeted in air attacks and suffered far less as a result. The degree of rural detachment is suggested in Heaney’s 1975 prose poem ‘England’s Difficulty’, which describes being brought outdoors at night on an adult’s shoulders to

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see the sky over Belfast glowing during the Blitz. The lack of a direct threat seems to have allowed rural areas to remain at a remove from the conflict in a way that was impossible for the cities of Belfast and Derry, many of whose inhabitants were also directly connected to the British war effort through industrial or maritime work.

The main aim of this chapter is to reconsider the importance of an earlier generation of northern poets who lived through the war years as young adults and were unable to keep it at a distance from their work. Robert Greacen has well described the impact of the war on his own development as a poet:

The formative period in my creative writing life was the 1940s, the first half of which saw the most terrible war in human history with its disruption of life, its mass carnage and organised brutality, its movement of populations – against all of which we poets beat our wings in vain.

This earlier generation has undeniably been marginalised in discussions of Northern Irish poetry, as is evident from the testy reaction of Greacen’s friend and fellow poet Roy McFadden to Jon Stallworthy’s 1995 biography of Louis MacNeice. Reviewing this book, McFadden took particular exception to Stallworthy’s claim that MacNeice’s reputation had been re-established by the ‘next generation’ of Northern Irish poets:

...whom he names, indiscriminately, as Mahon, Muldoon, Paulin, McDonald, Heaney and Longley. He expresses gratitude to ‘ten friends who read the typescript and improved it with their comments and corrections’. Mr and Mrs Longley and Tom Paulin are among the advisers named. Did they omit to point out that the ‘next generation of Northern Irish poets’ to that of MacNeice in fact consists of Craig, Greacen, McFadden, Fiacc and Montague? Mr Stallworthy should note for the paperback to restore the legitimate ‘next generation’ to its proper place in the succession.

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This chapter aims to correct this omission, and responds to Patricia Craig’s suggestion that the works of McFadden and his contemporaries offer a bridge between the works of MacNeice and those of later generations of Northern Irish poets.13

The international success of both post-war generations of Northern poets – war babies and baby boomers – in the final third of the twentieth century has certainly eclipsed that of those writers who were actually present and active in the province during the Second World War, and indeed a degree of critical disdain pervades what little discussion there is of Northern Irish poetry during this period. Terence Brown’s *Northern Voices* (1975) is a notable exception to this tendency, whilst Dawe’s recent anthology is striking in its broad selection: other anthologies have been far less interested in the poets examined in this chapter. Of four significant anthologies of Irish poetry, Brendan Kennelly’s *Penguin Book of Irish Verse* (1970), John Montague’s *Faber Book of Irish Verse* (1974), Paul Muldoon’s *Faber Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1984) and Thomas Kinsella’s *New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1986, rev. ed. 2001), none contains any poetry by Robert Greacen, one (Kennelly) contains a sole poem from McFadden, and only the Kennelly and Montague anthologies contain any poetry by John Hewitt or W.R. Rodgers.14 Of the poems selected, not one refers directly to the Second World War. Some avoidance of this period is understandable: undergraduate poetry by Greacen and McFadden is sometimes clumsy in its evident desire to respond to events of immense historical magnitude, and time has not been kind to much of Rodgers’s apocalyptic verse. This chapter is less concerned with quality, however, than with describing some of the cultural and historical pressures at work on poets in the province at the time.

Michael Longley has described the Belfast Group of poets to which he belonged as having given ‘an air of seriousness and electricity to the notion of writing’.15 Quoting Longley, Fran Brearton observes that this was ‘something which had been lacking in Belfast, despite the best efforts of the earlier generation of McFadden, Hewitt and

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14 It should be noted that McFadden voluntarily withdrew his work from John Montague’s anthology, citing an unspecified ‘nasty experience’ (Letter from Roy McFadden to Robert Greacen, 7 July 1968, Robert Greacen Collection, Linen Hall Library Belfast, Box 4, File 5).

Rodgers to promote a Northern cultural energy in the 1940s.\(^{16}\) John Hewitt’s earnest belief in regionalism, formulated during the war as a solution to cultural and political faultlines in Northern Ireland, can indeed in retrospect appear doomed and naive, given the province’s violent political history over the final third of the twentieth century.\(^{17}\) It is surely worth considering, however, what the seemingly elusive 1940s ‘Northern cultural energy’ consisted of in terms of the poetry produced at the time, and whether this energy depended on the Second World War for its existence. McFadden himself pre-empted Brearton’s assessment in 1961. Looking back at the literary activity of the war years with regret, he wrote that although fifteen years previously it had seemed that a group of writers in Northern Ireland ‘was emerging to form the basis of a local contemporary literature’, this had ultimately failed. He lamented that ‘today the group has disintegrated, the wild geese have flown away or been changed into domestic fowl. We have no coherent body of writing’.\(^{18}\) McFadden reaffirmed his belief in the special atmosphere of the war years in an essay published thirty three years later, but modified his pessimistic assessment of post war developments in the province:

> Literary decades are invented by critics for their own convenience. However, up to a point, the 'Forties commanded a particular unity, in that the war occupied much of the decade, with a common climate of carnage, boredom and, ironically, the exhilaration and heightened sense of being that responds to danger.\(^{19}\)

He goes on to describe how poetic activity was stimulated during the war by ‘the blackout and by a moving trainbound population of troops and workers’ and centred around the literary magazines and small-scale, independent publications such as *The Northman, Lagan* and *Northern Harvest*.\(^{20}\) McFadden notes with some sadness the fact that few poets chose to remain in Northern Ireland, claiming that by the end of the war

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\(^{17}\) I will explore Hewitt’s regionalist ideas further in the third chapter of this thesis.


\(^{20}\) Ibid. The Queen’s University Belfast student magazine *The Northman* was briefly known as the *New Northman* during the 1930s and early 1940s, but reverted to the title of *The Northman* for the Winter 1941-1942 edition. Despite this change in names, both *The Northman* and the *New Northman* should be considered as the same publication, and the change in name had no impact on the numbering of editions. It is possible that the name change may have been inspired by the popularity at this time of the left-leaning London magazine the *New Statesman and Nation*. 

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he and John Hewitt were the only poets still living in Belfast. He also expresses perceptible resentment at subsequent generations of northern poets when he claims that after the closure of the magazine *Rann* in 1953 'the North fell largely silent again – for a decade and a half – until affluence beckoned with an open hand and the Muse became the kept woman of the universities.'

McFadden was and remained a committed pacifist, but a degree of nostalgia for the war years is discernible in these retrospective analyses and in private correspondence between Greacen and McFadden from the early 1960s, when they briefly contemplated collaborating on an anthology of 1940s northern poetry. In these writings McFadden seems regretful that an opportunity to make a greater impression on both the locality and the world of letters was missed by the group of which he felt himself to be a member. This chapter examines poems by Greacen and McFadden which directly respond to the war, and will then move on to explore the poetry of two of their immediate antecedents, John Hewitt and W.R. Rodgers. Putting Hewitt's poetry to one side, on an empirical basis the war had a clear impact on these poets. Of the forty-two poems in Greacen's first collection *One Recent Evening* (1944), perhaps eighteen refer directly to the war, of McFadden's first, *Swords and Ploughshares* (1943) seven from nineteen, and Rodgers's first collection, *Awake! and other Poems* (1941) is dominated by references to the patterns and paraphernalia of modern warfare. The fact that conscription was not imposed in Northern Ireland means that none of the poets examined at length here was compelled to fight in the war. McFadden's pacifist conscience and political outlook did not allow him to join the British armed forces, and his friend Greacen also chose not to enlist. Rodgers, a Presbyterian minister, spent

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21 Ibid, p. 72.
22 Letters from McFadden to Greacen, 12 November 1962, 4 December 1962, Greacen Collection, Box 4, File 3.
23 Both Greacen and McFadden were members of the Belfast branch of the Peace Pledge Union. McFadden recalls that as a result of this they suffered some harassment following the Belfast Blitz in 1941:

By some strange crossing of wires, we were suspected of being sympathisers of the I.R.A., with pacifist bombs under Peace News bolstered mattresses. An ex-Black-and-Tan officer, then in charge of the anti-I.R.A. Campaign, interviewed me in Chichester Street barracks. He threatened us with the Special Powers act. He could put us down in the cells without charge and warrant. What did we know about James Connolly? he asked. We hung our heads and lisped. We were X? Pacifists, we said, who offered no threat to a P. Government for a P. people. He cajoled us, saying he too was a pacifist and a socialist, but he had to put first things first, ie the IRA and the war effort. We continued to blush and lispe, and he let us go in the end, but had us watched for several days afterwards.

(Roy McFadden, untitled recollections, McFadden Papers, MP35 (ix))
most of the war in his parish at Loughall, Co Armagh, whilst Hewitt served in the Civil Defence forces and also lectured at army camps across the province during the war.

A genuine belief in some kind of ‘energy’ was certainly palpable in critical prose writing of the war years: in an essay published in February 1943 Greacen wrote as if in premonition of Heaney’s ‘Mossbawn’ that a ‘literary resurgence has come to fruition in a time of darkened streets, or reorientation of life in a thousand details, at a period when huge masses of armed men and machinery tumble through our countryside.’ His tone was overwhelmingly optimistic:

Undoubtedly the presence of so many foreign troops on the streets is having the effect of drawing on the imagination of local people and of blowing a wholesome spirit through a closed-in and soured atmosphere. Young Ulster is on the march – energetic, enthusiastic, idealistic.24

Later critical appraisal of this period has been scarce, however. A survey of Irish poetic contributions to the decade in A. Trevor Tolley’s admittedly Anglocentric The Poetry of the Forties (1985) occupies little more than two pages (excluding Kavanagh, who is treated as a separate case), in which Greacen and McFadden are briefly mentioned only in terms of their rejection of the Irish Literary Revival. Tolley quotes from a dialogue between McFadden and Geoffrey Taylor, published in The Bell in July 1943, in which the former poet argued that ‘There is no mist on our bogs, but there have been bombs on our cities; and I think it natural that we should be more concerned with a society that produces and tolerates such enormities than with the silk of the kine.’25 Tolley reads this as ‘a rejection of the view that the proper Irish subject is the life of the Irish soil’, but observes a contradiction between McFadden’s vehement denial of rural subject matter in this exchange and much of his early poetry, such as the collection Flowers for a Lady (1945), which is ‘increasingly permeated by his feeling for Ulster life and the

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24 Robert Greacen, ‘When Peace Breaks in Ulster’, The Bell, 5.5 (February 1943), 397-399 (pp. 397-8, p. 399). The idea of ‘Young Ulster’ may refer to the society of the same name founded by the playwright Thomas Carnduff in 1936. Many of the writers with whom this study is concerned, including John Hewitt, Denis Ireland and Roy McFadden, attended and spoke at Young Ulster gatherings in Belfast during the Second World War. The 1943-47 minute book of the society is held in the Thomas Carnduff Archive, Special Collections Department, Queen’s University Belfast, MS21/13.
Ulster landscape. Both Greacen and McFadden published similarly bold pronouncements on poetry during the war years, but, as I will show in this chapter, the thrust of these manifestos was often inconsistent with the content of their own poetry, and contradiction might indeed be said to be a feature of their work. Tolley refrains from commenting on the ways that Greacen and McFadden defined themselves in their poetry in wider terms against the southern state, here implied in McFadden’s crude contrast of ‘bombs’ with ‘bogs’. Similarly the ‘silk of the kine’, a traditional (and significantly rural) characterisation of Ireland as the finest of cattle, is contrasted with the ‘enormities’ of war, produced by an implicitly more powerful ‘society’ of greater contemporary consequence.

Greacen and McFadden used Belfast’s experience of the war to assert the relevance and importance of their work, and the Second World War arguably aided their resistance of dominant southern poetic forms. The war gave the young northern poets a more secure platform from which to write, as the hardening of the border as a physical reality, and Northern Ireland’s direct and sustained experience of the conflict, deepened the sense of separation from the southern state at this time. However, in a later part of the passage not quoted by Tolley, McFadden continues to articulate one of the chief anxieties shared by himself and his contemporaries:

Culturally, I know, we are bastards, and perhaps it is not such a bad thing for the thoroughbred is liable to strange ailments. We are faced with the problem of creating a literary tradition in the north; but, though it must inevitably be strongly influenced by contemporary happenings in English poetry, there is no reason why we should not absorb that influence and build it into something of our own. Sometimes I think we are the least English part of Ireland.

Greacen and McFadden disavowed and rejected the work of English poets of the 1930s on many occasions, but, as we shall see, such renunciations should not necessarily be taken at face value.

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26 Tolley, p. 165.
Edna Longley does not dwell on work by Greacen, McFadden or Rodgers in any of the essays that make up *The Living Stream: Literature & Revisionism in Ireland* (1994), but an exploration of the concerns and influences evident in their war poetry gives further credence to her conception in this volume of Northern Ireland as a ‘frontier-region, a cultural corridor, a zone where Ireland and Britain permeate one another’ and her identification of an important ‘intersection between the British 1930s and the flawed political entities in Ireland.’ She argues that ‘This intersection, which cuts two ways and may have implications for culture and poetry in the other island too, was itself subject to change during the years 1939-1945.’ In 1942 Robert Greacen anticipated this analysis with clarity:

> The conclusion from the political and geographic facts is surely this – that the Six Counties, so far, despite all its reputed hard-headedness, has not had the cunning (if altruism is left out of the count) to act as the bridgehead between Ireland and Great Britain and to suck the best out of the English, the Gaelic and the Anglo-Irish cultures. Until very recently, the Northern Irish writer looked for a lead either to the Southern capital or to London: today he is beginning to realise, with pardonable arrogance, that he is in a position to inform both capitals about each other and, more important, to tell them about Ulster.

One such ‘intersection’ or ‘bridgehead’ that I will examine is the troublesome impact of English poetry of the previous decade on poets in Belfast during the war. As I have explored in the previous chapter, 1930s poetry is hugely important to Brian Moore’s heavily autobiographical novel of Belfast at war, *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, in which the imaginative life of the protagonist, seventeen-year-old Gavin Burke, is dominated by the poems that appear in *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1936). Quotations from some of these, including the Wallace Stevens poem from which the novel takes its title, W.H. Auden’s ‘Consider’, Louis MacNeice’s ‘An Eclogue for Christmas’ and W.B. Yeats’s ‘The Second Coming’, appear within the text of the novel itself. Later it is mentioned that Freddie Hargreaves, Gavin’s older friend and guide through Belfast’s enclaves of socialism and hedonism, is reading *The Waste Land* and Auden and

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31 Moore, *Emperor*, pp. 11-12.
MacNeice’s *Letters from Iceland* at the ARP post.\(^{32}\) The importance of the ‘End of Days’ poems by Auden, MacNeice and Yeats to Gavin’s apocalyptic view of the world would tend to support Patricia Craig’s claim that the discovery of the Faber collection was crucial to Moore’s own artistic development, and their presence in the novel also suggests that these poets loomed large in the imaginative consciousness of Moore and other aspiring Belfast-born writers of his generation: he and McFadden were born in 1921, Greacen in 1920.\(^{33}\)

Edna Longley writes with some force in ‘Progressive Bookmen: Left Wing Politics and Ulster Protestant Writers’ that the term ‘Auden generation’ should be laid to rest since its ‘Anglo-centric and metropolitan assumptions contradict the pluralistic tumult sketched by Valentine Cunningham in *British Writers of the Thirties*’, but it should be acknowledged that the writing of poetry in Belfast during the Second World War was appreciably Anglo-centric in direction and influence.\(^{34}\) During the early years of the war at least, the poetry of Auden and his contemporaries greatly preoccupied Greacen and his friends, and for Greacen and indeed W.R. Rodgers, London was of huge importance in terms of publication and reception, and was the city to which both poets eventually moved. Moore, too, recalled in 1974 that at the outbreak of war he was ‘very left wing [...], it was an era when anyone who read was very left wing, we were all under the influence of Auden and Spender and these people.’\(^{35}\) In his autobiography *The Sash My Father Wore* (1997), Robert Greacen wrote that following his discovery of literature and socialist politics at school, reading these English poets encouraged his adolescent socialist convictions towards the end of that decade. Instead of working on homework, Greacen claims that he would listen to Marxist lectures, watch Soviet films by Eisenstein and Pudovkin, plays by Clifford Odets, or would sit in his bedroom reading Auden, C. Day Lewis or Stephen Spender. Older friends at Queen’s described

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\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 69, p. 76.

\(^{33}\) Craig, *Brian Moore*, p. 76. One of Robert Greacen’s later collections of poetry is entitled *The Only Emperor*, and includes at least one poem which directly recalls the Second World War. ‘Drummond Allison, 1921-43’ subtitled ‘Killed in action on the Garigliano, Italy, 2 December 1943’ describes an evening spent with the eponymous English soldier poet, a friend of Greacen, in wartime Belfast, and laments Allison’s premature death (Greacen, ‘Drummond Allison, 1921-43’, *The Only Emperor* (Belfast: Lapwing, 1994), p. 9). The title poem which opens the volume describes a bomb-scare in Troubles-era Belfast, in which Greacen walks on ‘intent on Wallace Stephens’ as a bomb explodes (Ibid., p. 7).


\(^{35}\) ‘An Answer from Limbo’, BBC Radio Ulster, 11 May 1975, BBC Northern Ireland Archive, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra, Co Down, #BBC (BBE 19 / UT619). This programme is listed as having been recorded on 4 May 1975, but the announcer at the beginning of the broadcast reports that Moore’s words were recorded at a Seminar on contemporary Irish writing in Toronto the previous year.
Russia to him in glowing terms, and assured him that reports of the existence of ‘concentration camps’ and reports of the extermination of minorities were ‘capitalist lies’. His immersion in socialist culture led to a brief infatuation with the Soviet Union, briefly and colourfully sketched:

I could indeed hear the ‘opening of a new theme’. Bliss was it in that Red Dawn to be alive, but to be young was a veritable Soviet heaven!

Within a year or two, I was to be sadly disillusioned by it all. The dream crumbled before the iron realities like the Soviet-German pact and the disclosures of savage Stalinist repression of the kind that came to be openly admitted by Soviet leaders. The god had failed. For the time being there was blinding new light in eastern Europe, and it was spreading a crimson glow over the sleeping west. Awake! Awake! Even in faction-ridden, obscurantist Belfast, if one peered closely into the heavens, it was possible to discern the proud Red Star. It could shine for us, too, and the Lagan could flow crimson.

Underlying Greacen’s prose, characteristically exaggerated for comic effect, is a perceptible regret that the apparent hope that a socialist revolution might prove a solution to ‘faction-ridden’ Belfast’s sectarian divisions proved illusory. In The Emperor of Ice Cream Gavin Burke’s imagination is fuelled by the premonitions of apocalypse in ‘Consider’ and other poems, but the young Greacen seems to have been drawn more to the socialism of Auden and his contemporaries, poets that he repeatedly addresses in prose during the war. Considering the direction taken by the Queen’s University magazine the New Northman under his editorship, it is clear that Greacen’s relationships with his literary and political antecedents were problematic and unresolved.

For much of the latter half of the 1930s the New Northman published what might be expected of a student magazine, carrying reports on sport and music in the university, features on foreign travels, political commentary, and book reviews. Poetry was

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36 Greacen, Sash, p. 61.
37 Ibid., p. 62. The source of Greacen’s crimson Lagan might also be traced to the so-called ‘Red Clydeside’ movement of organised labour in Glasgow during the First World War and interwar years.
published without fanfare, with a few poems dotted around the magazine. Some mid-1930s issues do respond to international political developments: the Winter 1935-6 edition, for example, carries a report on a meeting of the Belfast Peace League, noting its disquiet with the activities of ‘the armament manufacturers and the war profiteers’. The first poem by Robert Greacen to appear was in the first wartime issue of the New Northman, in Autumn 1939. ‘From My Window (Pre-War)’ was attributed only to ‘R.G’, but the bracketed reference to war can be read as an attempt on Greacen’s part to write as a poet of contemporary significance: many subsequent poems published during the war are also given titles or subtitles which anchor the works to the date of their composition and proclaim their relevance to matters of current and pressing importance. In the following issue an article by T. Cusack on William Morris (prompted by the fact that on 24 March 1940 Morris would have been 106) focused on Morris’s poetry and revolutionary socialist credentials, and concluded by pronouncing him ‘founder of a tradition of Socialist poets, to-day carried on by Auden, Spender, MacNeice, Cecil Day Lewis, and others’, a quartet whose names would repeatedly surface in the magazine over the next few years.

Such material anticipated the new direction that the magazine would take from its Winter 1940-1941 issue, which carried an editorial on its first page entitled ‘A New Order in The “New Northman”?’, written by one of the new editors, Robert Greacen – the other was his friend John Gallon, also a poet. Promising that the magazine would henceforth be free from discussion of University affairs, Greacen deplores the ‘isolation’ of Queen’s from the surrounding community, arguing that this is ‘clearly illustrated by the continued failure of the New Northman to occupy the long-vacant niche that exists in Northern Ireland for an indigenous literary magazine, and its persistent elbowing into the already congested ranks of politically vociferous native journals’. Self-conscious, perhaps, of the magazine’s provincial origins, the article contrasts the perceived lack of success of the New Northman with Oxford and Cambridge university magazines that had found specialised readerships all over Britain, and notes that Trinity College Dublin manages to produce eight issues of its own magazine for every one edition of the New Northman. Greacen proposes that the magazine’s new incarnation should be rooted in Queen’s but invites contributions from

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41 ‘A New Order in The “New Northman”?’ New Northman, VIII.3 (Winter 1940-1941), 45-6 (p. 45).
‘a larger body of Northmen’, including local young writers who find it difficult to publish their work, and older writers who turn at present to English publishers, or to outlets in Dublin. His call for ‘a new character, a less obfuscated style, clearer prose, sweeter verse, more consideration for common standards of taste’, is followed on same page by Roy McFadden’s poem ‘Song’.42

Having seemingly already discarded his socialist convictions, Greacen confesses in this editorial to a ‘personal aversion to politics as a human activity. As was Jeremy Bentham, so am I disposed to look on politics as a necessary evil and, as such, preferably left, like vivisection or prostitution, to those with a flair for it.’43 He goes on to say that political dialectics ‘verge on the anachronistic’, and writes that after Churchill’s comment that any issue other than winning the war is irrelevant, matters such as the treaty ports controversy ‘have reached the inoperable stage […] War aims, post-war organisation and the like ideological preoccupations are like the pious resolves of the stricken toper to lead a better life if he is spared.’44 Announcing that the magazine intends to avoid domestic politics entirely, Greacen comments sarcastically that pronouncements by the New Northman on the Irish situation ‘cannot be welcomed either by the contending parties, who want no blurring scholasticisms introduced among their beautifully clear cut issues, or by the University, which is disadvantageously situated to be an outpost for political franc tireurs.’45

The magazine had undoubtedly changed: elsewhere the same issue carried short stories and poems, including ‘Provided “X” is Real’ – by ‘G’, an impenetrable piece of surrealist fiction. In a short essay entitled ‘Words & Emotions in Contemporary Literature’, Jack Boyd argued for a return to High Modernist principles, claiming that the debilitating effect of modern mass culture on audiences had presented the modern artist with considerable problems, and advising serious writers to avoid using certain words ‘which were once pregnant with meaning and rich in suggestive overtones’, such as ‘patriotism’, ‘blood’, ‘mother’, or ‘home’. Citing Joyce and Eliot as true revolutionaries, Boyd continued:

The younger writers have adopted different ideologies and creeds. There are Marxists, surrealists, and the rest. But the war came and upset everything. W. H.

42 Ibid., p. 46.
43 Ibid., p. 45.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
Auden and C. Isherwood, after writing a book, *Journey to a War*, now fled from a war; MacNeice has cleared the last ditch; Huxley is interested in yogi and Eastern Philosophy. All are safe in America.⁴⁶

The tone of disapproval here at the flight from Europe of Auden, Isherwood and MacNeice is echoed in many of the writings of the young Belfast poets during the war. The Communist tendencies of that older generation had been swiftly discredited by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1939, a circumstance which perhaps explains the reluctance of this younger body of creative writers in Queen’s to adhere to existing political groupings.⁴⁷ From the content of the magazine it is clear that the poetry of Auden and his contemporaries remained much on the minds of Greacen and his contemporaries, however.⁴⁸ Towards the back of that same issue Greacen reports on the first meeting of ‘A New Group The Verse and Drama Reading Society’, at which the Englishman Harold F. Brooks, an assistant lecturer attached to the English department during the war, spoke on the influence of Wilfred Owen on poets of the 1930s. The article concludes thus:

After dealing with Messrs. Auden, Spender and MacNeice, Dr Brooks brought the talk to a fitting conclusion by having a passage read from Mr T.S. Eliot’s recently published ‘East Coker’.

The next meeting will take place in the English Seminar on January 16, 1941, when we shall read Messrs. Auden and Isherwood’s ‘The Ascent of F6’.⁴⁹

The following issue, however, reported that ‘First this term we ascended Auden and Isherwood’s *F.6*. Whether it was exhaustion of the mountain air that turned our heads, I

⁴⁶ Jack Boyd, ‘Words & Emotions in Contemporary Literature’, *New Northman*, VIII.3 (Winter 1940-1941), p. 54. It seems likely that this was John Boyd, later editor of the little magazine *Lagan* and a friend of both Greacen and McFadden.
⁴⁷ In the province itself, the hegemonic nature of unionist rule also undoubtedly depressed many younger writers of the time and discouraged them from any involvement with existing political parties and institutions at a local level.
⁴⁸ Auden’s poetry was also popular with non-academic readers in Belfast at the time. Moya Woodside reports that at a meeting of ten friends in October 1940 to discuss forming a winter reading group, one contributor recalled having just read ‘September 1940’ and ‘Refugee Blues’ one night when the air-raid siren sounded (Woodside, MOS462, 26 October 1940).
cannot say, but at our next meeting we read A.A. Milne’s *Mr Pim Passes By*. The interest in these writers is hardly unusual, since Auden, Isherwood and Spender had perhaps the highest public profiles of poets at this time, but the references to Auden and his contemporaries do encourage the idea that taking control of the *New Northman* was part of a larger project to create in Belfast a new group, which defined itself (in part) against poets of the previous decade.

In her obituary of Robert Greacen, Patricia Craig certainly encouraged the appreciation of a group of writers in Belfast during the war, and went some way to correcting the omission that had so angered McFadden:

A coterie of talented and nonconformist writers was evolving in Belfast, against the odds: as well as Greacen and McFadden, it included authors and BBC men such as John Boyd and Sam Hanna Bell, novelists, poets, critics and dramatists. It was, in some sense, presided over by writers of a slightly older vintage, like the poet John Hewitt — and it bridged the gap between Louis MacNeice/W.R. Rodgers and the 1960s generation of Heaney-Longley-Mahon.

It is important not to overstate the importance of such a ‘coterie’: it is arguable that the emergence of such a group was inevitable in a city with comparatively few outlets for publication and a muted tradition of creative writing, and that resident writers assembled and interacted simply because they wrote at all, rather than because they adhered to any distinct literary or political ideology. It could be argued that in Belfast at this time the practice of writing itself constituted nonconformity. In such a way, and as Craig implies, there was considerable overlap between older and younger generations of writers in the city: the little magazine *Lagan*, for example, carried poems by...

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51 Roy McFadden seems to have had reservations about the idea of poetic groupings, writing in ‘The Poet’s Audience’ that:

> From time to time in the history of literature, poets become aware of the need for an audience. We saw it most recently in the Thirties with Auden, Spender and C Day Lewis. The desire to belong to a group is, of course, a natural one; but when it reaches the point of a poet attempting in his poetry to express a group feeling then it becomes a real danger: for any group feeling or consciousness exists at a very low level: most patriotism, desire for national vengeance; adoration of some national idol. A poet is not a television set. He is an individual concerned with his own experiences and its translation into something significant in terms of the past and present.

(McFadden Papers, MP5, unpublished, single sheet handwritten).
McFadden alongside contributions by older writers such as Sam Hanna Bell, Joseph Tomelty, Hewitt and Rodgers. However, in the introduction to the collection *Lyra* (1942), its editors Comfort and Greacen are certainly keen to foster the impression of a group of young writers in Northern Ireland (with Greacen himself at its head), as they write that ‘The Irish-Ulster group, who are more like a school than any of the others, includes Greacen, McFadden, Gallen, and Brooks (who is English). They are evolving something which again is new, a form of poetic realism.’ This frustratingly nebulous categorisation of ‘poetic realism’ (there is no evidence that the editors are invoking the French film movement of the 1930s and 40s here) is swiftly followed by an attack on Stephen Spender: as we shall see elsewhere Greacen is often forthright in condemning what he is against, but less effective in articulating a positive alternative. Such shortcomings are entirely understandable, however, given that he and his contemporaries wrote against the vast and confusing background of the war, and were not yet twenty years old at the time of its declaration in 1939. However, the vehemence of some of their attacks on Auden and his contemporaries, in particular McFadden’s dismissals of Louis MacNeice, should not go unchallenged, nor should Greacen’s professed adherence to the New Apocalypse, a movement which in retrospect arguably faltered in the face of such upheaval.

There seems little ‘realism’ of any kind in the poems Greacen himself contributed to *Lyra*, none of which address the war directly: ‘Ship Wreck’ and ‘Down by the Cries’ evoke a vague and psychological world of anonymous caves and waves, though the ‘patter / Of disciplined boots’ heard in the latter hints at militarisation. The editorial is implicitly critical of Spender for asking why younger poets offered no

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53 Alex Comfort and Robert Greacen, ‘A Word from the Editors’, in *Lyra: an anthology of new lyric*, ed. by Comfort and Greacen (Billericay, Essex: The Grey Walls Press, 1942), pp. 12-14 (p. 13). However, in the same introduction Comfort and Greacen also claimed that ‘Any attempt to represent it as a school is perversity pure and simple. Its sole object is to collect and present in a permanent binding poems which the editors felt deserving of a wider public’ (p. 12) and that ‘The fact that the book becomes, of itself, a contribution to a new romanticism, is again a reflection of our taste.’ (p. 13)

54 The ‘New Apocalypse’ is a somewhat nebulous term. It has been described as

A group of writers who flourished briefly as a group in the 1940s, united by a reaction against what they saw as the ‘classicism’ of W.H. Auden. It was characterized by wild, turbulent, and at times surreal imagery. They described themselves as ‘anti-cerebral’, claiming a ‘large, accepting attitude to life’, invoked the name of D.H. Lawrence, and approved of Dylan Thomas. George Barker, Vernon Watkins, and Henry Treece were associated with the movement.


imaginative analysis of ‘the struggle in which we are engaged’ (Comfort and Greacen suggest that younger poets see the war instead as a ‘cosmic calamity like the rain or the big winds’) so the mention of a father ‘Soldiering his introspection to the daily struggle’ in Greacen’s own ‘Lines for Friends expecting a Baby at Christmas 1941’ is indicative of the problematic inconsistencies between his prose and his poetry.\textsuperscript{56} It is hard to identify a coherent approach or adherence to a particular set of views or beliefs in the writings of Greacen and McFadden: Terence Brown has described how the young poets’ attempts to follow the New Apocalypse during the war were largely unsuccessful, and by 1976 (the year after Brown’s \textit{Northern Voices} was published) Greacen himself admitted that he and McFadden had merely ‘fellow-travelled’ with the movement.\textsuperscript{57} There are abundant contradictions between the poetry and prose of both writers during the war. Greacen may have attempted to turn the \textit{New Northman} into an organ of the New Apocalypse movement, publishing contributions from such luminaries as Henry Treece and Greacen’s later collaborator Alex Comfort, but, as Brown observes, the influences on his early poetry can also be traced to the ‘Pylon’ school. There is also considerable dissonance between Roy McFadden’s poetry and prose. McFadden may have claimed boldly in \textit{The Bell} in 1943 that ‘The past, as we have realised in the north, has no virtue except in so far as it may point a moral for the present’, but in the poem ‘The Pattern’, published in the collection \textit{Swords and Ploughshares} that same year he wrote that ‘out of the frail / Flotsam of the shipwrecked centuries, / I speak, builded with their bone and anger.’\textsuperscript{58}

I do not believe that the complex, crooked and disputed faultlines of the New Apocalypse, New Realism, Surrealism, Personalism and Neo Romanticism are of much use in the context of Northern Ireland: unlike London, the poetic community in the province was too small, and, as McFadden implies in the \textit{Force 10} article, too bound by the limits imposed by the timeframe of the war, to sustain similar fractures or the ensuing competition between such groups. Robin Skelton has suggested that the New Apocalypse ‘all boiled down to [...] a general discontent with the social-objective way of writing which prevailed in the thirties, plus some rather vague ideas about the


importance of “mythical” imagery. It is enough to say that Greacen, McFadden, Gallen and Gillespie were young men of the left of centre, though more anti-political than apolitical, collaborators for a time, poets who attempted a rejection of Ireland’s historical divisions and preoccupations and were of a reasonably romantic sensibility. What does encourage the idea of a group at this time is the contextual background of the Second World War, which both encouraged creative endeavour and enabled the dissemination of the results of such endeavour, undoubtedly granting these young poets far higher profiles than they could have expected in peacetime. As Derek Stanford has observed in his memoir of the 1940s: ‘Literary movements, especially in Britain, can subsist on a bare minimum of theory. Far more indispensable to them are willing or sympathetic editors and publishers.’ The young northern poets inspired some curious boosterism on the part of the Belfast newspaper the *Northern Whig*, for example, which published an article in late 1941 with the headline ‘Art Soars in North, Declines in South’, citing the current number of the *New Northman* and the poetry of Greacen and McFadden. The following January the newspaper hailed the fact that ‘More and more undergraduates and members of staff are taking to the writing of poems and short stories’, posed the oblique question ‘Queen’s and the Arts: A New Literary Movement?’, and claimed that ‘They Will Tell The South’. The *Whig* clearly had its own cross-border agenda, but such headlines show how the advent of war encouraged northern poetry to define itself against southern modes of expression.

The new direction taken by the *New Northman* under Greacen and Gallen was not favoured by all, however. In the following issue (Spring 1941), the Hibernophobic England-based playwright St John Ervine was stinging in his criticisms, in an essay spread over three pages entitled ‘What’s wrong with the “New Northman”’. Describing Oxbridge literary magazines (whose reach Greacen apparently wished to emulate) as ‘sludge’ he attacks the *New Northman* on the grounds that it lacks value for money for the outsider, being filled with trivia about clubs of relevance only to Queen’s students.

61 I have been unable to locate an exact reference for this article. A cutting is included in Roy McFadden’s cuttings scrapbook (McFadden Papers, CN2) dated 4 November 1941, but the article does not appear in that day’s edition of the newspaper nor in any of the editions of the *Northern Whig* from that week held in the National Library of Ireland. It seems likely that the date was wrongly recorded by McFadden himself.
The public, he says, is not interested in amateurs or experiments, and he deplores the publication of:

...feeble imitations of sour and disgruntled ‘modern’ poems, derived stuff whose most startling novelty is an abstention from initial capital letters, whose deepest defect is a tendency to confuse dull prose with duller verse, and stories which seem to have been written by persons who were begotten and born in underground urinals.  

Ervine also criticised the intentional editorial avoidance of political matters, urging the magazine to address the economic disparities between Northern Ireland and the southern state, and warning of the threat posed by the prospect of a united Ireland to Belfast’s status as a leading industrial city. Letters to the magazine also took issue with Greacen’s pronouncements: the poet and playwright Thomas Carnduff wrote ‘as a worker’ that ‘Queen’s University, or anything emanating from that institution, means very little to me,’ and R.P. Maybin called for more discussion of war aims. At Queen’s, fellow students also quickly made their dislike of the changes known, and perhaps significantly the New Northman reverted to the title of The Northman for the Winter 1941-1942 issue. A year after that, in a magazine half its previous size and under a redesigned masthead, new editors wrote that in its previous incarnation the ‘almost exclusively literary journal [...] was singularly deficient in interest for the ordinary Queen’s student, not excluding the Arts faculty’, and reassured readers that they aimed to appeal to broader tastes and focus more on university matters. Greacen’s contributions, both poetic and critical, were still published in this issue, but in 1943 he left Belfast for Dublin. The attempt to make Queen’s the centre of a new poetic movement had failed, and it was not until twenty years later that this ambition came to fruition.
Greacen’s Poundian roles as collaborator, convenor and organiser of poetry and poets during the 1940s, in Belfast, then Dublin and London, were arguably as important as his own poetic career. During that decade, in addition to the *New Northman* and his own collections *One Recent Evening* (1944) and *The Undying Day* (1948) Greacen also edited *Poems from Ulster* (1942); *Lyra* (1942) with Alex Comfort; *On the Barricades* (1944) with Bruce Williamson and Valentin Iremonger; *Northern Harvest* (1944) and its successor *Irish Harvest* (1946); and *Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1949), again with Iremonger. Listing most of these in a letter to Greacen in 1963, McFadden joked that during the forties his friend had been ‘anthologising the unedited conscience of his race [...] with a zeal and persistence that haven’t been repeated since.’

Before Greacen was twenty-one his work had been published in *Horizon* and *The Bell*, the pre-eminent literary journals in London and Dublin. Greacen admitted in his memoirs that his academic career at Queen’s was fatally damaged by his involvement in literary ventures, and having abandoned his degree he left for Dublin in 1943, to pursue a diploma in Social Studies at Trinity College. His various professed adventures in England during the war (he claimed in his memoirs to have obtained assistance in breaching the travel restrictions with the help of an RUC sergeant who was a friend of an aunt) open up connections with the literary life of wartime London, as he worked with Alex Comfort and encountered, amongst others, Cyril Connolly, Reginald Moore, Tambimuttu, and Stephen Spender himself.

In the early years of the war Greacen’s professed antipathy towards the 1930s poets was sustained, however. In 1942 he published the slim volume *Poems From Ulster*, which collected poems by himself, Brooks, Comfort, Gallen and McFadden, as well as Leslie Gillespie and Nicholas Moore. Greacen’s introduction deliberately contrasted the approach of these younger poets with the older generation of Auden and his contemporaries:

One of the most significant facts for the potential poets of the Forties was the disintegration of the group that had attracted so much attention during the previous decade. Some of them had gone to the USA; New Verse was

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68 Letter from McFadden to Greacen, 27 April 1963, Greacen Collection, Box 4, File 5.
discontinued, New Writing became less frequent and less dynamic, and a sea of silence swamped the vociferous literati who had told us so often of their devotion to the extreme left. ... There has been a marked turning away from the frequently tinsel-like objectivity of the Thirties, and a new sincerity, simplicity and ardour have replaced the work of the effete hangers-on of the Auden-Spender-MacNeice-Lewis movement, of which only the quadruple alliance remains.72

The phrase 'vociferous literati' had already appeared in Greacen's third New Northman editorial in Summer 1941 (the recycling of material under different titles would continue throughout his prose writing career) in which he went on to take issue with 'Objective Reporters, as some of them were called, [who] took to alcohol or writing scenarios for Hollywood, in Hollywood, having left too hurriedly even to pack their pylons into their suitcases.73 Such barbs as these may have been designed to disassociate Greacen's own work from that of these antecedents, since unfavourable comparisons were clearly being made at the time: that same Summer 1941 edition of the New Northman carried a letter from Charles Monteith, later a commissioning editor and subsequently chairman of Faber and Faber, at that time serving in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and based in Northern Ireland. Monteith argued that in the province 'all our writers are caught in a lethal dilemma, from which they must escape or die – London or Dublin, which?' and criticised the muddled attempts of young writers to adhere to left-wing ideas, claiming that their chronic inability to choose whether to follow routes suggested by the work of Auden and Spender or to subscribe to an Irish nationalist agenda had weakened Ulster literature:

You will see what I mean if you examine the work of Mr. Greacen, the most ambitious and promising of your poets. He evidently considers himself bound to write dutiful imitations of Auden and work himself into synthetical social rages. But after dreary passages of disjointed statements and confused imagery, he

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73 R.G., 'New “New” Writing', New Northman, IX.2 (Summer 1941), 17-18 (p. 17).
suddenly writes genuine poetry about Ireland and its curious spirituality which 'haunts life'.

It is to Greacen's credit that he was willing as editor to publish such penetrating and uncomplimentary assessments of his own work, which in this case identifies poetic debts that he has publicly disavowed.

The idea that writers in the province had felt compelled, since partition, to choose between the literature of England and that of the newly independent southern state was pervasive, and came under considerable scrutiny during the war. John Hewitt's explorations of regionalist ideas clearly attempted to resolve this dilemma, but the writings of Roy McFadden, who consistently displays a closer affiliation with the place of his birth than his friend Greacen, also repeatedly engage with the problem. Written during the early years of the war, McFadden's unpublished essay 'Life and Writing in North East Ulster' outlines some untapped subject matter for the Protestant writer in Belfast:

It is by the Protestant writer that the problem awaits solution: the problem of seizing the sprawling city of Belfast with its furtive, cobbled side-streets and their slogans (No Pope Here; Remember 1690; Up the I.R.A.): the ugly city circled with tumbling hills and straggling fields, whose workers are only a few generations removed from the soil: Queen's Bridge thronged with the 'Island men' returning from the shipyard: the Falls road with the cage-cars on petrol: of taking this great blustering, tragi-comical mass and shaking a coherent literature out of it. Nowhere else in the world is there so much vivid material crying out to be used.

The choice before the Ulster Protestant writer has long been one of taking the boat to England or the train to Dublin. Ruled by a political party whose knowledge of history begins and ends with 1690, he has had little

\[74\]Charles M. Monteith, 'Letter to the Editor', New Northman, IX.2 (Summer 1941), p. 31. Appropriately enough, considering his later role at Faber and Faber, Monteith also offered advice on altering the design of the magazine, and suggested that the visual side of the publication had been neglected:

Finally, change the format of the magazine. At the moment it is tall, thin, grey, and flat chested, like a middle-aged virgin. Cut the size of the pages in half and make it about the same shape as Horizon, remove the indecisive lino cut from the cover and get someone (Colin Middleton?) to design a new cover, and a new colour for it.

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opportunity of discovering that his province had a rich culture and civilisation of its own.\(^75\)

Evocative descriptions of Belfast scenes seem to provide the basis for McFadden’s tangible optimism at this time that the province can develop its own modern tradition of writing, informed by political strife and realist industrial imagery.\(^76\)

The outbreak of the Second World War may have presented younger poets in Northern Ireland with an opportunity to escape the historic choice outlined by McFadden and Monteith. If Greacen attacked the English poets of the Auden generation, he clearly had no intention of following traditional Irish poetic forms. In a letter to the *Irish Times*, published on July 11, 1941, Greacen provoked outrage with talk of ‘poetical impotence and sterility’ in Ireland, and a denunciation of the ‘inlooking’ nationalism of preceding generations. Most of the letter was reprinted as part of a longer editorial entitled ‘Modern Irish Poetry’ in the *New Northman* later that year:

> Clique writing about Cathleen ni Houlihan and Brian Boru, like the private allusions of the minor members of the English ‘Pylon’ School of the Thirties, will leave little or no impression on the wider world of letters, when there is the urgent necessity for the reaffirmation and the reassessment of the elemental human values that have come into brutal contact with bomb and bayonet.

He goes on to suggest that Irish poetry should be a ‘spearhead of progressive thought’ and that it ‘should show an awareness of modern trends without being slavishly imitative either of the later Yeats or of TS Eliot or of the MacNeice-Auden-Spender-Lewis School?’\(^77\) Greacen’s references to pylons at this time are important. The collective term “‘Pylon’ School’, deriving from Spender’s poem ‘The Pylons’, was a useful if reductionist way of grouping together these poets of the 1930s who had frequently dealt in industrial imagery, but 1941 also saw the publication of Louis

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\(^{75}\) Roy McFadden, ‘Life and Writing in North-East Ulster’, McFadden Papers, MP5, p. 7.

\(^{76}\) A similar letter from John Betjeman to John Hewitt congratulated Hewitt on his poem ‘Conacre’ and asked ‘Would you ever do a descriptive poem of Belfast? It has never been done – a Belfast Sunday, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th Presbyterian Churches &c!, the trams, the villas, the Northern Whig, the Newsletter, the Irish News, the redstreets, the wharves, the clock tower, the great hills waiting outside..’ (undated letter from John Betjeman to John Hewitt, Hewitt Papers, PRONI, D/3838/7/18/21)

\(^{77}\) ‘Modern Irish Poetry’, *New Northman*, X.3 (Autumn 1941), 33-34 (p. 33).
MacNeice’s critical study *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats*, the introduction of which describes hearing of the declaration of war whilst in Galway and contemplating the writing of the book itself:

As soon as I heard on the wireless of the outbreak of war, Galway became unreal. And Yeats and his poetry became unreal also. [...] My friends had been writing for years about the ‘facts’ of psychology, politics, science, economics, but the fact of war made their writing seem as remote as the pleasure dome of Xanadu. For war spares neither the poetry of Xanadu nor the poetry of pylons.78

In the face of a politically fractious and increasingly technologically sophisticated world, demonstrably capable of annihilating culture of any kind, MacNeice felt that the poetry of his contemporaries had swiftly been rendered irrelevant. His perception that Galway too ‘became unreal’ is also telling, implying that the outbreak of war had similarly swiftly effected a disconnection between Ireland and the now pressing reality of war.

Echoes of MacNeice’s introduction are clearly discernible in Greacen’s own, less nuanced, dismissal of both Irish ‘clique writing’ and English poetry of the 1930s as outmoded and anachronistic in the face of the war. Greacen’s editorial manifestos are strident when condemning the kind of poetry he dislikes, but vague when attempting to articulate what he is in favour of. He writes in his first editorial for the *New Northman* in 1940 of the need for a ‘new character’ and ‘sweeter verse, more consideration for common standards of taste’, argues in the 1941 ‘Modern Irish Poetry’ essay that ‘Simplicity, sensuousness and passion, as Milton holds, together with artistic and intellectual courage and honesty, are the only paths that lead to the truly intense poetic focus’, and in *The Bell* two years later claims that ‘It took the explosion of 1939 to release pent-up, genuine feeling and energy, and to quicken the sense of contemporary reality’.79 None of this means very much at all. However, it is possible to identify three main forces against which Greacen positions himself during the Second World War: the sectarian culture and politics of Northern Ireland at that time, the neutrality of the southern state, and the poetry of W.H. Auden and his contemporaries published over

the previous decade. Much of the poetry written and published by Greacen and his friends over the war years reacts against these pressures and influences. Linda Shires has argued that young British poets of the Second World War ‘could no longer accept the tone, idiom and interests of the Auden generation’ but that ‘the poets who made their reputations in the forties were responding to their literary forefathers – in mimicry and in defiance – as well as to their own historical time.’

Both mimicry and defiance can be read in the poetry and prose of both Greacen and McFadden at this time. It is worth considering in particular the impact of the poetry of Louis MacNeice on their work: the older poet’s weary and vituperative attitude to the place of his birth, his fierce condemnation of neutrality, and his own status as a member of a larger group of poets, are all factors which help to establish him as an important companion to the younger generation, but it is in the poetry itself that his influence can be most clearly felt. Greacen’s attitude towards Auden softened considerably over the decades. On the older poet’s death in 1973 he wrote that ‘I very much feel Auden’s loss. He was the greatest. A nice guy, too’, and a poem published the following year described Auden as the ‘Doctor’s son who x-rayed sick Europe’, whose ‘ageing face mapped out an era’s neurosis’, and concluded with the lines ‘Wordman Extraordinary, find in Valhalla/The Great Good Place of skald and hero.’

In *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (1976) Samuel Hynes notes the symbolic importance of journeys, especially by rail, and of border and frontier imagery to poems by W.H. Auden and his contemporaries, mindful in this observation, perhaps, of Auden’s ‘Night Mail’ and Spender’s ‘The Express’ and ‘View from a Train’. Trains, like pylons, symbolised modernity, and similarly cut across natural landscapes, but with a speed and noise which could be more effectively incorporated into the poetry. Hynes claims that the crossing of borders had both personal and political implications: whilst a young man had to cross a border into the

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81 Letter from Greacen to Derek Stanford, 4 October 1973, Greacen Collection, Box 1, File 1; Greacen, ‘Auden’, *Hibernia*, 24 May 1974, p. 15. Greacen apparently wrote to Auden in 1972, asking for his support for a round robin letter expressing concern at the ‘increasing nihilism of our culture’, circulated to thirty poets and published in the London *Times*. He reported that ‘We had replies from four-fifths, most of them sympathetic but some a little eccentric’ and said that Auden’s letter had been returned with a signature but no covering letter, weeks after the original had been printed in the newspaper (PHS, ‘The *Times Diary*, *The Times*, 10 March 1972, p. 14).
unknown to become a man of action, continental Europe’s fragile and falling borders had entered the poetic consciousness, symbolic of divisions between war and peace, tyranny and freedom.82

For some writers in Belfast during the Second World War, the cross border journey between that city and Dublin seems to have been an enduring preoccupation, as were the cultural, sensual and social differences between the cities, inevitably heightened during the war years. These differences were a source of some anxiety to Northern writers, anxiety that manifested itself at times in the poetry as defiance towards the southern state, often involving a degree of moral indignation over Irish neutrality, but that was tempered by an underlying self-consciousness regarding the apparent inferiority of Belfast’s cultural and literary status in comparison with its southern neighbour. Dublin’s exoticism and Belfast’s recalcitrance are thus loaded with considerable ambiguity in the poetry of Greacen and McFadden, where the differences between the two cities in wartime are explored with the sense that the distance of eighty-seven miles between the two is subject to considerable elasticity, as recalled by Greacen in 1974:

As a child I used to go into the station at Great Victoria Street and watch the arrival and departure of the steam trains and dream of journeys to such distant and romantic places as Derry and Omagh. Dublin then seemed as unlikely a destination for me as Outer Mongolia.83

Train journeys also figure heavily in the journalism of the Protestant nationalist writer Denis Ireland, a frequent contributor to the New Northman, Lagan and The Bell during the war.84 The essay ‘Leaves from a Journal’ describes travelling by train from Belfast to Dublin in the early years of the war to contribute to a radio broadcast, and focuses on a house on the border, the sight of which has preoccupied Ireland over the thirty-five years he has been taking this journey:

84 I shall examine the political writings of Denis Ireland in greater detail in the fourth chapter of this thesis.
...if a kind of psychic participation in the life of a house conveys anything of ownership, then the house is practically mine already. It stands to one side of the black boggy tableland over which the railway runs, on the lower slopes of a heavily wooded mountain: a square, honest-looking house of the kind you find dotted about the Irish countryside: the kind of house in which if there is a gun-room there is probably also a library, a square, friendly room filled with the musty smell of books that no one has read, or possibly even disturbed, for half a century.

Denis Ireland then imagines inhabiting this house, at once archetypal and specific, whose rooms would be decorated with busts or pictures of Henry Grattan and John Philpot Curran:

I could then lay down my *Irish Press* or *Belfast News-Letter*, as the case may be, my situation being both geographically and culturally a sort of half-way house between them, and instead of being disturbed by the inanities of the present, I could lean back in my library chair and be not entertained but instructed by my pictorial patriots...

Denis Ireland’s reverie, in its creation of a literal and symbolic half-way house, demonstrates a desire to escape or resolve a perceived oppositional cultural stand-off between Belfast and Dublin, and his recourse to 19th century liberal Protestant statesmen suggests a complementary frustration with 20th century Irish politics and ‘the inanities of the present’. This approach to anti-partitionism was reflected in the pages of *The Bell* during the war, which under Seán Ó Faoláin devoted three issues in the early 1940s to northern matters and to which Ireland, Greacen and McFadden were contributors. Roy McFadden’s poem ‘Train at Midnight’ from his first published collection *Swords and Ploughshares* (1943) also suggests a train journey as a means of traversing and transcending political conflicts linked to the land itself:

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85 Denis Ireland, ‘Leaves from a Journal’, *New Northman*, VIII.3 (Winter 1940-1941), 53-4 (pp. 53-4). In the fourth chapter of this thesis I will explore the nationalist MP Cahir Healy’s anti-partitionist short story *A Hired Boy on the Border* (1944), which also describes a house that spans the border.
Train, hurrying over hungry lean
Insurgent fields flaunting their green
Tatters of flags, pause to aver
Your anger and compassion for
This unreal country, always out of time.  

The ‘insurgent fields’ rendered as ‘green / Tatters of flags’ symbolise an exhausted, scarred, yet still active and defiant (‘flaunting’) Irish nationalism, cut across by the speed and strength of the train, which is either asked or demanded to pause, and voice its ‘anger and compassion’. This ‘anger’, along with the description of an ‘unreal country, always out of time’ suggests some exasperation, even from the professed pacifist McFadden, at the southern state’s wilful avoidance of the contemporary European political turmoil, with the word ‘unreal’ directly echoing MacNeice’s recollection of Galway as ‘unreal’ at the outbreak of war in The Poetry of W.B. Yeats. Flags aside, the journey in ‘Train at Midnight’ is almost totally decontextualised, and is clearly less important than the train itself, an agent of moral reawakening for the nation, sending out an ‘arcade of smoke / A salutation that will wake / Dreamers across the countryside’.

Other wartime poems by Greacen and McFadden explore these realities and unrealities more explicitly, often in terms of a perceived polarity between the two largest Irish cities, and succeed in reinforcing the oppositional relationship which Denis Ireland sought to escape. Crudely speaking, this established Belfast as industrially productive but culturally barren and afflicted by sectarian conflict, and Dublin as culturally vibrant but morally suspect. Such a perception of Belfast, though complicated by the Second World War, certainly survived the 1940s and arguably endured throughout the second half of the twentieth century, a point made particularly forcefully by Edna Longley in ‘A Barbarous Nook: The Writer and Belfast’. In his memoirs Greacen recalls cultural activity in Belfast during the 1930s and 40s as discredited and marginalised by powerful and intolerant political and religious forces, and appreciated only by a select band of dedicated practitioners. In a chapter entitled ‘Going South’ he

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87 Longley observes that ‘As regards “Literature in Belfast”, Belfast’s image, though most of its history, has combined Philistia with its other possible aspects as “Bigots-borough” (James Douglas’s coinage) or Cokestown-across-the-water.’ (Edna Longley, ‘A Barbarous Nook: The Writer and Belfast’, in The Living Stream, pp. 86-105 (p. 86).
wrote 'I can sum up my reasons for going south to Dublin in a word – escape. I was
dissatisfied with my personal life in Belfast. I felt oppressed by the general narrowness
and philistinism. I wanted new doors to open, new opportunities.'\textsuperscript{88} Greacen's poem
'Cycling to Dublin', published in \textit{One Recent Evening} in 1944 and dedicated to Leslie
Gillespie, a fellow undergraduate poet at Queen's, also describes these prevailing
attitudes:

We were the Northmen, hard with hoarded words on tongue,
Driven down by home disgust to the broad lands and rich talk,
To the country of poets and pubs and cow-dung
Spouting and shouting from every stalk \textsuperscript{89}

In this third stanza, the 'hoarded words' imply that the cycling friends feel unable to
express themselves fully as poets within the identity of a 'Northman' (the allusion to
the magazine is salient) and have been driven south by a desire to vent their emotions
away from the disapproval of others. The word 'hoarded' is evocative of hidden and
accumulated treasure, and, like McFadden's essay 'Life and Writing in North East
Ulster', suggests that a rich seam of northern experience can be mined by young writers
under the right conditions. It is also worth remembering that Dublin provided Greacen
and some of his friends with the first professional outlet for their works in the form of
the Gayfield Press, founded by Blánaid Salkeld and her son Gavin in 1937, and which
produced limited editions of single poems with woodcut illustrations by local artists.\textsuperscript{90}
These included Greacen's 'The Bird', Maurice James Craig's 'Black Swans' and Roy
McFadden's 'Russian Summer'.\textsuperscript{91} 'Cycling to Dublin' does not present crossing the
border as some kind of panacea to their problems, since the southern state is rendered in
terms which conform to the chaotic, rural, and over-emotional stereotype of the Celtic
other, 'spouting and shouting'. The promiscuous implications of 'spouting' and 'stalk'
are reinforced by the attractions of 'Dublin's fair city' as they appear in the clichéd and
italicised refrain, the 'colleens, fair colleens', who are 'ever so pretty'. The journey
south offers an escape from a repressive environment for the northmen, and the

\textsuperscript{88} Greacen, \textit{Sash}, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{90} 'Salkeld, Blánaid', in \textit{The Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing}, ed. by Lorna Sage (Cambridge:
\textsuperscript{91} McFadden, 'The Belfast Forties', \textit{Force 10} (Autumn 1994), p. 68.
southern state crucially is credited as a country of ‘poets’, but a degree of moral disapproval may be read in Greacen’s brief evocation of drunken chaos which unravels in ellipsis.

Such a reading is encouraged by the poem which follows ‘Cycling to Dublin’ in Greacen’s first published collection One Recent Evening (1944), ‘Memories of Dublin’, subtitled ‘November, 1940’ which illustrates more fully Greacen’s relationship with the city:

Clashing coloured life and gaiety,
Dirt and yells, and the shrill suspense
Of empty alley-ways; Blackpool lights; cooking smells.
All this in past or future tense.

The façades of the eighteenth century –
Burke and Goldsmith frozen for posterity,
Who whistle and spit near culture’s sanctuary,
And drawl opinions on an isolated war.
[...]
The city is so much scenery from the Abbey:
The people are waxen marionettes.
For them, the rush for drinks and shabby
Buses; then nausea, dull, bottled joy in heart.92

Here the city is again the location for drinking and shouting, twinned here with Blackpool, the British cultural capital of licentiousness. During the war Dublin offered sensory pleasures forbidden in the north: it was, as Greacen recalled in 1976, a ‘ville lumière, offering steak and nylons to ill-fed Northerners’.93 Here the southern capital’s ‘lights’ distinguish it from Belfast, where the blackout remained in force, whilst ‘cooking smells’ hint at the widespread availability in Éire of foodstuffs that were subject to rationing north of the border. The poem is jealous of the ‘colours of all spectrums’ and displays an adolescent fascination with ‘Shannon’s virility’. Comparison with another English city might establish Dublin here as an alternate Soho

(the post-war destination for a number of Irish writers) for northmen starved in wartime of sex, whiskey, bacon and eggs.\textsuperscript{94}

The invocation of Burke and Goldsmith, whose statues appear either side of the entrance to Trinity College, clearly complicates ‘Memories of Dublin’, however. Their status as ‘frozen’ guardians of this academic and cultural ‘sanctuary’ is immediately undermined by the apparent whistling and spitting of the statues themselves. Greacen’s disapproval of those in Dublin who drawl ‘opinions on an isolated war’ is evident however, and matters are perhaps clarified by a later poem whose title echoes this line. ‘On the Sense of Isolation in War-Time Ireland’, from *The Undying Day* (1948) again invokes Burke, and also recapitulates derogatory national stereotypes. The poem begins by describing ‘We’ Irish as ‘that vainly violent, lawless crew / Whose generous verve leaves all to chance / But seldom halts the irregular advance’, continuing to list a series of Anglo-Irish writers of the past, the ‘unfettered great’ who ‘gave no inch to fate’ and who ‘shall make the Anglo-Irishry endure’: Burke, Swift, Sheridan, Congreve, Goldsmith, Moore and Yeats, the last of whose ‘shadow falls across the Liffey still / Pressing its callous spell on Irish will.’ Greacen’s attitude towards these forebears is ambivalent, but he calls upon them as a means of disparaging the present crop of Dublin writers, cast as ‘yes-men glimmer[ing] in pretence, / Secure in their own dribbling competence’, in contrast with their antecedents who ‘the world for subject took / And wed the fearless thesis to their book’. The poem ends with the sarcastic lines ‘So now in days of fevered fret and stress / Let Europe measure out our Irishness!’, and can be seen to address the cultural implications of Irish neutrality, indicting Dublin and its writers with myopic introversion for concentrating on local concerns at a time of international crisis and freezing out ‘those who speak with honest passion’.\textsuperscript{95}

The supposedly carefree atmosphere of wartime Dublin is much dwelt upon by the young northern poets. Belfast-born Maurice J. Craig’s poem ‘Kilcarty to Dublin’, dated 1943, describes how:

...life goes on in the last lit city
Just in the way it always has done

\textsuperscript{94} Ironically, Séan Ó Faoláin, a southern visitor to Belfast, wrote of the city in *An Irish Journey* (1940) that ‘There is no aristocracy – no culture – no grace – no leisure worthy of the name. It all boils down to mixed grills, double whiskies, dividends, movies, and these strolling, homeless, hate-driven poor.’ (Ó Faoláin, *An Irish Journey* (London, New York, Toronto: Longman, 1940), p. 269)

And pity is lost on the tongues of the witty
And the wolf at the door is a figure of fun.96

In Greacen's 'Poem to K.D.' he sends 'greetings' to a friend in London:

From this careless Augustan city of grace and slums,
Where in Merrion Square the whispers of death
Gauze over the rhododendrons and the parched grass.
I greet you from a neutral country in a neutral hour
When the blood pace slows and nothing stirs
But the leaves in the parks, so gently:
So gently that not even the newspaper headlines
Can fluster the plumes of swans, gliding, gliding,
As on a lake of fire, fringed by pink water.97

Dublin's parks were a common reference point for both Greacen and Roy McFadden. In 'St Stephen's Green, Dublin', published in Flowers for a Lady (1945), McFadden also sends a 'greeting' from neutral Dublin, emphasising the extent to which he feels detached from home in these opening lines:

The north lies backward in a fold of time.
I send you greeting from the singing south
Where there is sun and unselfconscious laughter.98

Such descriptions of Dublin's untroubled wartime gaiety are familiar, but the idea of Northern Ireland lying 'backward in a fold of time' is unusual. The phrase illustrates the extent to which the histories of the two cities have further diverged as a result of the Second World War, but inverts the perception that, due to its belligerent status, it is Belfast, rather than Dublin, that was of greater contemporary consequence. This view underpins much of the poetry examined in this chapter, and was asserted with force by Seán Ó Faoláin, who wrote in The Bell in July 1942 that 'the strength of the North is

that she does live and act in the Now. Belfast has an immediacy. Ulster has a contemporaneity. With the first line of ‘St Stephen’s Green, Dublin’, repeated at the beginning of its penultimate stanza, McFadden suggests that south of the border Belfast’s experiences may be forgotten, ignored, or consigned to history, before outlining in similarly oblique terms over the following eight stanzas the folly of so doing.

In this poem McFadden casts himself as an outsider in the southern state, ‘A foreign flower in your bleak midwinter garden,’ who has been psychologically scarred by unspecified traumatic experiences, and who carries death ‘Curled like a worm in the brain, twisting the eye, / Sharpening the casual word with bitterness.’ As a roving intermediary, he charges himself with the responsibility of warning carefree Dublin of its potential downfall:

Old city, with a young girl’s face,
Your mask is foreign to my broken streets.
Your easy laughter mocks the living dead.
Take heed of history, for I have seen
Such as you broken and swept away
As the sea smooths the footprints from the sand.
With all your wisdom, still remember this.

Here the mask of a ‘young girl’s face’ is contrasted with ‘broken streets’: the bomb-damaged urban landscape, we might assume, of Belfast, a reading encouraged by the portentous lines ‘I have seen / Such as you broken and swept away’, and the later reference to ‘bombs in the North’. McFadden’s use of the imagery of ‘broken streets’

101 Ibid., p. 272. Robert Greacen wrote of his friend that:

I was always amused by his suspicious attitude towards Dublin which, in some ways, differed little from that of a traditional Orangeman. He showed no interest in Dublin’s Augustan beauty or its easy going relaxed character. He tended to think that the city was a trap for the writer who would squander his energies and ideas in tavern talk.

(Greacen, Sash, p. 128).
102 This is a fair assumption, given that McFadden was present in Belfast at the time of the Easter Tuesday raid – indeed, his family home was so badly damaged that the McFaddens were forced to move to Lisburn (see ‘A Poet’s Michael McLaverty’, unpublished talk given at Ulster Arts Club, 7 May 1986.
perhaps constitutes an attempt to draw together the violent histories of the two cities – for residents of Belfast scenes of urban destruction were of urgent contemporary resonance, but for Dubliners the words might evoke memories of the devastation of the centre of their city during the Easter Rising a quarter of a century previously. Such relatively recent history is perhaps hinted at in McFadden’s appeals to the city itself, which is in contrast with many other cities presently at peace and ‘Proud with the arrogance of history’, to recall the fragility of ‘cultures, loves and histories’, which can ‘Drop with gulls into the quiet rivers / To float, face down into anonymous seas.’ McFadden’s entreaty to consider the seemingly inevitable mutability of all civilisations then widens to encompass the whole island, and crucially is made within earshot of Belfast’s wartime experience:

You who remember history, recollect
That history moves like rivers into seas,
Accepting no horizons: that its strands
Of generous sun and dancing limbs are drowned
Or spattered with white shipwreck, whiter bones.
This is an island out of step with time.
Listen to the other city sounds at night:
Bombs in the north, the stampede to the hills.  

McFadden overtly addresses the whole ‘island’ here, but these lines must surely be read as a warning primarily for the southern state, when Éire’s reluctance to involve itself in the present is contrasted with the air attack experienced by the inhabitants of Belfast, which forced them from their homes in a ‘stampede to the hills.’ The use of ‘island’ here may be compared with Louis MacNeice’s twice repeated use of the phrase ‘neutral island’ in the poem ‘Neutrality’, even when addressing the southern state’s neutrality. It

(McFadden Papers, MP27), and a handwritten, unpublished and untitled autobiographical fragment (MP35 (ix))).

104 As I noted in the Introduction to this thesis, this must be qualified by the acknowledgment that Dublin did suffer air attack during the war: bombs fell on the city in January and May 1941, the latter attack on the North Strand area killing thirty four and destroying hundreds of houses. Bombs also fell on Borris, Co Carlow, Drogheda, Wexford and the Curragh Racecourse, Co Kildare. However, it is incontrovertible that far more lives were lost and far more damage was incurred to infrastructure north of the border. See Wills, That Neutral Island, p. 208, p. 212, and Kearns, The Bombing of Dublin’s North Strand, 1941: The Untold Story.
is likely that the imaginative resonance of an 'island' in this context overrode the matter of the border. The influence of MacNeice’s poem may also be discerned in the reference to a strand scarred by ‘whiter bones’: ‘Neutrality’ ends with the gruesome spectacle of mackerel of the west of Ireland growing ‘fat – on the flesh of your kin’, a reference to the many sailors and merchant seamen who perished in the Battle of the Atlantic, whose bodies later washed up on beaches along the west coast of Ireland.105

Having addressed Dublin for the bulk of the ‘St Stephen’s Green, Dublin’, McFadden returns at the poem’s close to his ‘greeting’ to the North, culminating in these lines:

Where I walk neutral streets with calls to peace.
I send you greeting in a time of war,
When only those who love can dare to live,
When only those who love will never die.106

Unlike MacNeice, the avowedly pacifist McFadden is unable to attack Irish neutrality with serious venom: here he states his belief in love as a counter to the prevalent destruction. In ‘Dublin to Belfast: Wartime’, a much shorter poem also published in Flowers for a Lady, McFadden describes the return journey between the cities as ‘tunnel[ling] back to war’, another distancing effect which locates Dublin in its own time hole, immune to the effects of the conflict and unworried by the prospect of war, with ‘uncensored lights / Careless of retribution from the skies, / Unreprimanded and insouciant streets’:

You tunnel back to war, where licit light’s
A swinging arm redeeming the night sky,
Grabbing for midges dancing in the dark
Over the braced and vulnerable town:

Again McFadden insists on complicating matters, undercutting the tunnel metaphor with another striking image, shrinking an anti-aircraft searchlight to a mere torch beam searching for midges, rather than enemy aircraft, a move which would seem to

diminish, rather than emphasise, any sense of menace. Belfast is described as a ‘braced and vulnerable town’ however, and the poem’s closing lines further suggest that the city remains under threat. In ‘St Stephen’s Green, Dublin’, gulls are symbolic of the mutability of civilisations and cities, plunging into ‘quiet rivers’ to float ‘face down’ towards the sea: here again the birds appear as harbingers of potential disaster, as in the lines: ‘The brazen gantries and the querulous gulls / Harsh from the islands occupied by storm.’

The ‘gantries’ that appear here are perhaps as resonant of Belfast in poetry of the 1930s and 40s as Spender’s pylons or Auden’s gasworks were of England at the time. The English poets found strange beauty in their industrial landscapes, but the shipyard gantries of Belfast often appear in poetry as forbidding emblems of cruelty, or of religious and political conservatism. Gantries are of particular importance to Louis MacNeice’s renderings of the city during the 1930s. In ‘Belfast’ industrial and religious oppression are fused in one symbol as ‘Against the lurid over the stained water / Where hammers clang murderously on the girders / Like crucifixes the gantries stand’; famously in ‘Carrickfergus’ he describes his birthplace lying ‘between the mountain and the gantries’; while in ‘War Heroes’ he foresees soldiers returning to Belfast after a ten years war to see ‘dead men hanging in the gantries’ and ‘a lame bird limping on the quay’, the source, perhaps, of the ominous gantries and gulls in McFadden’s ‘Dublin to Belfast: Wartime’. Gantries are similarly imposing presences in Robert Greacen’s poem ‘Ulster’:

Standing under the wing of gantries,
The phallic sentinels of Belfast’s lough,
He ponders beneath pride’s vacant sneer,
Hating and loving futile majesty.

Like MacNeice’s ‘Belfast’, the one word title of ‘Ulster’ invites this poem to be read as an attempt to define the characteristics of the province, and as such it follows familiar lines, describing it as ‘firm and gaunt and black’, ‘coarse and ungrateful’, and asking whether it is ‘the mother-symbol / Of stolid, stupid sordidness?’, before hailing its soul.

‘tense with beauty’ and bursting in ‘fierce reticence’, at once ‘Old and grim like basalt, / Yet fresh in day’s caress.’

Greacen’s winged and ‘phallic’ gantries are reconstituted in animal and sexual terms, but retain as ‘sentinels’ the sense of foreboding (and, importantly, stasis) evoked by those in MacNeice’s poems. ‘Ulster’ was first published in the New Northman in Winter 1940-1941, the same issue in which Greacen as editor set out his non-political and literary vision for the magazine. The poem was printed facing Jack Boyd’s article which, as I have outlined, castigated MacNeice and his contemporaries for fleeing to America: the juxtaposition is demonstrative of MacNeice’s proximity to the poetry and prose of the younger generation, even as they disavowed him.

Edna Longley has written that ‘It is interesting that MacNeice, for whom Belfast was the first city, should have been in the vanguard of absorbing the city into English poetry generally’, but his impact on poetry in Northern Ireland during the war has yet to be fully traced. As I have suggested, many of Greacen and McFadden’s poems of wartime Belfast and Dublin betray the influence of MacNeice’s own pre-war and wartime poetic engagements with Ireland, the most quoted and most direct example of which was ‘Neutrality’, written in September 1942 following the death of his friend Graham Sheppard, who had drowned in the Atlantic following a German U-boat attack. The poem has been discussed at length by Clair Wills, amongst others, but what concerns me here is how MacNeice’s severely critical attitude to Ireland north and south during the 1930s and war years can be seen to resonate through the work of the younger poets.

In the sixteenth section of the lengthy autobiographical poem Autumn Journal, published in May 1939, MacNeice uses the image of a medieval Irish round tower to figure the southern state’s isolation in the face of impending war, as exclamation marks convey the poet’s sarcastic and desperate rage: ‘Ourselves alone! Let the round tower stand aloof / In a world of bursting mortar!’

Robert Greacen and Valentin Iremonger’s draft introduction to their Faber anthology Contemporary Irish Poetry

110 Ibid.
111 Gantries make another appearance in Greacen’s ‘The Man Who Weeps’, subtitled ‘December 1940’, a pre-Belfast Blitz poem in which he writes ‘I only know of bombing from the English papers...’ in contrast with Ulster where ‘swirl the saffron Irish vapours, / Across her hills winged gantries ride.’
(1949) included a strikingly similar attack on Irish neutrality in prose, which similarly utilised the image of a round tower. Greacen claimed that the contentious passage was cut by T.S. Eliot, a director of Faber and Faber at the time, and reprinted the unpublished sentences in his memoir *The Sash My Father Wore*:

> Few people really believed that Ireland would succeed in preserving her neutrality: consequently as the problems to be solved in Ireland were similar to those in any country, it was obvious that it was no use burying one’s head under the wool-blanket of Celtic twilight. Ivory Round Towers, even if complete with the green-whiskered wolfhounds of Banba, Deirdre of the Sorrows, the harp that once and the dying fall of the mellifluous and kingly Gaelic, would hardly provide cover against the assault of tommy-gunned, jack-booted airborne divisions.\textsuperscript{115}

Greacen and Iremonger’s deliberate contrasting of Celtic mythology with modern weaponry, and their exaggerated sarcasm and polemical tone are heavily reminiscent of MacNeice’s attack on the independent southern state in *Autumn Journal* ten years previously. MacNeice was similarly scornful of mythology, declaring: ‘Kathaleen ni Houlihan! Why / Must a country, like a ship or car, be always female, / Mother or sweetheart?’ and savagely dismissive of the Irish language: ‘Let the school-children fumble their sums / In a half-dead language.’\textsuperscript{116} These lines were directly echoed by St John Ervine in his excoriation of the remodelled *New Northman*, which mocked Eamon de Valera’s insistence on the importance of the Irish language, suggesting mischievously that for a married man with children in the southern state contemplating the severe disparity between the provision of unemployment assistance north and south of the border ‘The right to have his infants taught arithmetic in Gaelic might not seem to him sufficient compensation for it.’\textsuperscript{117} Allusions to MacNeice’s writings permeate the pages of the magazine even when he is not mentioned by name.

MacNeice’s series of poems ‘The Coming of War’, published in Dublin by the Cuala Press in *The Last Ditch* in 1940 and later revised as ‘The Closing Album’ for *Plant and Phantom* in 1941, perhaps had the greatest impact on Greacen and

\textsuperscript{115} Greacen, *Sash*, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{117} Ervine, ‘What’s wrong with the “New Northman”’, *New Northman*, IX.1 (Spring 1941), p. 7.
McFadden’s poetry, however. Traces of ‘Dublin’, the opening poem in ‘The Coming of War’, may be found in Greacen’s poetic evocations of the same city, especially ‘Memories of Dublin’. The ‘gentle veils of rain’ of the former find their echo in the ‘soft rain’ of the latter, whilst MacNeice’s ‘catcalls and the pain, / The glamour of her squalor’ are reflected in Greacen’s ‘Clashing coloured life […] Dirt and yells’. The poets share a concern for Dublin’s Georgian architecture, its squares and statues: MacNeice’s portrayal of the ‘squalor’ of an ‘Augustan capital’ is discernible in Greacen’s ‘careless Augustan city of grace and slums’ in ‘Poem to K.D.’, and ‘the bare bones of a fanlight / Over a hungry door’ in MacNeice’s ‘Dublin’ can be read as the antecedent of ‘the ragged fanlight’ in Greacen’s fiercely anti-colonial ‘Georgian Twilight’.

Although MacNeice refers to Belfast in ‘Valediction’ as his ‘mother-city’, it is rendered in this poem and ‘Belfast’ in the same collection in arguably masculine terms, dominated by the sounds of hammering from the shipyards and the drums of Orange parades. Greacen’s phallic gantries can be seen to follow this tendency to represent Belfast as often oppressively male in character. By contrast, MacNeice’s Dublin is feminised – he writes of ‘her seedy elegance’ and states that ‘she will not / Have me alive or dead’ – and McFadden’s ‘St Stephen’s Green, Dublin’ similarly feminises the city, describing an ‘Old city, with a young girl’s face’.

Terence Brown’s apprehension of Ireland as it appears in MacNeice’s ‘The Closing Album’ is of a ‘self contained world, a good dream that he knows must end when he returns to the nightmare of war-threatened England’. Brown’s evaluation of the Ireland’s symbolic status in the series is of clear relevance here, and his description might just as easily be applied to those poems of Greacen and McFadden which address wartime Dublin, where the southern capital is similarly sequestered from the ongoing conflict.

Brown also notes the emphasis on domesticity in ‘Cushendun’, the second section of the sequence, in which MacNeice describes in heavily sensuous terms time spent in a cottage in the eponymous Antrim village over the summer of 1939. Here it initially seems possible to withdraw from the escalating political tension, as is


suggested by the first word of the third stanza: ‘Forgetfulness: brass lamps and copper jugs / And home-made bread and the smell of turf or flax’. By the fourth and final stanza the prospect of conflict intrudes, however, via the medium of the wireless:

Only in the dark green room beside the fire
With the curtains drawn against the winds and waves
There is a little box with a well-bred voice:

What a place to talk of War.\(^{123}\)

This domestic scene also stands for Ireland itself of course, both in the almost inevitable symbolism of the colour of the room, and in the way that the ‘winds and waves’ outside evoke Ireland’s literal status as an island and isolated geographical and political position in relation to the coming war. McFadden’s ‘In Ireland Now’ similarly enacts an attempted withdrawal to a domestic lair, before acknowledging the war outside in oblique terms:

In Ireland now, at autumn, by frugal fires,
We hurry to lock the present out with the closed door
And night-slammed windows; huddling into a past
Where life at times could turn a nonchalant head,
We watch the heads of flame swirl in the draught,
The demon dancers on reflecting walls,
Backed by an angry wind strumming the wires.\(^{124}\)

Plato’s allegory of the cave is reversed here, as, far from conjuring up an outside world, the subjects of the poem attempt in vain to hide from a reality it seems they would rather not contemplate. As in ‘Cushendun’, it seems that it is no longer an option to ‘turn a nonchalant head’, and here the wind ‘strumming the wires’ suggests that news transmitted by telephone or telegraph can penetrate the domestic scene, just as MacNeice’s cottage is troubled by the wireless news. The second stanza casts Ireland ‘on the edge of a crumbling continent’, and contrasts ‘local hills goodnaturedly at play’

and pampered ‘girlish fields’ with ‘the passionless slaughter of millions, all faceless, unknown’. Collective guilt is implied, as McFadden finds that ‘the mass resolves’ into ‘a singular / Soul pulsing in your wrist, the killer’s pulse’, thrusting responsibility for these atrocities onto the reader. There is a helplessness about this poem, a sense that ‘In Ireland Now’ no action can be taken to address the horrors going on elsewhere (the bombing of Belfast is not alluded to in the poem, apart, perhaps, from the final line which warns that ‘winter’s onslaught gathers overhead’). McFadden’s predicament, which sometimes dampens the moral force of the poetry, lies in the fact that the pacifism to which he adhered was ultimately unable to satisfy his moral disquiet at atrocities being committed elsewhere.

It seems that for all the editorial bluster against Auden and his contemporaries, and apparent interest in the fashions of the New Apocalypse, a more important antecedent for Greacen and McFadden’s war poetry may be found closer to home in MacNeice, whose distress at Ireland’s introversion, isolation and stasis in the face of colossal historical upheaval they clearly share. Despite the discernible debts of influence, McFadden in particular maintained an exclusionist policy towards MacNeice. In the dialogue with Geoffrey Taylor in 1943 he dismissed the older poet, as he spoke of the lack of progress made in trying to create a literary tradition in the north:

So far the results have been disappointing. MacNeice was never Irish, and it is mere sentiment to imagine him so. If he had continued to live in Belfast we might well have some foundation for a new architecture in Irish poetry. As it is, he is merely one of an ever-growing catalogue of names irretrievably lost to this country.

Attempts such as these to exclude MacNeice from the Irish poetic canon anticipate a debate that would resurface amongst Irish poets and academics during the 1980s and 1990s, but it is striking how McFadden’s forceful condemnations of the older poet in

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125 McFadden did admit in 1988 that his first introduction to contemporary poetry had been through reading MacNeice’s Selected Poems in 1940, which he had bought from Davy McLean’s Progressive Bookshop (see McFadden, ‘Louis MacNeice: Late of this Parish’, McFadden Papers, MP27, p. 1 – this is the typed text of a talk given at the Ulster Arts Club in June 1988).

prose contradict the traces of MacNeice’s influence discernible in his poetry.\textsuperscript{127} In the essay ‘Life and Writing in North-East Ulster’, he writes that MacNeice ‘must be surrendered to the English for he has forgotten (if he ever knew) the native idiom’, before praising the ‘swaggering rhythms and great blasts of contempt’ which characterise the poetry of W.R. Rodgers, by contrast hailed as a ‘great Ulster realist’.\textsuperscript{128} McFadden then hails the promise of his friends and contemporaries, citing Maurice James Craig and Greacen as poets who have achieved recognition outside their own country, ‘the latter of whom has unfortunately fallen in with the MacNeice-Heysham-boat tradition’.\textsuperscript{129} This illustrates the awkwardness of McFadden’s position. Having dismissed the idea that MacNeice could be considered an Irish or Ulster poet with reference to the older poet’s departure for England, he then judges the success of his contemporaries on the basis of how their work has been received outside Ireland, which in the cases of Craig and Greacen can mean only publication in England. This in turn contradicts McFadden’s criticism of Greacen in the following clause of the sentence for having ‘fallen in’ with an apparently outdated MacNeician tradition of crossing the Irish Sea. It is surely possible to read this confusion as anxiety on McFadden’s part regarding the influence of MacNeice on his own work, particularly when he concludes the essay by stating that ‘the immediate problem facing Belfast writers is the problem of extending the idiom to include the factory chimneys, without forgetting the hills forming their background’, thereby proposing a literary landscape reminiscent of the sonorous opening line of MacNeice’s poem ‘Carrickfergus’.\textsuperscript{130}

However, if Greacen and McFadden’s poems on Ireland and the war seem rooted in experience and, despite their protestations, successfully guided by Louis Roche explores Denis Donoghue’s contentious 1987 review of Alan Heuser’s \textit{Selected Literary Criticism of Louis MacNeice} and the ensuing debate in the \textit{London Review of Books} in ‘A Reading of Autumn Journal: The Question of Louis MacNeice’s Irishness’, \textit{Text and Context} (Autumn 1988), 71-90 (pp. 74-7). Alan Gillis has criticised Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis for excluding MacNeice from consideration in \textit{Modernism and Ireland: Poetry of the 1930s} (1995):

\begin{quote}
It is strange indeed to ignore a poet because he did not work in Ireland, within the covers of a book that celebrates Beckett’s, Coffey’s, and Devlin’s exile. One can be Irish anywhere except for England, it seems, which is bad news for Clarke, Kavanagh, and Yeats, among a great list of others. Moreover, this lazy reliance on a neat distinction between Irish and English ‘cultural problematics’ implies a retreat into a clichéd historicism that insists that such things as class conflict, the city, international political crises, and world war are unIrish (a strange proposition from avowedly modernist critics).
\end{quote}

(Gillis, p. 18)


\textsuperscript{128} McFadden, ‘Life and Writing in North-East Ulster’, McFadden Papers, MP5, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.

MacNeice, their poems which try to address wider international questions, are, perhaps inevitably, more problematic. McFadden’s ‘In Ireland Now’ was first published in *The Northman* Winter 1941-1942 edition, which also carried another typically stinging attack by St John Ervine on the younger generation of poets. The Greacen-edited collection *Poems from Ulster* was the subject of a particularly exasperated diatribe. Citing the poem ‘Elegy on a Hill’, Ervine asked:

What *is* the object of this wilful obscurity? Chaucer has been dead for over 500 years, and the English he used is now archaic, but I can grasp his meaning, even when I have to use a glossary; but the glossary has not yet been compiled which will enable me to understand the meaning of some of the poems in this book. Partly, I think, it is because none of you knows how to punctuate. You are worse, in this respect, than women novelists, and God knows, they’re pretty awful.\(^\text{131}\)

He also attacked Greacen’s assertions in the preface of *Poems from Ulster* that poetry was the natural medium for young men, writing that:

The cruellest and most credulous soldiers in Hitler's army are the young men. It is the youth of Italy which cheers when Mussolini calls liberty a fetish. […] That guff about old men bequeathing horrible legacies to young men is well enough in the mouth of an Auden, but in the mouths of Ulstermen – come, come!

I notice that Mr McFadden is terribly upset about Belgium’s starving children. Why Belgium’s particularly? Was he upset enough to get out of his leather chair?\(^\text{132}\)

Ervine's irritation levels an important charge against poems by Greacen and McFadden that address the international situation. Notwithstanding their experience of the Belfast Blitz (McFadden noted the irony that as a pacifist his house was destroyed in the bombing), as non-combatants who spent the war in Ireland they were reliant on second


\(^{132}\) Ibid.
hand accounts of events elsewhere, and in this important respect such poetic engagements lack authenticity and credibility. Terence Brown has suggested that attempts ‘to interpret international events in war-torn Europe in terms of the New Apocalypse [...] lacked real roots in imaginative experience, so declin[ed] into a wan, if professionally competent, verse-making.’ In the case of some poems Brown’s assessment might be considered over-generous, however. The piece of writing at which Ervine directs particular opprobrium is McFadden’s ‘Poem’, which opens with these lines:

Sitting futile in a room,
While Belgium’s starving children,
Pouch-eyed, brow-puckered, humourless,
Shrivel into premature age,
My head is heavy with my sins and the sins of my brothers.

Here McFadden assumes some guilt for the fate of the children, attributing this (it would seem) to a general corruption on the part of the human race. In the concluding stanza he claims to love the world and grieve for it as he sits ‘pinioned between fat arms of a leather chair, / Vainly sending my soul into those countries / That have felt the bad blood from the broken vein of the past’, feeling haunted by the suffering of others:

Seeing between the lines of irrelevant reading
And in the personal images moving among the ashes,
The flabby bellies and sadly accusing eyes
Of hungry children, and hearing their silence.

This is, perhaps, as much a case of ‘irrelevant writing’ as ‘irrelevant reading’. Given his inertia, McFadden’s guilt and distress, as Ervine suggests, are certainly lacking in

133 In unpublished recollections McFadden wrote: ‘After the 1941 Blitz, Robert Greacen had to search for me, for, true to form, I, the pacifist, got blitzed, while the enthusiastic prosecutors of the war sheltered under the blessing of bishops of country houses too far away to merit a bomb.’ (McFadden Papers, MP35 (ix)).
136 Ibid.
credibility. Perhaps tellingly, ‘Poem’ was not included in McFadden’s *Collected Poems*, published in 1995.

One of Robert Greacen’s least successful war poems, ‘Lament for France’ addressed the German invasion of France. The poem is alternately grandiose and demotic, as the lament itself (‘All the frontiers are twisted back, all the faces / Have become one face, the gigantic face of terror.’) is interrupted by three imagined interjections by German soldiers, each of which mocks a part of the French national motto:

(‘Nothing will stop us now,’ say the feet,
‘Down are the barriers. Nothing stands in the way!
What do they say — do they say ‘Liberty’?
My truncheon, Hans, that’s the answer to freedom!’)\(^\text{137}\)

The poem then attempts to address the Holocaust, as other German voices are heard to say ‘Death to the Jews!’ and laugh that ‘They say that men are brothers! They’ll be brothers all right. / Brothers at the abattoir!’ Despite the fact that the Nazi soldiers will take ‘everything / That can be assessed, all that will be taken down’, the poem ends with an optimistic affirmation of faith in the French Republic:

In the heart, the Republic lives beyond her death,
Till grave-faced men shall bring the phoenix-birth.
Where brothers shall be equal, proudly free,
They will remember France, salute her memory.\(^\text{138}\)

This well meaning poem is fatally damaged by the inept and crassly imagined conversations of the Nazi soldiers, whilst Greacen’s apparent romanticised belief in French Republican ideals contrasts with his more cynical and critical attitudes towards


\(^{138}\) Ibid., p. 66.
Ireland and Britain that surface in other poems and in prose. The poem that precedes ‘Lament for France’ in *The Undying Day*, for example, ‘The Glorious Twelfth’, subtitled ‘12 July, 1943’, refers to the suspension of Orange Order parades for the duration of the Second World War:

Four years since fire has run swift rivers into Europe
From Dunkirk to Briansk, from Naples to Novgorod,
From Caucasus to Clyde, from Warsaw to Belfast.
And now, in Derry and Downpatrick, no Ulstermen are marching
To the rustle of their banners and the flogging of their drums.
Our red-brick cities have their blackened skeletons,
Our people carry the public and the personal wound.

Contrasting war torn Europe with a concomitant kind of demilitarisation in Northern Ireland, Greacen exploits a striking irony, although the cynicism of the observation is swiftly undercut by a chilling acknowledgement of local wounds. This poem can be read as a forerunner to Paulin’s ‘provincial world history’, and Greacen’s conception here of a web of causes and consequences spreading across Europe is notably more effective as a means of connecting events at home with atrocities abroad than McFadden’s expressions of guilt and paralysis in ‘Poem’.

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139 The Protestant nationalist writer and politician Denis Ireland was also distressed by the fall of France, as Risteárd Ó Glaísean explains:

Bhain tumann na Fraince roimh ionrach na nGearmáin i mBheithimh 1940 anbheangadh agus an bhreathnú doisndearth phobhlachtaí a fuair Éireannach ón tior agus má bhí an tsaol Éireannach le Hitler, mura ríobh dothóireacht Éireannach i bhfeidhm don tsibhialtacht e, ní raibh Denis ar dhuine acu.

(The fall of France before the German assault in June 1940 shocked Denis Ireland. He considered the republican example of that country to be keenly important for [the country of] Ireland, and if some nationalist Irishmen had respect for or were intrigued by Hitler, even if it was clear to them that he was a danger to civilisation, Denis Ireland did not agree with them.)


141 Twelfth of July celebrations were reportedly cancelled during the war due to a fear that parades involving military drums and banners by marchers who did not face conscription and might otherwise have been marching to a real war would have drawn a caustic response from the British army and government. (James Kelly, *Bonfires on the Hillside: An Eyewitness Account of Political Upheaval in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Fountain Publishing, 1995), p. 119). John Hewitt wrote of the Twelfth in 1941 that ‘All is quiet here. We rippled over the Twelfth almost imperceptibly.. Half a dozen flags and 2 orange lilies and a photo of old men in sashes in the ‘Whig!’ (letter from John Hewitt to Patrick Maybin, 22 July 1941, Hewitt Papers, PRONI, D/3838/3/12).
In ‘The Poet Answers’ from *One Recent Evening*, Greacen attempts to make sense of the poet’s role in the context of the war. He begins by asking readers to ‘take a warning from the violent times’, as bombers fly home across a landscape that recalls blitz-ravaged Belfast ‘over the smoking chimneys from blazing docks / With wings singed by hatred or delivered duty’, before confronting those from whom he feels under a different kind of attack. These are the ‘sterile critic’ and the ‘common man’, with their shared contempt for the poet’s ‘personal vision’, as well as ‘the propagandist sliding rulers of metric value’, all of whom demand poems of the ‘political struggle’ and have no interest in the poet’s ‘faint and copulative heart’. The answer to such demands, writes Greacen, is ‘plain, the answer shouts itself’:

I am I, I am the poet, the maker, the breaker,  
I am the prophet, the madman, the dreamer, the healer,  
I am the killer, the universal panacea  
For the broken, the inarticulate, the oppressed, the tortured.  
I make – therefore I am! I make!142

This is followed by the bombastic assertion that ‘My world is all the world, all worlds, / My agony is the agony at Calvary and Dachau’. This poem provides another stark illustration of the gap between Greacen’s ambition and desire to address such weighty matters and his ability to do so in poetry.

Greacen and McFadden remained civilians, but John Gallen, Greacen’s friend and co-editor, served in the British army in the Far East during the war, and was killed after its end, in a climbing accident in India in January 1947. Published in *The Northmen* that summer, Greacen’s obituary of his friend emphasised the comradeship of their time on the magazine, praising Gallen as a ‘true and resourceful ally’ in combating the ‘hostility’ and ‘apathy’ shown towards them at Queen’s. Greacen is keen to forestall ‘cant later about his dying for Democracy’, however, and as a ‘corrective’ to any such perception concludes his article with an extract from Gallen’s final editorial for the magazine, which describes a young writer in wartime facing considerable pressure from others to stop producing ‘bilge’ and enlist in the army. The young man eventually cracks and agrees to join up, but admits he doesn’t have ‘the faintest idea’

what he is going to fight for and concedes that the motives for his decision are low
ones: 'the herd instinct, social advantages, and escape from boredom.' Once in the
army, his experience is miserable, since 'Everyone was so disgusted with the poor boy
that he was hardly ever spoken to in the army, and he was run over and killed by a red
bus on his very first leave. And the moral of that is: Truth is the opinion of the majority;
ever tell a lie.' Such a savagely cynical parable in miniature questions the ability of
the individual to act meaningfully in the context of war. Without questioning the
sincerity of Greacen's grief, it is difficult not to view his decision to reprint this
particular extract in the context of his own decision not to enlist, which, in Northern
Ireland, he was free to make.

Gallen's poem 'For R.A.' is one of three reprinted in the same issue of The
Northman. In it the poet begs forgiveness from the dedicatee (seemingly a lover) for
having 'unmade the world', and like poems by his contemporaries Greacen and
McFadden attempts to bear responsibility for atrocities in which he was not directly
involved:

My spell raised Hitler, and my guilty hands
Made Belsen. Now by myself impeached, I dare not
Presume to penance till you, by time unreached
Fear not to speak to me my own forgiveness.

The similarity of these lines to those I have already quoted from Greacen's 'The Poet
Answers' and McFadden's 'Poem' is notable. Readers today may feel uncomfortable at
the fact that both 'The Poet Answers' and 'For R.A.' bring named concentration camps
into their admissions of guilt, but these poems do raise questions of how poems by
combatants and non-combatants should be read together, and show how such questions
are further problematised in the context of Northern Ireland, where conscription was
not imposed. If Greacen and McFadden's clumsier poems may be dismissed as the
work of adolescent bystanders, Gallen is perhaps less easily sidelined. Due to the
rapidly changing nature of warfare at this time, however, combatant poets cannot be
considered uniquely authentic voices: after all, perhaps one of the most powerful poems
in response to the Belfast Blitz, Padraic Fiacc's 'Der Bomben Poet', was written by

144 John Gallen, 'For R.A.', The Northman, XV.3 (Summer 1947), p. 16.
someone who did not experience it at all. The seventeen-year-old Fiacc was in the United States when he wrote ‘My home town / Has just bin / Blown up’ and articulated conflicting feelings of detachment and engagement in the lines ‘I have nothing to write / Poems about.’\(^\text{145}\) The idea of common responsibility, independent of geographic location or combatant status, further encourages Paulin’s idea of provincial world history, where conceptions of local, national and international histories begin to overlap.

John Hewitt also considered his position as a home front poet. In ‘Minor Poet’s Dilemma, 1940’, he looks for guidance from poetic antecedents:

Caught in my prime in pitiful disaster,  
my world’s walls gape atilt, about to fall:  
where must I turn for comfortable master  
to fill the hush of terror’s interval?

There are two poets to whom Hewitt contemplates turning: Edward Thomas, who ‘when earth was breaking, / brooding on vole and hawthorn, deathward went’ and Roman Landor, who at eighty still made ‘immortal quatrains of pure sentiment’.\(^\text{146}\) Leaving aside Landor, the reference to Thomas, who was killed on the Western Front in 1917, returns us to the problematic relationship between combatant and non-combatant poets. Thomas’s own status as a ‘war poet’ certainly highlights this troubled area: though best known for his involvement in the First World War (he joined the British army before conscription was introduced), the bulk of his work in prose and poetry examined England, its countryside, environment and rural culture (hence Hewitt’s reference to ‘vole and hawthorn’), whilst some of his poems that relate directly to the war were written before he had reached the Western Front.\(^\text{147}\) As Robert Greacen recalled in 1976, the strength of identification between conflict and poetry encouraged

by memories of Rupert Brooke and other soldier poets of the First World War fuelled
an expectation in the early years of the Second for heavily circumscribed poetry about
the war which arguably had not been fulfilled. At a time when, in Britain at least,
demands were being made of poets to produce work which addressed the war, the
invocation of Thomas suggests that Hewitt was aware of these calls.

Hewitt did not produce any great number of poems which addressed the Second
World War directly, however, and at this time instead tended to explore the landscape
and cultural history of his immediate locality in poetry and prose. One poem which
does refer to the war is ‘The Volunteer’, written in 1951, which recounts the story of a
ship’s engineer which retires to a small cabin ‘among the whins’ near an Ulster village.
Despite his age, on the outbreak of war the man volunteers to serve at sea, but is
repeatedly mocked by inhabitants of the village, when he hears nothing in response to
his offer from ‘Head Office’. Eventually however, ‘one black week, when all the
bulletins / were bomber raids, retreats and fallen towns’ a letter arrives at his shack, to
tell him that his name has been added to a list pending vacancy: ‘John bore the letter in
a trembling fist, / and read it twice at every neighbour’s fire’. The poem is clearly
and sincerely sympathetic towards the seaman, but does not comment substantially on
the war: instead Hewitt explores the isolation of the volunteer from the community in
the context of the Second World War. There is no overt moral condemnation here, but
as in MacNeice’s ‘The Coming of War’ series, rural Ulster again appears ‘unreal’ in
this context, its inhabitants remaining detached from the international situation. It is
possible that the poem also references Hewitt’s own attempts to volunteer for service
with the British armed forces during the war: variously turned down and ignored by
recruiting officers due to his reserved occupation in local government, he nevertheless
admitted to feeling ‘a recurring sense of guilt’ at his inability to become directly
involved. In his unpublished memoir A North Light, Hewitt expressed regret at not
having served in the forces:

149 See, for example, ‘To the Poets of 1940’, Times Literary Supplement (30 December 1939), p. 755.
150 Hewitt, ‘The Volunteer’, Collected Poems, pp. 119-120 (p. 120). Another poem with the same name
describes the death of his uncle in France in the First World War (Hewitt, Collected Poems, p. 267.).
151 John Hewitt, A North Light: Twenty-five years in a Municipal Art Gallery (unpublished
autobiography, John Hewitt Collection, University of Ulster, Coleraine), pp. 99-100, p. 102; Frank
xxxiv-v.
And so, though I tried, admittedly not hard enough to hurt, I was not able to take any part in what I realised must have been the greatest imaginative experience of my generation; and may be in that loss I have suffered a serious deprivation which has left me perhaps less adult than my years require.\(^{152}\)

Instead he joined the Civil Defence Forces, and also lectured widely on art and literature in British army camps around Northern Ireland during the war. Hewitt recalled satirically that ‘when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, and talks on our new, approved ally were in demand’ he was employed for his left-wing, but importantly non-communist, credentials: ‘And so the Marxist Dialectic was wafted from Ballymoney to Newry.’\(^{153}\)

A journey to or from one of these meetings seems to have inspired the poem ‘Ulster Winter (1942)’, originally entitled ‘Winter in Armagh’.\(^{154}\) It opens with an army lorry speeding along a winter road ‘Between black hedges under a grey sky’, and the first four of six stanzas describe a wet, sometimes boggy landscape, intermittently enlivened by flocks of starlings and flashes of colour from decaying leaves. Hewitt then turns his attention to his companion in the cab of the lorry, and concludes the poem with these two stanzas:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{I glanced at the young soldier by my side,} \\
&\text{Gripping the wheel with a grubby-knuckled hand,} \\
&\text{A cockney by his tongue, and wondered if} \\
&\text{I spoke my thoughts he’d even understand.} \\
&\text{For I am native, though my fathers came} \\
&\text{From fatter acres over the grey sea:} \\
&\text{The clay that hugs the rows of exile bones} \\
&\text{Has shaped my phantom nationality.}^{155}
\end{align*}
\]

These lines suggest that the presence of troops in the province during the war fed into Hewitt’s regionalist conception of the British Isles, whereby he sought to reconfigure

^{153}\) Ibid.  
^{155}\) Ibid., p. 485.
Britain and Ireland on a federal basis, as a group of culturally and politically distinct regions. So distinct, indeed, that the soldier is described as 'cockney', rather than English-speaking, and Hewitt's sense of alienation from the young man is so extreme that he wonders if communication between them is possible. This poem also shows how Hewitt sought rootedness for his own identity as an Ulsterman in the soil, the 'clay', which has received and moulded the 'exile bones' of Hewitt's planter forebears. Gerald Dawe sees in Hewitt's poetry 'the struggle against art's enticement, the lure of the imagination, distant horizons, the unknown -- and the need to resist this in both poetic and political terms'. In 'Ulster Winter (1942)', as in Hewitt's long poem 'Conacre' written the following year, it is the land that acts almost mystically as an anchor for such resistance, at a time when the interconnectedness of previously disparate parts of the world was becoming dangerously apparent and 'distant horizons' drew ever closer.

As well as giving lectures and working at the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery, Hewitt's role as a convenor of writers and artists was also hugely important to the cultural life of Belfast at this time. With his wife Roberta, he welcomed artists and writers of many nationalities to their house at 18 Mount Charles during the war, including writers stationed in Northern Ireland with the British armed forces such as Hamish Henderson, Rayner Heppenstall, Emmanuel Litvinoff and John Manifold. He also offered encouragement to the younger generation of Belfast poets, even if they subsequently disavowed his ideas: Roy McFadden's personal recollections of encounters with Hewitt are warm, but he did not share the older poet's localised vision. The poets with whom the earlier part of this chapter is concerned showed little interest in Hewitt's regionalist ideas, as McFadden recalled in 1961:

Attempts were made to conjure up some inoffensive shoemakers, clergymen, mechanics who had happened to toss off the odd poem in their youth, were exhumed from their century-old graves and held up as our literary ancestors.

158 Roy McFadden, 'No Dusty Pioneer: A Personal Recollection of John Hewitt', in Dawe and Wilson Foster (eds), The Poet's Place, pp. 169-80, (pp. 171-2).
McFadden’s relationship with Hewitt’s poetry was more complex, as can be seen in two wartime essays which offer conflicting appraisals of the older poet’s ‘realism’. In ‘Life and Writing in North-East Ulster’ McFadden defends Hewitt’s work from critics who characterise it as ‘Georgian’, and praises ‘the essential realism of his work which speaks for an agricultural community still more afraid of the sidhe-mounds than H.E. Bombs’, but in ‘The Position in Ulster’ he criticises Hewitt’s ‘lapse into photographic realism’. In both essays McFadden contrasts Hewitt’s poetry with the ‘complementary’ work of his contemporary W.R. Rodgers, and, further complicating the vexed matter of ‘realism’, argues that Rodgers was the ‘first great Ulster realist’ whose ‘arrogant, swaggering rhythms and great blasts of contempt are as much a part of the 6 counties as the Cave Hill or the Mournes’. Robert Greacen was also keen to praise Rodgers, writing in 1942 that if the older man’s poems recalled Auden and Gerard Manley Hopkins, they still rang ‘true and vital. His imagery is always courageous, with just a hint of foolhardiness: in fact Rodgers rarely fails to excite and stun.’ Conceding that Rodgers is guilty of ‘tiresome revelling in alliteration’, Greacen nevertheless lauds his ‘all round sheer excellence’ and concludes by voicing a fear for his future development as a poet since ‘one feels that he has said everything that he has to say and that he could hardly better his technique.’

Since then Terence Brown has described Rodgers as ‘a romanticist of words, delighted in their instability and in word games, verbal associations for their own sake’, and reads his early poems as the work of a personality at war with itself, attempting to reconcile Calvinist duty with the Romantic desire for rich and diverse experiences. Rodgers’s reputation has arguably suffered since his death in 1969: Derek Mahon wrote in 1993 that ‘Now he is remembered as an idiosyncratic period rhymester who started late and stopped early and produced at most five or six lyric poems of continuing interest’, but hailed him as ‘unique – a renegade Presbyterian minister with an all-

159 McFadden, ‘Reflections on Megarrity’, Threshold, 5.1, p. 32.
Ireland perspective'. Such appraisals have emphasised the singular stylistic approach and powerful rhythms of Rodgers’s verse, and focused on his vocation as a minister, but to conclude this chapter I want to consider the impact of the Second World War on his poetry. As John Wilson Foster has written, ‘Many of the pieces are explicitly war poems, written by a non-combatant innocent of bloodshed, whose knowledge is filtered through newspapers and newsreels’, and in which the war persists as ‘an unavoidable, if distant fact’. In such a way ‘Stormy Day’ from his first published collection _Awake! and Other Poems_ (1941) describes a blustery day in a city park, where cherry and beech trees cavort and dip in the wind and boats on a lake are ‘roped and ready for hire’. The scene is troubled, however, by the intrusion of some static news boards:

There! Do you see, crucified on palings,
Motionless news-posters announcing
That now the frozen armies melt and meet
And smash? Go home now, for, try as you may,
You will not shake off that fact to-day.
Behind you limps that dog with tarry paw,
As behind him, perfectly timed, follows
The dumb shadow that mimes him all the way.

In ‘Sing, Brothers, Sing!’ Rodgers counsels against the transformation of warfare by wireless into constantly babbling aural entertainment, and, echoing Andrew Marvell’s ‘To His Coy Mistress’, cautions that ‘At our back door we failed to hear / War’s dust-bin chariot drawing near’, whilst in ‘Music in War-Time’ the war is seen to overwhelm the individual imagination, as ‘All things, even our thoughts’ shapes, subscribe / To these importunate times.’ Here an orchestra is reconfigured as an arsenal, where a trumpet ‘Juts and jets jumpily like a gun’, and ‘lean violins dive and flow / In close

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formation [...] Whirling and wheeling and whorling / Like aerial convoy'.¹⁶⁸ The music itself echoes the patterns of submarine warfare, as an ‘alien phrase up-pokes and breaks / Tentatively like periscope’, a drum ‘drops its depth charge’, and counterpoint below combs ‘the thoughtless unknown depths / A clear and harmonious lane-way / For following and conducted ears.’¹⁶⁹

As with Robert Greacen, connections may be drawn through Rodgers’s friendships and publication history between the relatively isolated literary environment in Northern Ireland and other wartime poetic circles, in England and south of the border. Prior to the publication of his first collection *Awake! and Other Poems* in 1941, he successfully submitted poems to the London magazines *Horizon*, *The Listener*, and the *New Statesman and Nation*: in 1940 Rodgers received a letter from John Lehmann asking if he planned to write more, ‘as the Hogarth Press is still anxious to continue its tradition of publishing the most interesting new poets’.¹⁷⁰ In 1945 there were, it seems, plans for Rodgers to collaborate with Graham Sutherland on an illustrated poem for a new magazine, but frustratingly these seem to have come to nothing.¹⁷¹ The forging of these links encourages the perception that Rodgers was keen to escape Ulster’s political and religious strictures. Unlike John Hewitt, Rodgers appears to have felt profoundly disconnected from his immediate environment. Nowhere is this more apparent than in a short article entitled ‘Black North’, published in the *New Statesman* in November 1943.

Written during a year’s leave spent in Oxford, the piece attempted to describe the social and political composition of Northern Ireland for the benefit of the magazine’s English readers, but caused outrage in Rodgers’s parish of Loughall, County Armagh by posing the inflammatory rhetorical question ‘Have we in Ulster a “fascist” government?’, and claiming that the ‘pitfall’ of the Ulster Protestant character was its ‘hypocrisy.’¹⁷² Rodgers’s biographer suggests that the writing of this article amounts to a conscious

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¹⁶⁸ Rodgers, ‘Music in War-Time’, *Awake!*, p. 54.
¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 54, p. 55.
¹⁷⁰ Letter from John Lehmann to W.R. Rodgers, 4 November 1940, W.R. Rodgers Papers, PRONI, D2833/C/2/2/10. *Awake! and Other Poems* was later published by Secker and Warburg. In 1940 Cyril Connolly, editor of *Horizon*, wrote to Rodgers encouraging him to continue submitting poems but rejecting ‘End of a World’ on the grounds that it was too similar in metre to the poems by Rodgers that *Horizon* had already published. Connolly suggested that Rodgers’ poetry suffered from ‘a tendency to reproduce an exquisite verbal honeycomb without very much honey’ and suggesting that he send it instead to the Trotskyite publication *Partisan Review* (Letter from Cyril Connolly to W.R. Rodgers, 23 December 1940, Rodgers Papers, D2833/C/2/2/6).
¹⁷¹ The magazine was to have been entitled *Flair*, and would have been published by Percy Lund Humphries Ltd — it was planned that Sutherland would illustrate Rodgers’s poem ‘Lent’ (Rodgers Papers, D2833/C/3/3).
effort on the minister’s part to distance himself from the community of which he had inevitably become an important part. Though Rodgers managed to repair some of the damage, and was even elected to the local Unionist Council, his departure for London in 1946 to take up a role at the BBC offered by Louis MacNeice encourages the idea that Rodgers felt at odds with and exhausted by the political and religious life of the province. Like the younger poets Greacen and McFadden, Rodgers appears to have felt some release from this during a visit to Dublin in the summer of 1941, when he stayed with Geoffrey Taylor, poetry editor of The Bell, and greatly enjoyed evenings spent in the company of writers including John Betjeman, Austin Clarke and Frank O’Connor, before returning reluctantly to Armagh.

The poems in Awake! and Other Poems were written between 1938 and 1940, and the collection is dominated by the advent of the Second World War, contextually anchored by the physical paraphernalia of guns, planes, telegraph wires and ships: significantly, for the 1942 American edition, the title was amended to Awake! and Other Wartime Poems. The publication of the book was itself affected by the war, when the first printing was destroyed entirely in the bombing of Plymouth in 1940, and the prospect of air attack is addressed in several poems. ‘The Raider’ describes the isolated figure of the ‘lone airman’, a pilot ‘Frocked and fanged by fire, by nagging fingers / Of guns jagged and jogged, with shell-bursts tasselled’, and wonders if the man’s eyes ever ‘alight and loiter’ on the country below, or if his gaze ‘easily dissolve(s) / Upon the moving surfaces’. In ‘The Far-Off Hills’ Rodgers again uses the aerial perspective of the aviator to address the dehumanising and distancing effects of modern warfare, lamenting the fact ‘that distance puts / Ten-league boots on brutality’, as bombs drop from the aircraft:

Miles below, in a spidery splash,
On the pin-point town,
Gumming grimacing faces to the pavement,
While the alert executor, lark-light,
Tiny climber in titanic chasm,

174 Ibid., pp. 42-3.
175 Wilson Foster, ‘The Dissidence of Dissent’, in Dawe and Longley (eds), Across a Roaring Hill, p. 150.
176 This was explained to readers in a note opposite the contents page of the original 1941 edition.
Rinses the pin-prick pity in the burst
And cloudy roundabout of pride.¹⁷⁸

The mapping of war is also evident in 'Escape', where Rodgers figures the coming of war as a threatening, growing web of connections:

The roads of Europe are running away from the war,
Running fast over the mined bridges and past the men
Waiting there, with watch, ready to maim and arrest them,
And strong overhead the long snorings of the planes’ tracks
Are stretching like rafters from end to end of their power.
Turn back, you who want to escape or want to forget
The ruin of all your regards. You will be more free
At the thoughtless centre of slaughter than you would be
Standing chained to the telephone-end while the world cracks.¹⁷⁹

This poem may be compared with Robert Greacen's 'The Glorious Twelfth', which conjures a network of fire, running 'swift rivers into Europe'. In this web, however, made up of roads, plane contrails and telephone lines, Rodgers signals the importance of technology to the war, and emphasises how progress in this field has pitched the entire continent into the conflict, where danger now presents itself along a road, from the sky, or at the end of a cable. The words 'running away from the war' also appear in the fifth section of Louis MacNeice’s sequence 'The Coming of War', where they describe the drive west to Sligo in the summer of 1939, escaping the 'Black / North – the winch and the windlass, / The drum and the Union Jack.'¹⁸⁰ Given Rodgers's use of 'Black North' as the title for his New Statesman article it is clear that 'The Coming of War' should be regarded as an antecedent here. MacNeice also denied the possibility of escape: although he manages to leave the oppressive paraphernalia of Ulster behind him, the west of Ireland ultimately proves no haven from the international conflict, and in the seventh section the war repeatedly 'comes down' on him in Galway, as though a

¹⁷⁹ Rodgers, 'Escape', Awake!, p. 45.
physical weight were descending.\textsuperscript{181} Rodgers’s paradoxical assertion that those at the centre of the conflict will be ‘more free’ perhaps suggests that the war will offer an opportunity for Rodgers himself to escape from the bounded and conservative climate of his parish and of Northern Ireland itself. In one important and much quoted phrase from the notes for \textit{Awake! and Other Poems}, Rodgers wrote that he felt he had been ‘schooled in a backwater of literature out of sight of the running stream of contemporary verse’: the war appears to have granted him greater fluidity, in his personal life and in his poetry.\textsuperscript{182}

The fact that the Second World War is such a defining presence in this first collection certainly suggests it acted as a creative release for him as a poet. Cathartic purgation is loudly proclaimed by ‘Action Stations’, in which Rodgers describes how evil was once something inside him, leaving his heart ‘locked and rotted with / Inaction’, but that now ‘private avenues of feeling’ are no longer ‘contained and occluded’. The catalyst for this is clear:

\begin{quote}
War shot its spark, and our shut chimneys
Shed and vehemently vomited
Their woolly volumes. From our hearts' hearths,
Past the dampers, checks, and private chokes
And sooted flues of feeling, issued
In ashy sheets the shy repressions.\textsuperscript{183}
\end{quote}

These expulsions are directly linked to the outbreak of war, but excitement at the unleashing of creative possibilities is tempered by the constant presence of ‘Evil’, now outside the body, and ‘overt and aloof’ in the skies and the seas. The war becomes a

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., pp. 684-5.

...‘the running stream of contemporary verse’ was evident in the great wash of books in the manse at Loughall. And we all dipped into it at Davy McClean’s, where more books were read than bought; and where indeed Wesley Sutton displayed in the window his handwritten copies of the reviews of \textit{Awake!}, like bulletins outside a palace of royal births and deaths. We all splashed in the stream of poetry, for it was totally accessible; and unlike today, its current was not narrowly culverted in one direction.

\textsuperscript{183} McFadden, ‘The Dogged Hare’, McFadden Papers, MP35 (vii)
\textsuperscript{184} Rodgers, ‘Action Stations’, \textit{Awake!}, p. 42.
\end{quote}
fixation to which other considerations are subordinate, as the reader must 'Look how / All the lines of our lives converge on / The gun’s focus and the bullets’ fan.'\textsuperscript{184} This image of a fan can also be traced back to ‘The Coming of War’, where ‘fan-shafts of sun’ as MacNeice drives through the countryside to Sligo echo the ‘bare bones of a fanlight / Over a hungry door’ in Dublin in the opening section. Along with the ‘tumbledown walls’ going ‘leap-frog / Over the moors’ in Mayo, and the water ‘combed out / Over the weir’ on the Corrib, MacNeice deploys fans in ‘The Closing Album’ to animate the poems with rippling movement, showing how the muted yet perceptible effects of the outbreak of war were felt in Ireland as they radiated from a European centre.\textsuperscript{185} In keeping with the explosive tone of ‘Action Stations’, Rodgers’s ‘fan’ of bullets is clearly a far more violent image, but it may be seen to reflect the map sketched in ‘Escape’, where ‘roads’ and ‘tracks’ likened to ‘rafters’ stretch from the ‘thoughtless centre’.

Edna Longley has articulated a positive conception of a ‘female, feminist, connective’ web in Northern Ireland of multiple affiliations, local, national and international, giving writers and others ‘the ability to inhabit a range of relations rather than a single allegiance. The great advantage of living in Northern Ireland is that you can be in three places at once.’\textsuperscript{186} The larger scale wartime webs of cause and effect outlined by Greacen and Rodgers are threatening by comparison, and draw Northern Ireland into traumatic contemporary European histories, but they similarly serve to question entrenched local positions and enable the province’s own history to be contextualised anew. The multiple meanings of the word ‘chained’ in ‘Escape’ must be heeded, but such physical images are complemented by Rodgers’s associative use of language, whereby disparate words are yoked together as a result of their sound and appearance rather than any etymological correspondence, resulting in linguistic eddies,

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
swirls and eruptions that articulate the tumultuous and sometimes chaotic patterns of conflict.\textsuperscript{187}

During the eruptions of violence in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s and early 1970s, both Robert Greacen and Roy McFadden drew comparisons between the febrile atmosphere in the province and their experience of the war years. In a letter to Greacen in August 1969, McFadden wrote of the fires and petrol bombs that ‘It’s almost like wartime again. One measures food and remembers that rationed but keyed-up existence.’\textsuperscript{188} This sense of recognition drove McFadden back to reconsider the poetry of the forties: in the following week’s letter he describes re-reading poems by Valentin Iremonger with pleasure and observes that it was a pity he was never taken on by a major publishing house, ‘Especially now when, according to JHH, our generation has been completely forgotten.’\textsuperscript{189} The war continued to prey on McFadden’s mind, and that September he wrote that he had never liked Belfast ‘where the shawlies in Cromac Street matched shawled official minds; but I will never leave it. When I was growing up, it was an ignorant, prejudiced place. Now Belfast is sophisticated. It suffered education during the war.’\textsuperscript{190} After two years, McFadden’s gloom seems to have intensified, as he describes life in Belfast to his friend (Greacen was living in England at the time). McFadden writes of army searches, of bomb scares real and imagined, of boarded up windows, and, with a blackly Orwellian acronymic misplacement, of the prospect of central Belfast being demolished by the ‘ARP’. He concludes that ‘It’s worse than the war, because the thing is happening from inside.’\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{187} It is perhaps telling that Roy McFadden uses a wartime analogy to describe a page of Rodgers’ manuscripts:

...every word in the page has a barrage balloon above it, like the balloons that come out of people’s mouths in the children’s comics. Each balloon has a word in it. And every balloon has another alternative balloon above it, all rising and soaring to the seventh heaven of unachievement.

I remember seeing one of his manuscripts. It looked like an inverted sow feeding an enormous airborne farrow.

(McFadden Papers, MP3 5 (vii))

\textsuperscript{188} Letter from McFadden to Greacen, 17 August 1969, Greacen Collection, Box 4 File 3.
\textsuperscript{189} Letter from McFadden to Greacen, 25 August 1969, Greacen Collection, Box 4 File 3. ‘JHH’ refers to John Hewitt.
\textsuperscript{190} Letter from McFadden to Greacen, 27 September 1969, Greacen Collection, Box 4 File 3.
\textsuperscript{191} Letter from McFadden to Greacen, 20 November 1971, Greacen Collection, Box 4 File 3.
Robert Greacen also drew parallels between Northern Ireland’s experience of the Second World War and of the Troubles. In a letter to the *Irish Times* in 1974 he mused on the swift growth in stature of the ‘Northern Renaissance’ group of younger poets:

There seems to be a literary ferment in Belfast comparable with the upsurge in creative writing that characterised the period of the Second World War. Does violence stimulate creativity? Perhaps it does in the sense that when life and limb are in danger we tend to concentrate more on permanent than temporary values. Or, more prosaically, is it that when people must perforce stay at home a number of them take to poetry to while away the long evenings.\(^{192}\)

This is a tentative analysis, and Greacen’s contentious idea that violence stimulates creativity is undercut by the more practical suggestion that remaining undercover during long evenings (a stricture that those who lived through the Blitz would remember) may equally well encourage the writing of poetry. Indeed, as Hewitt in particular repeatedly claimed, it is probable that the wider territorial confinement of the war years, when government restrictions on the movement of civilians made travel to Britain difficult and to Europe impossible, was a hugely important stimulant to creative endeavour in Northern Ireland. On occasion the urge to write poetry or prose may simply be an instinctive reaction to something strange: Greacen recalled that, having expected to be overtaken by ‘mass hysteria’ during the war, ‘the only answer was that if I kept on writing I might be able to remain detached and sane. Writing seemed to be a necessary therapy which, if frustrated, would lead to mental numbness and inner death.’\(^{193}\) Like Greacen, I would hesitate to draw a direct link between the violence of these historical periods and any resulting artistic production, but poetry produced in Northern Ireland during the war is clearly animated by anxiety at a map redrawn. As the province was opened up to new cultural influences, the work of its poets belies a profound sense of fear that Northern Ireland, having edged on to the international stage, was now prey to new and threatening forces. Such a sense of uncertainty over the province’s place in the world is exemplified by the fourth stanza of Maurice James

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Craig’s post-Belfast Blitz poem ‘Easter Tuesday, 1941’ published in *The Northman* towards the end of 1941:

Steel and concrete, floating
On the estuary bog
Rest on nothing sounder
Than a drifting log.
No burrow can protect you
From the power of the dog.\(^{194}\)

Chapter Three

‘Strange Openings’: Visual Art in Northern Ireland and the Second World War

Contributions made by visual artists in Northern Ireland to the cultural life of twentieth-century Ireland have often been marginalised. Compared with the vast quantities of critical matter devoted to Irish literature of this period, Irish art in general could be seen to have suffered relative neglect, but the scarcity of critical works which address visual art in the northern state since partition is especially acute. John Hewitt and Mike Catto’s two-volume *Art in Ulster* (1977) stands almost alone in this respect, but although comprehensive in scope it is heavily biographical and historical in approach, and is short on analyses of specific works and their impact.¹ Catalogues published to accompany a series of four exhibitions mounted at the Golden Thread gallery in Belfast between 2005 and 2007, under the umbrella title *Collective Histories of Northern Irish Art*, carried livelier and more provocative short essays and interviews, but these by their nature were slim and fragmentary. Most critical literature on modern Irish art has taken an all-Ireland approach, exemplified by S. B. Kennedy’s *Irish Art and Modernism 1880-1950* (1991). Given that painters and sculptors from Northern Ireland discussed here and in other studies frequently travelled south to Dublin (as well as east and southeast to Britain and Europe) in order to gain recognition, sell their work and socialise with fellow artists, and, importantly, examine paintings and sculptures that they were unable to experience first-hand in Belfast, such approaches are often justified. However, the specific and unique position in which Northern Ireland found itself during the Second World War surely warrants a separate and specific investigation into the impact of the war on the production of visual art in the province.

In her thesis ‘Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism: Cultural Identity in Irish Art, 1943-1960’ (2006), Riann Coulter describes the study of Irish art as a ‘fledgling discipline’, which has only recently begun to ‘adopt more critical approaches’ to the idea of a canon. Coulter argues that ‘Despite these developments, the question of what constitutes “Irish” art and attempts to define a “National tradition”

have remained the dominant themes of Irish art history.\textsuperscript{2} These themes were clearly of pressing concern in the early years of the Free State, when George Russell and the \textit{Irish Times} amongst others made repeated demands for a recognisably Irish ‘national’ art, but Coulter detects a continuing preoccupation with ‘Irishness’ in the works of contemporary writers, citing the tendency of critics such as Sighle Bhreatnach-Lynch and Fintan Cullen to focus on questions of nationality in post-colonial re-readings of early twentieth century realist art, thereby contributing to a counter-revisionist discourse and preventing the recognition of other cultural identities at play.\textsuperscript{3}

Attempts to define an Irish national tradition in the visual arts and more recent post-colonial analyses have both contributed to the marginalisation of art specific to the northern state, whilst John Hewitt’s ambitious efforts to recover and reinvigorate Ulster regional artistic and poetic traditions remain unsurpassed. Histories of twentieth century British art have also tended to ignore Northern Ireland. Hewitt’s claim that by the mid 1930s ‘A new generation of artists had grown up in Ireland. And with us of the north, this was partly due to the emergence of our area as a constitutional and legislative entity’ is important and contentious.\textsuperscript{4} If, as Hewitt implies, partition altered the conditions of cultural production on the island, then the war, which resulted in southern neutrality and northern travel restrictions, surely cemented and furthered differences between the cultural climates in each jurisdiction. Focusing solely on artists working in the northern state at this time should allow us to examine the effects of the Second World War on their work without being drawn into well-trodden questions of national identity.

The cultural atmosphere in Northern Ireland certainly changed considerably as a result of the war. The unprecedented influx of foreign troops, or refugees such as Alice Berger Hammerschlag, brought many new cultural modes and traditions to the province, and the new anxieties, uncertainties and visual stimulants resulting from the conflict seem to have encouraged artists to experiment with form and composition to a greater degree.\textsuperscript{5} Art produced and exhibited in Northern Ireland during the war years

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 32.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{4} Hewitt, \textit{North Light}, p. 60.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{5} Alice Berger Hammerschlag, an abstract painter, fled mainland Europe in the late 1930s. She met her husband Heinz, also a refugee, in Belfast during the Second World War, and they married in 1947. Hammerschlag was closely associated with the Lyric Theatre, where she managed the New Gallery and designed stage sets, and her work was widely exhibited during her life and is held in the collections of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Ulster Museum and the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin. At the}
was more diverse in theme and style and more open to continental influences than had previously been the case. The visual arts received new and important official backing in the form of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts in Northern Ireland (CEMA (NI)), established in 1943 to encourage public interest in the visual arts through programmes of travelling exhibitions and lectures across the province. Some commercial demand for art also seems to have survived the privations of war: in December 1940 Moya Woodside reports that on ordering a picture frame she had been ready to commiserate with the art dealer on what she had presumed was a spell of bad trade, but that ‘he hadn’t been so busy for the last 7 years’, serving not regular customers but ‘quite unfamiliar people who came in and paid cash’ who were buying all they could afford. The dealer confides that when the Swedish and continental stock that was presently so popular was to run out he feared he would not be able to replace it. As we shall see, more pessimistic voices do contradict the idea that the war years were of great profit to artists in Northern Ireland, but a newfound sense of community between artists and writers in Belfast is certainly palpable in the little magazines and occasional publications such as John Boyd’s Lagan (which Edna Longley has described as the ‘Belfast equivalent of Penguin New Writing’) and Robert Greacen’s Northern Harvest that appeared over the war years, and the pressures and restrictions of life on the Home Front seem to have encouraged an unofficial and mutually supportive group of artists and writers to gather in the city, aiding the circulation of radical ideas. This was also the first time a significant group of artists from Northern Ireland began to achieve renown outside their immediate locality without emigrating, and it is notable that the third annual Irish Exhibition of Living Art held in Dublin in 1945 was dominated by a group of artists from the province.

In this chapter I shall attempt to chart the impact of the war on the artistic community in Northern Ireland: it could indeed be argued that the war was instrumental in stimulating the formation of such communities. I shall then examine paintings by

opening of her memorial exhibition it was said that she was of ‘inestimable value to the progress of art in Northern Ireland.’ (Diarmuid Kennedy, ‘The legend who lived in lost Belfast’, Belfast Telegraph, 5 April 2007 <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/lifestyle/the-legend-who-lived-in-lost-belfast-13430881.html> [accessed 8 June 2011] (para. 11 of 12))


Woodside, MO5462, 9 December 1940.

Colin Middleton, Gerard Dillon and William Conor which respond to the war, and reconsider these artists in a hitherto unacknowledged international context by tracing connections between their works and contemporaneous British and European sources. In the light of the body of work produced by artists in Britain and Northern Ireland working under the auspices of the War Artists' Advisory Committee, I aim to show the permeability of divisions between official and unofficial art during the war, and argue that, stylistically and thematically, the two strands had some striking elements in common. I will also explore the pivotal role of arts administrator, critic and poet John Hewitt in formulating and fostering a regionalist approach to cultural production in Northern Ireland, in particular to the visual arts, during the war years. Though his various writings have undoubtedly been hugely important to the development and perception of visual art in Northern Ireland, some of his conclusions require further interrogation and reassessment. In a way this chapter is more limited in its scope than the others: I have confined myself to discussing paintings and drawings, and for the most part will only be looking at works produced during the war years. This is mainly due to the nature of the material available. Painting was undoubtedly the pre-eminent visual art form in the province at this time: I have struggled to find any relevant works in the field of the plastic arts (perhaps due to a wartime shortage of materials) and charting the impact of the war on the architecture of the province involves geographical, social and technical questions that go far beyond the remit of this study. That the time frame of this chapter is narrower than others in this study is perhaps explained by the greater immediacy of drawing or painting: there have been sporadic literary engagements in Northern Ireland with the effects of the Second World War over the years since 1945, but it seems as though the majority of artistic responses to the conflict came during the years of the war itself.

The global scale of the Second World War and its after-effects has complicated attempts to chart the impact of the conflict on Western visual art. Some histories of twentieth century art imply that a creative hiatus took place, by omitting the war years altogether or avoiding addressing them directly. Robert Hughes writes in *The Shock of the New* (1980) of the 'enforced hibernation' of art and literature between 1939 and 1945, and credits the war mainly with killing off surrealism, by exposing the (literal) cowardice of those surrealists who avoided resisting fascism in either a military or
subversive capacity. He identifies the war as the point at which the centre of artistic power shifted from Paris to New York, as surrealism was overtaken by abstraction. The activities of a relatively vibrant community working in Belfast during the war pose a limited, localised but compelling challenge to such generalised assertions that the war years constituted an artistic hiatus, and Colin Middleton’s continued exploration of surrealism during and after the war is testament to the fact that this mode could survive and develop in new settings at this time.

As was the case during the First World War, representational art which responded directly to the war tended to be officially commissioned, though a clear shift had occurred between 1918 and 1939. Officially commissioned British art of the First World War tended to show scenes from overseas battlefields, but during the Second World War, due to the changing nature of warfare depictions of the Home Front also became important, as visual art began to respond to the bombing of European cities. Technological developments had revolutionised the conditions of cultural production between the wars: the Second World War was the first major conflict recorded extensively and with clarity through film and photography, and these newly dominant forms questioned the documentary relevance of traditional modes of painting and drawing. The role of photography in reporting the concentration camps, through the work of Lee Miller in particular, arguably assured the primacy of that medium by 1945. Hughes argues that ‘Art was in fact now ill-equipped to compete with print photography, or film in explaining what the political catastrophes of the twentieth century meant,’ while Frances Spalding claims that ‘What is noticeably absent in Second-World-War painting is any record of human suffering’. This point is echoed by Mark Rawlinson’s contention that British artists and writers during the Second World War concentrated on buildings, rather than bodies, in their imaginings of destruction ‘in which violence connoted social cohesion, rather than the destruction of persons, and in which the sensuous apprehension of destructive force made the vulnerable body more, not less, invisible.’ The horrors of Auschwitz, Belsen and the Burma railway, uncovered to the Home Front public towards the end of the war through newspapers and newsreels, certainly occasioned serious and unprecedented questions of self examination for artists and writers, however. Adorno’s uncompromising

11 Rawlinson, British Writing of the Second World War, p. 72.
admonition that ‘After Auschwitz it is barbaric to write poetry’ posed a serious challenge, and as the war ended the enormity of the Holocaust in particular questioned the validity and worth of artistic endeavour. The English artist Nevill Johnson, who spent the war in a variety of locations around Northern Ireland, admitted in his autobiography *The Other Side of Six* (1983) to such feelings immediately after the war, even as he experienced commercial success for the first time:

All artists are subject to periods of doubt, however, and I was no exception. It came suddenly; the painting was rubbish I felt, however well received; these silent surreal wastelands, these mute bones and raven skies – who was I addressing? Of what relevance these Arcadian shores to a world of blackmail and bombs?

From an Irish perspective, there is no great critical consensus on the impact of the war on visual art and culture. In a review of the ninth Irish Exhibition of Living Art (IELA) in 1950, the critic Edward Sheehy claimed that Irish painting had radically changed course over the previous decade, comparing painting in Ireland before 1940, which he characterised as being confined by a narrow academic style, limited to portraiture, rural scenes and ‘acres of watered down Impressionism in landscape,’ with the new exhibition in which the ‘emphasis is on the modern, that is on imagination, on individual vision, on the experimental, and consequently away from safe, the accepted and the familiar in both technique and expression.’ Sheehy is clear in attributing responsibility for this change to the war years of ‘spiritual unrest [...] from which our political neutrality did not save us.’ He continues:

It may appear contradictory; but it seems to me that our very isolation created here a feeling of individuality and self-confidence; or alternatively and perhaps simultaneously the very precariousness of our chosen isolation demonstrated even more strongly than involvement that we were part of modern Europe, and not, as some would pretend, an exotic and miraculous survival from a Celtic Middle Ages. At any rate the result was that Ireland, for the first time in her

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13 Johnson, *Other Side of Six*, p. 50.
history, developed a body of painters comparable to their contemporaries in Europe and America.\textsuperscript{14}

This idea that the war years allowed, prompted or forced artists in Ireland to reassess what they were capable of, thereby escaping tired fidelities to academic styles and narrow conceptions of national identity, has endured. Bruce Arnold has claimed that after the Second World War Irish artists began to lose 'any sense of obligation, such as those felt by Yeats and Jellett,' artists who might have been modernist in outlook, but seem to have felt some kind of duty to their nationality and obliged to render the newly independent Ireland within an officially approved aesthetic.\textsuperscript{15} A new generation did not. For S.B. Kennedy:

...the war years in Ireland were a watershed between the early self-conscious years of independence and a more certain identity. As far as the visual arts and Modernism in particular are concerned, the time saw a tacit acceptance of many ideas which had evolved during the previous two decades. It was this willingness to consider new ideas, in the main alien to Ireland, that distinguishes the 1940s from previous decades.\textsuperscript{16}

Clair Wills draws back from such bold claims in her cultural history of Ireland and the war, focusing briefly on disagreements between nationalist adherents to the idea of specifically Irish art and European exponents of the avant-garde who entered the southern state during the war years, and describing the tensions in Dublin between the White Stag Group and local artists and writers. Rather than seeing the war as a 'watershed' for questions of identity in art, she suggests that ensuing debates over whether it was possible to be both Irish and avant-garde were part of an older 'routine opposition of local and European, native and foreign,' and that 'At their best the new arrivals brought an injection of fresh energy, disrupting the tired Gaelic versus Anglo-Saxon ping-pong.'\textsuperscript{17} Not all have subscribed to the idea that the war years were at all

\textsuperscript{14} Edward Sheehy 'Recent Irish Painting in the Irish Exhibition of Living Art', \textit{Envoy}, 3.10 (September 1950), 45-52 (p. 45).
\textsuperscript{17} Wills, \textit{That Neutral Island}, p. 285.
revolutionary or beneficial for art in Ireland, however: in an essay on Irish painting and post war internationalism published in 1998, Peter Murray writes that Éire’s neutrality resulted in an isolationism that ‘had a silent, insidious, and ultimately damaging effect on the country’s cultural and artistic life, the years after the war being something of a doldrums.’

Despite the fact that these appraisals for the most part address the southern state, and often specifically Dublin, there are some ideas here of relevance to the northern situation. Though life was, in Catherine Marshall’s phrase, ‘crushingly difficult’ for some artists in Northern Ireland during the 1930s, 40s and 50s, artists in the province also began to experiment with new forms and techniques during this time, perhaps to a greater extent than their southern counterparts. Works produced by artists such as Arthur and George Campbell, Gerard Dillon, John Luke and Colin Middleton during the 1930s and 40s indicate a new found awareness of modernist styles in Northern Ireland, with some correspondence to developments in the southern state: it must be admitted, however, that Middleton’s surrealist work seems to have no counterpart.

The pre-war cultural atmosphere in Northern Ireland appears to have offered little encouragement to aspiring artists. Prevalent attitudes towards artists were memorably summed up by the protestant nationalist journalist and critic Denis Ireland, who wrote in a catalogue for the 1968 William Conor memorial touring exhibition that:

A man sketching in France is still a French citizen, as much within the law as anybody else. A man sketching in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast was outside, if not the law, at any rate, the mores; he wasn’t doing anything useful, wasn’t helping to propel that tide of red brick up the lower slopes of the Black Mountain.

Artists seem to have been viewed in their own communities with suspicion and hostility, to the extent that as a young man Conor sketched on the streets of Belfast shielded by a newspaper, in an attempt to fool passers-by into thinking that he was

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studying racing form. John Hewitt recalled that as a boy of seven or eight, and aware that artists were unlike other people, he once followed Conor along a street, curious to know where he was going:

He was William Conor, the artist. His brightly coloured shirt, his big tie, his flat black hat, all marked him out as different. A man who lived to paint pictures; who didn’t teach in a school, or drive a bread-cart, or wear an apron behind a counter. A strange and wholly alluring person. He forged on with that slow urgent characteristic stride of his.

Hostility endured: Gerard Dillon initially became a decorator after it was made clear to him that painting was not an acceptable profession where he grew up in West Belfast. He eventually moved away to London. An essay in the Socialist Party newsletter *Northern Star* in June 1940 entitled ‘The Sahara of the Arts’ acknowledged that although Ulster was ‘far from poor’ in the world of letters, in terms of visual art ‘Local painters, good local painters, are neglected and, in exhibitions, scorned.’ Such scorn was a matter of abiding interest to John Hewitt, who refined his explanations for the enduring distrust of and resistance to creative expression in the province in a number of writings over his career, beginning with a flurry of essays and reviews published during the war. In ‘Painting in Ulster’, an essay which appeared in the one-off anthology *Northern Harvest* (1944), Hewitt wrote despairingly of the ‘culturally conservative climate of the province,’ adding that ‘One of the gravest obstacles has been and to some measure still is that our Ulster buying public has been unwilling to give adequate support to local effort.’ He suggested that climatic and geographical forces were ranged against the aspiring artist, and claimed that landscape painting in Ulster had long been hampered by the province’s damp climate. In a radio talk in 1945, Hewitt argued that the lack of aristocratic and ecclesiastical patronage was partly responsible for the shortfall:

26 Ibid., p. 144.
No King established his court among us. No Church has been rich enough, and the aristocracy, apart from the brief Georgian flourish at the end of that Century, has had little cultural influence. Our merchant-class came to power too late. And there were no cities crammed with craftsmen to draw upon for the traditional skills.  

A later essay ‘The Bitter Gourd: Some Problems of the Ulster Writer,’ published in the third number of the little magazine *Lagan* in 1945, found Hewitt lamenting the lack of artistic and literary heritage in Ulster, attributing this deficit to the absence of a single common and regional ancient language, and blaming in part the ethnic composition of the province:

Scotsmen, Englishmen and Irishmen have here in Ulster become clotted in an uneven and lumpy mixture. The juxtaposition of these rubbing, striking, colliding elements has frequently produced brilliant results in organisation and material enterprise: our best men are the Lawrences, Kelvin, Hart, Bryce; extroverted men of tremendous energy, skill and integrity, but deficient in creative genius.

The argument continues somewhat vaguely: detecting an inherent ‘inarticulateness’ in the ‘Protestant block,’ Hewitt claims that the best articulators of Ulster’s separateness have tended not to be native Ulstermen, citing Carson, F.E. Smith and Randolph Churchill in support of this. More solid, perhaps, is his argument that the rapid industrialisation of Belfast during the nineteenth century was uncongenial to creative expression, that the ‘absurdly vaunted material values’ of the province, the pride in having ‘the largest shipyard, the largest ropeworks […] did really make the artist’s position extremely difficult.’

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27 John Hewitt, ‘Art in Ulster’, radio broadcast on BBC NIHS, Sunday 11 November 1945, Coleraine Hewitt Collection, Box 12, 4/1, p. 3.
29 Ibid., p. 98. Ironically, during the First and Second World Wars, William Conor and others produced a number of officially commissioned paintings of shipyard scenes in Belfast. I shall explore some of these towards the end of this chapter.
Fellow socialists in Belfast at this time were also keen to blame nineteenth century industrialisation for the cultural and political conservatism of the province: two years earlier in 1943 Robert Greacen had expressed dismay at the deleterious effect of 'a stale industrialism, all guts and no heart' on the political culture of Ulster, and the 1944 edition of *Lagan* carried an essay by Denis Ireland entitled 'Smoke Clouds in the Lagan Valley', which similarly attributed the stifling of radical Protestantism during the nineteenth century to the burgeoning industrialisation of the city. These polemicists did not believe that creative expression had been entirely suppressed: Ireland wrote of Conor's folded newspaper that it 'acted both as shelter and release; hence the instantaneous quality of his street sketches, their uninterrupted flowing rhythm.' The cultural conservatism of heavily industrial metropolitan Belfast and its establishment during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was clearly incompatible with artistic experimentation with avant-garde forms and styles, however, and even Conor's more impressionistic street scenes, cited by Ireland, are undeniably stylistically conservative. In May 1944 the 'Northern Notebook' in the Communist newsletter *Unity* addressed Belfast's reactionary culture in a report on a groundbreaking meeting to discuss a community arts theatre, attended by the Church of Ireland's Dean Kerr, Presbyterian Dr Frazer-Hurst and the leading Catholic priest Dr Ryan:

We appear to be on the eve of a revival in the cultural life of the province, particularly insofar as public interest in painting and the drama is concerned. There is no shortage of painting talent amongst the workers of Belfast, as the gable walls of the city amply demonstrate. But this talent is rather hampered by a tradition which seems to say that only one theme is worthy of treatment: that of a river-crossing by a certain Dutch gentleman one day in July, 1690.

Admitting that communists and socialists could often seem uninterested or even hostile to artistic expression themselves, over the following months *Unity* made a clear and conscious effort to devote more energy to cultural matters, with a regular column by 'P.W.G' on literary matters as well as previews of live and radio classical music

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32 'Red Hand', 'Northern Notebook', *Unity*, 4 May 1944, p. 3.
concerts. A satirical piece by the artist George Campbell entitled ‘Overheard at an Exhibition’ appeared in February 1945 and lampooned the resistance of the Belfast public to more avant-garde modes by imagining an inane stream of commentary by one exhibition visitor to another:

Do you paint or draw, darling? You should because mother said everyone should have something to fall back on – not literally speaking of course – something to have as a sideline just in case there is a slump or something. You know how these politics are. [...] oh, look at that picture! Isn’t it horrible? It must be upside down. Let’s go to the other room.33

In addition to such dismissive attitudes towards some forms of artistic expression, aspiring artists arguably also suffered from a lack of stimuli, in terms of works of art that could be appreciated first hand in Belfast and Northern Ireland. At the outbreak of the Second World War a single dedicated art gallery in Stranmillis in South Belfast served the whole province. The Victorian zeal for museums had not passed the city by, but initially extended only so far as scientific concerns. Noel Nesbitt’s A Museum in Belfast (1979) describes how the Belfast Museum opened in 1831 with the intention of satisfying the ‘fast growing desire’ for scientific knowledge of the citizens of Belfast, displaying artefacts relating to natural history, archaeology and ethnography.34 When the Belfast Free Public Library opened in 1888 the city gained a space for temporary art exhibitions on the top floor, funded by grants from the Government Committee of the Belfast Corporation, but the city did not obtain a permanent home for paintings until the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery (later the Ulster Museum) finally opened after a number of delays in 1929. Hewitt, who joined the museum as an art assistant in 1930 and would remain an employee until 1957, was highly critical of the incomplete building in his unpublished memoir A North Light, describing it as:

...a monument to civic indecision and lethargy; its original cost ninety thousand pounds, just the cost of a wartime bomber. During the war, everytime I heard on

33 George Campbell, ‘Overheard at an Exhibition’, Unity, 22 February 1944, p. 3.
the radio of a bomber being lost, I thought 'There goes the other bit of the Museum and Art Gallery.'

The new building relegated the visual arts to the uppermost floor, and the museum’s acquisitions policy, dating from 1910, was conservative for the most part, consisting of plans to buy water-colours, topographical drawings and maps of Belfast, and modern British and French art. The largest of five rooms on the upper floor contained oils by Turner, Orpen and Lavery, the other four displayed water-colours, portraits of various civic dignitaries, more works by Lavery and the Robert Lloyd Patterson Collection. The controversial assembly between 1929 and 1933 of the Lloyd Patterson Collection, made possible by a bequest from the eponymous local connoisseur, did suggest that some attempts were being made to display more contemporary styles.

Against this background the Second World War had a galvanizing effect on the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery. Though the upper floor and permanent collection were evacuated on the outbreak of war, numerous and varied temporary exhibitions were held over the war years. In addition to exhibitions organised by CEMA (NI) of works by Irish and British artists, and other shows of paintings and drawings depicting the Home Front, for the first time the gallery began to display many works by overseas artists, as the British Council developed cultural links with the exiled governments of German-occupied European countries. Exhibitions held between 1942 and 1945 showing the art and life of Allied nations included works by artists from Belgium, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and Yugoslavia. An exhibition on the post war future of Belfast, in which ten architects outlined their visions for a remodelled city,

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35 Hewitt, North Light, p. 11.
36 Nesbitt, p. 31.
37 The bequest itself consisted of a collection of minor works by Victorian artists, but after a damning independent report commissioned from the visiting art critic Frank Rutter it was decided to sell the majority of these and use the proceeds to purchase modern British art, through the Contemporary Art Society in London. For a detailed account of this episode see Brian Kennedy, Ulster Museum, A Catalogue of the Permanent Collection: 1, British Art 1900-1937 Robert Lloyd Patterson Collection (Belfast: Friends of the Ulster Museum, 1982), pp. 3-5.
38 Nesbitt, p. 37.
39 Ibid., p. 40.
was particularly successful, and attracted eleven thousand visitors to the gallery over a
twelve day period before being moved to the centre of Belfast. Reflecting on his time
at the gallery, Hewitt was keen to emphasise the international scope of the exhibitions
held during the 1940s and 50s:

Our people had, over the years, a chance to see not only Scottish and Welsh
painting and work from the North West of England, but Turkish, Dutch,
Australian – Drysdale, Dobell, Nolan; Italian – Chirico, Severini, Carra,
Morandi, Campigli –, and in sculpture one expansive show took in Moore,
McWilliam, Chadwick, as well as the best of the Irish, north and south.

Before the war European travel, although expensive and unfeasible for most
people, was probably the best way of broadening one’s artistic horizons, and it is
significant that two of the figures who dominate this chapter, John Hewitt and Colin
Middleton, were able to pursue this course. The influences on Middleton’s early work
can arguably be traced to those artists whose work he had seen on occasional trips to
Britain and Europe, such as van Gogh (Middleton visited an exhibition in Leicester in
1928) or Ensor and other Flemish masters, whose work he explored during a visit to
Belgium with his father in 1931. Hewitt also benefited from trips to the continent with
his father during the late 1920s, visiting galleries in Bruges and Brussels in 1927 and
Paris in 1929. The painter John Luke also travelled to Paris with Nevill Johnson, who
had settled in Belfast in 1935 and begun to paint under Luke’s tutelage. Johnson
recalled their experience of cubist and surrealist art as ‘exploring and tasting rare fruits.
[...] Life-enhancing stuff it was’, contrasting this glamorous world with cultural life
back home on the margins, where ‘In spite of (or resulting from) the gritty masochism
of its inhabitants Belfast harboured also a gaggle of rebels, mavericks, odd-balls, poets
and sensible men.’ The war precluded European travel, and, as Catherine Marshall
describes, painters including Daniel O’Neill were in large part dependent on the
kindness of a Belfast librarian for the privilege of examining reproductions of
contemporary art:

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The isolation and displacement of the Second World War had, inadvertently, allowed European ideas of Modernism to be examined and assimilated – the source being the City Reference library, in Belfast. Here, the Chief Librarian, Mr Jenkinson, would, contrary to library rules, allow O’Neill and his fellow painters to borrow illustrated texts for the weekend, thereby enabling them to study colour reproductions of the European Moderns. Travel to see the originals would have been impossible, even if they had the means, due to the restrictions of the War.\(^45\)

The paradoxical possibility that in being cut off from the continent Northern Ireland became more open to modern European artistic influences was explored at length in a number of writings by John Hewitt.

The apparent pre-war cultural conservatism in the province, and the relatively late establishment of a major art gallery, helped to ensure that financial pressures on artists in Northern Ireland were severe. Few outlets for the sale of their works existed, and as Hewitt suggests in ‘The Bitter Gourd’, in seeking a living artists were forced into commercial exploitations of their talents which frustrated more fruitful artistic explorations of their native land:

A man may spend a lifetime copying the features of company directors or prelates. Another man will link his name with a known area, to a bundle of mountains or a stretch of coast and continually repeat his own convention for rendering these in terms of pigment. Never in our history have we had a painter who lived in a country place and made not merely the scenery of it, but the whole tangled bird’s nest of its life, its people, their business and behaviour, their garments, gestures and architecture, the stuff and substance of his work. The cosmopolitan school of Paris has wiped such an ideal from our minds.\(^46\)


\(^46\) Hewitt, ‘The Bitter Gourd’, Lagan, 3 (1945), 99. In A North Light, Hewitt writes of his father’s brother who had attempted to make a career from painting in late nineteenth century Belfast, recalling that ‘Art as a means of living did not rate high in our estimate of careers. A younger brother of my father, Sandy, had, late in the last century, been an art student, but the hazards of his craft drove him over to the commercial side, and even there his struggle had been hard.’ (Hewitt, North Light, p. 2)
Hewitt’s assessment leaves painting in the province in an invidious position, caught between a conservative industrial and religious establishment which was reluctant to support artistic endeavour beyond portraiture or landscape painting, and a Parisian School of painting whose lure he feared would discourage artists from exploring their native land. This dilemma had been articulated in more strident terms by Seán Ó Faoláin in an editorial for a special Ulster number of The Bell in July 1941, in which he wrote that:

Up there, on the other hand, a ruthless industrialism, and an equally devastating hyper-internationalism, are at the same time preventing life from being cultivated with humanity. There it is not that there are no barriers – there is no sieve – everything comes flooding in on a people cut off from their roots and will as effectively smother them as our introversion will indubitably smother us if it continues.  

However, whereas Ó Faoláin’s apocalyptic pessimism is driven by an ever-present anti-partitionism and concern for the widening gap between north and south, Hewitt’s arguments are more difficult to disentangle. His feelings about the potential influence of European art on painting in Ulster changed noticeably over the war years, seemingly in tandem with the development of his theory of regionalism. The fears expressed in ‘The Bitter Gourd’ in 1945 of the effect of ‘the cosmopolitan school of Paris’ signal a shift from views expressed by Hewitt in an essay entitled ‘Under Forty: Some Ulster Artists’, published in the anthology Now in Ulster the previous year. Here he praised the more experimental activities of contemporary artists in Northern Ireland, and detected a movement over the five years since the outbreak of war from a preoccupation with cubism and impressionism to a new awareness of ‘problems which still have validity in Great Britain and on the Continent.’  

Use of the word ‘validity’ here is indicative of Hewitt’s longstanding anxiety about the relationship between Irish and continental art.

In a guide to the Belfast Art Gallery published soon after the end of the war, Hewitt outlines an historical assessment of why Ireland ‘in the last thousand years has

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47 ‘Ulster’, The Bell, 2.4 (July 1941), 4-11 (p. 6).
had no indigenous tradition of the Fine Arts." Blaming the lack of stability on an island ‘shattered by gusts of foreign invasion and by civil war’ he claims that ‘the colonial economic structure which took its place left no room for the growth of any aesthetic tradition,’ and again cites a lack of ecclesiastical, political or royal centres of power large or rich enough to encourage and support artistic communities or schools of painting as the main reason why talented individuals tended to travel abroad to further their careers in the visual arts. Hewitt believed that the combination of technological innovation and provincial institutional initiative had at last given rise to a situation where post-war artists no longer felt the need to emigrate in order to succeed, but he was apprehensive about the potential impact of British and European artistic developments on local production:

...the time lag in the rate at which aesthetic developments inaugurated on the Continent became effective in this westernmost edge of Europe has, until recent years, left the mode in which our resident artists express themselves outside the contemporary flow. Now, with the accelerated speed of communications, with the general rise in the cultural level, with the unflagging campaign of loan exhibitions carried out by the Belfast Gallery and, latterly, by C.E.M.A. (N.I.) there is evidence of the gap being narrowed. But it would be wrong for us to attempt completely to close it, in order to make aesthetics in Ulster merely a reverberation of the gossip of the London and Parisian studios, or our pictures weak imitations of the international manners, for the best art is always a rooted art.

The idea of a ‘time lag’ and ‘gap’ between Ireland and the European metropolitan artistic capitals is recurrent in Hewitt’s writings on this subject. In *A North Light* he describes the modelling master at the Belfast art school he attended during his final year of secondary education:

In the first decade of the century he had gone to France and come back a convert to Impressionism. This fairly demonstrates the existence of the time-lag

50 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
51 Ibid., p. 18.
between Continental usage and its being taken up in our westernmost island. That forty years evident at the century’s start became progressively shortened, decade by decade, with the increase in travel and in the availability of the mass media of communication, so that now the delay in adopting the latest mode of executing or assembling a work of art, has, for the quickest of talents, narrowed to a bare twelvemonths.\(^52\)

Despite Hewitt’s fears, and repeatedly and earnestly expressed beliefs in the value of a regionalist approach to cultural production, there remains in his writings a nagging sense that art in Northern Ireland should be judged by, or even live up to, British or European standards: the guarantors, it might be inferred, of ‘validity’. Eamonn Hughes writes of *A North Light* that following the ‘surprise of foreignness’ of his first visit to the continent in the 1930s, Hewitt’s concern was ‘to judge local work by European standards in an attempt to diminish the gap he perceives between Northern Ireland and elsewhere’, and indeed, in such writings, Hewitt often appears to be irreconcilably caught between lamenting the historical insularity of the province, expressing a desire to open it up to contemporary influences, and wishing to preserve distinctive regional modes of expression.\(^53\)

The shift in Hewitt’s thinking is even more pronounced when his post-war wariness is compared with his involvement with the Ulster Unit during the 1930s. Exhibiting for the first and only time in December 1934, this group emulated the similarly short-lived Unit One collective in England, a disparate collection of painters, sculptors and architects trying to define an international modernist aesthetic.\(^54\) Unit One, whose members included Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, collapsed after two years in 1935, having been unable to unify its intentions in a single manifesto.\(^55\) Hewitt helped to organise their travelling exhibition at the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery, which included sculptures by Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth and paintings by Edward Burra, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson and Edward Wadsworth, and wrote in *A North Light* that ‘Of the earlier exhibitions I handled none was more

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54 Hall, p. 7.
influential on my thinking than that of the now forgotten Unit One. [...] For the more progressive it demonstrated more clearly than ever before how far out of step with the time’s drift elsewhere was the work venerated and practised by their exhibiting contemporaries. The Ulster Unit, formed in 1934, was a collective of mainly young, London-educated artists, invigorated by their time in England and keen to improve awareness of modern art in Northern Ireland. Members included John Luke, George MacCann, Colin Middleton and Romeo Toogood, and like its English predecessor the group dissolved soon after the first exhibition, which had likewise revealed a complete lack of common purpose.

The catalogue for that exhibition, held in December 1934, carried a preface written by Hewitt, secretary to the collective, in which he writes with enthusiasm about the prospect of growing closeness between Ulster artists and their European counterparts:

In this Unit, Ulster has for the first time a body of artists alert to continental influence while that influence is still real and vital. It is no vain hope that with a consistent group bound by more ties than those of mere geographical proximity, working on experimental lines and no longer in an archaic dialectic, Belfast will move step by step not only with Great Britain but with France and Scandinavia.

Here Hewitt envisages the ‘time lag’ disappearing as Belfast becomes culturally synchronous with the rest of Northern Europe (though notably not, it seems, with Germany). Hewitt’s journey from unbridled enthusiasm for the potential of European influence on art in Northern Ireland in the 1934 catalogue, to his deep reservations over ‘weak imitations’ expressed a decade later in both ‘The Bitter Gourd’ and the museum guide, can be interpreted less as a recoil from a Europe ravaged by war and fascism and more as part of the development of his theory of regionalism, itself encouraged by the pressures of the war. This was formulated with aims not only of bridging sectarian divisions in the province, but also of defining a strong regional identity for the province.

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57 Coulter, ‘Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism’, p. 95.
58 S. B. Kennedy, Irish Art and Modernism, p. 77.
in the face of creeping Anglo-American cultural homogenisation, the latter perhaps hastened by the presence of so many British and US troops in Northern Ireland during the war.

An outline of his theory, initially inspired by reading Lewis Mumford’s *The Culture of Cities* (1938), appears in an article entitled ‘Regionalism: The Last Chance’ published in 1947, in which he advocates breaking up national government organisations into smaller regional bodies to tackle specific problems – citing US President Roosevelt’s Tennessee Valley Authority, established in 1933, as an ‘outstanding example’ of this – and describes a devolutionary process beginning with the stimulation of local culture. Arguing that strongly held and defended regional identities need not preclude the membership of a larger cultural and political association, he suggests that for Ulster this could take the form of participation in a federal Ireland or federated British Isles, a radical notion in the political and social context in which he was writing.

The Second World War exerted a formative influence on Hewitt’s theories. Tom Clyde writes that ‘Ulster regionalism did not spring fully-formed from the brow of John Hewitt, but was rather the result of a slow process of growth which was given a new and radical boost by a particular set of circumstances.’ As Clyde elaborates, prominent among such ‘circumstances’ was of course the Second World War, and Hewitt himself clearly acknowledges the importance of the war years to his life and to culture in Northern Ireland in the numerous references to it in writings over the rest of his life. His optimism in ‘Regionalism: The Last Chance’ about the chances for the success of regionalist policies in Northern Ireland undoubtedly sprang from the cultural activities that he had witnessed (and often been a part of) during the war, as he approvingly cites little magazines and literary journals, the activities of CEMA (NI) and

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60 Hewitt, ‘Regionalism: The Last Chance’ in Clyde (ed.), *Ancestral Voices*, p. 123. Hewitt cites Lewis Mumford when he argues that:

> Regionalism, as one French observer points out, begins with a revival of poetry and language: it ends with plans for the economic invigoration of regional agriculture and industry, with proposals for a more autonomous political life, with an effort to build up local centres of learning and culture.

(Ibid.)

61 Ibid., p. 125.

the works of Sam Hanna Bell, John Boyd and Joseph Tomelty. Significantly, however, most of these activities took place on the margins, often involving the unofficial voices and frequenters of Campbell’s café, and Hewitt expresses dissatisfaction with the attitudes to and contributions of the various branches of the official apparatus of the northern state to cultural production in the region, singling out the Stormont government, BBC Northern Ireland and Queen’s University for criticism. Hewitt’s frustrations with administrative powers in Belfast over his twenty-seven year involvement with the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery are well documented in *A North Light*, and he clearly felt that the potential for regional revival lay for the most part outside Northern Ireland’s conservative institutional framework.

Like others, in retrospect Hewitt took a positive view of Northern Ireland’s enforced wartime isolation, and in the 1972 essay ‘No Rootless Colonist’ he wrote with a degree of nostalgia of the opportunities it had afforded:

...with the Second World War, we were cut off from the larger island to the east and from the Europe which, by travel, we had grown to enjoy and accept as also part of our inheritance. Consequently, we were forced to take our holidays in Donegal or elsewhere in the province of Ulster. It was then that our long acquaintance with the middle Glens of Antrim began. Even dutiful exercises like lecturing in army camps broadened my experience of the six partitioned counties of the North. And walking in the Rosses I felt myself no stranger.

Such emphasis on Northern Ireland’s isolation should not be allowed to obscure the fact that huge numbers of British, European and American soldiers and European refugees arrived in the province during the Second World War. Tom Clyde writes that ‘the presence of so many outsiders must have forced upon people an awareness of their identity, as distinct from these others, and of what it is that makes them different’, and the exhibitions staged in the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery were perhaps the most visually arresting illustrations of the impact that these visitors had on the cultural life of the province. Letters from Hewitt to his friend Patrick Maybin in 1942 mention exhibitions of Polish War Art in August and Czech paintings in December of that year,

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and emphasise the effect these had on his own understanding of Irish political history. Following a talk by a Lieutenant in the Czech army, Hewitt realises ‘that to solve the Irish problem we must know more than Ireland. [...] I shall have to study the patterns of Nationalism in light of Slovenia and Moravia and SubCarpathian Russia not in the twilight of Cromwell and King Billy’, and compares the division between rural Catholic Slovenia and industrialised Protestant Bohemia with the partition of Ireland.66

Theoretical questions aside, practical difficulties had perhaps the greatest impact on artists during the Second World War. In Britain and Ireland travel restrictions, shortage or unavailability of materials, and (in Britain only) conscription clearly impeded the activities of painters and sculptors. These privations had some unexpected and exciting results, exemplified by the activities of Henry Moore, who, faced with a shortage of sculptural materials, worked on paper in his capacity as an official war artist, and produced a hugely popular series of drawings of sleepers sheltering in the London Underground during bombing raids.67 Shortages arguably heightened the material significance of some works of art: in Northern Ireland the shortage of paper forced William Conor to sketch on the reverse of Red Cross advertising material, whilst Gerard Dillon framed some of his paintings of the Belfast Blitz using wood gathered from the bombsites; conversely John Hewitt recalled Colin Middleton using old canvases to make sandbags for Air Raid Precautions.68

Intermittently imposed travel restrictions between Britain and Northern Ireland stimulated local involvement in artistic activity in the province, as Gillian McIntosh describes:

Wartime travel restrictions meant that few artists from Britain were able to visit the state. This forced CEMA to rely almost entirely on local talent. The late 1940s saw the development of a regionalist ethos by CEMA; its reports are littered with references to local artists and performers, it used the resources of

66Letters from John Hewitt to Patrick Maybin, 24 August 1942 (p. 2) and 9 December 1942 (pp. 3-4), PRONI Hewitt Papers, D/3838/3/12.
local art collectors, and it purchased work by local artists. This was reflected in the development of an interest in the arts by local groups.69

In one crucial respect artists in Northern Ireland were undoubtedly freer than their British counterparts, as the lack of conscription allowed the generation of Dillon and Middleton to pursue creative activities rather than being drafted into the forces. This is not to say that members of the artistic community in the province were entirely detached from the British war effort. Although Dillon’s nationalist background and political beliefs precluded his involvement in either a civilian or military capacity, George Campbell worked in an aircraft factory, George MacCann served in Burma with the Inniskilling Fusiliers and John Hunter commanded the Army Cadet Corps in Belfast.70 As I explained in the previous chapter, after a number of failed attempts to join the British Army (as a local government officer his was a reserved occupation), John Hewitt joined the local civil defence organisation and was active in lecturing on art, literature and Marxism at army camps all over the province during the war.

Hewitt’s practical role of encouraging and publicising art in the province was seemingly vital to the success of cultural ventures in Northern Ireland during the war, however.71 In 1943 he was promoted to the position of chief assistant at the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery, organised Middleton’s first solo exhibition and helped to found CEMA (NI).72 He later remembered that year as being particularly culturally exciting:

This year 1943 is notable for the evidence which emerged strongly that Belfast was entering an unusually vigorous phase in the creative arts. Small exhibitions in dingy rooms down-town, in a frame-maker’s shop, gave the first evidence of new talents, such as those of Gerard Dillon, Daniel O’Neill, and the Campbell

71 The extent of Hewitt’s fame and influence in wartime Belfast may be gauged from an incident recalled by James McIntyre in his memoir Making My Mark, involving the painter Markey Robinson. Robinson had been sketching an army barracks on the Antrim Road when he was spotted by a passing military police patrol, and was dragged into the barracks for questioning. His sketchbook was confiscated and it took four hours of interrogation before police were satisfied that Robinson was not a German spy. He was eventually released, ‘having given the name of John Hewitt, the Keeper of Art at the Ulster Museum, as guarantor.’ (McIntyre, Making My Mark, p. 94)
brothers, George and Arthur. In the literary field the appearance of the first of the annual issues of *Lagan*, edited by John Boyd and his associates, is our best record, demonstrating that a new generation of writers was coming forward, and the establishment of the Ulster Group Theatre showed advance on another front. While the basic causes for this wide striving are not readily teased out, the wartime isolation of Northern Ireland was certainly a factor, compelling us to till our own gardens.\(^73\)

Despite his role in its foundation, it is notable that once again the developments celebrated by Hewitt were led not by the embryonic state-funded organisation CEMA, but result from the activities of the members of an unofficial community operating on the margins and gathering in the 'dingy rooms down-town', or perhaps at John and Roberta Hewitt's Mount Charles flat. The first edition of *Lagan* he mentions carried a self penned essay entitled 'Some Observations on the History of Irish Painting', in which Hewitt offers explanations for the lack of an Irish tradition of the visual arts similar to those discussed earlier in this chapter, but *Now in Ulster*, which appeared the following year, provides a more comprehensive group portrait of the artists and writers gathered in Belfast at the time. This one off anthology, edited by Arthur and George Campbell, carried short stories by James D. Gildea, Sam Hanna Bell and Gerry Morrow, essays by Hewitt, Hubert R. Wilmot and Denis Ireland, verse by Hewitt and Roy McFadden and, in a move that distinguishes *Now in Ulster* from other contemporary publications, monochrome reproductions of paintings by the Campbell brothers, Gerard Dillon, John Luke and Colin Middleton amongst others.\(^74\) Hewitt's essay 'Under Forty: Some Ulster Artists' is a personal overview of the state of the provincial arts scene, in which he divides the artists whose works appear in the anthology into broad categories. One group, of George Campbell, Gerard Dillon and Dan O'Neill, is characterised by the 'direct, unequivocal notation' of painters described as:


...strongly emotional. Their subject matter is drawn largely from the life of men in towns, the life at hand, seeking no escape into the psychological world of Middleton or the ideal world of Luke. [These artists respond] More often to the pity. The pity for the shabby, the hopeless, sometimes shocked into the violence of the street accident or the air raid. It is therefore no mere chance that both Dillon and Campbell are here represented by pictures of the Blitz, surely the event of our time with the harshest impact - at any rate, for those of us who have not fought.75

With the benefit of hindsight, Hewitt's distinction here appears reductive. Although Middleton did produce a diverse body of surrealist work during the war, and these paintings can of course be read as psychological explorations of the world of the unconscious, some of these works would seem to combine such explorations with more direct engagements with the physical effects of the Belfast Blitz, including a number of representations of the destruction of the built environment. As Hewitt observes, two of the sixteen paintings reproduced in Now in Ulster, George Campbell's Dead Street (1941) and Gerard Dillon's Bombed Street (1941), respond to the Belfast Blitz of 1941. The traumatic impact of the destruction can be felt in the works, with varying results. Dead Street uses menacing smudges to convey the urban destruction that verge on the abstract; in Dillon's impressionistic Bombed Street barely discernible groups of stunted figures huddle together in a ruined street. The fact that these reproductions appear in the little magazine together with Colin Middleton's The Dark Tower (1941), which also depicts a damaged building, encourages a reading of Middleton's painting as a more oblique engagement with the effects of the bombing, and I shall return to this work later in this chapter. Middleton's discontinuous and heterogeneous wartime output also includes a number of neo-impressionistic paintings of Belfast street scenes that display a deep fidelity to the communities and streets of working class Belfast, and to what might be termed 'the life at hand'. In addition, Hewitt's claim that Gerard Dillon, in concert with Campbell and O'Neill, is an artist given to 'direct, unequivocal notation' oversimplifies the deep ambiguities in works produced by Dillon over the war years, and fails to acknowledge the complexity of his relationship with the landscape and iconography of the west of Ireland. Hewitt's attempt to group these artists into such

categories may be attributed to a more general eagerness to encourage the prospect of a body of Ulster artists broad enough to encompass different schools.

The wide range of cultural responses, both official and unofficial, to the blitzkrieg on cities in Britain and Northern Ireland, shows how the patterns, sensations and incongruous juxtapositions resulting from these unprecedented and specifically urban scenes of destruction proved both inspirational and troubling for artists and writers at the time. In an illustrated article for *Picture Post* magazine in May 1941 Louis MacNeice describes damage caused by bombing in London as ‘a spectacle’, compares the patterns of smoke and water he saw with those of an Impressionist painting, and writes that: ‘When the All Clear went I began a tour of London, half appalled and half enlivened by this fantasy of destruction. For it was – if I am to be candid – enlivening.’ In an essay published a few months later MacNeice contrasts the experience of seeing the rich West End the morning after a bombing, which he describes as ‘almost exhilarating’, with his impressions of the destruction of a poor area the same night, which he calls ‘heart breaking’. As I discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the enlivening sensual effect of such symbolic destruction on the spectator and the conflicting emotions that result from this are described in Brian Moore’s *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, where the protagonist’s feelings of exhilaration when bombs begin to fall on City Hall, Queen’s University and Harland and Wolff’s shipyard, clear symbols of patriarchal and political authority in the city, are similarly swiftly undercut when the awful human cost of the raid is revealed the following morning. Artists and writers had to be mindful of treading a difficult line between excitement and pity, as the visual spectacle of the Blitz was accompanied by an inescapably brutal loss of civilian life. In an interview in 1971 Graham Sutherland recalled this dilemma in relation to his *Devastation* series of paintings of bomb damage in Swansea and London, executed throughout 1940 and 1941:

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77 MacNeice, ‘London Letter 5’, *Common Sense*, 10.7 (July 1941), 206-7, repr. in Heuser (ed.), *Selected Prose*, pp. 131-6 (p. 131, p. 132).

The City was more exciting than anywhere else mainly because the buildings were bigger, and the variety of ways in which they fell more interesting. But very soon the raids began in the East End – in the dock areas – and immediately the atmosphere became much more tragic. In the City one didn’t think of the destruction of life. All the destroyed buildings were office buildings and people weren’t in them at night. But in the East End one did think of the hurt to people and there was every evidence of it.79

Citing works such as Frank Dobson’s *Bristol, November 24th, 1940* (1940), which depicts the destruction of a Georgian terrace, Stuart Sillars has argued that much representational art of Blitz destruction during the war directly echoes Burkean Romantic ideas of the Sublime as exemplified by the Gothic ruin, supporting this with reference to reports of ‘intense excitement’ felt by those who experienced the bombing recorded in official mental health analyses of the time:

For both those used to suffering mental illness and those generally categorised as ‘normal’, the experience of bombing is one related to a heightened state of awareness: the new sights and sounds of the blitz, the suspension of the usual order, the sheer risk and closeness of death or injury, gave the experience of living a fresh intensity. This intensity is in no small measure founded on fear, this fear derived in part from the visually spectacular.80

London-based artists and writers were particularly stimulated by such sensations, and Elizabeth Bowen, T.S. Eliot, Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland and Dylan Thomas are among those who responded to the Blitz in their works. The bombing of Belfast also inspired a number of creative responses. James MacIntyre recalls being allowed by his parents to travel into the city centre to sketch the destruction, two months after the Belfast Blitz when he was fifteen years old:

At Lower Donegall Street I saw that though St Anne’s cathedral had escaped the bombing, its neighbours had been razed. As I stood at the bottom of North

Street I looked in silence at what remained of Waring Street, Bridge Street and High Street. Windowless husks of buildings and lone towering gable-ends stood eerily tranquil among the mounds of rubble, stacked high, waiting for removal. Huge fawn and white Clydesdale horses, coats shining with sweat, hauled cartloads of wooden crates towards the cargo boats anchored at Queen’s Quay. People quietly crisscrossed the streets, intent on their own affairs. And, clattering past, all unknowing of the trauma, were the trams.81

MacIntyre’s line drawings of the destruction are included in his autobiography. Many such representational drawings and paintings of bomb damaged cities were produced during the Second World War (in Belfast William Conor’s drawings (Fig. 1) are the most notable artistic record), but resemblances between the chaotic shapes and scenes thrown up by the aerial bombing of urban areas and the stylistic modes of other artistic movements have also been noted, and have encouraged some artists and cultural historians to make bold assertions. In 1961 Adrian Stokes claimed that the patterns of cubism had anticipated the scenes of destruction caused by the heavy bombing of urban areas:

A collapsed room displays many more facets than a room intact: after a bombing in the last war, we were able to look at elongated, piled-up displays of what had been exterior, mingled with what had been interior, materializations of the serene Analytic Cubism that Picasso and Braque invented before the first war; and usually, as in some of these paintings, we saw the poignant key provided by some untouched, undamaged object that had miraculously escaped.82

Bryan Appleyard’s argument that futurism and vorticism were defeated by the First World War when it revealed the terminal logic behind their ‘machine fantasies’ and that subsequently the Second World War ‘appeared as a cruel, dreamlike validation of much that was modern’ is similarly sweeping.83

81 MacIntyre, Making My Mark, p. 57.
83 Appleyard, p. 61.
Surrealist imagery might also be discerned in the juxtapositions, shapes and situations thrown up by the destruction of the Blitz. There is clear surrealistic potential in many of the widely circulated photographs taken in the aftermath of air attacks on London, such as Fred Morley’s confected scene of a milkman carrying a crate of bottles down a street reduced to rubble, or the photograph showing a postman collecting mail from a pillar box itself partly buried by debris.\(^4\) Angus Calder, whose *The Myth of the Blitz* uses Morley’s milkman on its cover, detects the influence of inter-war surrealist photography in Bert Hardy’s work for *Picture Post* during the Second World War, citing Bill Brandt, whose own officially commissioned wartime documentary photography also contains surrealist elements.\(^5\) The surrealistic and even strangely comic potential of bombsites was also apparently realised in Belfast during the war, through the work of a pair of performance artists recalled by Robert Harbinson:

...a site just off Castle Junction had been conveniently cleared by the Germans. The space left by their bombs provided two men with an arena in which to perform wonders with their bodies. Clad only in a sort of bright bathing costume one of them reclined gracefully on a bed of nails, with an apparent minimum of discomfort. Meanwhile, the other balanced a ladder surrealistically on top of his head. At the end of the ladder, up in the air, a chair was balanced, its height to be measured only against the bomb-scarred, stranded fireplaces of the next building.\(^6\)

The influence of surrealism is also discernible in paintings which depict or respond to the destruction of buildings on the Home Front, and tracing the relationship between form and historical incident through a series of wartime paintings by Colin Middleton does provide a new line of enquiry into the work of a notoriously problematic artist. In this respect Dickon Hall’s assessment that Middleton’s ‘Numerous drawings of bombed buildings and terraces show another aspect of the artist at work, the swift, acute and detached line of a draughtsman struck by the strange

\(^4\) Morley’s photograph of the milkman was apparently posed using an assistant (Christopher Howse, ‘Never mind the milkman, the ruins are real’, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 September 2010 <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/culture/christopherhowse/100046561/never-mind-the-milkman-the-ruins-are-real/> [accessed 9 June 2011] (para. 4 of 5)).


\(^6\) Harbinson, *Up Spake*, p. 92.
shapes of this new cityscape' is illuminating.\(^7\) Surrealist paintings might well have been eclipsed by scenes of real destruction, or indeed representational paintings or photographs of the time, but in some of Middleton’s works the physical destruction visited on Belfast is frequently incorporated into the psychological world of surrealist art. It may be argued that in such works he followed the path taken by 1930s surrealists in their responses to the Spanish Civil War, when artists that had previously displayed little overt interest in politics were rapidly impelled by the fascist threat to reflect the intricacies of the increasingly violent political situation.\(^8\) Middleton’s own oeuvre is so varied as to frustrate claims of congruence between his wartime paintings and a distinct radical political viewpoint, however, and my aim here is to set some of his works in an historical context that enables a sharper appreciation of some of the forces that impacted upon artists in Northern Ireland at this time. Riann Coulter’s work on Middleton’s wartime paintings has centred on his search for Jungian symbols and use of the female archetype, but I want to concentrate instead on material evidence within the pictures, and believe that an examination of some of the war paintings disproves Catherine Marshall’s assessment that time ‘had little place in Middleton’s philosophy. In his search for the essential and enduring, he ruthlessly eliminated contemporary references.’\(^9\)

Detecting resemblances between figures and tropes of artistic styles and actual wartime scenes is an engrossing if potentially anachronistic pursuit, but similarities were clearly noted at the time. Patrick Maybin, a close friend of John Hewitt from Belfast (they had met through a poetry circle at Queen’s University), was a doctor who joined the Royal Army Medical Corps on the outbreak of war. Stationed initially in Northern Ireland and Britain, and subsequently posted to North Africa and Italy, he wrote numerous detailed letters to his friend during the war, discussing works of art, literature and philosophy. It is worth quoting at length from one startling letter written in late 1943:

\(^{87}\) Hall, p. 9.
Marshall somewhat disproves her own conclusion with earlier and well founded claims in the same essay that *Strange Openings, Magpie Delivery and Siren Over Belfast* were inspired by the wartime blackout (p. 48).
Tunisia is a much richer and more friendly country than Algeria. The battlefields have been nearly all cleared up. Some of the towns have been bombed and bombarded till hardly a house is habitable. Here and there one comes on a huge salvage dump of several acres – burnt out trucks and tanks and cars, and demolished guns. At places – a level crossing, or a road junction – in the shade of a group of cactus plants, a small group of white wooden crosses. One scene stays in my mind: a flat coastal plain, brown in the lit sunlight; a road along the margin of a wide beach, sweeping around to the edge of a small port, so much bombed that not a living person was to be seen; at the sea’s edge a crashed bomber, one huge wing with its black Nazi cross angled across the sky. Behind it the pier, with the cranes twisted and tilted across the dock; a wide expanse of purple blue sky, and a low bar of cloud across the horizon. The scene was familiar, not in detail but in mood; I remembered why – it is the mood of Colin Middleton, 1940.90

Maybin’s vivid and dream-like description, so detailed as to constitute an ecphrastic composition in itself, includes many elements familiar from Middleton’s wartime surrealism, such as the sense of traumatic aftermath, the apprehension of conflict, and the juxtaposition of recognisable material objects in an alien landscape devoid of human presence. It also demonstrates the psychological power of the complex interplay between artistic style and wartime reality and shows how this was felt contemporaneously: Middleton had never travelled to Tunisia and never experienced desert warfare, but here, one and a half thousand miles from Belfast, Maybin is struck by the resemblance between the scene before him and a Middleton painting, and feels the need to record this in a letter.

Born in 1910, Colin Middleton grew up in the middle-class Belfast suburb of Cavehill and was educated at the nearby Royal Academy grammar school. His father worked in the linen industry as a damask designer and had studied painting at the Manchester School of Art, and unlike many of his contemporaries Middleton grew up surrounded by artists, painters and designers. After leaving school he entered the family firm as an

90 Letter from Patrick Maybin to John Hewitt, 6 November 1943, PRONI Hewitt Papers, D3838/3/10.
apprentice and attended the Belfast College of Art as a part time student, where contemporaries included Tom Carr, John Hunter, William Scott, and Romeo Toogood. Middleton depended on his occasional trips to London and Europe to satisfy his interest in art during the 1930s, and it was at this time that he discovered Salvador Dali and British surrealists such as Tristram Hillier and Edward Wadsworth. Surrealism proved to be a liberating discovery for Middleton, and was to have a profound impact on much of his work for the rest of his life. When his father died in 1935 he took over the family business, which prevented him from leaving Belfast and pursuing an artistic career in London or Paris. An emotional man, of whom John Hewitt wrote to Maybin in 1944 that ‘he’s an odd creature – Genius maybe – but God help anyone who gets too close to his flame’, the war began for Middleton with deep personal sadness when his first wife Mae, herself a painter, died in 1939. He married his second wife Kathleen (Kate) towards the end of the war. Over a career which spanned more than fifty years until his death in 1983, he produced an astonishingly varied body of work, ranging from the surrealist works to post-impressionist landscapes, expressionist pieces, and abstract homages to Kandinsky. In addition, as Hall observes, he was a particularly skilled draughtsman – John Hewitt attributed this talent for precision, so evident in the surrealist pieces, to his original trade as a damask designer. Catherine Marshall writes that his ‘chameleon-like changes of style’ could well be described as ‘an art historian’s nightmare,’ and of the sheer variousness of Middleton’s first one man show 1943, Hewitt recalls that ‘an immediate reaction [...] was that the artist was hypersensitive to influence’. Another writer that year was less guarded, and opened his review of the exhibition with a volley of questions:

What in thunder is this man Middleton driving at? Is he driving at anything? Or is he just a deliberate deviser of meaningless arrangements of incongruous objects, in the hope of attaining a cheap notoriety? Is he pretending to mean

91 Hall, p. 4.
92 Ibid., p. 7.
93 Hewitt, North Light, p. 62.
94 Letter from John Hewitt to Patrick Maybin, 6 November 1944, PRONI Hewitt Papers, D/3838/3/12. This letter also contains an account of the beginning of Middleton’s relationship with Kate.
95 Hewitt, North Light, p. 63.
something important and profound, whilst, in reality, he means nothing at all? In plain language: is he a charlatan? Is he a fraud?97

Middleton’s predilection for experimentation has remained a source of critical confusion and speculation, and despite his evident technical versatility the lack of a single recognisable Middleton style arguably prevented him from achieving wider renown. Brian Fallon wrote that:

Middleton is somewhat of a puzzle – one of the most naturally gifted Irish artists of his generation, he painted as a Surrealist, an Expressionist (with an obvious Yeatsian influence), a geometric abstractionist in the Ben Nicholson manner, a solid, straightforward landscapist, and even, occasionally, in the Euston Road style. The steady quest for a personal language apparently did not interest him and he preferred to work as an impulsive eclectic, picking up any style which interested him and filling it with his own very Northern personality.98

Dickon Hall suggested that ‘Middleton’s work seems to have been created more for himself than for the public, and this would in part explain his disregard for the usual conventions of stylistic consistency.’99 For Hewitt he epitomised ‘the puzzle and the problem of the artist now,’ and was the victim of a fragmented age: in A North Light he wrote that ‘Too honest, too open-minded, he has refused to drive or goad his genius along a single avenue.’100 In 1947 Middleton wrote to his friend Hewitt to ask about the prospect of regular picture sales in Belfast, expressing his dislike of the metropolitan bias of the art world even as travel between Northern Ireland and Europe became quicker and easier:

99 Hall, p. 15.
100 Hewitt, North Light, p. 101.
I somehow feel that the whole idea of Bond Street and the centralisation of major picture dealing is all wrong. Painters, poets and the like are not born into darkest Belfast to paint or sing to a galaxy of epicureans congregated round a shrine. Mark you: I'm not preaching against the circulation of songs and pictures — I should hate to think that I should never see a Van Gogh in the flesh again — nonetheless...

The sentence tails off with an ellipsis, suggesting that, as it was for Hewitt, the tension between the metropolitan and the provincial was a conundrum that Middleton, who remained in Belfast for the duration of the war, found hard to resolve. Assailed by manifold artistic styles, in a new age of photography and cheap commercial reproduction, where no single school of painting could dominate, it may be that Middleton simply felt unable to limit himself to a single mode, or that his deployment of a multiplicity of styles constituted a more considered strategy of self expression. Dickon Hall has suggested that in creating an anthological body of work Middleton was trying to address the problem of the provincial painter by being genuinely contemporary, and certainly the artist's (perhaps ironic) self-proclamation as 'the only surrealist painter working in Ireland' conveys a keen desire to differentiate himself from his peers and his national and cultural background. Considerations of his stylistic variations can easily descend into mere conjecture, and it is not my intention to attempt to resolve them here, but rather to suggest that comparisons of Middleton's wartime works allow us to approach shifts between styles from an historical as well as a personal perspective. An untitled autobiographical poem written in October 1941 reveals a profound emotional restlessness in Middleton at this time:

The youth who left his father's grave, a man
possessed of new possessions to possess,
an endless quest for equilibrium...
[...]
the child that first beholds its own bright blood
and trembles still and still retains the taste;
the child that cherishes the first bad word

102 Hall, p. 13, p. 18.
incomprehensible, a power to wield.103

October 1941 marked six months since the Easter Tuesday air raid on Belfast. The Blitz seems to have had a severe effect on Middleton, though accounts of this differ: according to Kenneth Jamison he had found himself unable to paint at all for these six months following the raid, although in a letter written in July of that year Hewitt tells Maybin of a period of concerted activity: 'He's painting green luminous phosphorescent mothers and children with intense decay and death screaming out of them. His work seems deeper in content and less sympathetic. He threatens to go on to crucifixions and agonies!'104 The idea of a 'quest for equilibrium' is also interesting in terms of the Second World War. Although on a personal level the loss of his father in 1935 was clearly deeply painful, Middleton's sense of his subsequent life as a search for balance in the face of opposing forces could easily refer to the unsteady position of the artist in relation to the war. Stepping back and addressing himself in the third person in such a consciously poetic soliloquy as this, Middleton can be seen to question the value of artistic pursuits at this time, but in a far less polemical way than Nevill Johnson's earthy anxieties about his paintings' worth against a 'world of blackmail and bombs'. Another Middleton ellipsis suggests an awareness of the uncertain place and role of the artist in wartime, as he is stretched like his counterparts in London between excitement and pity.

If stylistic appropriation and variation allowed Middleton to negotiate his peripheral and provincial location in Belfast, and enabled him to avoid being bound by a fractured national cultural background, it also offered a strategy for responding to the complex stimuli thrown up by the Second World War. Middleton's creative variousness was not just a feature of the war years and continued over his entire career, but his technical versatility did allow him to produce a variety of nuanced responses to the war which tend to refute dismissive opinion of him as a stylistic magpie or a purveyor of pastiche. Middleton's own pronouncements on his works are relatively rare and often decidedly enigmatic, but are consistent in their seriousness. In a note written for his first one man exhibition dated August 291943, which he describes as 'the outcome of requests for elucidation regarding the nature of my work', Middleton writes that his

paintings arose from a ‘process of personal integration’ and suggests that his work is driven by current events when he states that ‘Today, as never more urgently in the known past, humanity is faced with the problem of survival.’ Describing survival as both physical and spiritual, he goes on to question ‘whether the Artist is to be considered as a superior intellect manufacturing luxury articles for a select circle of tradesmen and patrons, or – is the craftsman to be a vital link in the social chain’, and asks rhetorically if the craftsman is to aspire to be ‘entertainer or visionary? profiteer or prophet?’ Though it is clear that Middleton feels that his own role is on some level a public one as part of this chain, this feeling is troubled by his claim to be dedicated to individual expression and to have ‘no concern’ with schools of painting, as it is indeed by his ambiguous conception of the metaphorical ‘chain’:

These [...] paintings are the outcome of an unconscious will to perfect ‘the link’ as a necessary stage in the perfecting of ‘the chain’.

Since we are dealing throughout with symbols, ‘the chain’ may be regarded in a purely utilitarian sense as a shackle, or, as a symbol of co-operative strength: a linking of hands, hearts, minds: of purpose: of perfection, having neither beginning nor ending, and therefore transcending survival.¹⁰⁵

Middleton’s emphasis on the symbolic content of his paintings has been echoed by subsequent critical appraisals of his work, but this should not be allowed to obscure the impact of the material historical context on his wartime compositions.

*The Dark Tower* (1941, Fig. 2) is a surrealist scene played out on the type of anonymous, undulating plain familiar from the works of Salvador Dali.¹⁰⁶ Two spindly

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¹⁰⁵ Colin Middleton, ‘Note on One Man Exhibition’ (dated 29 August 1943), Biographical File, Middleton Archive.

¹⁰⁶ This landscape might also be compared with the desert which forms the setting for the conclusion of Louis MacNeice’s 1946 BBC radio play, also entitled *The Dark Tower*, a reworking of Robert Browning’s ‘Childe Harold to the Dark Tower Came’ through which the echoes of the Second World War clearly reverberate. MacNeice’s desert shifts in form, described by the central character Roland first as ‘Flat – no shape – no colour – only here and there / A mirage of the past’ then as having ‘no end / Nor even any contour, the blank horizon / Retreats and yet retreats; without either rise or fall’ before mountains begin to close in as ‘A circle of ugly cliffs – a lobster-pot of rock!’; finally, as the play ends, the Dark Tower itself rises ‘Like a wart coming out of the ground!’ (MacNeice, *The Dark Tower*, in *Selected Plays of Louis MacNeice*, ed. by Alan Heuser and Peter McDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 111-148 (p. 142, p. 144, p. 146, p. 147)). Citing this radio play, Peter McDonald has argued that deserts figure in MacNeice’s work as one of the central images for the individual in wartime (Peter McDonald, *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 106). I have not been able to trace any direct connection between MacNeice and Middleton, but the coincidence is striking.
towers dominate the middle distance of the painting, asymmetrical and eccentric structures whose resemblance to recognisable buildings is vexed by their irregular dimensions and planes. Hewitt went so far as to claim one tower as 'now a monstrous air-machine plunged in the sand, and now a great blind fish or eel-creature. These towers are echoed by two similar constructions on the horizon. In the foreground the heavily stylised figure of a woman in a dress dances beneath a stylised human eye situated on a two dimensional quadrilateral, that looks away to the right. The towers seem to be missing pieces gouged from their sides, as though damaged by bomb blasts, and bricks litter the ground on which the woman dances. Notwithstanding Hewitt's lyrical view of the painting, and putting the overtly surrealist imagery of the woman and the eye to one side for a moment, these towers can be seen in the context of British romantic depictions of urban bomb damage such as John Piper's series of paintings of bombed churches in Bristol (1940, Fig. 3) or Graham Sutherland's 1941 Devastation series (Fig. 4), but are particularly reminiscent, given the monochromatic reproduction used in Now in Ulster, of contemporary photographs. The distance between The Dark Tower and more representational depictions of bomb damage is not as great as might be thought. A clearer parallel can be drawn between Middleton's Dark Tower and James Doherty's photograph of Belfast's Trinity Street Church on 12 July 1941, having been decapitated and lost its spire in the Easter Tuesday raid (Fig. 5). We might also compare the towers with John Armstrong's War Artists' Advisory Committee commission Coggeshall Church, Essex (1940, Fig. 6), a painting which shows how easily a restrained surrealist style could be recruited for official war art, and similarly depicts a church tower ripped open by a bomb blast. It is worth remembering that surrealism was also co-opted, albeit indirectly, into an important advertising campaign for the British Government at this time. One of Abram Games's extraordinary Your Britain. Fight For It Now (1942, Fig. 8) series shows a bright and clean two-dimensional image of the planned Finsbury Health Centre (to be constructed post-war)

108 In Belfast, William Conor's popular Air Raid Memories (1941) series of sketches of Blitz damage, commissioned by the War Artists Advisory Committee and exhibited at Robinson and Cleaver's department store in Donegall Square in August of the same year are the most notable examples (Wilson, Conor 1881-1968, p. 68).
109 John Armstrong (1893-1973) was an English painter whose work became increasingly surrealist in character following the Spanish Civil War, and increasingly dominated by visions of the destruction of buildings (see Invocation (1938, Fig. 7)). Unsurprisingly, his war art produced under the auspices of the WAAC included a number of similar depictions of bomb damage. (Mark Glazebrook, 'Introduction' in John Armstrong 1893-1973 (exhibition catalogue, London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975)).
forming a wall which half covers a dark, filthy and ruined structure, a bomb damaged building in which a bandy legged boy with rickets stands, joylessly trailing a small pink toy boat through a puddle. A tombstone looms against the rear wall of the ruin, and the words ‘neglect’ and ‘disease’ are daubed on the cracked and stained walls. Darracott and Loftus point out in their survey of wartime posters that the symbolic deployment of colour and the fusion of modern architecture with dilapidated ruin in a single image ‘show Games’s familiarity with surrealist work by artists such as Dali and de Chirico’, and the poster demonstrates the grammar of surrealism, the use of incongruous juxtaposition and realist technique, could be recruited with relative ease during the Second World War to art forms intended for a mass audience, and for political ends.

If, as Kenneth Jamison claims, Middleton was unable to paint for six months following the Blitz, it is possible that The Dark Tower itself was painted before the bombing of Belfast. If this was the case, however, Middleton would surely have been aware of the scenes of destruction that followed earlier raids on cities and towns in Britain, from photographic reports in magazines and newspapers, or perhaps from newsreels. The landscape of the composition, the neutral undulation on which the towers stand, and the consciously enigmatic symbolism of the woman and the eye would all seem to be products of the psychological world (or the result of Middleton’s encounters with earlier surrealist artworks), but the damaged towers themselves and the debris in the foreground root this work in the year and place of its composition. The inclusion by the editors of Now in Ulster of a reproduction of this work alongside two other more conventional representations of the Belfast Blitz by George Campbell and Gerard Dillon in the illustrated section of the little magazine bears out this contextual reading. The similarities in size and design between such little magazines and the ‘War Pictures by British Artists’ series produced by the WAAC during the war, which also printed monochrome reproductions of recent paintings, further demonstrate the ways in which boundaries between official and unofficial art were collapsing at this time.

110 On the personal orders of Winston Churchill, the bandy legged child was removed from the publicly displayed version of the poster (Joseph Darracott and Belinda Loftus, Second World War Posters (London: Imperial War Museum, 1972), p. 31).
111 Darracott and Loftus, p. 31.
113 War Pictures by British Artists No. 2: Blitz, introduced by J.B. Morton, (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), reproduced paintings of bomb damage by Edward Ardizzone, Henry Moore, John Piper, and Graham Sutherland amongst others.
If the Blitz had encouraged Middleton’s surrealist paintings, it also tethered these works to the earthly and the material, restricting the opportunity for psychological escape and driving him to work within a localised surrealist vision. In *The Dark Tower*, the presence of the woman and the eye distract from this and their meaning is unclear: cynical readings of Middleton’s surrealist works have seen the use of such imagery as little more than mischief-making, poses and knowing attempts to shock and confuse the Belfast public. Addressing another of Middleton’s surrealist paintings from 1941, *The Fortune Teller* (Fig. 9), Hall detects ‘a sense of showing off’ and accuses Middleton of employing ‘impenetrable imagery’ in so doing.\(^{114}\) *The Fortune Teller* is free from overt references to the Blitz or the ongoing conflict. Here another mysterious woman (a topless flamenco dancer, perhaps) appears in an anonymous and barren landscape, surrounded by seemingly random objects and birds, comprising a faceless grandfather clock, a ladder, two cockatiels and another, smaller yellow bird housed in an open fronted cabinet on the ground. In the background a church on a hill appears to have a vast door opening from its tower. The discordance of the scene is amplified by the sheets of paper or fabric blowing across the landscape: one larger sheet is loosely caught on the woman’s head and one sheet above the cabinet, although completely blank, immediately calls to mind an open newspaper, its shape suggesting that it is being held by an invisible reader. The sheets do not offer an explanation for this particular assembly of objects, or their juxtaposition with the dancer and the birds, but they do form an unexpected link between *The Fortune Teller* and another of Middleton’s wartime paintings.

The title of *The Holy Lands* (1945, Fig. 10) would seem to refer to the eponymous area of inner city south Belfast to the east of Queen’s University, and, although it depicts rows of terraced houses similar to those which make up this part of the city, in representative terms the painting is vague and heavily stylised. Semi-vorticist rows of houses fan out across the middle and far distance, and the hillside in the foreground seems to have been introduced to aid the composition. However, the figures that populate the scene make this a positive and convincing portrayal of urban Belfast at play, demonstrative perhaps of the intermittently warm feelings towards his home city experienced by Middleton during the war. Amongst the figures on the hillside are a courting couple, an elderly man sitting alone with his walking stick, and a

\(^{114}\) Hall, p. 8.
man in a bowler hat reading a newspaper, while in the foreground some boys play football. The threat of war would appear to be absent (and indeed, by 1945 the threat of air attack had all but disappeared for the residents of the city), and like Middleton’s 1941 Annadale paintings, the scene seems to endorse a conventional and reassuring view of civilian life. However, in *The Holy Lands* a peculiar note of discord is sounded, by the blank sheets of newspaper that blow across the scene, similar to those which drift across the desert in *The Fortune Teller* and threaten to envelop the woman in the flamenco skirt. In *The Holy Lands* the sheets are more tidily organised: spines aligned in the same direction towards the horizon, they flutter from the hillside across the skyline from right to left, echoing a flock of birds in the resulting shape. Against the vorticist backdrop of the terraces the airborne papers are eerie, even ghostly, and none of the figures on the hillside seems to have noticed them. The sheets also appear in a post war painting, *Elijah* (1948), where seven fly in a circle around a woman and two Blakeian images of the eponymous prophet, the larger of which crouches on a pile of books, while the smaller figure squats on one of the airborne loose sheets. Without entering at length into the allegorical and symbolic implications of this later work, it is worth remembering in the context of the Blitz that the biblical prophet Elijah calls down fire from the sky as he conducts his test to ascertain the relative powers of the false god Baal and Yahweh the God of Israel.\(^{115}\) If *The Holy Lands* is considered alongside its surrealist counterparts, the loose sheets can be seen to hint at undisclosed chaos and implied destruction, and serve to link the recognisable and named world of urban Belfast to the troubled world of the unconscious that Middleton calls up in the earlier and later works.

More straightforwardly concerned with contemporaneous events in Belfast, perhaps, are Middleton’s neo-impressionistic paintings from the latter half of 1941. These include a series of Belfast street scenes, the composition of which Kenneth Jamison claims held a therapeutic value for the artist, in the face of personal tragedy and the strain of life lived in the shadow of war: ‘As though to dispel the dark memories these paintings of this period are an affirmation of the normality of life in city streets where children play and people go about their tasks.’\(^{116}\) Both *Lagan: Annadale, October 1941* (1941, *Fig, 11*), the first Middleton painting purchased by the

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\(^{115}\) 1 Kings, 18:38.  
\(^{116}\) Kenneth Jamison ‘Painting and Sculpture’ in Michael Longley (ed.), *Causeway: The Arts in Ulster*, pp. 43-70 (p. 50).
Belfast Museum and Art Gallery after his debut exhibition, and *Allotments on Annadale Embankment* (1941, Fig. 12), recall Derain or a more impressionistic Lowry in the studied naivety of their technique; in terms of subject matter, these are calm and peaceful depictions of a named and recognisable local scene. If *The Dark Tower* and *The Fortune Teller* were exercises in alienation and defamiliarisation, the Annadale paintings, also produced in 1941, are precisely the opposite, in which Middleton recovers what had been threatened by the Belfast Blitz that same year by evoking scenes of peace and contentment in his home town.\(^{117}\) These works may sit uneasily beside the surrealist paintings of that same year, but this is precisely what they did, in the Hewitt-organised exhibition of 1943. As Coulter observes, the decision of the Museum to purchase *Lagan: Annadale, October 1941* was significant:

> The first Middleton to enter a public collection, this was a conservative choice within the context of the exhibition and yet the loose brush strokes, glimpses of exposed canvas and simplified figures produced a conscious naivety that positioned *Lagan, Annadale*, among the more radical works in the Gallery’s collection. Significantly, as a representational image of everyday life set in a familiar area of Belfast, *Lagan, Annadale* could be clearly identified as a local picture. While Middleton’s surrealist and symbolist canvases displayed the ‘continental influence’ that Hewitt celebrated, his impressionistic images of civilian life struck a chord in wartime Belfast.\(^{118}\)

There is a sense of community in these wartime representational scenes of Belfast: though generally without faces, the figures that populate the paintings are recognisable and humble as they go about their business or recreation. In her study of William Conor, perhaps an unlikely antecedent whom Middleton nonetheless held in high regard, Judith C. Wilson emphasises Middleton’s fidelity to the topography of Belfast:

> But in this phase, in the early Forties, these were in no sense Conor pastiches. The colour range was richer, more various than lay on the artist’s palette. The emphasis was on the streets themselves, the little red-brick rows, the painted

\(^{117}\) Other works in this vein include *If I Were a Blackbird* (1941, Fig. 13) and *Shop Street Corner* (1942, Fig. 14).

\(^{118}\) Coulter, ‘Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism’, p. 106.
doors and window frames; and these were often topographic, identified, as in Nelson Street, Mary Street, Glenard — a detail Conor never supplied.\textsuperscript{119}

The 1939 painting \textit{Fish and Chips} (Fig. 15) is demonstrative of how Middleton was able to use distinctly surrealist techniques to represent a quintessential Belfast street scene. Here the eponymous fish and chip shop and a pawnbroker's shop take the foreground, between which a terrace of houses can be seen, and a red brick factory with smoking chimney and a church or chapel with a cross on its roof are also visible in the background. The shapes of the buildings have been simplified and stylised: they are rendered in flat planes of colour, lack any texture, and cast heavy shadows. The technique is reminiscent of de Chirico, but the effect is much less menacing. No persons or animals intrude on the scene, but the mood is leavened by the restrained use of primary colours and the deployment of a few semi-comic details. The pawnbroker's is identifiable by the traditional three yellow balls on its sign, but the chip shop displays a small blue fish on the wall of the building and a sign in the show window reading 'FISH AND CHIPS' in white capitals on a red background.\textsuperscript{120}

Whilst the influences on Middleton's diverse wartime oeuvre were both local and international, many of his paintings reveal an abiding concern with the city of Belfast and its built environment. Although Middleton also produced a number of demonstrably abstract works, such as \textit{The Child's Brain: Opus 1 No. 16 group II} (1940, Fig. 16) and \textit{The Dark Lady} (1941, Fig. 17), from which this concern would appear to be absent, in a later expressionist painting entitled \textit{The Refugee} (1944, Fig. 18), which might be read as a response in general terms to the pain of the dispossessed across Europe, a group of buildings and most significantly a factory chimney can be seen on the left of the composition.

Middleton himself seems to have associated surrealism with the apprehension of war and violence: in an interview in 1973 he said that the flaring of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s had encouraged the use of 'strong, bright colours' in his work.

\textsuperscript{119} Wilson, \textit{Conor 1881-1968}, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{120} Middleton's uninhibited use of text here recalls the frequent appearance of words and advertisements in the works of the contemporaneous Dublin artist Harry Kernoff, but the deployment of surrealist technique is far more radical.
That’s another thing that has been motivated by the tension up in the North. People expect you to turn up to painting the troubles in the same way as a newsman goes out with a camera and takes photos of it. I had enough of that during the blitz in ’41.

Somewhat of the same thing happened then that’s happening now. The tension, the repressed anxiety ... all the things that build up and push in on the emotional side ... I find that it builds up, it’s re-activated the old surrealist bug, and it’s coming up.¹²¹

The 1970s would indeed see a return to dreamscapes populated by idealised female forms, again featuring houses (Measuring the Sky: Wilderness Series, No. 4 (1972)) and more indeterminate built structures (Game of Chance: Wilderness Series No 1 (1972, Fig. 19)). Coulter claims that ‘One explanation for the coincidence between Middleton’s surreal works and periods of international and regional unrest, may be that during these years [...] the landscape and people of Ulster were physically and psychologically scarred by violence’, and uses this assertion as a springboard for a discussion about his search for symbols to represent this trauma.¹²² Although his paintings are clearly often heavily symbolic, I believe that his preoccupation with the built environment shows that Middleton was also capable of responding more directly to historical traumas, in a way that demonstrates clear links with British and continental contemporaries and forebears.

Siren over Belfast (1944, Fig. 20) is one such simultaneously symbolic and literal response to the Belfast Blitz and the pain of its aftermath. This apocalyptic painting depicts a scattering of buildings dwarfed by a huge, red-lipped, vaguely sphinx-like demon or monster with a mane of flames, which fills the sky above. Apart from three factory chimneys and a church tower (characteristic references to the industrial and religious Belfast cityscape) the buildings are rough, windowless, single storey and humble, and the eye is drawn to the bright flames emanating from the creature’s head. The punning title links the siren used to warn of an imminent air raid with the mythological female siren, and the combination of the open screaming mouth of the monster with the bright red lips and flames cause the painting to emit a palpable sense of very loud noise. In addition, some kind of guitar like instrument is being

played in the foreground, though whether by the Siren itself or by a pair of disembodied hands is unclear. The sound hole of the guitar echoes the cyclonic pattern that must be taken as the eye of the siren, and its neck recalls both the barrel of a gun or a factory chimney such as those in the background, if one had been laid horizontal. Here creativity, destruction and violence are fused in the heavily symbolic image of the siren. The human and animal elements in the composition, the small figures of a girl in a green dress with a red ribbon in her hair in the middle distance, seemingly carried off her feet by the blast, and a red animal (a fox or a dog, perhaps) running beside her, are reminders of the human and personal cost of the destruction, and leaven the symbolic import of the work. In this work the paint has been applied in thicker layers: in contrast with the smooth planes and undulations of The Dark Tower and The Fortune Teller we see a more expressionist surrealism closer to the works of Max Ernst during the 1930s than to Dali. Indeed, Ernst’s The Angel of the Hearth series (1937, Fig. 21) is arguably an important antecedent for Siren Over Belfast. Produced following the defeat of the Republican forces in Spain, Ernst’s paintings show a monstrous, many limbed bird-like demon, dancing and raging over an anonymous, flat landscape. In 1938 Ernst briefly gave the work the title The Triumph of Surrealism, a despairing comment on the failure of communism and surrealism to resist fascism successfully, which he explained as ‘an ironic title for a kind of juggernaut which crushes and destroys all that comes in its path. That was my impression of what would happen in the world, and I was probably right.’\textsuperscript{123} In 1980 Middleton himself responded to a journalist’s ‘charge of eclecticism’ with reference to Ernst, saying that he had ‘been accused of imitating every big name in Europe. The only one omitted is Max Ernst, whose work really stimulates him.’ In the same interview Middleton claimed to feel an affinity with Catalonia and praises Dalí’s work of the 1930s and 40s, after which period he suggested that religion began to dominate Dalí’s paintings to the detriment of their quality.\textsuperscript{124} This might encourage a comparison of Siren Over Belfast with Dalí’s Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonition of Civil War (1936, Fig. 22), which was painted just before the outbreak of war in Spain, and which provides another surrealist imagining of a monstrous beast dominating a landscape.\textsuperscript{125} A reconsideration of Siren Over Belfast in the context of


these European antecedents shows again how Middleton brought a set of artistic styles previously alien to Ireland to bear on local subject matter.

Middleton’s *Strange Openings* (c. 1942, Fig. 23) is a far more clinical and detached representation of the Belfast urban landscape following the Blitz. Stylistically a close companion to *Fish and Chips*, this lacks the warm colours and semi-comic touches of the earlier work and is very much a post-Blitz painting. The title refers to holes that appeared in the side of buildings as a result of bomb blasts, and the painting depicts doorless and windowless rows of terraced houses, and, looming larger, presumably industrial buildings with large, similarly perfectly rectangular openings in their sides. The buildings are rendered in a heavily stylised fashion, and were it not for the title and context of the painting the subject matter would not readily be apparent. The style adopted by Middleton here again recalls de Chirico’s arcades and piazzas of his *pittura metafisica* period, in the theatrical intensity of flat, stylised surfaces and depth of shadow (Fig. 24). In this way *Strange Openings* makes no reference to the chaotic effects of the Blitz, the irregular patterns of destruction, disruption and fragmentation that proved so stimulating to many artists and writers. It is a far remove from the sound and fury of *Siren Over Belfast*, and the haunting title of *Strange Openings* echoes its eeriness of tone: no human or animal intrudes on this deserted urban landscape, and no sheets of newspaper blow through the scene. The composition is entirely made up of straight lines, and the holes in the side of the buildings appear as part of the design rather than damage occasioned by bomb blasts, in contrast with the chunks bitten out of the sides of the towers in *The Dark Tower*. Where *Siren over Belfast* emits noise and pain, this composition is a deserted stage set, dominated by a portentous silence. Yet despite Middleton’s nod to the de Chirico style, *Strange Openings* ultimately remains faithful to the closely packed terraced backstreets, the outside lavatories and brick walled back yards, and once again the recognisable and the knowable in Belfast is rendered in a distinctly foreign style.

For Middleton, it seems, the importance of place was heightened by its destruction. In an interview with Michael Longley in 1967 he articulated a kind of mystical identification with places using a near mantra: ‘Place is everything. Place is terribly important. Places, places, places. I just can’t go out for a day’s sketching – that’s meaningless, utterly horrible, terrifying.’126 Hewitt’s observation about Northern

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Ireland’s wartime isolation forcing artists and writers to till their own gardens, thereby resulting in an ‘an unusually vigorous phase in the creative arts’, is illuminating in this respect.\footnote{Hewitt, \textit{Colin Middleton}, p. 18} This observation is certainly applicable to Middleton: the works I have discussed show him stating emphatically in paint his fidelity to place by turning to his home town as subject matter, whilst continuing to explore a variety of continental styles. Though Middleton engages with differing effects of the Blitz in these works, a concern for the built environment is common to his non-expressionist pieces: his war paintings show that the impact of the Blitz on art in the province went beyond representational depictions of the damage. Middleton’s paintings show the blitzed cityscape as the site of a complex dialogue between representational and non-representational artistic modes, initiated by the unprecedented, cataclysmic, and hugely traumatic collision between the international and the local.

Gerard Dillon was on holiday in Connemara at the outbreak of war in September 1939. He was twenty-three. Refused permission to cross the Irish Sea as he would not be enlisting in the British Army, he returned initially to his family home in the Falls Road area of Belfast, where he had been born and brought up. Having lived in London during the 1930s, where he had worked as a decorator and moved in artistic and cultural circles entirely alien to his strictly Catholic background in Belfast, he soon found the atmosphere in the poverty-stricken and strongly nationalist area stifling. Belonging to a group by turns hostile to the British war effort and supportive of Irish neutrality, Dillon was greatly affected by the febrile political atmosphere, as his biographer James White explains: ‘It became impossible to ignore the conditions imposed by the war and to adopt the previous attitudes of ignoring as far as possible all signs of political authority.’\footnote{White, \textit{Gerard Dillon}, pp. 34-35.} Matters were made worse by the fissure in his own family: though his mother was a stridently vocal nationalist, his father had served in the British army during the Boer war and two of his brothers enlisted to fight in the Second World War, causes of incessant domestic strife between his parents.\footnote{Ibid., p. 20.} When travel restrictions allowed, Dillon divided his time between Belfast and Dublin during the war years,
spending much of his time in Belfast in the family house in Lower Clonard Street, with curious consequences:

He seemed to be charged with an energy for painting and he painted all the walls of the house white like the Connemara cottages, and on the walls of the kitchen and staircase he painted a series of double heads influenced by the stonecarvings he had seen in the west. He even painted the blinds on the kitchen window, and the children would stand outside in the dark evenings when the blinds were pulled down and pretend they were at the picture house. Even these images on the blinds have a monastic feeling, as if he wanted to reflect the concept of the stained glass windows in churches when seen from the outside.\(^{130}\)

Dillon’s attempts to turn a corner of urban wartime Belfast into a Connemara cottage register his eccentric preoccupation with the west of Ireland and its importance to his wartime oeuvre (Fig. 25). His creation of this defensive lair also shows that he had a close affinity with material things, as is borne out by his use of found objects. Riann Coulter’s exploration of Dillon’s engagement with the west during the 1940s and 50s focuses on his homosexuality, which, she argues, he felt to be at odds with his Catholic and nationalist identity. She suggests that paintings such as *Potato Pickers* (1944, Fig. 26) or *Grey Beach* (c. 1950, Fig. 27) draw on imagery from an officially approved myth of the West in various attempts to mask their homoerotic content.\(^{131}\) I want to reappraise his west of Ireland paintings in the context of the Second World War, which arguably also posed a challenge to his nationalist identity.

Many of Dillon’s works do, however, address the war directly: an exhibition which opened in Dublin in February 1942 included several paintings of Belfast after the Blitz, as well as *Shades*, a study of an army sentry outside his box. Dillon also socialised with American soldiers, often in the company of the Campbell brothers in

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\(^{130}\) Ibid., p. 49. Dillon’s creation of this interior might be compared with Louis MacNeice’s emphasis on domestic space in his sequence ‘The Coming of War’ (1940). In the section ‘Cushendun’ MacNeice describes in sensuous terms time spent in a ‘whitewashed house’ in that Antrim village immediately before the outbreak of war. Initially it seems as though this is a place where ‘Forgetfulness’ is possible, withdrawn from the world’s troubles, but news of war intrudes via a wireless set in the final stanza of the section (MacNeice, ‘The Coming of War’, *Collected Poems*, p. 682). I have explored this poem in the previous chapter.

\(^{131}\) Coulter, ‘Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism’, p. 19.
Dubarry’s pub, where the artists would execute quick sketches of the soldiers for little more than the price of a drink.\textsuperscript{132} James MacIntyre recalls a meeting with Dillon:

Our conversation turned to the Blitz and Gerard told me that he had framed his paintings of the carnage with scarred timber taken from bombed sites.

‘People bought them and they imagined I was so hard up I couldn’t afford to buy frames,’ he chuckled.

I thought this was inspirational.\textsuperscript{133}

His use of found materials in this way – later he would experiment with collage as a form and incorporate old gloves, string and pictures torn from magazines and newspapers into his works – enables the material destruction of the blitz to be incorporated into his own work in a strikingly literal way.\textsuperscript{134} On the opening of the 1942 exhibition, Mainie Jellett, something of a mentor to Dillon during the war, said that it took courage for a young man to embark ‘on a painting career at a time like this, with the forces of destruction rampant, whilst the forces of construction were struggling for life.’\textsuperscript{135}

Away from these works, however, it was during the war that Dillon’s more substantial paintings began to reflect in earnest the landscape and people of Connemara and the Aran Islands, which he first visited in 1943. The bird’s eye perspective and vibrant colours of The Little Green Fields (1945, \textbf{Fig. 28}) recall the influence of Marc Chagall, but Dillon also draws on an important element of compositional design from medieval Irish stonemasonry. The painting depicts a patchwork of small fields enclosed by dry stone walls such as those found on the islands and in the west of Ireland. Dillon uses these walls to separate a number of different scenes within the same landscape. These include a graveyard (in which one of the headstones carries Dillon’s own name), a boy carrying a pail in each hand, a man digging potatoes, some hens, a small village with a church, a pair of horses near a Neolithic stone table, a ruined tower and a man praying to the carved statue of a saint. John Hewitt noted in 1949 that the panelled form of The Little Green Fields can be traced back to the carved decorations on medieval

\textsuperscript{132} White, \textit{Gerard Dillon}, pp. 41-2.
\textsuperscript{133} James MacIntyre, \textit{Making My Mark}, p.102.
\textsuperscript{135} White, \textit{Gerard Dillon}, p. 39.
Irish High Crosses; Coulter writes that Dillon depicts 'an unspoilt rural idyll, untainted by both modernity and British rule.'

Notwithstanding these observations, I believe that the composition also bears fruitful comparison with a pair of works from English painter Stanley Spencer's *Shipbuilding on the Clyde* series of wartime paintings, painted under the direction of the War Artist's Advisory Committee (Fig. 29, Fig. 30). The elongated rectangles that make up the wings of Spencer's vast triptychs *Burners* (1940, Fig. 31) and *Welders* (1941, Fig. 32) are echoed in the shape of Dillon's painting, but a more fundamental similarity is the decision to compartmentalise the canvas. Workers in Spencer's triptychs are separated from their companions by geometrical divisions made by the different sections of metal on which they are working; there is no clue to the shape of the ship on which they are working as a whole, and we are, as Timothy Hyman observes, 'in the belly of the whale.' Of *Welders*, Margaret Garlake writes that 'the treatment of their bodies, bent and distorted in order to perform their work, vividly illustrates the extent to which war had diminished personal liberty, particularly for working class men.' In light of this admittedly eccentric comparison Dillon's *The Little Green Fields* might be reassessed: rather than inhabiting a 'rural idyll', the figures in the painting can be seen to be constrained by centuries old restrictions, and as locked into their manual occupations as the Clydeside shipbuilders. It is notable that none of the hands of the three human figures in Dillon’s painting are free: on the left the boy’s hands are both taken up with the buckets; in the centre the man’s hands are clasped in prayer; and on the right another man is bent over a field hard at work. Such figures may indeed embody the rugged masculinity of ‘devout, Gaelic-speaking, “manly” men’, endorsed by de Valera’s government and the Catholic Church, and which Coulter believes Dillon drew on for such works. Given his feelings of confinement during the war and his potentially vexed sense of national identity,

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136 Hewitt is quoted in S. B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, p. 361; Coulter, ‘Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism’, p. 176. Both Hewitt and Coulter refer to this painting as *West of Ireland Landscape*, but the National Gallery of Ireland list the work as *The Little Green Fields*, and since the painting belongs to that collection I will use this title. The possible nationalist undertones arising from the title *The Little Green Fields* should not go unacknowledged.

137 For a full history of this series of commissions see Andrew Patrizio and Frank Little, *Canvassing the Clyde: Stanley Spencer and the shipyards* (Glasgow: Glasgow Museums, 1994).


however, this work may be re-read in terms of restriction and frustration.\textsuperscript{140} Like Spencer’s shipbuilders, the men are disconnected, facing away from each other and engaged in different pursuits. Further examples of Dillon’s paintings in which the canvas has been divided up are \textit{High Cross Panel} (1949, \textbf{Fig. 33}), \textit{The Spectator} (1950) and \textit{The Irish at Play} (1953), all of which recall the medieval Celtic design. In \textit{Forgive us our Trespasses} (1942, \textbf{Fig. 34}) a confession box occupies roughly the upper left quartile of the composition, which depicts the interior of a church. Figures of worshippers queuing for confession do not overlap the confessional at all, which itself is described simply by linear divisions creating three small boxes in which the priest (half obscured by a curtain) and two kneeling worshippers can be seen. In this painting Dillon divides the composition more overtly to evoke the restrictions imposed by religion: indeed, the church has arguably taken care of the symbolism of the scene already.

Another work, \textit{Demolition} (1950, \textbf{Fig. 35}), has a more complex history. In the early spring of 1945 Dillon returned to London, taking on work as a ‘ganger’ leading groups of other Irish workers doing emergency repairs of bombed houses.\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Demolition} gives us a view of a house whose front wall has been removed, as though by a bomb blast: the composition is compartmentalised by the different rooms and workmen can be seen in each room, as James White observes ‘from the standpoint of a doll’s house open for a child to play.’\textsuperscript{142} Here the symbolic potential of the work is somewhat undercut by the fact that the removal of the front of houses was an actual material result of air attack during the Second World War. The workers are not disconnected from each other in \textit{Demolition} as they are in \textit{The Little Green Fields} (two pairs are evidently in conversation), but the ability to reflect both medieval Celtic design and twentieth century bomb damage in broadly similar designs is striking.

Such compartmentalisation of the canvas can be seen in a hugely diverse series of paintings around this time, examination of which should allow a reconsideration of Dillon’s oeuvre within a broader and more inclusive international context than the focus on his debt to medieval Celtic design has thus far permitted. The Mexican artist Diego Rivera’s mural \textit{The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City} (1931,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{140} Coulter, ‘Nationalism, Regionalism and Internationalism’, p. 175.
\textsuperscript{141} White, \textit{Gerard Dillon}, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p. 53. Citing Louis MacNeice and George Orwell, Mark Rawlinson has claimed that during the Second World War it became ‘literary convention’ to describe bombed-out houses with reference to doll’s houses as part of a ubiquitous discourse of ‘the figurative and conceptual containment of war’s destructiveness.’ (Rawlinson, \textit{British Writing of the Second World War}, p. 96)
\end{flushleft}
Fig. 36), for example, is divided into six main sections by a trompe l’oeil wooden scaffold, within which artists and labourers can be seen at work. As the title suggests, this is a mural which itself depicts the painting of a mural; echoing the Renaissance tradition, and like both Dillon in Island People (1950, Fig. 37) and Spencer in Burners and Welders, Rivera has included himself as the artist within the composition. While Rivera’s work seems on first inspection to celebrate the nobility of the ordinary worker, the colossal symbolic figure of whom dominates the central panels of the mural, The Making of a Fresco is a complex work, and, like Spencer’s Clyde triptychs, its metacritical vision complicates the respective places of individual workers, artists and patrons in relation to collaborative projects.

The separation of figures by divisions within a composition has also been used in representations of military scenes. In 1943 the American artist Benton Spruance produced Fathers and Sons (Fig. 38), a lithograph divided into organic shapes, echoing the lines of a dead tree which stretches across from the left of the composition. These shapes may represent the kind of foxholes dug by troops engaged in combat in open country, and within these cramped spaces an American and a German soldier confront each other: helmeted, masked and holding weapons. The sky above is pock-marked by explosions and streaked with aircraft contrails, and in the cut-away ground beneath the soldiers their forms are echoed by the similarly contorted figures of two skeletons from the previous war. One of these still wears a helmet of American or British design, whilst a coalscuttle helmet of similar design as that used by the German army during the First World War lies beside the skull of the other. The lithograph illustrates unambiguously the human cost and physical pain of combat conditions, but, as in other works I have referred to, symbolic potency here derives from the compartmentalisation of the composition. There is no evidence of a direct link between Spruance and Dillon, but Fathers and Sons does bear direct comparison with a later work by the Belfast artist: in The Brothers (1966, Fig. 39) three skeletons can be seen incarcerated in coffins underground, as though the ground had been cut away. Dillon, Spencer, Rivera and Spruance were geographically disparate artists, but their use of division and compartmentalisation allows us to draw connections between these works, which describe in various ways the economic, historical, political and religious pressures exerted on the individual around the time of the Second World War.

Dillon’s The Little Green Fields and Spencer’s Glasgow paintings are interesting foils to many examples of officially commissioned wartime art produced at
this time, which attempted to encourage support for the British war effort through the careful presentation of scenes of collective endeavour, in rural, agricultural and industrial contexts. Spencer’s triptychs are paradoxical: although they were officially commissioned, and in the context of that war effort clearly illustrate the complex combination of diverse technical skills that go into the building of a ship, the compositions themselves communicate a profound disconnection between the workers. No direct connection between Stanley Spencer and Northern Ireland can be discerned until the early 1950s, when he visited his brother, a musician who lived in Belfast, on four occasions. He produced at least four portraits of his niece and one panoramic cityscape, *Merville Garden Village near Belfast* (1951, Fig. 40), which contrasts the new post-war housing development with the older garden it enclosed. According to John Hewitt, at this time Spencer struck up a friendship with influential Hungarian born local collector Zoltan Frankl, who bought three of his works including the shipbuilding painting *Caulkers*. Hewitt and Spencer also grew close, and after conducting lengthy taped conversations with the artist for a radio interview, Hewitt affectionately identified Spencer’s Clydeside paintings with industrial Belfast:

And in Belfast where we know the ways of shipyard folk, we enjoyed his remembering being in Port Glasgow as a war artist, and liking the working people that he lodged with, and when he drew a number of their portraits and presented them, these became by far the best framed works of his he ever saw; the best of craftsmanship and the best of material going into their making.

This idea of the craftsman is important: Spencer’s inclusion of himself as the figure of the artist in both *Burners* and *Welders* may have constituted an attempt to demonstrate that the war artist, far from being a detached observer, was an integral part of the war effort.

William Conor also saw himself as a craftsman and as a user of materials. In a speech to the Royal Ulster Society in 1958 he declared:

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143 Hyman and Wright (eds), *Stanley Spencer*, p. 224.
144 Hewitt, *North Light*, p. 175.
In this topsy turvy age, when everyone is shouting ‘forward’, and no one is expected to ask ‘where’ it would seem as if nothing matters or rather, it matters nothing what the artist paints or sculpts, and the artists themselves are so fiercely individualistic that they don’t know what each other is getting at. Sometimes I think the artist, as an honest and skilled craftsman, is quickly disappearing and it would seem that the very deficiencies in work today are seized upon as something very novel and original.

Art exists only where things are made to last forever.145

Many of the works Conor produced during the Second World War evoke more orthodox ideas of collective endeavour, in which his view of craftsmanship as integral to Belfast’s industrial prowess is evident. Of a much older generation than the other artists I have referred to so far, Conor was fifty eight by 1939, and had been an official war artist in the First World War, visiting munition works and Army camps such as Ballykinlar to make sketches of the everyday life of the Ulster Division (Fig. 41).146 These sketches had been exhibited at the Belfast City Hall over Christmas 1916 alongside portraits of Carson and Craig, and Conor was later commissioned to paint the opening of the first Northern Ireland Parliament in 1921, a painting which hangs in Stormont today.147 In April 1940 he received a letter from the Ministry of Information in London on behalf of the War Artist’s Advisory Committee, offering him £50 for between six and eight drawings, and £1 a day in expenses, should he be away from home to study things first hand.148 All drawings were to be submitted to the Ministry for censorship and artists were barred from showing family or friends any of the works before submission. Duly recruited, Conor reluctantly assumed a relatively high public profile in the Northern Ireland war effort: a special exhibition consisting of work commissioned by him was a feature of Belfast’s War Weapons Week and opened in December 1940.149 Conor was the only artist permitted to draw the arrival of the US army in the province: Landing of the First American Troops in Northern Ireland (26

145 Wilson, Conor 1881-1968, p. 87.
146 Ibid., p. 13.
148 The activities of the WAAC under the direction of Kenneth Clark have been related in detail elsewhere, in Meirion and Susie Harries, The War Artists (London: Michael Joseph in association with the Imperial War Museum and the Tate Gallery, 1983), pp. 159-163, and in Stansky and Abrahams, London’s Burning, pp. 16-28.
149 Wilson, Conor 1881-1968, p. 65.
January 1942, Fig. 42) shows Major-General Russel P. Hartle, in command of US troops in the province, the Duke of Abercorn, then Governor of Northern Ireland, Sir Archibald Sinclair, the British Air Minister, and Private Milburn Henke, first American soldier officially to step on British soil, leaving the gangplank at Dufferin Quay in Belfast as the band of the Royal Ulster rifles plays in background.\textsuperscript{150}

Despite Conor’s elevated status, according to his friend William Carter he had little enthusiasm for the work:

The work he did then was not, I think, of any great significance in his life as an artist. I think he hated the war and he hated everything to do with it. Of course economically it was a difficult time, the wartime interfered with normal work and normal activities and the fact that he couldn’t travel easily outside the Province. I think it was a bad period of his life that he didn’t like to remember or talk about.\textsuperscript{151}

It cannot be said that the war had any discernible lasting impact on his career as a painter, aside from the officially commissioned pieces: after 1945 Conor reverted to his familiar territory of portraits and local scenes touched little by the outside world or overt political considerations. However, it is notable that many of the titles of Conor’s wartime works refer to named streets and locations in Belfast, in contrast to works produced pre and post war which, portraits aside, frequently deal in archetypes, with generalised titles. This is partly due to the nature of the work, but also suggests that, like Middleton, Conor recovered a sense of fidelity to his home city in his war pictures. Conor’s drawings for the WAAC during the Second World War are also vital to an understanding of the officially approved views of the province at war that the British and Northern Irish governments wished to promote.

Although Conor completed *The Launch* in 1923, long before the Second World War, its imagery prefigures many of his wartime paintings, and significantly it was included in *The Irish Scene*, a large book of colour reproductions of his paintings published in 1944. The composition shows three men watching the bow of a ship as it is

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., p. 70. \\
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., p. 71.
launched down a slipway, a union flag just visible flying from the bow. A review of Conor’s 1923 one man exhibition describes the emphasis on collaborative endeavour in his industrial works:

The reaction of the life-struggle in a manufacturing community upon the individual is nearly always the basis on which his art is founded. This idea pervades that fine painting ‘The Launch’ one of his most recent achievements. Here the interest does not centre on the spectacle of the great ship sliding magnificently down the slips, but on the figures of the three shipyard workers who watch intently the seal of final success set upon their labours.

The wartime shipyard commission *Riveting* (1940, **Fig. 44**), a watercolour on paper, also features a trio of workers. In sharp contrast to Spencer’s Glasgow series, here the side of the ship is drawn as a vast, monolithic curved wall, and the focus of the composition is on the three men working together in the bottom half of the painting. Conor’s concern was with the collaborative and human face of heavy industry. This may be contrasted with another Belfast shipyard painting produced under the auspices of the WAAC, Edward Mansfield’s *The View across the Musgrave Yard, Belfast: with the Centre Plate of a ship in the foreground and Ship No 1154 ready to leave the slips* (1942, **Fig. 45**). Here the pattern of booms and scaffolds that surround the ship on the slipway is used to break the composition into an almost cubist collection of geometrical shapes, though the potential ambiguity of these lines and blocks of colour is reined in by the inescapable resonance of the white ensign of the Royal Navy, which appears just below the evening sun in the top left corner, a symbolic nod to the British war effort.

Conor’s officially commissioned war pieces are far more unambiguous, and could be considered nakedly propagandist in some cases. *Men of the Home Front* (1940, **Fig. 46**), like many of the works drawn with crayon on paper, shows shipyard workers crossing Queen’s Bridge, Belfast, probably on the way home after a shift. The body language of the men seems relaxed, and they talk in groups of four or fewer as they walk. One man removes his hat to scratch his head. This is not a depiction of a well drilled and disciplined civilian army, and the emphasis is on the informality and

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152 See Conor’s *Men of Iron* (1922, **Fig. 43**). This was painted a year earlier, but is practically identical to *The Launch* that appears in William Conor, *The Irish Scene* (Belfast: Derrick MacCord, 1944). Conor painted a number of similar pieces with this theme and/or title.

ordinariness of the workers and their camaraderie. Conor also drew the women of the home front. *F.A.N.Y's Crossing Donegall Place, Belfast* (1940, Fig. 47) depicts three uniformed nurses (of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) with confident and smiling faces, their legs marching purposefully in unison, whilst in *Collecting Scrap Metal* (1940, Fig. 48) four women drag a mangle across a terraced street. They also seem cheery despite the effort clearly being expended, as two older women look on from across the street. *Evacuation of Children, Great Northern Railway Station, Belfast* (c. 1940, Fig. 49) is a bustling, chaotic scene showing women of all ages escorting children on to a train. The atmosphere is affectionate and cheery, and rather than expressing fear or sorrow the women and children are smiling. In sharp contrast to Spencer's shipbuilding paintings (and, indeed, Dillon's wartime paintings), with their compartmentalisation of tasks and activities, Conor's drawings frequently promote the idea of civilian and industrial life as a collaborative group endeavour. In so doing, and without reference to innumerable contradictions, social conditions and historical antagonisms, such works offer a wholly positive view of the urban geography of Belfast at this time, where sites of industrial production were located next to and between residential areas, with the former, to a considerable extent, defining the latter.

It is clear that the pressures acting on the production of visual art in Northern Ireland during the war years were many, various, and often acute. Given the lack of material evidence, it seems unlikely that the Second World War had any long term impact on artists working in the province. It is tempting to refer once more to Louis MacNeice's sense of the war years as an 'interregnum', and concede that as the war ended and the unique presences and pressures resulting from the conflict dispersed and receded, artists in Northern Ireland returned to localised pre-war concerns.\(^{154}\) Having described the wartime blossoming of Hewitt's regionalism, Tom Clyde concludes that:

> It is obvious that any protest eventually fades: people die, move away, get seduced by other ideas and, if no obvious progress is being made, simply fade away. Related to this process is the fact of the end of the War. The troops in Northern Ireland left, taking their money with them; artists were able to travel

\(^{154}\) MacNeice, *Strings Are False*, pp. 20, 27-29.
again and new artistic influences developed on the liberated European continent, recalling Winston Churchill’s infamous phrase, the old quarrels re-emerged undiminished.\textsuperscript{155}

Despite this, Clyde admits that regionalist ideas formulated by Hewitt during the war were taken on by the cultural institutions of the province, the BBC, CEMA (NI), Queen’s University and the Ulster Museum, and states that, as a result, ‘no Ulster poet since that time has found his or her self so confused, isolated and burdened by cultural cringe as Hewitt and his predecessors did.’\textsuperscript{156} The difficulty of defining the extent of the long-term impact of the war on culture in Northern Ireland echoes one of the central concerns of this thesis, the seemingly contradictory proposition that art in the province became increasingly open to outside influences during the war years even as it turned in on itself and reflected specifically regional concerns. This paradox is certainly present in the majority of the material I have discussed in this chapter, whether in Hewitt’s critical prose or Middleton’s paintings. Hewitt, whose writings frequently suggest that the war years had an enlivening and rejuvenating effect on culture in the province, himself undermined this view when late on in \textit{A North Light} he admitted that his ideas of progress may have been illusory. He describes the period 1939-1949 as:

\begin{quote}
...a starved decade, largely concerned with the problems of art in my own province and country, a period in which, because of the flaring-up of activity in a war-isolated community, we were probably disposed to exaggerate its value without the constant check of European standards...\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

This would seem to contradict his assertion made in ‘Under Forty: Some Ulster Artists’ that ‘we now have artists working on problems which still have validity in Great Britain and on the Continent,’ and Hewitt himself remained unable to resolve this issue.\textsuperscript{158} Asked in conversation with Brian McAvera what elements most influenced the production of art in the post war years in Northern Ireland, S.B. Kennedy’s answer also reflects this ambiguity:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., p. 258.
\textsuperscript{157} Hewitt, \textit{North Light}, p. 153.
\end{flushright}
I’m sure the most important was the aftermath of WW2 in the period 1945-1955. We had survived! And that was no mean thing. It was suddenly possible to do things: the Brave New World. I’m sure that lots of artists felt that they were striking out, yet looking back, the period between 1945 and 1960 was really a continuation of issues and subjects that had been dealt with in the decades before the war.159

What is clear is that the war instigated an unprecedented influx of overseas soldiers and refugees, that this influx resulted in the deeply symbolic opening up of the bomb-damaged Belfast Museum and Art Gallery to a number of exhibitions of works by foreign artists; that the war brought together in Belfast a mutually supportive group of artists and writers, represented in print by a number of small-scale publications; that the global scale of the conflict forced its way into the visual art of the province at this time, encouraging the assimilation and development of continental styles and helping to displace, to some extent, what had been a parochial tradition; that the bombing of Belfast had a profound impact on artists from the city, manifested in a distinctive engagement with the built environment and in representations of named streets and areas of the city; and that although the Home Front work of the most prominent official war artist in the province at the time conforms, in the main, to official projections of the war effort, there is evidence elsewhere of cross-pollination between official and unofficial art in the province.

The artists I have discussed lack a common style, and indeed one thing that can be said to characterise visual art in the province during the war years is its singularity and eccentricity. Although I have attempted to place works by Colin Middleton and Gerard Dillon in wider contexts by setting them against British and European antecedents and counterparts, it is clear that the idiosyncratic approaches of these two artists make it very difficult to subordinate their work to other, externally established stylistic modes and traditions. The Second World War forced artists to confront new problems and scenes, either because they were paid to do so or because they felt impelled to do so. If the vibrancy of the wartime community of artists and writers in Belfast faded after the war, the sense of eccentricity remains.

Chapter Four

Ulster Quislings and Drapery Romances: Political Writing

In 1942 the Socialist Party in Belfast published a poetry pamphlet entitled *15 Poems*, to be sold to raise money for the Russian Red Cross. It featured poems by nine writers, including Maurice James Craig, John Hewitt, Colin Middleton and W.R. Rodgers. The type face used on the cover of the pamphlet betrays the influence of Soviet design, but it is an opaque collection, few of whose poems appear to respond directly to the war or reflect the concerns of the party under whose auspices it appeared.\(^1\) The first poem, William Adair’s ‘Soviet Symbol’ is overtly propagandist, however, opening and closing with lines adapted from those popularised by Karl Marx in 1875 and later adopted and adapted by Lenin and Stalin, amongst others: ‘Each one according to his ability [...] And take to each according to his needs.’\(^2\) The ‘symbol’ of the poem’s title is a paragon of physical strength and fortitude, with ‘earnest’ eyes, ‘patient’ fingers and ‘clean’ blood, equally proficient with ‘smooth machine or swing / Of scythe’, the inheritor of the impending new order:

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History is his; to rising eyes around
Of men in moaning and in bond he holds
Its meaning and the means enpalmed.
Oh smile! Oh freedom over frontiers bound.\(^3\)
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Adair’s faith and optimism hints at the possibility of a united Ireland as part of the socialist revolution, as the poem continues to prophesy a time when ‘To laughter in the North reaction cedes. / A day! their separateness all men end’.\(^4\) The subsequent poems in the collection are less optimistic, and tend to describe a world dominated by fear and uncertainty. W.R. Rodgers’s offering ‘Neither Here Nor There’ evokes a land where ‘all’s lackadaisical’, ‘flat, indifferent’, conceding only in the final line that ‘at night

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1 In a letter to W.R Rodgers, encouraging him to contribute to the anthology, John Hewitt wrote that ‘The verses will not be propagandist or left or Soviet salutes – just typical poems as good as we can get.’ (Letter from John Hewitt to W.R. Rodgers, 28 October 1941, Rodgers Papers, D2833/C/1/8/1)
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
there is the smell of morning.'\(^5\) John Hewitt’s contributions are also pessimistic.\(^6\) His first, ‘The Little Lough’ describes a ‘small narrow lake’ but is perhaps best read as a fearful love poem on the eve of war, in the lines ‘Tho’ many things I love should disappear / in the black night ahead of us’.\(^7\) ‘Sonnet in Autumn’ similarly laments the disappearance of cherished things in the face of an overwhelming threat, as ‘The heedless rose has blown / unmarked, unheeded in the hooting throng’, suggesting that even nature reflects the new anxiety, as ‘the hard bright berries of the haw / report an older, an austerer law, / a season older, suddenly afraid.’\(^8\)

Small as it was, *15 Poems* is demonstrative of the interpenetration of political, poetic and artistic spheres in Belfast at this time. John Wilson Foster has described the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) during the 1940s as an ‘enormously important asylum to the artistic or merelyarty’, but the tendency of radical political and artistic groupings in Belfast to overlap and inform each other during the war was perhaps most apparent in gatherings at Campbell’s coffee house opposite the City Hall.\(^9\) An unofficial debating chamber characterised by its fiery conversation, Campbell’s was frequented by many of the artists and writers whose work this study explores: Robert Greacen sketches a typical wartime morning there in his memoir *The Sash My Father Wore*, where characters including Denis Ireland, William Conor, Richard Rowley, Joseph Tomelty, Sam Hanna Bell and F.L. Green drop in to the café, described as ‘an island of tolerance in our bitterly divided community. Dissent is permissible and nobody will drench you with coffee for not saying “the right thing”’.\(^10\) A 1961 BBC radio documentary, which featured the memories of former patrons, emphasised the importance of Campbell’s as a forum for political, literary and artistic debate during the 1930s and 40s. The poet John Irvine recalled that the café was untroubled by any presiding chairman figure, allowing all comers to contribute freely to discussions; in a similar vein the artist Padraic Woods compared it to Doctor Johnson’s coffee house, with the important difference that instead of patrons gathering round a great man,

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\(^5\) W.R. Rodgers, ‘Neither Here Nor There’, *15 Poems*, p. 3.
\(^6\) These might be contrasted with earlier poems by Hewitt which offered unconditional praise for the Soviet Union, such as ‘A Chant for the Workers of the World on the 13th Anniversary of the Revolution’ (1930, cited in Edna Longley, ‘Progressive Bookmen: Left Wing Politics and Ulster Protestant Writers’, *The Living Stream*, p. 120).
\(^8\) Hewitt, ‘Sonnet in Autumn’, *15 Poems*, p. 5.
\(^9\) Wilson Foster, ‘Was there Ulster literary life before Heaney?’, *Between Shadows*, p. 213.
\(^10\) Greacen, *Sash*, p. 130.
everyone considered themselves a Doctor Johnson.\textsuperscript{11} The café brought disparate individuals together: there, it was claimed, the landscape painter James Humbert Craig could sit down with left-wing expressionist artists and speak a ‘common language’.\textsuperscript{12} Campbell’s also attracted political and religious figures. In his autobiography \textit{Bonfires on the Hillside} (1995) the journalist James Kelly recalled the independent Unionist MP Henry Porter engaged in ‘conspiratorial plotting and planning’ with the young Ian Paisley at a table near the stairs, and Elizabeth McCullough, a school girl in the early years of the war, describes in her memoir \textit{A Square Peg: An Ulster Childhood} (1997) the rattling of coffee cups as Paisley held court among the students of the Presbyterian Training College on the first floor, together with Jewish international bridge players, junior architects and members of the Belfast Arts Theatre.\textsuperscript{13}

As this chapter will describe, the collegiate and tolerant atmosphere of Campbell’s is hardly representative of the established political culture in Northern Ireland at this time, but such gatherings as occurred at the coffee house illustrate the close co-existence of unofficial and marginal artistic, literary and political communities in Belfast during the war. Magazines such as \textit{Lagan} and \textit{Northern Harvest} and (in Dublin) \textit{The Bell} are notable for the diversity of their contributions, and are illustrative of the cross-pollination between creative, journalistic and political writing at this time. Left-wing political publications in Belfast also took an interest in cultural matters: as well as articles which examined war aims and addressed plans for post-war political and social reconstruction, the Socialist Party newsletter \textit{Northern Star} regularly carried socialist reconsiderations of Irish history, pieces of cultural commentary, and took a particular interest in film releases during the war. The Communist Party weekly \textit{Unity} published reviews of books, exhibitions and radio programmes as well as occasional poems, and encouraged its readers to attend concerts of classical music.

This chapter examines overlapping discourses in literary and political writing of the province, at a time when writers and publications that were ostensibly literary made significant interventions in political matters and when, conversely, politicians and journalists made bold forays into literary territory. To this end, I explore the ways in which writers contested the overtly politicised issues of the place and status of Northern

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{11} ‘The Table in the Window’, BBC Radio Ulster (9 November 1961), BBC Northern Ireland Archive, #Museum 7612.
\bibitem{12} Ibid.
\bibitem{13} Kelly, \textit{Bonfires on the Hillside}, p. 149; Elizabeth McCullough, \textit{A Square Peg: An Ulster Childhood} (Dublin: Marino Books, 1997), p 115.
\end{thebibliography}
Ireland in relation to the Second World War across a number of genres, and show how the language and events of the war were incorporated into political arguments within the province. If preceding chapters have been largely circumscribed by genre, I have found it necessary in this chapter to address a far more diverse body of work, including biographies, cartoons, historical writing, little magazines, pamphlets, plays, poems, short fiction, speeches, tourist guidebooks, travel writing and other miscellaneous prose works.

As the various publications that were officially commissioned or sanctioned by the Stormont government sought to emphasise the strategic importance of the province to the British war effort as a means of strengthening ties between Northern Ireland and Britain, nationalist and republican writing of the war years was firmly anti-partitionist and attempted to downplay or deny the province’s role in the war. Such publications often targeted the political corruption of the unionist elite and ongoing discrimination against the Catholic minority. To an extent this fault-line mirrored existent divisions and transitions, inevitably predicated on the sectarian identities that dominate the political culture of the province. The debate was not entirely determined by a binary division between pro-war unionists and anti-war nationalists, however: the growth during the 1930s and 40s of a vocal and diverse movement of Communist, socialist and internationalist writers, poets and pamphleteers, prolific in their production and distribution of printed matter, briefly challenged the province’s sectarian political landscape and offered an escape route for those unwilling to become part of this. As John Wilson Foster has observed:

Pre-war socialism was a way in which Northern Irish writers could overcome, however precariously, their prior and largely involuntary primary identities as either Protestant or Catholic, unionist or nationalist and take part, first and foremost, in an unpartitioned and recognizable intellectual and artistic community (or, at worst, coterie); as a bonus, it was a way too of defining oneself as an artist and dangerous. [...] Socialism was a way in which such Protestant literati as Bell, Hewitt, Greacen and others could cock a snook at the prevailing atmosphere of Unionist Northern Ireland which starved artists of sufficient oxygen. [...] Socialist views were a purchase on art and intellect and
also a way of being anti-Unionist without being nationalistic and (to use an offensive phrase of the day) a ‘Fenian lover’.\textsuperscript{14}

The growth in the appeal of socialist ideas at this time, driven by a desire for domestic social reform and by the entry of the Soviet Union into the war in June 1941, modified Northern Irish literary and political responses to the war and to local affairs on both sides of the sectarian divide. Both unionist and anti-partitionist writers incorporated socialist ideas and rhetoric into their arguments in response to this growth in popularity, but socialists themselves found that the war presented them with difficulties. In a speech at the Cooperative Hall in Belfast in June 1942, later reprinted in pamphlet form by the Communist Party of Ireland, the Scottish Communist Westminster MP William Gallacher argued that ‘In searching for unity here in Northern Ireland or in association with any contacts in the South, the richest soil for the growth of union is the new understanding the people are getting everywhere of the Soviet Union.’\textsuperscript{15} As the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact had created difficulties for left leaning activists and their publications, the entry of the Soviet Union into the war also proved problematic for socialists and Communists in Northern Ireland, many of whom were ideologically anti-partitionist but who found themselves drawn into supporting an Allied war effort in which the British Empire was a major force. Some circumvention of this was possible, as can be seen from W.H. McCullough’s claim in another Communist Party pamphlet entitled \textit{Changes are needed at Stormont} that ‘This is a real peoples’ war. On the side of the democratic forces are included the Soviet Union, the first Socialist country in the world, China who has fought Japanese Imperialism for over a decade, and liberty-loving peoples throughout the world.’\textsuperscript{16} The pamphlet spent much energy lauding the bravery of the Soviet Union, and criticised the Northern Ireland Government for failing to mobilise the people of the province sufficiently, calling for a representative government comprised of members of all parties. On the question of the southern state, however, McCullough was reticent: a short and vague section entitled ‘Attitude Towards Éire’ could only claim that the neutrality of the southern state was of grave concern to ‘democratic opinion’, and mused that ‘it is indeed strange to find that part of

\textsuperscript{14} Wilson Foster, ‘Was there Ulster literary life before Heaney?’, \textit{Between Shadows}, pp. 213-14.

\textsuperscript{15} W. Gallacher, MP, \textit{Freedom or Slavery?} (Belfast: Communist Party of Ireland, 1942), p. 5.

\textsuperscript{16} W.H. McCullough, \textit{Changes are needed at Stormont} (Belfast: Communist Party of Ireland, c. 1940), p. 15.
Ireland out of step with the rest of mankind'. A later McCullough pamphlet, *Ireland Looks to Labour* (1943), was more optimistic, and asked all anti-fascists in Ireland to fall in behind the war effort despite the continuance of partition, apparently in the hope that the projected rise of a powerful twenty-six county Labour movement could lead to the ‘final and complete unification of Ireland and the establishment of Socialism.’ His subsequent call for the full implementation of the British government’s Beveridge Report is demonstrative of the contradictions within the socialist movement in Northern Ireland at this time, however.

By 1945, in *For a Prosperous Ulster: An explanation of the Communist Party’s Policy for Northern Ireland*, McCullough had retreated from any talk of unity, and merely claimed that the Labour movement should ‘fight for a Government that will be a good neighbour of the Government of Southern Ireland.’ It should be noted that his admiration of the Soviet Union remained constant throughout these vacillations. The tortuous ideological trajectory of the maverick MP Harry Midgley, from advocate of Home Rule during the 1920s, through leading roles in the NILP during the 1930s and early 1940s, to his departure to form his own Commonwealth Labour Party in 1942 and to become the first non-unionist member of a Stormont cabinet the following year, before finally taking the Unionist party whip in 1947, offers the most striking illustration of the difficulties in trying to pursue socialism with an international conscience, in the rigidly circumscribed atmosphere of Belfast political life at this time.

The post-war history of the NILP itself, riven by splits and unable to build on wartime socialist momentum, bears this out. However, in addition to the involvement of soldiers from Northern Ireland in theatres of conflict across the world and the influx of foreign troops and refugees during the war, the growth of socialist groups and publications in Belfast during the 1930s and 40s did help to open up a political culture largely defined and determined by its insularity to some new and external pressures and influences. The impact of the Spanish Civil War on the Northern Ireland general election of 1938, thanks in no small part to Midgley’s own controversial campaign in

his Dock constituency in support of the defeated Republican forces, is demonstrative of this.\textsuperscript{21} As this chapter will show, writers of all shades of opinion explored comparisons between the political situation in Northern Ireland and that of other countries, often using terms specifically associated with the Second World War such as ‘quisling’. This tendency demonstrates how, to use a term favoured by Bew, Gibbons and Patterson, the war ‘de-insulated’ the political culture of the province at this time, and suggests that writers felt increasingly able to reconsider the province in an international context.\textsuperscript{22} In a pamphlet published by the Belfast branch of the PEN in 1942, the historian D.A. Chart argued that historical writers were especially well-placed to advance the aims of the International PEN, and encouraged the production of studies which examined the affairs of more than one nation. Having outlined the lacunae he perceived in the study of Irish history, he concluded that:

> International comparison is needed in all branches of history. The Continent often speaks of Great Britain as being insular in its outlook and thought, but we, being on the far side of that island barrier, are still more inclined to confine our studies to our own country and consider its experience unique and solely to be regarded. Before the history of a part of the world is attempted, there should be some knowledge and appreciation of the whole.\textsuperscript{23}

Chart’s entreaty might be compared with Seán Ó Faoláin’s repeated attempts in \textit{The Bell} to emphasise the interdependence of the wider world. An early editorial in May 1941 entitled ‘Provincialism’ argued that ‘everywhere, and Everyman, nowadays, is indebted to somewhere and somebody else, related to somewhere else, inferior and superior in something or other to somewhere else. There are no longer any water-tight regions.’\textsuperscript{24} This presented writers in Ireland with a specific dilemma, as Ó Faoláin acknowledged in an editorial introducing a Special Ulster Number of the magazine two

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\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 98-110. See also Sam McAughtry, \textit{Hillman Street High Roller} (Belfast: Appletree, 1994), p. 99: ‘In Dock Ward we talked of little else. We had hardly a rag on our backs [...] we’d hardly shoes to our feet, we were queuing up for stale loaves, and there we were worrying about the Spanish Civil War.’

\textsuperscript{22} Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson, \textit{The State in Northern Ireland 1921-72} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p. 103.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{The P.E.N. In Ulster, Contributed by Well-Known Writers of Belfast Centre} (Belfast: Reid and Wright, 1942), p. 6.

\textsuperscript{24} ‘Provincialism’, \textit{The Bell}, 2. 2 (May 1941), 5-8 (pp. 5-6).
months later, which bemoaned the growing divide between culture north and south of the border:

Unfortunately, however much there is to be said for those two modes of life – for that international way to the open sea of world-ideas, or for this national way of cultivating our own garden – it cannot be said that either is being at all as fruitful as that undivided Ireland of, say, forty years ago. The emphasis on inward and outward is possibly to blame, this passionate, and therefore almost always stupid, rivalry or hyper-nationalism and hyper-internationalism that has resulted from Partition.\(^{25}\)

The ‘two modes’ here decried by Ó Faoláin determine much of the debate over Northern Ireland’s place in the war, and are especially apparent in the works of unionist and loyalist writers keen to emphasise the heightened international stature of the province during the war, generally at the expense of the southern state: to this end St John Ervine’s distinction in 1943 between Northern Ireland’s ‘outlook’ and Éire’s ‘inlook’ (probably unconsciously) echoed Ó Faoláin’s analysis.\(^{26}\)

The Second World War drew some writers in Northern Ireland into new and unfamiliar territory. Towards the end of this chapter a consideration of the ways in which writers of various hues approached Winston Churchill, a figure who was talismanic in the context of the British war effort but whose interventions in Irish affairs earlier in the twentieth century remained hugely contentious within the province, will reveal the extent to which the political culture in Northern Ireland during the war encouraged unexpected advocacy and further challenged established patterns of debate. These publications, which often printed extracts from Churchill’s speeches in support of their arguments (some pamphlets reprinted entire speeches), also highlight the crucial importance of the quotation and recontextualisation of existing material to political discourse in the province during the war. Partly due to this, this chapter does not confine itself to material published in Northern Ireland. The Bell in particular was an important forum for debate on Northern Ireland in the 1940s, and I have treated such

\(^{25}\) ‘Ulster’, *The Bell*, 2.4 (July 1941), p. 5.

\(^{26}\) Quoted in ‘Telegraph Plans’, *Northern Star*, 4.1 (March 1943), 12-14 (p. 13). Ervine’s remarks had originally appeared in the *Belfast Telegraph* the previous month.
relevant material published in Dublin and London as an integral part of the political and literary culture of the province at this time.\textsuperscript{27}

The conclusions of historians regarding the impact of the Second World War on Northern Ireland have tended to focus on the status of the border following the conflict, and the resulting political and territorial implications for the province and the island of Ireland as a whole.\textsuperscript{28} There is a general consensus that by the end of the war Northern Ireland lay more securely within the United Kingdom, a view that was anticipated by unionists at a very early stage. Prime Minister Lord Craigavon’s broadcast in February 1940 set the tone for much subsequent rhetoric, concluding with these words:

\begin{quotation}
...I am anxious that all my listeners across the Channel should realise that though Ulster be but a small link in the chain which encircles and binds the Empire, she is, by virtue of her strategical position and her hardy Northern stock, a strong link – a link that will neither break nor bend before the King’s enemies. We are King’s men. We will be with you to the end.
\end{quotation}

When Craig’s successor J.M. Andrews resigned in 1943, Churchill’s letter of commiseration claimed that ‘the bonds of affection between Great Britain and the people of Northern Ireland have been tempered by fire and are now, I firmly believe, unbreakable.’\textsuperscript{30} The following year Hugh Shearman, later a writer of pro-union propaganda for the British government, argued in the one-off little magazine \textit{Northern Harvest} that ‘Ulster’s ready participation in the war’ had reinforced connections between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and, with some smugness, observed that

\begin{quote}
It is worth noting that one of the most strongly worded condemnations of Irish neutrality can be found in a novel, Nicholas Monsarrat’s \textit{The Cruel Sea} (1951), which describes the lives of Royal Navy sailors during the Battle of the Atlantic. In a two page long polemical digression Monsarrat, who himself served in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve on the Western Approaches during the war, wrote that ‘it was difficult to withhold one’s contempt from a country such as Ireland, whose battle this was and whose chances of freedom and independence in the event of a German victory were nil.’ (Monsarrat, \textit{The Cruel Sea} (London: Cassell, 1951, repr. 1996), pp. 151-2)
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{29} Craig, ‘We Are King’s Men’, in \textit{The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Volume III}, p. 365.

\textsuperscript{30} Quoted in Fisk, p. 470.
Ulster people have a vivid and pleasant sense of having thoroughly backed a very fine winner in the war.' If, as Robert Fisk has written, 'The war created a strengthened bond between London and Belfast, a link that was accentuated and repeatedly emphasised throughout the war by Éire’s refusal to stand by Britain in her hour of need', the Northern Ireland Government were certainly keen to emphasise both the 'strengthened bond' and the southern 'refusal' in the years after the war, and commissioned or supported a number of publications to make these arguments.

Pre-eminent among these was John W. Blake's lengthy *Northern Ireland in the Second World War* (1956), commissioned by the Stormont administration in 1945 and published by the British state publishing company His Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO). The title *Northern Ireland in the Second World War* is itself significant: the choice to use 'in' rather than 'and' or 'during' is illustrative of the book's aim to emphasise the province's active participation in the war. The book was written with the co-operation of civil servants at Stormont, and provides a comprehensive survey of the agricultural, industrial and military history of the province at war, as well as detailing the deployments of Ulster regiments and Belfast-built ships around the world. The text is accompanied by numerous statistical tables and several gatefold maps. Despite the arid nature of some of his material there was a clear ideological dimension to Blake’s history, deriving from its official status and resulting content and tone: as Gillian McIntosh writes, it was 'intended to represent the Northern Irish state’s part in the war in which the unionist government wished it to be remembered' and was aimed 'at reinforcing in the minds of the British public and politicians the common bond which war had created between Northern Ireland and Britain [...] which unionists believed would ultimately prevent future Westminster administrations from abandoning them.'

However, despite (or perhaps as a result of) Blake’s emphasis on the debt owed by the British government for Ulster's contribution and loyalty during the war, the book did not meet with unalloyed approval in London. Brigadier H.B. Latham of the British cabinet office historical section complained that Blake's sole focus on Northern Ireland resulted in a distorted history, and that to focus on ships simply because they were built in Belfast or on army units because they were based in Northern Ireland had led to

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32 Fisk, p. 470.
33 McIntosh, *Force of Culture*, p. 157, p. 166.
'complete nonsense'. The *Times Literary Supplement* was also critical, writing that Blake’s history, with its wealth of statistical information was ‘not [...] a book for the ordinary reader’ and that it was ‘questionable whether a provincial history of the war [was] either necessary or dignified.’ Such comments show a certain degree of resistance in Britain to the inclusion of Northern Ireland’s anomalous story within the history of the British war effort, obliging pro-union writers to write against both nationalist and British preconceptions of the war, and perhaps accounts for the intermittent extremities in tone and content of some of the works discussed later.

In addition to its almost overpowering wealth of factual information, Blake’s history also promoted an essentialist and homogenous conception of the ‘Ulster’ character, described as an ‘Anglo-Scottish planter stock, Protestant and alien in the first instance [...] Presbyterian Scots among them, dour, fervent, conscious of high destiny and taught self-reliance by many a grim experience [who] left their mark indelibly on the province’. The book presents the war as a test passed with merit by the people of Northern Ireland, which further separated the province from the southern state: ‘Though the province was small, nevertheless it contained hidden strength; and its greatest strength derived from the character of the Ulster people. Geography, history, tradition and religion all in some way differentiated Northern Ireland from Eire [sic].’ Blake claimed that the people of Northern Ireland were ‘less given to romantic fancies than the Southern Irish’ and were thus more amenable to the presence of American soldiers in their midst. The final lines of the book claimed that ‘Devotion and self-effacement gave fundamental worth to Northern Ireland’s war effort. For the final assessment is of the spirit.’

Published in London, clothed in an orange dust-jacket and violently polemical, St John Ervine’s biographical study *Craigavon: Ulsterman* (1949) also sought to emphasise the sense of separation between Northern Ireland and the southern state engendered by the Second World War. Ervine himself admitted in the preface that the book, over 670 pages long, was no formal biography, but aimed to give the facts of the late Prime Minister’s life and ‘expound the beliefs and political faith of Ulster Unionists, of whom I am one.’ Though he had long resided in London, the novelist

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34 Ibid., p. 165.
36 Blake, p. 34, p. 298, p. 535.
37 St John Ervine, *Craigavon: Ulsterman* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1949), p. vii. Denis Ireland, who seems to have derived some enjoyment from jousting with Ervine, wrote that:
and playwright remained a frequent and irascible correspondent to various newspapers and periodicals in Belfast, making inflammatory contributions to several cultural and political debates. Much of Craigavon: Ulsterman is dedicated to attacking Irish neutrality. In his preface, a rambling and digressive amalgamation of statistical data and personal anecdote, Ervine claimed that Northern Ireland’s involvement in the Second World War offered a pressing and contemporary justification for partition and, significantly, entitled the province to claim moral superiority over the southern state:

The conviction held by many Southern Irishmen, and especially by Gaelic Leaguers, that Ireland, like an over-fastidious spinster, can draw her robes around her and avoid the contagion of the world’s slow stain by pretending that she is totally detached from the rest of mankind and can live self-sufficiently by herself, muttering ancient incantations in an obsolete language and maintaining a far, far nobler life than is maintainable elsewhere, is one which Ulster Unionists, who have a high sense of reality, cannot share.

Ervine emphasises Northern Ireland’s membership of the Commonwealth and willingness to play a part on the world stage against the southern state’s relative isolation during the war. The repeated use of the self-coined term ‘Eireans’, deliberately casting those from south of the border as alien, aids this strategy. He continues to credit partition with sparing the whole of Ireland from the ‘suffering and distress’ of the Second World War, and argues that Craigavon and others who had fought for partition in the first place had thus helped to prevent the subsequent ‘horrors of war’ from breaking ‘upon her unprotected body.’ Ervine is also keen to discredit and diminish the extent of southern participation in the war in terms of recruitment to

The sound of Mr St. John Ervine being a publicist has a curiously muffled quality, as if in his headlong rush for fame he had shot right through the scenery of his times and was now making a noise behind it. The noise is the noise of breaking glass, or Mr Ervine heaving bricks through backstage windows. If you disagree with him, he calls you either a fatuous fellow or a nitwit. There is no secret diplomacy about him; you get, and, if you enter into the spirit of the game, you also give, a custard pie straight in the dial, and no harm done to anybody, the good old Keystone tradition.

(Ireland, ‘This and That’, Irish Bookman, 1.3 (October 1946), 81-4 (p. 81))

38 I have quoted from some of Ervine’s correspondence to the New Northman regarding poetry in Northern Ireland during the Second World War in the second chapter of this thesis.
39 Ervine, Craigavon, pp. vii-viii.
40 Ibid., pp. x-xi.

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the British armed forces, attacking a perceived tendency to overstate this. Conceding that there is a scarcity of accurate figures to settle the matter, he nonetheless deplores the idea that ‘Accompanying these diverse and excessive estimates and forthright assertions was usually an insinuation or even a direct statement that Southern Ireland was doing far more for the Allies than Northern Ireland.’

Craigavon, indeed, remains a peripheral figure for much of the book, and on many pages makes no appearance at all: instead Ervine uses the book as an opportunity to write a highly partial history of Ireland over the life of its purported subject, pursuing a number of vendettas as he proceeds. The tone is frequently abusive, and no opportunity is lost to discredit ‘Eireans’, the Catholic Church or the southern government (Eamon de Valera is variously described as ‘black clad, as if perpetually attending funerals’ and a ‘shoddy Torquemada’).

When Ervine does address Craigavon, however, it is with reverence, the depth of which may be gauged from the fact that the final part of the book, recounting Craigavon’s last year as Prime Minister and death in office, is entitled ‘He Goes Home’. The eccentricity of the book’s composition and the importance Ervine accords to the war as part of his argument are equally apparent from the fact that the seventy-third section of this concluding part reads solely ‘On September 3, war against Germany was declared.’ Although Ervine is clearly determined to emphasise the involvement of the province in this war, his narrative certainly does not follow that of a People’s War in part sketched by Blake. If reverence is accorded to Craigavon and the commercial and unionist elite, the workers of the province are granted a great deal less respect, as Ervine deplores the ‘proletariat’s infantility’ in the face of war and argues that the ‘greatest difficulty’ in the organisation of the war effort was posed by the ‘apathy’ of working people who believed the Germans could do them no harm. He refuses to countenance the idea that the government’s preparations for civil defence had been in any way insufficient, and deals with this issue in fewer than nine lines, arguing that since Belfast had been built on piles it had proved impossible to build deep underground shelters in the city, and that ‘Other complaints as stupid and shallow were made by the sort of people who always start to scream and panic when trouble comes’.

41 Ibid., p. xvi.
42 Ibid., p. 572.
43 Ibid., p. 550.
These dismissals are contrasted with the assertion that it was ‘lucky for the North of Ireland that Craigavon’s head was very cool.’

Grief at Craigavon’s death in November 1940 was, according to Ervine, ‘widespread and undisguised […] Craigavon, more truly than any other man, personified his people […] Merely to be in his company was to feel reassured.’ Tributes paid by politicians and others of all shades of opinion are recounted over five pages, but the eighty-fifth section of ‘He Goes Home’ again consists of one line of text alone: ‘There was no message of any kind, official or personal, perfunctory or sincere, from the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland.’

Much of Ervine’s subsequent assessment of Craigavon’s legacy is given over to a bizarre attempt to rebut the idea that Ulstermen could be characterised as ‘dour’, including a sustained personal comparison of Craigavon and de Valera over twenty six lines:

Craigavon liked functions: de Valera detests them. Craigavon smoked and drank and gave parties: de Valera neither smokes nor drinks, and he does not entertain, as he himself told the Dáil early in 1944. Craigavon was interested in men’s worldly state: de Valera, like all men of unconvivial and monastic character, is indifferent to mortality.

Over the following thirty pages that conclude the study Ervine derides Éire’s foolishness in leaving the Commonwealth, and expresses the hope that a united Ireland will one day join (significantly as ‘King’s men’) a union with Great Britain and other parts of the Empire including ‘we dare to hope, Indians’. A deliberately divisive and provocative appendix, occupying another thirty pages, provides a ‘sectarian analysis’ of illiteracy in Ireland north and south, using tables which break down the populations of each province and county into religious categories: Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist and other denominations. Within these religious affiliations the respective numbers and percentages of literate individuals over the age of nine are given, statistics which purport to show that higher levels of literacy may be found amongst Protestants.

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44 Ibid., p. 554, p. 555.  
46 Ibid., p. 571.  
The main text of *Craigavon: Ulsterman* is frequently interrupted, by tables of figures showing election results, salary scales, and army recruitment numbers by geographical area and religious affiliation, and by lengthy quotations taken from Craigavon’s private correspondence, parliamentary debates and legal statutes, but Ervine also quotes liberally from works of literature. Having recalled the traumatic effect on the city of Belfast of the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, he quotes the whole of Thomas Hardy’s poem ‘The Convergence of the Twain’. Later in the book, in tribute to Craigavon’s wife, Ervine quotes the final twelve and a half lines of Shakespeare’s ‘Sonnet 116’.\(^48\) The poetry of Robert Browning appears at length on several occasions: in a section describing Craigavon’s resolve to put an end to civil disorder in Belfast in the last week of November 1921, seventeen lines of Browning’s long poem ‘Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau’ are quoted, beginning with the lines ‘Heavily did he let his fist fall plumb / On each perturber of the public peace’. This quotation is contextualised with the assertion ‘So Browning writes of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, and might have written in anticipation of Craig.’\(^49\) The study is also illustrated with photographic plates, showing Craigavon and his family, as well as other scenes from recent history, including a parade of the Ulster Volunteer Force, the signing of the Ulster Covenant, the meeting of the first Stormont cabinet and the visit of Winston Churchill to Belfast in 1926. As we shall see, the eccentric, digressive and highly partial approach taken by Ervine in this book, a cross-generic combination of selective history, personal attack, literary excerpts and statistical information, is characteristic of political publications of all hues in Northern Ireland around the time of the Second World War.

Another study of Craigavon, Hugh Shearman’s *Not an Inch: A Study of Northern Ireland and Lord Craigavon*, was published in 1942, seven years before Ervine’s book, and less than two years after the Prime Minister had died in office.\(^50\) Though far less intemperate than *Craigavon: Ulsterman*, Shearman similarly uses Craigavon’s indelible association with the province, as head of its government from partition until his death, as the basis for a history of Northern Ireland. Shearman’s

\(^{48}\) Ibid., p. 217, p. 539.  
\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 456.  
\(^{50}\) Shearman is notable for his conservative and unionist historical works, but also published two novels during the war, *The Bishop’s Confession* (1943) and *A Bomb and a Girl* (1944). *A Bomb and a Girl* was described by its author as a study in ‘the psychology of crime’ (p. 7). The action of the novel takes place around Queen’s University Belfast in the years immediately before the Second World War, as a young man, Stanislaus McOstrich, builds and detonates a bomb, killing one of his lecturers (Shearman, *A Bomb and a Girl* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944)).
titular subject is monumentalised in reverential tones, as is apparent from his chapter titles, which include: 'The Northern Iron', 'The Forging of the Iron' and 'The Man and the Conflict'. *Not an Inch* largely avoids referring to the ongoing world war, but Shearman does praise Craigavon's foresight in apprehending the likelihood of war during the 1930s, and is keen to write Northern Ireland into a European context:

[Craigavon's] anxiety about the foreign situation and about the future of the province emerged in various speeches. A phrase he used was, 'Ulster is nobody's Czechoslovakia', and he warned an English audience that outside interference with the balance of parties and interests in Ireland might easily produce a situation such as had arisen in the Spanish civil war. He seemed to envisage Belfast as the Barcelona of a fresh tragedy.\(^{51}\)

Including *Not an Inch*, between 1942 and 1971 Shearman published six books of varying length under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Government. His post-war writings addressed the Second World War with increasing directness and, as McIntosh has observed, his attitude towards southern neutrality quickly became more hostile, a change in tone that Shearman himself later attributed to the discovery of the concentration camps.\(^{52}\) A shift in his views can be observed between *Northern Ireland: Its History, Resources and People*, published by HMSO in 1946, and *Anglo Irish Relations*, published by Faber and Faber in 1948. Both publications appear to have been produced for a British readership. Though the introduction to the earlier thirty two page booklet wrote of the 'vital importance which Northern Ireland has had in the strategy of Britain and the United Nations in the Second World War', it expended just over two pages on the Second World War, stating that 'While Éire declared herself to be neutral, Northern Ireland entered the war automatically as part of the United Kingdom but also by the will of its inhabitants.'\(^{53}\) Two years later, however, in the lengthy historical study *Anglo-Irish Relations*, Shearman attacks Irish neutrality, arguing that the policy had made the southern state 'a burdensome passenger in the carrying out of Britain's defence arrangements', and that furthermore 'Northern Ireland was playing the part


\(^{52}\) McIntosh, *Force of Culture*, pp. 185-6.

which Éire might have played', given the enormous strategic and economic importance of the province to the British war effort. He then plays on a twisted essentialist stereotype to claim that 'the traditional Irish love of success made many ready to indulge in a theoretical admiration for the Nazis and to attribute to lying British propaganda many statements about the character of Nazi rule', and also referred to the 'pro-German activities' of the IRA north of the border, including the attacking of fire brigades during air raids.\textsuperscript{54}

In \textit{Anglo-Irish Relations} Shearman openly discusses the problems faced by the Labour movement in Northern Ireland. He suggests that the NILP has become paralysed by its failure to achieve a consistent post-war position on the matter of the border, but argues that the popularity of left-wing ideas has encouraged the Unionist party to pursue more progressive social policies and made it 'a much less conservative party.'\textsuperscript{55} Shearman claims that Northern Ireland is at the vanguard of such reforms, ahead of Britain and far ahead of the southern state. In the province, he contends, dogmatic socialism has been rejected but public control has been steadily advancing at the expense of private enterprise:

In some enterprises, such as housing, principles resembling those of the Tennessee Valley Authority have been adopted. In many matters, but particularly in education, the Unionist government has shown great courage in repudiating the reactionary counsels of its own right wing, and, in pursuing a progressive policy, has not been intimidated by the bitter opposition of an intransigent minority.\textsuperscript{56}

Such assertions may be read as attempts to encourage a more favourable disposition towards the province amongst a left-wing readership in Britain, and indeed Shearman goes on to claim that the war has done much to change the attitude towards Ireland of the British Labour party, which had traditionally been sympathetic to the south 'at the expense of the north'. Concluding his study, Shearman attempts to invert a 'curious paradox', in what he identifies as the prevailing perception of Anglo-Irish relations. Rather than seeing Ireland as engaged in a struggle against a much larger country over

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 266.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 267.
many centuries, he suggests it is possible to see England instead as the minority ‘small community fighting for its life and its ideals’, noting that historically the Irish have been on the side of Spain, France and (in 1916) Germany against England, and that again in 1940, when England stood alone against a mightier foe, Ireland (excepting Northern Ireland) ‘remained a burdensome and embarrassing neutral’.  

None of Shearman’s subsequent works would scale these heights of opprobrium. Ulster (1949), published in London by Robert Hale, was an anomalous addition to a series of guides to the history, landscape and economy of a number of English counties (and the Isle of Man). The inclusion of Ulster in such a series might be seen demonstrative of a desire to incorporate Northern Ireland wholly within the United Kingdom, but the travelogue includes material relating to the three Ulster counties not in Northern Ireland, and refers to the northern state as ‘the smaller Ulster’. Perhaps due to the nature of the series in which it is published, Shearman does not attack southern neutrality in this volume, concentrating instead on the importance of the province in wartime as a centre of agricultural and industrial production, and emphasising the positive social and cultural impact of the war. He suggests optimistically that the presence of service personnel and refugees of many nationalities had ‘considerable repercussions on the social life and outlook of the people’ and with reference to the Williamite War claims that ‘during the war of 1939-45 one could hear a greater variety of languages and accents in the streets of Belfast than were to be heard even at the time when Schomberg’s heterogeneous army was there 250 years before.’  

In Northern Ireland, a guidebook published by HMSO in 1968, Shearman was similarly upbeat, glossing over the matter of partition in a section entitled ‘Troubled Times’, observing that the Second World War ‘brought new problems and new opportunities’, whilst suggesting that ‘The strategic importance of Northern Ireland – as a base covering the Atlantic shipping lines and a training ground for British and Allied troops – was emphasised by the neutrality of the Irish Free State to the South.’ Shearman highlighted what he perceived as the positive consequences of the war for the province:

In spite of the evils and hardships imposed by the War, it also had the effect of giving a new impetus to social and economic reforms. Greatly assisted by the

59 Ibid., p. 135.
acceptance of the principle of ‘parity’ with Great Britain, the post-war Government of Northern Ireland initiated far-reaching measures of reform, in education, in the social services, in the stimulation of the economy and in other spheres.61

Three years later, in *Northern Ireland 1921-1971*, a heavily illustrated book published by HMSO to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of partition, Shearman wrote that the war ‘emphasised the contrasting and diverging destinies that had been chosen by the northern and southern communities in Ireland’, and noted the ‘cordial cooperation’ between the Attlee government in London and Brooke’s administration in implementing progressive policies proposed in the Beveridge report.62 As in the 1968 guidebook, Shearman quotes from Churchill’s broadcast of May 13, 1945, when, following victory in Europe, the British Prime Minister claimed that but for the province’s ‘loyalty and friendship’ the British people ‘should have been confronted with slavery or death’, perhaps the most emphatic assertion that the war had cemented partition and strengthened the political bond between Britain and Northern Ireland.63

Ervine’s biographical study and Shearman’s miscellaneous publications demonstrate a willingness on the part of unionist writers to act on behalf of the government of Northern Ireland in the debate over the province’s place and role in the Second World War after the war’s end. Like the official historian Blake, both writers claimed that Northern Ireland’s international stature had been boosted after its involvement in the war, and are bullish about the readiness of the province to contribute to future world events. They argue that this heightened international significance is entirely dependent on Northern Ireland remaining within the United Kingdom and continuing to define itself in ever more strident terms against the southern state.

Shearman’s guide books show how contentious political arguments were allowed to diffuse in non-confrontational, overtly innocuous publications, often for the benefit of an assumed British readership, but more populist advocacy of these ideas

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61 Ibid., p. 24.
may be found in less official sources. Ulster Parade, a little magazine founded by the playwright Ruddick Millar, was published during the war by the Quota Press in association with the Belfast News Letter, and carried work by local authors. For the most part this consisted of light-hearted prose entertainments with a local focus, along with some short playlets and poems. Quoting from a favourable review in the Bangor Spectator, the back cover of the fourth number suggested that its light and humorous nature and neat size made it ideal for travelling or as a gift for friends and relatives serving in the forces abroad, and also recommended sending 'a copy to those Canadian and U.S.A. Friends who have so kindly been sending you parcels [...] You cannot send money – so here is your chance to send a little bit of Ulster.' Contributors to Ulster Parade rarely addressed the war directly (the magazine was perhaps intended to offer distraction from the ongoing conflict), but those that did so tended to support the war effort uncritically. Poems are populated by 'noble' soldiers, 'stern-faced' workers and 'proud' labourers. A piece by Gerald R. Lyttle entitled 'Yank in Ulster' consisted of an imaginary exchange between an unnamed local man and an American GI of Ulster descent. The former takes it upon himself to explain the local political situation to the soldier, claiming that after twenty one years since Northern Ireland 'assumed the status of a self governing unit within the Empire [...] we feel justly proud of our short history – a history of both Faith and Loyalty'. He continues to argue that Hitler 'would spell success' if the Germans were to occupy the province, emphasises the strategic importance of Northern Ireland, arising from its location on the edge of the Atlantic, and is dismissive of 'the comparatively feeble state of Eire [sic] over the Border.' The unnamed man's lengthy speech draws to a close by contrasting the smallness of the province on the map of the British Empire with the 'biggest shipbuilding yards, the biggest linen factory, the biggest tobacco factory' that may be found in Belfast. Lyttle's piece ends on a saccharine note, with the GI's reply that the man forgot to include that 'Ulster possesses the biggest hearts in all the world.' While the nature of the delivery is less than subtle, the messages conveyed here are familiar from unionist political discourse, as Northern Ireland's fidelity to Great Britain and the Empire, its newfound strategic significance and industrial prowess are all stressed. It is significant that readers

64 Ulster Parade, 4 (1943).
65 Irene Turner, 'From the Cave Hill', Ulster Parade, 4, pp. 70-1; Celia Randall, 'Dawn – Belfast Hills (April, 1941)', Ulster Parade, 7 (n.d.), p. 84.
66 Gerald R. Lyttle, 'Yank in Ulster', Ulster Parade, 5 (n.d.), 103-8 (p. 105, p. 106, p. 107, p. 108). This issue is also undated, but it can be assumed that, like the fourth number, it dates from 1943.
of *Ulster Parade* were encouraged to send the magazine to friends in Canada and the United States, and that the exchange recounted by Lyttle takes place between a local man and an American GI. The Second World War presented unionist writers with many opportunities to recast their allegiance to Britain within a militarised context, but they were also determined to secure Northern Ireland's place within the transatlantic Allied war effort.

*A Yank from Ulster* (1943), a play by Ruddick Millar, the founder of *Ulster Parade*, reflects this desire more obliquely. Also published by the Quota Press, the play opens with the arrival of American soldiers in the fictional village of Kilbally, contrasting the delight of the younger female characters at this prospect with the hostility of the older, male generation of farmers, concerned at the potential damage to crops and irritated at being referred to as 'Pop'. One of the GIs, Jim Logan, is a Hollywood film star who acts under the name Willis Williams. He has an Ulster ring to his American accent, and turns out (somewhat implausibly) to have left the village only eleven or twelve years previously. Logan becomes romantically involved with Margaret, the daughter of John McMillan, the patriarchal farmer central to the play, to the consternation of the local magistrate William McWhirr, who is disgusted at the behaviour of the Americans, calling them 'a disgrace to Kilbally' and remarking of Logan that 'He and his kin' are a menace to our women folk.' McWhirr intends to start a protest movement to force the Americans from the locality, but Margaret, having asked him why he thinks the soldiers were sent there in the first place, furiously answers her own question: 'Because they're ready to defend our country – to save your precious skin and mine. Because they're going to fight for us and maybe die for us.' The play ends with the discovery that McWhirr is Logan's uncle, and the marriage of Logan to Margaret. *A Yank in Ulster* is propagandist in its resolution and its portrayal of the American influx, and seeks to emphasise the bonds between Northern Ireland and the United States, over and above the province's participation in the British war effort. The British armed forces are mentioned almost as an afterthought at the end of

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67 Millar's one act comic play 'You Never Know Your Luck' also makes reference to a romance between a local girl and a GI (*Four New One-Act Plays*, selected and edited by Patricia O'Connor (Belfast: Quota Press, 1948)).

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the play, when McMillan’s other daughter Jean is married off to a local farmer, Ned Wilson, who joins the Royal Air Force.68

These ideas were also promoted in another Quota Press publication, Isobel Marshall’s collection of short stories A Jack and his Jill: A Romance of Modern Derry (1944).69 The story ‘Miss Felicity Entertains the Americans’ opens with the village of Alltandore being roused from ‘its customary state of slumberous content’ by the arrival of American forces: ‘The little town hummed with excitement, curiosity and rumour, and the tall smartly-uniformed men with their handsome bronzed faces were regarded with admiration, tinged with a certain shyness by the inhabitants.’ Although she had been born into a wealthy family, the now elderly Miss Felicity lives in poverty in a cottage on the outskirts of the village. As a young woman she had fallen in love with a draper, whom she was refused permission to marry and who subsequently left the village. Miss Felicity invites four of the American soldiers for a tea party at Christmas, and the company of the young men makes her thoughtful about the loss of her lover. Wishing to recapture her youth, she decides to buy some new clothes for herself and her maid, Susan, but balances this outlay by purchasing some Ulster Savings Certificates, being ‘mindful of sundry warning posters regarding idle spending.’ Her former lover, Peter, then reappears in the village, and it transpires that Will, one of the American soldiers who attended the tea party, was his son, after which discovery Peter and Miss Felicity marry.70

The title story of Marshall’s collection follows a young orphaned woman, Jemima Jane, who leaves her cruel aunt in the country and moves to work in a drapery shop in Derry. She finds the wartime atmosphere of the city exciting, and is particularly intrigued by the ‘various figures in uniform’. Like Miss Felicity, government propaganda posters encourage her to support the British war effort personally and practically:

The very posters fired her with enthusiasm. Isolated as she had been in the country, she had never realised what war meant and had thought little about it. Now her whole desire was to help in any way she could. She became a diligent

68 Ruddick Millar, A Yank from Ulster (Belfast: Quota Press, 1943), p. 9, p. 10, p. 22, p. 37, p. 57-8, p. 61. The play was first performed at the Clarence Place Hall, Belfast, on Christmas Night 1942 by the University Players (p. 76).
69 Some of these had already been published in Ulster Parade.
collector of salvage, a special box was kept for rags, another for rubber, while
the smallest piece of bone was immediately carried to the nearest collection.71

Jemima Jane begins working in a military canteen, where she meets Jack Archer, a
farmer’s son from Antrim who has joined the Royal Navy. Their romance is cut short
when he leaves on active service, first taking her to a local beauty spot where ‘the
mountains of Donegal lay purple on their left, and the Foyle crept below them – a
ribbon of gleaming silver amongst fields of summer green.’ She later hears that
Archer’s ship has been sunk, but at the end of the story he appears miraculously at the
place where they had earlier parted.72

The weakness of Marshall’s plotting can barely support the propagandist
messages that she is keen to impart, but, like Millar’s play, the fact that each of her
stories concerns a woman becoming romantically involved with a serviceman advances
the idea that Northern Ireland’s role in the war is to support the American and British
armed forces. The stories and plays published by the Quota Press are non-
confrontational, and tend to avoid attacking the neutrality of the southern state, or
acknowledging the existence of nationalist dissent within the province. Nevertheless, in
promoting close and positive relations between local people and service personnel,
thereby emphasising the place of Northern Ireland within the transatlantic war effort,
this popular material can be seen to contribute indirectly to the contemporaneous
unionist line.

The interpenetration of nationalist literary and political spheres can also be
observed at this time, and is exemplified by two pamphlets published by the nationalist
MP Cahir Healy.73 The front cover and title page of The Mutilation of a Nation: The
Story of the Partition of Ireland (1945) promise ‘many extracts from the records of the
period, the speeches of public men, writers and Statesmen from 1920 onward. The
gerrymandering of electoral areas, and persecutions of Nationalists, with statistics’, and
much of the pamphlet is indeed taken up by the highly selective reprinting of
quotations. Some of these have been chosen to demonstrate the bigoted attitudes of

72 Ibid., p. 29, p. 34, p. 35, p. 40).
73 Healy was elected to the Northern Ireland House of Commons for the South Fermanagh constituency
in 1929, and retained the seat until 1965, though he boycotted the Stormont parliament until 1945. Healy
was also elected to Westminster for the Fermanagh and Tyrone constituency on three occasions, serving
from 1922-24, 1931-35 and 1950-55 (Eamon Phoenix, ‘Healy, Cahir (1877–1970)’, DNB,
named unionist politicians towards the Catholic population, but other quotations taken from ‘English Statesmen’ including Andrew Bonar Law, Lord Robert Cecil and Earl Winterton, appear to favour a united Ireland.\footnote{Cahir Healy MP, \textit{The Mutilation of a Nation: The Story of the Partition of Ireland} (Derry: Derry Journal Ltd, 1945), p. 4.} Recruiting other unlikely personages to the anti-partitionist cause, Healy also quotes from Hugh Shearman’s biography of Lord Craigavon, Winston Churchill’s Bradford speech of 1914 and the third clause of the Atlantic Charter of 1941, where Churchill and US President Roosevelt agreed to guarantee ‘the rights of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live, and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 3. I shall return to Healy’s use of Churchill’s speech later in this chapter.} The pamphlet also briefly explores the historical reasons for partition, and uses tables of figures to show the extent of gerrymandering and under-representation suffered by the minority Catholic population in Northern Ireland.\footnote{Healy, \textit{Mutilation}, pp. 11-22.} A final nineteen-page section, entitled ‘A Peep into the News’, is made up of short anecdotes describing the mistreatment of Catholics in the province, taken from newspapers, radio programmes and speeches, followed by Healy’s analysis of statistical data relating to employment and housing, again presented in tables.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 23-44.}

In ‘A Peep into the News’ Healy deliberately examines recent injustices in Northern Ireland in the context of the Second World War, thereby exposing hypocritical establishment and government behaviour. He contrasts the execution of the IRA bombers Peter Barnes and James Richards in Birmingham on 7 February 1940 with the handover to Japan that same day of nine German citizens taken from a Japanese liner, despite the fact that they had been captured under international law. Healy, who had himself been interned by the British authorities between July 1941 and December 1942, also compares the treatment of a Mrs Alice Graham, dismissed from the Post Office in early 1943 after one of her sons had been interned and another convicted of treason felony, with that of Leo Amery, who remained British Secretary of State for India while his son John made propaganda broadcasts for the Nazis from Germany.\footnote{Ibid., p. 23, p. 27. Healy was interned under the Defence of the Realm Act for eighteen months in Brixton Prison in London, after a letter apparently containing his thoughts on the possibility of a German victory was intercepted. Whilst in prison he formed a lasting friendship with the leader of the British Union of Fascists, Sir Oswald Mosley (Eamon Phoenix, ‘Healy, Cahir (1877–1970)’, \textit{DNB}, (para. 9 of 252.)} Clearly intent on emphasising the connections between local incidents and
international affairs, Healy reprints an extract from an article in the Derry Journal on 6 September 1939, which reported that 400 Catholic workers who had been told it was unsafe for them to continue work in a shipyard had assembled at St Mary’s Hall, and elected to send telegrams to Churchill, Chamberlain, Mussolini, Roosevelt, de Valera and Daladier, reading: ‘Catholic workers of City of Belfast engaged in work of national importance have been brutally victimised and thrown out of work because of religion. Do you stand for this?’ They do not appear to have received any replies. On the penultimate page of the pamphlet Healy quotes without comment, contextualisation or explanation from St John Ervine’s novel Mrs Martin’s Man (1914), where a voice with an Ulster accent is heard talking about the iniquities of the Home Rule Bill in terms of ‘them Cathliks havin’ the upper hand’, before another is heard to say that they had suffered no interference as a result of being Catholic when in England, but ‘in this place...’. The voice continues to relate being driven out of the shipyard, and describes workers writing ‘To hell with the Pope’ on the side of the ship under construction. Healy’s polemical collation of argument and anecdote, culled from diverse fictional and non-fictional sources, which quotes freely from political opponents and seeks to compare the local situation with developments abroad, should be regarded as an illustration in microcosm of the complex texture of published debate at the time.

Cahir Healy had made a fictional intervention of his own the previous year, when the short story A Hired Boy on the Border (1944) was published in pamphlet form by the Dublin Catholic Truth Society. The story is related by a seventeen-year-old boy from rural County Donegal, who travels to a hiring fair in Strabane, where he is taken on by a Presbyterian farmer named Jonkins, whose farmhouse straddles the border. Jonkins explains that as a result of this location he finds himself pestered by customs officials from both jurisdictions, though he rejects the idea that any real hostility exists between the two forces: ‘They call our place “Neutrality House”, for both Sides lay claim to it, and search it – maybe together – odd whiles. The folks believe the two packs stan’ scowlin’ at wan another day and night, but I could open their eyes if I liked.’ The ground for the allegory is thus swiftly laid, and the story continues to describe the boy’s time working on the farm, and the frequent visits of customs officials

79 Healy, Mutilation, p. 29. I have not been able to establish whether ‘City of Belfast’ refers to the city itself or to a ship bearing this name.
80 Healy, Mutilation, p. 43.
attempting to recover smuggled goods. The focus on smuggling belies the wartime setting of the story, but the effects of the ongoing conflict are acknowledged only once, when after a breakfast of porridge, milk, bread, butter and eggs the boy observes that ‘We might hear a lot iv rationin’ but we never met it’. Unlike Healy’s later pamphlet, the story does not encourage the contemplation of a wider historical context to the matter of the border. The vaguely whimsical narrative also requires a less forthright anti-partitionism, as is apparent from Jonkins’s reply to the boy when he is asked why the house is continually searched:

‘Oh, because we’re on the Border – the first house on an unapproved road. I wish to heaven we could shift it to Athlone; they say that’s the centre iv Irelan’. Maybe it’s the Customs men from your side we’d hev later in the day. It’s a mortal pity iv folks that hev this oul’ Border at the back door’, he added despondently.82

With such remarks Healy seeks to ridicule the very existence of the border: Jonkins’s mischievous desire to move the frontier to Athlone suggests that it may be regarded as no more than an arbitrary demarcation. In addition to the various allusions to smuggling, the story also suggests that the border is culturally and socially porous. The boy from Donegal is surprised by the frequent parties featuring music and dancing held at night in the farm house, which, due to the Presbyterian faith of his master, he had not expected. In this carnavalesque transgression Healy offers hope for a future in which Ireland is united by an enjoyment of culture and freed from religious strictures (Jonkins refuses to conform to Presbyterian stereotype, presiding over an untidy house and remaining in bed in the mornings, waking the boy in the room above by striking the ceiling with a long ash pole). The story builds to its climax when Jonkins asks the boy to escort two cows over the border from the southern state one night. He is swiftly caught on the northern side by patrolling Specials, who promise him ‘a great time in Derry Jail’, but is allowed out on bail the next day of court sitting, when Jonkins pays all fines owing. He subsequently discovers that his mission was a dummy, to distract the officials from the movement of an entire herd of cattle across the border half a mile

82 Ibid., p. 11.
away. The story thus ends with the outwitting of the northern authorities and the implied message that the Northern Ireland is under-resourced (in this regard it is significant that goods in the story travel one way only). Considered in its political context, Healy’s short story is clearly less stridently anti-partitionist than the later pamphlet, and, indeed, the nature of his Dublin publisher suggests that it would probably be assured of a receptive audience. *A Hired Boy* uses gentle humour to ridicule, rather than castigate, the existence of the border, and Healy does not seek to explore the effects of partition with reference to an international or colonial context. The divergent strategies of these pamphlets exemplify contrasting northern nationalist approaches towards the Second World War. Whilst some writers addressed the war directly, comparing local injustices with recent events elsewhere in the world, and criticising the Allied war effort on the basis that Britain’s colonial record rendered the enterprise hypocritical, others turned away from the war, and pursued a strategy of selective blindness, often aided by a retreat to a rural hinterland.

The publication of the booklet *Orange Terror* in 1943 was also demonstrative of the convergence of cultural and political spheres at this time, and underlines the importance of Dublin publications to the debate. The seventy-two page critique, published under the pseudonym ‘Ultach’, brought together two articles which had previously been published in the Dublin *Capuchin Annuals* of 1940 (‘The Persecution of Catholics in Northern Ireland’) and 1943 (‘The Real Case against Partition’), where they had appeared alongside other polemical and fictional pieces which deplored unionist rule in Northern Ireland since partition. The publication of *Orange Terror* as a separate booklet was announced by Father Senan, the editor of the *Capuchin Annual*, in the 1943 edition. He stated that proceeds from sales of the booklet would go into a fund ‘to fight partition’, and, like the publishers of *Ulster Parade*, encouraged readers to send the new, thinner publication to friends and family members abroad. *Orange Terror* constitutes a hugely significant indictment of unionist rule at the time: the booklet was

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83 Ibid., p. 13, p. 8, pp. 15-16.
84 ‘Ultach’, ‘The Persecution of Catholics in Northern Ireland’, *The Capuchin Annual 1940* (Dublin: Capuchin Periodicals’ Office, October 1939), 161-175, and ‘The Real Case against Partition’, *Capuchin Annual 1943* (Dublin: Two, Capel Street May 1943), 283-361. It should be noted that although the 1940 Annual states that it was published in October 1939, the 1943 edition apparently did not appear until May 1943.
85 Father Senan, ‘Orange Terror’, *Capuchin Annual 1943*, 643.
banned by the Northern Ireland government but circulated in the southern state, provoking considerable debate in the pages of *The Bell* and in the chamber at Stormont over subsequent months. Without commenting on the factual accuracy of Ultach’s contentions, I will examine what *Orange Terror*’s formal qualities, its use of language and terminology, and the debate it provoked, can tell us about the anti-partitionist reaction to the Second World War in Northern Ireland.

Like Healy and others, Ultach incorporates numerous quotations into his argument, drawing on speeches and statements by politicians and others, including the former and present Prime Ministers of Northern Ireland, to demonstrate the endemic anti-Catholic bias of the unionist establishment. Statistical information and tables of figures are deployed to show the extent of gerrymandering, and the imbalance in the distribution of education funding in the province. The use of statistical information in this way might be compared with George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), the first half of which includes several tables of figures as part of a sociological investigation into working class living conditions in northern England. The second half of Orwell’s book is taken up by a lengthy essay, polemical and autobiographical, which examines the ability of socialist ideas to improve these conditions, and quotes from a variety of contemporaneous sources, including other political prose writings, newspaper reports, novels, poetry and popular song. I have not been able to establish any direct connections between Orwell’s work and nationalist political culture during the war, but in combining sociological and statistical analysis with combative political arguments, often with reference to autobiographical, anecdotal and literary material, *The Road to Wigan Pier* could be seen as an influential antecedent of *Orange Terror* and Cahir Healy’s *The Mutilation of a Nation*.

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86 Extracts from debates regarding the ban in the Northern Ireland House of Commons and Senate in January and February 1944 are have been included in the reprinted edition of *Orange Terror*. See ‘Ultach’, *Orange Terror: The Partition of Ireland, a reprint from The Capuchin Annual, 1943* (Kilwaughter, Antrim: Ard Righ Press, 1998) pp. 68-75.


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Orange Terror is more overtly dialogic than other publications of this time, however: over half of the booklet is taken up by a section entitled ‘Comments’, where interested parties were invited to contribute their views on partition and unionist rule, to which Ultach then responded. The visual impact of the publication is also particularly striking: the cover of the booklet features a flock of bats, suggesting that the fear inspired by unionist rule and the threat of persecution was so terrifying as to be of a supernatural nature (Fig. 50). Two illustrations that accompany the text, one in the 1943 Capuchin Annual and one in the booklet itself, are dramatically symbolic and perhaps betray the influence of Soviet didactic political art. The print which appears in the Capuchin Annual bears Ultach’s name at its foot, and shows a vast, cruel-faced giant smashing a statue of Lady Justice onto a burning street of terraced houses with one hand, as the other turns the handle of a huge black press marked ‘Pogrom’, in which tiny figures are being crushed into an oozing pulp. Below this a trio of top-hatted drummers beat their instruments in unison as a fourth is in the process of writing ‘To Hell With The P...’ on the plinth on which the press rests (Fig. 51). The second print is similarly forbidding. Here the same giant is dressed in robes, and a badge featuring a crown is pinned to his breast. He holds a whip in his left hand and a perfectly balanced pair of scales in his right. On one side of the scales is a solitary top-hatted drummer, but on the other stand six bare-headed figures of a similar size. A branding iron marked ‘RC’ lies next to a burning brazier on the ground, and the giant’s feet rest on several identically shaped human bodies, whose faces are pressed into the ground (Fig. 52).

Orange Terror also includes a photograph, which shows a brick wall on which the slogans ‘Rebels Beware’, ‘To Hell With Popery’, ‘Where Popery Reigns Poverty Remains’, ‘Rem 1690, Down the IRA’, and God Save Our King’ have been daubed. This is accompanied by the caption ‘In 1943, on your way to Mass in a Belfast church, this warning greets you at a street corner.’ Copies of selected documents were also reprinted in the booklet. These included a resolution made by the County Grand Lodge of the Belfast Orange Order, stating that any member of the order found frequenting a Roman Catholic public house would be found guilty of ‘unbecoming conduct’ and dealt with accordingly, and an Introduction Card issued by the Northern Ireland Ministry of

91 Ultach, Orange Terror, p. 58.
Labour in 1936, on which the reason given by one employer for refusing a man work is simply listed as ‘Religion’.  

In addition to the visual and theoretical impact of *Orange Terror*, Ultach also shows a keen awareness of the importance of the use of language to the maintenance of the political status quo. Noting the pervasive and hypocritical use of the word ‘loyal’ in promoting the British war effort in the province, he observes that ‘of course the Home Guard is another nice hideyhole for those good “loyalists” who would like to see the Papishes conscripted, but have no intention themselves of proving their “loyalty” in act’, and later interrogates the historic political usage of the word ‘loyal’ in the maintenance of unionist rule, with reference to recent newspaper reports. The booklet concludes with a poem, written by Ultach, entitled ‘Belfast, 1942’, which takes the form of a prayer from a father to his son that the younger man’s heart will not be blackened by ‘The fevered hate / Of men misled / By greed’s envenoming word’. The anti-partitionist aim of the booklet is clear, but formally and stylistically *Orange Terror* is characterised by its diversity. By turns hysterical and controlled, polemical and dialogic, documentary and anecdotal, the heady mélange of textual and visual material can be seen, like Ervine’s *Craigavon: Ulsterman* and Healy’s *The Mutilation of a Nation*, as representative of Northern Irish political print culture at large at this time.

*Orange Terror* opens with a section entitled ‘I Live There’, in which Ultach describes how he has suffered at the hands of ‘them’, ‘the people’ and ‘those people’, terms by which he refers to those who vote for and maintain unionist rule. Though he and his family have been beaten, witnessed the killing of family members, been evicted from their home and reduced to poverty, Ultach claims that he continues to view his persecutors as ‘agreeable and obliging’ on a personal level. Having outlined the wider patterns of discrimination and intimidation in the province, Ultach poses the rhetorical question ‘And how has the situation changed if at all since war began?’ His answer is that the war has simply provided the authorities in Northern Ireland with another excuse

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92 Ibid., p. 28, p. 12, pp. 18-19.
93 Ultach, *Orange Terror*, p. 5. Catholics and critics of the government, he writes, tend to be accused of disloyalty, yet when a man found guilty of conduct likely to lead to a breach of the peace at the Derry Petty Sessions had defended himself on the basis that he was loyalist, and was asked by the magistrate what his interpretation of this was, the defendant replied ‘It means I belong to the Orange Order and the Apprentice Boys.’ As Ultach observes, according to this no Catholic could then defend himself on this basis under any circumstances. He also quotes the Stormont M.P. Hugh Minford, who stated in July 1936 that: ‘There are only two classes in Northern Ireland, the loyal and the disloyal. The loyal people are the Orangemen. The disloyal people are the Socialists, Communists and Roman Catholics’. (p. 15)
94 Ultach, *Orange Terror*, p. 72.
to intimidate the Catholic population, on the basis that 'All internal disturbance must be sacrificed in the wider interests of the Empire'. Arguing that anti-Catholic discrimination is an integral part of the Northern Irish war effort, he claims that workers from England and Scotland are invited to cross the Irish Sea to take up manufacturing jobs in Belfast when the native Catholic population is being offered war work in England. With profound weariness, Ultach describes how many welfare and relief organisations avoided helping Catholics in the aftermath of the Blitz, whilst regulations hampered those organisations that did try to help:

Even the war and its consequences for civilian life are turned to the benefit of the ascendancy clique and their followers. The spectacle of one man having a house half wrecked and getting no compensation while another actually has his house not only repaired but redecorated in a fashion it never knew before; the spectacle of vested interests being allowed to cut right across even air-raid welfare activities; the smug job-hunter holding forth about the war effort, the co-operation of all classes, the healing of sectarian wounds, and his not caring what a man is, etc., etc., and at the same time doing nothing for the war effort except such petty persecution of Catholics as comes within the scope of his job.

As I have argued in the first chapter of this thesis, relating the familiar British social historical idea of the People’s War to the Home Front in Northern Ireland is hugely problematic, and these lines provide a stark illustration of the difficulties. If the war effort in Britain depended on the co-operation of all sections of society and posed a brief challenge to established social structures, the same can hardly be said of Northern Ireland, where, despite some lessening of sectarian tensions, the differences in allegiances and aims of nationalists, unionists, the Northern Ireland Government and the British Government remained unbridgeable during the Second World War.

Orange Terror begins as an exposé of discrimination and intimidation, but moves beyond this to a systematic critique of unionist rule, recasting partition and the treatment of the Catholic population in Northern Ireland in a European context.

95 Ibid., p. 1, p. 5.
96 Ibid., p. 6.
97 Calder, People’s War, pp. 17-18.
Claiming that ‘Established twenty-two years ago, before Hitler’s phenomenal rise to power, [Northern Ireland] nevertheless presents an almost perfect example, within its limitations, of what we know as the totalitarian state’, Ultach drew on Waldemar Gurian’s *The Future of Bolshevism* (1936), a study which aimed to show the essential similarity of the regimes of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. Ultach contended that Northern Ireland was equally dominated by one party, which likewise maintained a front of democratic accountability through regular rigged elections. He suggested that the intimidation of the nationalist press and the use of the Special Powers Acts of 1922 and 1933 also constituted totalitarian measures, and argued that the continual stoking of the threat of Rome and persecution of Catholics by official and unofficial government agents ensured the necessary state of high political tension that such regimes used to keep the masses in movement. In support of this thesis Ultach quoted from speeches by Craigavon, Brooke, Andrews and other establishment figures, which discouraged people from employing Catholics, or were otherwise demonstrative of anti-Catholic bias.

Significantly, Ultach’s analysis had been preceded by a socialist outrider: in 1938 the Communist Party pamphlet *Craigavon In The Dock* claimed that the 1922 Special Powers Act had given the Northern Ireland authorities powers ‘equalled in no country outside Fascist Italy and Germany’, and cited an English Civil Liberties Committee report of 1936 which had argued that such regulations contravened Habeas Corpus and that the status of the unionist government in the province was ‘paralleled only by Continental dictatorships’. In ‘Ulster: a Reply’, a response to *Orange Terror* published in *The Bell* in March 1944, Denis Ireland’s Ulster Union Club also favoured the analogy: referring to the internment of one of the club’s own members for the publication of subversive material, it claimed that Northern Ireland could be seen as ‘one of the earliest models of a police state in Europe’. The comparison was even drawn to comic and satirical effect: a cartoon published in the Queen’s University undergraduate magazine *PTQ* in 1940 entitled ‘Secret Police of the Nations’ depicted caricatured figures of the Gestapo, the OVRA and OGPU before a fourth sketch...
showed three ungainly, confused and vacant looking B Specials, one waving a gun towards a startled cat.\textsuperscript{101}

The use of language, imagery and terminology specifically relating to the Second World War was widespread within nationalist and socialist print culture in the province at this time, and the search for reflections of the global in the provincial further shows how the war ‘de-insulated’ Northern Ireland. Responding to Ultach’s arguments in the ‘Comments’ section of \textit{Orange Terror}, the republican abstentionist Éamon Donnelly, introducing himself with the words ‘I am not a bigot’, argued that descendants of planters ‘have no more right in Ireland than the Germans have in either Czecho-Slovakia or Norway’ and ‘are the oldest Quisling Government in Europe’.\textsuperscript{102} Donnelly’s reference to the Nazi invasion of Czecho-Slovakia echoes Henry Harrison’s repeated use of the term ‘Sudeten Irische’ in his anti-partitionist book \textit{The Neutrality of Ireland: Why It Was Inevitable} (1942). Harrison compared Neville Chamberlain’s hypocritical expressions of concern for ‘the liberties of the Sudeten Deutsche abroad [with] his stony indifference for the liberties of the Sudeten Irische at home.’\textsuperscript{103} In a 1940 Left Book Club publication entitled \textit{Churchill Can Unite Ireland} Jim Phelan described the plantation of Ulster as a kind of ‘Sudeten-German affair’, but claimed that republicans and socialists had no quarrel with the descendants of planters, who had been sold religious hatred in a ‘Nazi trick’; similarly, in the Fabian pamphlet \textit{The Irish Question Today} (1941) John Hawkins refers to Fermanagh, Tyrone, Derry City, South Down and South Armagh as “‘Sudetenland” counties’, and argued that a united Ireland ‘would at any rate check the Quisling-breeding to which unnaturally divided nations are peculiarly subject.’\textsuperscript{104} The analogies drawn between Northern Ireland and the Sudetenland are inexact and confusing, but aim to equate the Nazi invasion of the northern regions of Czecho-Slovakia with the British presence in Northern Ireland. Comparisons between the province and Czecho-Slovakia were not the sole preserve of nationalist writers, however: in his study of Craigavon, \textit{Not an Inch}, Hugh Shearman quoted the late Prime Minister using the phrase ‘Ulster is nobody’s Czecho-Slovakia’,

\textsuperscript{102} Ultach, \textit{Orange Terror}, p. 56.
with entirely different implications. With these words Craigavon attempted to stoke the threat of invasion by the southern state, and warned that any attempt by Britain to cede Northern Ireland to Éire would be resisted.

The term ‘quisling’ was also widely used on both sides of the debate during and after the war. In *The Mutilation of a Nation* Cahir Healy described the Northern Ireland government as ‘Ulster Quislings [who] prefer the considerable emoluments and prestige which come from governing a corner of the Irish Nation to taking their place in a national assembly,’ whilst his fellow nationalist MP Eddie McAteer concluded his anti-partitionist pamphlet *New Thoughts on an Old Subject* (1948) with the words ‘If I succeed in adding but one per cent to the cost of British or British quisling administration here I shall have succeeded beyond my best expectations.’ The term was also a powerful piece of personal abuse. In a speech to the Northern Ireland House of Commons, reprinted in pamphlet form as *The Stormont Cabinet: A Labour Indictment* (1943), the Labour MP Jack Beattie said of his former colleague Harry Midgley, who had taken a seat in the unionist cabinet, that ‘the Quisling and the turncoat is the object of contempt in all countries – nowhere more so than in Northern Ireland.’

These uses of the word ‘quisling’ cast unionists as collaborators, who have fashioned a puppet regime for a totalitarian force of occupation, and furthermore suggests that Britain’s war against the Axis powers is hypocritical, given its own colonial history in Ireland. Usage of the word by nationalists also subverts the propagandist discourse of the British war effort in which the term was of common currency. An editorial in the London *Times* on 19 April 1940, ten days after the German invasion of Norway, opened with the lines ‘We should all be profoundly grateful to Major Quisling. He has added a new word to the English language’ and emphasised the speed with which the term had taken hold: ‘During the past week […] he has attained a swift notoriety. Not only has his name been heard or read by almost everybody, but twice already it has been used in these columns as a plain synonym for “traitor”.’ The editorial highlighted the acoustic resonance of the word, described as a ‘gift from the gods’ for journalists and writers, that ‘contrives to suggest something at once slippery

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105 Shearman, *Not an Inch*, p. 179.

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and tortuous.' 

Winston Churchill's references to ‘filthy quislings’ and ‘squalid quislings’ in broadcast speeches in the second half of 1941 further cemented the meaning of the term. The word ‘quisling’ had become closely associated with the (British) war against Nazi Germany, and its use by anti-partitionist writers in attacks on British or unionist rule in Northern Ireland was part of a wider linguistic strategy designed to show that Britain’s pursuit of the war was hypocritical, marking a departure from the idea that partition was wrong in and of itself. Subversion of language associated with a political opponent can also be observed in unionist rhetoric, however: Lord Craigavon’s famous broadcast in February 1940 included the pledge that ‘Britain’s difficulty is Northern Ireland’s opportunity to place all her resources, both human and material, at the disposal of the United Kingdom in this hour of crisis’, an ironic appropriation of the nationalist slogan ‘England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity’ popularised during the First World War.

The Second World War does seem to have provided a context within which nationalists and unionists could engage with each other’s contentions. In New Thoughts on an Old Subject Eddie McAteer appealed for a peaceful post-war campaign of non-cooperation with government and military forces in Northern Ireland, drawing particularly explicit analogies. He argued that:

Irish people must not be spectators at military tattoos, parades or any functions under Occupation auspices. Our attitude must be the attitude of the French to the Germans whilst France was under German occupation. [...] We have no


108 'Quisling is as Quisling Does’, The Times, 19 April 1940, p. 7.
109 ‘Winston Churchill: broadcast’ (24 August 1941), and ‘speech’ (to Joint Session of United States Congress, Washington D.C., 26 December 1941), in The Churchill War Papers, Volume 3: The Ever-Widening War, 1941, ed. by Martin Gilbert (London: William Heinemann, 2000), pp. 1099-1106 (p. 1103) and pp. 1685-90 (p. 1688). In the first of the speeches the term ‘quisling’ is applied to Norwegian collaborators alone, but in the address to the US Congress the word is used to describe all those in occupied Europe who had been ‘suborned’ by invading Nazi forces, suggesting that over the months the word had passed into more general usage.
110 Craig, ‘We Are King’s Men’, in The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Volume III, p. 363. St John Ervine adapted Craig’s words for a voiceover for a wartime propaganda film entitled Ulster, which sought to emphasise Northern Ireland’s industrial prowess:

The Northern Ireland Parliament made this declaration at the outbreak of war. The people of loyal Ulster will share the burden of their kith and kin in every part of the Empire to the uttermost of their resources. Britain’s difficulty is Northern Ireland’s opportunity to place all her possessions, human and material, at the service of our King. The people of Ulster have long loved and have defended liberty. They will not fail to defend it now.

(quoted in John Hill, Cinema and Northern Ireland: Film, Culture and Politics (London: British Film Institute, 2006), pp. 85-6)
personal antipathy to the human beings encased in British uniforms but we must make it clear that we have the very strongest objection to their uniforms in Ireland. Icelanders left the pavement when British soldiers approached.\textsuperscript{111}

Given the extent of French collaboration with the Nazi forces of occupation, the provision of support by Britain for the French resistance movement during the war, and the subsequent liberation of France by Allied forces, McAteer’s assertion in this regard is perhaps ill-advised, but his reference to Iceland is apposite. When occupied by British forces in 1940 Iceland remained neutral: like Northern Ireland, Iceland was strategically important to the Allies in terms of the Atlantic convoys, and like Northern Ireland was occupied by many thousands of American troops in the latter stages of the war. Relations between Icelanders and the occupiers were sometimes frosty, but there was no organised attempt to disrupt the activities of the Allied forces.\textsuperscript{112} By referring to Iceland, McAteer engages with the proposition that Northern Ireland’s status within the United Kingdom was vital to Allied success in the European war, which, as I have shown, was rapidly adopted as an article of faith by many unionist writers and politicians.

In the article for the socialist \textit{New Statesman} that so incensed his congregation, W.R. Rodgers asked, rhetorically, ‘Have we in Ulster a “fascist” government?’\textsuperscript{113} There were many nationalists, it seems, who would have answered in the affirmative. In his pamphlet \textit{Ireland – can it remain neutral?} (1941), the Scottish Communist MP William Gallacher repeatedly referred to the Ulster Volunteers of 1912 as ‘Storm Troopers’.\textsuperscript{114} T.J. Campbell, a contributor to the ‘Comments’ section of \textit{Orange Terror}, twice refers to the ruling orange elite as ‘Herrenvolk’, using the Nazi conception of the Germans as

\textsuperscript{111} McAteer, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{112} James Miller, \textit{The North Atlantic Front: Orkney, Shetland, Faroe and Iceland at War} (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003), pp. 87-8, pp. 101-11, pp. 120-132.


\textsuperscript{114} William Gallacher, \textit{Ireland – can it remain neutral?} (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1941), p. 5.
a master race born to rule and maintain order.\textsuperscript{115} Likewise, in the 1943 \textit{Capuchin Annual}, Benedict Kiely writes that the possibility of cross-community co-operation in Omagh is hindered by ‘an unreasoning \textit{Herrenvolk} mentality’ and in March of that year the Socialist Party’s \textit{Northern Star} newsletter described a recent newspaper article by St John Ervine as a ‘clarion call to the Ulster \textit{Herrenvolk}'.\textsuperscript{116} Like ‘quisling’ this word had been brought into common usage by the war against Germany, and can similarly be identified with the British war effort through its use in a broadcast by Churchill two years previously.\textsuperscript{117} The imported terms ‘quisling’ and ‘\textit{Herrenvolk}’ were used in British political discourse of the Second World War to condemn the treachery of the collaborator and the dictatorial nature of Nazi ideology, but the very foreignness of the words (which were frequently italicised) also helped to promote the idea that these tendencies were alien to the British character and to British public life.\textsuperscript{118} Anti-partitionist and nationalist writers used these terms in various attempts to equate the recent actions of Nazi Germany with the behaviour of the British and Northern Ireland governments and their forces, but such usage only serves to embed their writings within the discourse of the Second World War, and problematises the efforts of some nationalist writers to cast the province as an uninterested or unwilling participant in the war, aligned with neutral Éire and ostensibly outside this context.

Several contributors to the \textit{Capuchin Annual} during the war pursued this approach. A series of Northern Irish travelogues either avoided acknowledging the effects of the Second World War on the province altogether, or suggested that the war was a false, alien or immoral intrusion, incompatible with the idealised conception of Ireland on which the writers preferred to dwell. This course was also established visually: lengthy photographic sections in the 1940 and 1943 annuals were dedicated to Ulster, but privileged scenes of rural tranquillity and failed to show any of the physical effects of the conflict. Fifty pages of photographs in the 1943 annual do include some

\textsuperscript{115} Ultach, \textit{Orange Terror}, pp. 60-2.
\textsuperscript{117} In a broadcast on 24 August 1941, following a summit with American President Roosevelt at which the Atlantic Charter had been drafted, Churchill said ‘It is the rule of the \textit{Herrenvolk} – the master race – who are to put an end to democracy, to parliaments, to the fundamental freedoms and decencies of ordinary men and women’. (‘Broadcast’ in Gilbert (ed.), \textit{The Churchill War Papers, Volume 3}, p. 1103)
\textsuperscript{118} For example, in a 1940 broadcast on Hitler’s imperial ambitions, the British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax proclaimed that ‘To this German ideal of vassal States dominated by the \textit{Herrenvolk} Britain opposes the ideal of freedom – a community of nations, freely cooperating for the good of all, and animated by justice and good faith in their dealings with one another.’ (‘Lord Halifax’s Broadcast’, \textit{The Times}, 23 July 1940, p. 5)
images of Belfast, including the view over the city from Cave Hill and shots of the City Hall, St Malachy’s College and the Falls Road, but in displaying no signs of bomb damage or wartime paraphernalia it must be presumed that these date from before the war. Whatever the provenance of the photographs, the aim was to present a view of Ulster as unsullied by the effects of the war. Writers for the *Capuchin Annual* are reluctant to concede that the war might be of any real concern to Ireland, and contemplate the outsiders who have arrived in Northern Ireland as a result of the conflict with disdain: in its pages the war appears less as a matter of global consequence and more as a malign cultural phenomenon.

In a piece entitled ‘Ulster’s Contribution to Anglo-Irish Literature’ for the 1940 annual, the architect and poet Padraic Gregory wrote that

...it is pleasant to be able to record two facts, the first that Ulster writers are still, to-day – at a time when the simplicities of an agricultural people are in danger of being overwhelmed by the complexities of mechanisation – concerning themselves with simple elemental things and ably interpreting those experiences, emotions, and aspirations, which have been common to humanity since the beginning of time; and the second, that we know of no Ulster writer of the day who may be said to be deliberately assisting the decadence so apparent in modern English literature. 120

The fear of ‘decadence’ and a deep-seated dislike of growing industrialisation inform a number of contributions to the publication, along with a resentment of the transatlantic war effort on the grounds that it has accelerated these unwelcome intrusions. Most of the material that I have examined so far in this chapter has shown how the war ‘de-insulated’ Northern Ireland’s political culture, but it is clear that some nationalists resisted this process and strove to re-insulate the province at this time, from the effects of the war and from external, and specifically Anglo-American, cultural influences.

In an essay for the 1943 *Capuchin Annual* the Dublin-born lecturer and writer Máirín Allen described her memories of Belfast while at school there at the time of the First World War, before reflecting on the atmosphere in the city during the present war.

In Allen’s recollections the First World War appears to have been of little direct consequence to Belfast. A dull background subject discussed only by adults, the conflict was thoroughly overshadowed by the pressing immediacy of the events taking place around her: the activities of snipers on the Shankill Road, the intimidating presence of British soldiers and the constant raids by A and B Specials. She does remember adult nationalist indignation over the question of conscription, however, and recalls that even at a young age she herself thought that the policy was ‘very wicked indeed’. Viewed through the lens of the ongoing conflict, Allen’s recollections of the First World War are resonant of nationalist resistance to Belfast’s involvement in the Second World War, and her piece closes with a description of her recent return to the city:

There is not enough war work to employ all Belfast’s workless. The tallest mill on York Street is a heap of bricks and mortar. One looks from Castle Junction down old High Street towards the Albert Memorial and great, gutted gaps confront the eye. The historic Whig offices in Bridge Street have a shaken look ... This is blitzed Belfast.

A boy goes by shouting the ‘Tally,’ Belfast’s evening paper, the *Belfast Telegraph*, and easily the best evening paper in Ireland. But there is no news – nothing but war propaganda. The dimly-lit trams – blacked-out, of course, and criss-crossed with strips of paper – are bewildering. A ’phone call in a blacked-out and bulb-less telephone booth strains one’s frayed temper. The Grand Central Hotel will surely provide matches. But the Grand Central Hotel is too full of uniformed girls and men to bother. American accents are around one – and Belfast accents, unchanged by years of radio-standard-English. ‘Coffee, miss?’ ‘No, thank-you.’

The discombobulation she feels at the changes in Belfast is reflected in these concluding paragraphs, where the impact of the war is registered as a series of shattering and confusing effects detached from their causes, causes which she seemingly has little interest in exploring. The prose itself is disjointed: though ‘of course’ the trams are blacked out and taped in case of air attack she still seems to find

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122 Ibid., p. 187.
this ‘bewildering’, and the air of disconnection is compounded literally by the ‘blacked-out and bulb-less telephone booth.’ Her professed confusion enables her to describe the war in terms of a random affliction, alien to the city, whilst the claim that the Belfast Telegraph is ‘easily the best evening paper in Ireland’, and her dismissal of today’s news as ‘nothing but war propaganda’ voice resentment at the idea that Irish and local news has been overtaken or displaced by international events. Allen’s reference to the pervasiveness of American accents implies that Belfast faces a new cultural threat at this time, but her observation that the native accent remains unchanged following ‘years of radio-standard English’ and her final ‘No, thank-you’ (to coffee, the drink of intellectuals and foreigners) are illustrative of a determination to resist this new influx.

Allen continued in this vein in ‘Ulster Sketch Book’, published in the Capuchin Annual the following year. This short travelogue focused on the religious history and architecture of the ancient province, and this devotional context amplified the incongruities of the ongoing conflict. She seemed particularly troubled by the influx of foreign military personnel: Derry is described as ‘busy catering for the amusement of British and Canadian and American soldiers and airmen and marines, white and coloured’, and Armagh appears ‘strangely cosmopolitan’. Allen is again concerned by the intrusion of non-native accents:

At a street corner American coloured troops stopped their jeep to ask the way. And the hotel bars were filled with the accents of Boston and Philadelphia and San Francisco: you might have closed your eyes and thought you were at an American talkie film. But all this super-imposed outer-world faded and became unreal before the Armagh that centres round Patrick’s hill of the white doe, where the Cathedral on the site of his church now stands.

The unpalatable contrast between the ‘coloured troops’ and the ‘white doe’ dramatises her refusal to allow ancient myths to be displaced by current events. Allen is typically resistant to the urbanised areas of the province, writing in an ‘Afterword’ that, in attempting to sketch rapidly Ulster’s main features, she has chosen to concentrate on

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124 Ibid., p. 373.
the rural because ‘what is most enduring in the northern province, what is fruitful and what is traditional has survived best in the countryside.’

Other contributors to the *Capuchin Annual* were also seriously dismayed by the ‘cosmopolitan’ impact of foreign voices. In a piece entitled ‘Armagh City – First Impressions’ for the 1943 edition, the Cork poet D.L. Kelleher described visiting the city for the first time in 1941, having previously known it only from a woodcut in a school textbook. Like Allen, his romantic conception of the city is troubled by the presence of soldiers:

...there was a difference. I was seeing Armagh under war conditions with troops from the ends of the earth in the streets. The accents of far countries made a strange contrast with the mellow, muffled bark of the native Armagh. The old place sloping down from its two cathedrals to that piece of the English scene that is the Mall still kept the gracious air of the book-plate, but every passing soldier was a reminder that we are living in a new age and that now it is more than ever true that only the violent can hope to carry away the kingdom of earth as well as the kingdom of heaven.126

As Terence Brown has observed, the preoccupation of nineteenth century writers of the Irish Literary Revival with the image of Ireland as a rural or pastoral nation maintained its hold over artists and writers in the newly independent southern state: the retreats to the Ulster countryside in the pages of the *Capuchin Annual* may be read in the context of this often politicised tendency, whereby ‘rural life was a condition of virtue inasmuch as it remained an expression of an ancient civilization, uncontaminated by commercialism and progress.’ Brown also notes that ‘When Irish writers turned to rural Ireland to discern there an unsullied tradition, they naturally highlighted those aspects of that life which suggested an undying continuity, an imperviousness to change, an almost hermetic stasis that transcended history’.127 In the *Capuchin Annual* travelogues we see this version of the Irish pastoral coming under considerable strain, as its ability to transcend history is questioned by the enormity of the world war, the presence of

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125 Ibid., p. 377.
large numbers of outsiders and the intrusion of the physical paraphernalia of the conflict.

It should also be noted that nostalgic pastoral literature and picturesque depictions of village life were hugely popular in England during both world wars and the interwar years. Citing John Betjeman, Graham Greene and H.V. Morton, Victoria Stewart has described how writers concerned with the nature of Englishness were similarly hostile towards industrial and urban landscapes.\(^{128}\) Stewart has also argued that:

When a consideration of the countryside involves a critique of industrialisation, as represented by life in the city, these two aspects can be collapsed into each other so that the countryside, as it is now, is seen as a repository for the skills, virtues and values that the depredations of modernity are causing to vanish elsewhere. The countryside is not simply at a geographical remove from the city; it also represents a lost past. The village community can therefore become a synecdoche for the nation as it used to be.\(^{129}\)

To an extent, these ideas are applicable to the writings of Allen, Gregory or Kelleher: as the ‘outer-world’ fades and she contemplates ‘Patrick’s hill of the white doe’, Allen certainly seems eager to reclaim a ‘lost past’, and Gregory is equally keen to stave off the ‘depredations of modernity’. As Stewart notes, English pastoralism has often been associated with conservative political attitudes, but the Capuchin Annual’s preoccupation with rural Ulster is much more politically charged.\(^{130}\) The English countryside was repeatedly and visibly co-opted into various propagandist promotions of the British war effort, but I have found far fewer such appropriations of rural scenes in Northern Ireland.\(^{131}\) A brief travel piece in Ulster Parade described a trip around North Antrim, through Slemish, Ballymena and Ballymoney, and, in sharp contrast to the contributions to the Capuchin Annual, made a notable attempt to draw the landscape into the war effort:

\(^{129}\) Ibid., p. 98.
\(^{130}\) Ibid., p. 99.
\(^{131}\) Rose, p. 198, p. 203.
Within sight of Dunluce something unusual caught the eye – there across a field was a little rocky promontory ploughed and set in drills all ready for its share of potatoes. All around was land rather poor for tillage, yet this almost inaccessible strip of land was ready to do its share in the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign. Surely a parable of Ulster and her people.  

The short-form travelogue was pervasive at this time. In ‘Journey in Ulster’, which also appeared in the 1943 *Capuchin Annual*, Conal Casey made a tour of all nine counties of the ancient province, and, like Allen and Kelleher, contrasted the mythical past with the intrusions of the present. In Enniskillen Casey detects an air of repression and the sense that there is ‘No freedom now.’

In the hotel, Government officials and commercial travellers meet at breakfast, Belfast accents and English accents, naively discuss war propaganda and war films. The town comes slowly, watchfully to wakefulness, blinds rising like lifting eyelids, carts rattling in from the country, men and women going to Mass. Fort Hill lifts one suddenly to a vision of the long lake stretching to the quiet mountains, the loveliness of Fermanagh, detached and apart from all wars and human change, as beautiful as it was when the poet was welcomed to the chieftain’s house.

Rural Ulster is presented here as a refuge from contemporary troubles, as Fermanagh’s pastoral ‘loveliness’ is contrasted with the alien falsity of a war promulgated through ephemeral ‘propaganda’ and ‘films’, and discussed ‘naively’ in accents alien to the locality. For Casey and Allen, urbanised areas were more susceptible to the corrupting influences of the war. Casey argues that Derry’s involvement in the war was part of a long-running programme of cultural and historical adulteration of the city:

Deep down, Londonderry should be part of Ireland, but its vision has been twisted by centuries of misrepresented and misunderstood history; has in the last thirty years been given a new manufactured loyalty, in the last four years been invigorated by a hectic and artificial war-time activity. Derry as I saw it had

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133 Conal Casey, ‘Journey in Ulster’, *Capuchin Annual* 1943, 495-501 (p. 496).
been swamped by Londonderry. Streets were beflagged, shop windows filled with models of military aeroplanes, footwalks crowded with American and English soldiers, sailors, airmen. Military lorries streamed past under the shadow of the walls. Two black soldiers walked rollingly down Lawrence Hill. [...] Londonderry could not between 1939 and 1943 (when the ban was lifted), march in procession. War-time conditions had silenced the drums, scattered the files of sashed men, folded the banners. In time the present war will become part of this strange tradition, falsified history, ignorance of the things that went to the making of the city. That is an unpleasant prospect for one who loves Derry of the oak grove, the quiet dark church and the kneeling children, the singing and the music and the Gaelic Feis. Derry found its economic and industrial power in the Donegal hinterland, now cut from it. Londonderry when the shouting of the captains ends will have memories of white ships on the Lough, swaggering sailors on the street; thin porridge, when compared with the farm produce of Donegal. A man I knew spoke to me on the street. He said: ‘The nations of the world are here.’

Well, the nations will go. There will again be closed factories, men without work, a city dying economically after political execution. Londonderry should raise another pillar to Carson and write under it: *By this hand we fell.*

Here again the war appears in terms of brash and noisy falsity, incompatible with an ancient, peaceful, primarily rural and devotional culture, characterised by the oak grove and the quiet church. The model planes in the shop window shrink the significance of the war to a childish diversion. Later on the train, as a Spitfire dives to the level of his carriage, Casey bemoans the fields at Limavady ‘scarred’ with the concrete of an aerodrome. Like his fellow *Capuchin Annual* contributors Casey describes the coming of war as an imposition of alien sights and sounds (along with Allen, he appears to be particularly disturbed by the presence of black American troops) but his response to these intrusions differs significantly from the disconnected impressions of Belfast conjured by Allen’s autobiographical essay, or by Kelleher’s pessimistic apprehension of a ‘new era’ in Armagh. Casey sees Derry’s involvement in the war as

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134 Ibid., pp. 497-8.
135 Ibid., p. 498.
merely another stage in an ongoing project to pervert history and manufacture loyalty, a
sustained plot to sever the city from neighbouring Donegal administratively and
psychologically. Conceding that the city has benefited economically from the war, he
contends that such material prosperity will be fleeting, and suggests that the positive
legacy of the war in the province will be quickly subsumed by the ‘normal life’ of
continuing cultural, economic and political repression. Casey’s response to the man
who tells him ‘The nations of the world are here’ offers further resistance to the idea
that Northern Ireland might be reconfigured by the influx of outsiders and its role in the
global conflict. If the anti-partitionist arguments of Healy and Ultach drew imaginative
analogy and comparisons between the historic situation in Northern Ireland and
international developments, many contributors to the Capuchin Annual sought to
withdraw the province from a global context, through strategies of wilful isolationism.

It is possible that these journeys through wartime Ulster were inspired by Seán
Ó Faoláin’s An Irish Journey (1940), a travel book illustrated by Paul Henry. Like
Allen and Kelleher, Ó Faoláin was disturbed by the impact of the war on the
ecclesiastical city of Armagh, where ‘The War, as the cinema says, featured
prominently in the town – British soldiers coming and going, the lovely eighteenth
century Rokeby Green desecrated by tramping feet, soaking tents, and old bricks flung
down to make roadways across it.’\(^{136}\) Like Casey, Ó Faoláin is distrustful of cinematic
propaganda here, and is also dismayed at the defilement of an historic landscape.
Unlike the contributions to the Capuchin Annual, however, An Irish Journey makes no
attempt to downplay the scale of the impact of the war, the effects of which are
presented as deadening and horrifying. Condemning Omagh as ‘one of the dullest,
flattest towns in the whole country’, Ó Faoláin then travels through Derry and Strabane
to Belfast:

[The city] had begun to seem less and less desirable the nearer I came to it. I
think I saw it, this time, under the worst possible conditions – war-conditions;
sandbags; concrete shelters – pathetically futile; general gloom. Only at night, in
the black-out, when every street was a gully of darkness, and a sense of eerie
mystery lurked at every corner, did I feel the least stir of my imagination.

\(^{136}\) Ó Faoláin, Irish Journey, p. 274.
Donegall Place suggested *The Murders of the Rue Morgue*. Grosvenor Road might have been a brothel quarter.\(^{137}\)

The reference to Edgar Allan Poe is entirely appropriate, as Ó Faoláin goes on to describe Belfast’s ‘blackness’ and ‘ruthlessness’ with genuine fear and horror, as though the war has cast a peculiarly macabre and supernatural pall over the city (the bats of *Orange Terror* certainly have their place in this context). He suggests that Goya would have enjoyed the Falls Road during blackout, and a description of RUC officers on patrol during the blackout proceeds in this gothic vein:

... hulked out of the dark, like mountains, before us, and bruised into one of those slits of light to warn Mrs Murphy that the Germans mustn’t be guided to Belfast by her tuppenny tallow candles. There they leaned, great ominous figures, threatening a brutality which their poor country hearts never bred, clothed in the midnight of uniforms, with their gasmasks in bags bulging their backsides, and there was pity and horror in this brutalization by the North of Southern softness. (I wonder how many of these policemen come from Kerry and Clare and Tipperary?)\(^{138}\)

These officers, formerly of the Royal Irish Constabulary, but relocated to Belfast following partition, dominate a cartoonish tableau that both ridicules the zealous enforcement of blackout restrictions (*An Irish Journey* was published in 1940, the year before the Belfast Blitz), and highlights an anomalous and discordant by-product of partition, the presence of officers from the south in crown forces north of the border. Ó Faolán then moves into the sociological territory explored by Ultach’s article for the *Capuchin Annual* the same year, investigating the matter of Catholic ‘disloyalty’, and similarly quoting from anti-Catholic speeches of Craigavon and other members of the unionist establishment. He also cites an *Irish News* inquiry into the recruitment of Catholic working class men by the Ulster regiments during the First World War, which compared the numbers who were killed in action during the war with the subsequent loss of life during the Belfast ‘pogroms’ of 1920-22.\(^{139}\) Ó Faolán’s shift in emphasis

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\(^{137}\) Ibid., p. 240, pp. 263-4.

\(^{138}\) Ibid., p. 265.

\(^{139}\) Ibid., p. 268.
and tone shows how the impressionistic, non-systematic mode of the travelogue could co-exist within the same polemical anti-partitionist discourse as the journalistic approach of Ultach, similarly incorporating quotation and statistical analysis.

More nuanced and equivocal, perhaps, was Benedict Kiely’s ‘Long After O’Neill’, an article published in the 1943 *Capuchin Annual*, describing the changes to rural life on the Tyrone side of Lough Neagh since the outbreak of war. In the first chapter of this thesis I explored the ways in which Kiely’s post-war novel *Land Without Stars* showed how the Second World War presented considerable difficulties for nationalists, and, like that later novel, ‘Long After O’Neill’ offers an ambiguous appraisal of the effects of the war on Northern Ireland. Far less politically inflected than other contributions to the *Capuchin Annual*, Kiely’s essay openly acknowledges the involvement of the Catholic population in the war. Visiting the village of Pomeroy, where, he writes, locals used to play association football with British soldiers before the war, Kiely meets a man who has started playing Gaelic football instead. Kiely asks where the other local footballers are, and the man tells him that most members of the team have joined the British army and are fighting in Egypt, saying ‘Nothing else for them to do. Tell me now what outlook is there for any young fellow with ambition? You’re O.K. If you belong to the other side, you know. But if your colour is Irish green......’

In contrast with Kelleher’s vague fear of a ‘new era’ and Allen’s disconnected impressions of Belfast, which both appeared in the same edition, Kiely draws a clear line here between the global progress of the war and the parochial life of the village, and notes that the effects of the war were felt differently by nationalist and unionist populations. Unlike Ultach, whose article ‘The Real Case Against Partition’ was also published in the 1943 annual, Kiely is even-handed when apportioning blame for the civic paralysis. Of his home town of Omagh he writes:

... neither the Nationalist council nor the Unionist council showed any great desire to do anything sweeping for the social or sanitary development of the town. And that is extremely interesting at a time when a European war has given a sudden, almost frenzied, life to local administration and social work in other parts of Ireland.\(^{141}\)

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\(^{141}\) Ibid., p. 244.
Casey saw the city of Derry ‘invigorated’ by merely fleeting ‘hectic and artificial war-time activity’, but Kiely suggests that whilst Omagh remains riven by sectarian division, elsewhere in Ireland the war has effected positive change, in the provision of ‘local administration and social work’. It is frustrating that Kiely does not elaborate on what he means here, but in appearing disheartened by the lack of change, rather than repelled by the extent of it, he diverges once more from the path taken by his fellow contributors.

Kiely also seems disappointed by the very nature of the ongoing war. Historically, he claims, young men arrived in the garrison town of Omagh from all over the north west of Ireland, in the romantic hope of an adventurous life in the Ulster regiments. Since the advent of the present conflict however, he senses that any such illusions have dissipated, writing that ‘The garrison is bigger than ever but it has lost all that colour that was its one poor merit, the yellow blare of brass, the wild promise of great horizons.’ The present war, it seems, offers no chance of adventure. He proceeds to recall three very different men he encountered in Omagh who had all recently joined the British armed forces. The first is a young local boy, an orphan raised by neighbours and Borstal. A month after their meeting he is seen by Kiely being arrested for desertion, waving a hand and ‘laughing in salutation and farewell.’ The second is English, an airman who he finds sitting with his head in his hands beside a salmon leap, and who tells Kiely of his Irish ancestry. The third is a Belfast theologian and member of the Plymouth Brethren movement, who laughingly takes a Catholic tract from Kiely:

The war may have swallowed them up; some wild tornado of bursting shells, falling bombs, maddened struggling men, in any place between Ostend and Mandalay. The poor Irish lad, intensely uncomfortable in his uniform; the seasoned man with his good habit of introducing himself to chaplains; the theologian with his tracts; dozens, hundreds of others, marching past, swallowed up in a terrible tide.142

As in Land Without Stars, the powerlessness of the individual is set against the immensity of the war, figured once again as a barely comprehensible global phenomenon. As with Gavin Burke’s ARP uniform in The Emperor of Ice Cream, the

142 Ibid., p. 248.
allusion to ill-fitting clothes is salient, and is once again illustrative of nationalist awkwardness in the face of this global conflict.

If Kiely’s writings are characterised by equivocation and uncertainty, beneath the prose of the Protestant nationalist Denis Ireland there also lurks disquiet and unease over Northern Ireland’s place in the war. Appearing in Northern Harvest in 1944, ‘The Road to the Isles’ was another Ulster travelogue, in which Ireland explored the impact of the war on rural life and landscape. The bus tour takes him out along the Antrim coast road where the ‘only sign of war is a motor torpedo boat, droning like a mechanical beetle, so far out as to be invisible’. On reaching Portrush, however, he finds the town ‘full of British troops suffering the pains of exile in a foreign land. Which is strange, seeing that Portrush is the nearest thing to an English seaside town that Ireland has to show, a corner of a foreign field that is forever Blackpool’. The facetious reworking of Rupert Brooke’s ‘The Soldier’ suggests that the war has engendered a sense of geographical uncertainty. Moving on, Ireland suggests that the city of Derry is more secure in its Irishness, despite the seaplanes over the Foyle and the warships in the Atlantic: he describes it in Capuchin Annual-esque terms as the city ‘of the leafy oak shade, the spires and pinnacles against the sunset, the rusty key that must be turned, not forced, before Ireland is a nation once again.’ Again, however, the presence of military personnel complicates matters:

In the bar of the hotel the hawk-men are relaxing after their patrols over the grey wastes of the Atlantic; the atmosphere is pure tin-shanty West translated into terms of the flying services, with machine guns substituted for six-shooters and quickness at the bomb lever the mark of a living man. The frontier has rolled back from North America, eastwards in time and space to Europe, then westwards again to this city on the Foyle where Irish Protestantism first issued its battle cry of ‘No Surrender’.

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143 Denis Ireland, ‘The Road to the Isles’, Northern Harvest, 131-9 (p. 131).
144 Rupert Brooke’s poem ‘The Soldier’ (1914) opens with the lines: ‘If I should die, think only this of me: / That there’s some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England.’ (Rupert Brooke: The Collected Poems, with a Memoir by Edward Marsh (London: Sidgwick, 1918, 3rd rev. ed. 1942, repr. 1979), p. 302).
145 Ireland, ‘The Road to the Isles’, Northern Harvest, p. 133.
146 Ibid., pp. 133-4.
The implications of ‘hawk-men’ are diverse. In the first place, the term casts the airmen as alien or extra-human, predatory and threatening, but the hyphenation of the word also recalls W.H. Auden’s poem ‘Consider this and in our time’ (1930), which opens with an invitation to ‘Consider this and in our time / As the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman’, and significantly roves in its first stanza over a scene of military personnel in a hotel bar. Andrew Radford has observed that although Auden’s poem outwardly displays ‘disabused wisdom and confident authority [...] a closer study of the poem reveals instabilities of tone which its striving for impersonal objectivity never entirely conceals’. The poem’s initial invitation to make sense of ‘our time’ from the detached and elevated viewpoint of the ancient or modern flyers quickly unravels in a confused series of accusations, observations and sketches, vaguely premonitory of impending apocalypse. Similarly unbound by borders, Denis Ireland’s hawk-men show the difficulty in trying to determine the place of Northern Ireland in the war. In this passage frontiers shift with rapidity, leaving Derry in an uncertain, transcontinental and transcultural location, unmoored from a clear sense of time or historical context, where the European war is overlaid with the jargon of the cinematic American wild west. Like Auden’s poem, the register and tone are unfixed and fluid. Ambiguities proliferate, and, as with Kiely’s writings on and around the war, Denis Ireland’s flippancy and humour enable a certain amount of evasion, as cultural, historical, and literary references are scattered like chaff. In this essay his preoccupation with frontiers and concern with Ulster’s physical geography clearly reflect his deeply held anti-partitionist convictions, but also betray his interest in the debate over Northern Ireland’s place and role in the war, to which he would be a vocal contributor over the coming decades.

Denis Ireland was certainly politically active at this time. In 1941 he founded the anti-partitionist movement the Ulster Union Club, ‘to recapture for Ulster Protestants their true tradition as Irishmen.’ Several pamphlets were published under its auspices, and Ireland also contributed to numerous little magazines, newspapers and radio programmes in Belfast and Dublin throughout the war. A captain in the Royal Irish Fusiliers during the First World War, in 1948 he became the first resident of Northern Ireland to take a seat in Seanad Éireann. His career is illustrative both of the

cultural gravitational pull of Dublin and of the interpenetration of literary and political spheres at this time. The Ulster Union Club was itself enthusiastic and didactic in both the arts and anti-partitionist politics, advertising in its first manifesto activities including weekly discussions and lectures on current affairs, economics, history and the Irish language, as well as dancing and music classes. As a Protestant nationalist, who remained hugely proud of his service in the First World War, Denis Ireland’s life and writings exemplify the maverick tendency that, as is apparent from this chapter, managed to prosper to some extent in a range of cultural and political movements during the war years.

The Second World War is a significant preoccupation in Denis Ireland’s post-war writings, and, as a nationalist, his continued willingness to revisit the war years is notable. Radios and gramophones recur in his recollections of the period. Symbolic, perhaps, of how he felt Northern Ireland to have existed at one remove from the war, they offer a way of tuning in to events in Europe, or of drowning them out with music. ‘Notes Taken on the Eve of War’, published in From the Jungle of Belfast (1973) describes a scene in late September 1938, in the lounge of a hotel beside Carlingford Lough, as elderly ladies knit in time to the music playing on the wireless. As the tune comes to an end, everyone in the room becomes still. The voice of an announcer in London is heard, reporting that the Munich conference has ended in agreement, and the knitting resumes:

Like mice emerging from the wainscoting, all slip back into safe suburban slots – back to tea-time tinklings from The Geisha; back to smut from the circulating libraries; back to English leg-papers made flesh at the Belfast Opera House; clockwork adultery simulated beneath the gilt fronts of empty, lorgnette-presuming stage-boxes.

For a moment, threatening the clockwork, back-numbering even smutty novels and Gone With the Wind, the grinning skeleton of reality in Europe beckoned at the door of our provincial Irish woodshed. Then drops and lotions from the B.B.C. Faded the frosty spectacle beyond the hotel windows where in

150 Anthony Powell was stationed next door to Denis Ireland in Belfast during the Second World War (Ó Glaisne, Denis Ireland, p. 165).
151 Ulster Union Club, What is the Ulster Union Club? (Belfast: Ulster Union Club, 1941), p. 6.
the golden haze of a glorious September afternoon, against the forested background of dark-blue Carlingford mountains, there had glimmered for a moment, like icebergs on a summer sea, the ghosts of the new Ice Age in Europe, the skeleton horsemen of the now-postponed Apocalypse, the ghastly arc-lit abattoirs of the Third Reich, the greasily-smoking chimneys of Auschwitz, and all the horrors still to come.\textsuperscript{153}

At a time of collapsing borders in Europe, Carlingford Lough is an apposite scenic backdrop, since the lake forms part of the partition between Northern Ireland and the southern state and opens onto the Irish Sea. As in Derry, Denis Ireland finds the tensions of cultural and geographical uncertainty in an Irish border region reverberating with new urgency in the context of the European war. In Derry the war appeared through the phoney cinematic lens of the American wild west, but here it is local culture that is found wanting, as the ‘provincial Irish woodshed’ and the cultural mores of geriatric and suburban Belfast are set against the vast scale of the horrors to come. Ireland seems to be suggesting that the moribund cultural atmosphere in Northern Ireland was incapable of addressing events of such magnitude, a contention that may be read in the context of his desire for Irish unity and his (admittedly eccentric) hope that the war might encourage this to become a reality on a strategic basis.

The striking dissonances and incongruities between cultural artefacts and the wider historical context in which these were encountered clearly interested Ireland. Smutty novels and \textit{Gone With the Wind} are made to seem thoroughly redundant in the shadow of the ‘grinning skeleton of reality’, whilst in an essay entitled ‘The Fourpenny Box at Portrush’, from the July 1941 ‘Ulster Number’ of \textit{The Bell}, he had mused on finding a sensationalist English murder mystery novel, set in London and the Adriatic, in a second hand bookshop in Portrush.\textsuperscript{154} In a similar vein, ‘Sketches from War-Time Belfast’, also published in \textit{From the Jungle of Belfast}, explores the experience of listening to music in wartime, and describes a gramophone concert in a Belfast restaurant during the Blitz. The programme included works by Mozart among a variety of European classical and romantic pieces, and again Ireland explores a wartime

\textsuperscript{153} Denis Ireland, ‘Notes Taken on the Eve of War’, in \textit{From the Jungle of Belfast} (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1973), pp. 67-69 (p. 68).

\textsuperscript{154} Denis Ireland, ‘The Fourpenny Box at Portrush’, \textit{The Bell}, 2. 4 (July 1941), 62-5.
peculiarity, here of listening to music heavily identified with Germany (and, indeed, arguably exploited by the Nazis during the war) as German bombers fly overhead.\textsuperscript{155}

...against an uproar of fire-engines in High Street, the crystal clarity of Mozart, conjuring up crystal-lustred salons in Vienna; not even the bombers flying high over the fire-sprinkled city can obliterate the sound tracks from the backs of our minds. Bonn, Salzburg, Vienna: if only a stack of records remains, we can redraw the map of Europe, the world before the Nazis.\textsuperscript{156}

He continues to link the pieces of music with quasi-magical and romantic German scenes, suggesting a faith in the transcendence of art, and the ability of great music to transport those who hear it away from the traumatic context in which they listen. Later in this autobiographical fragment the communal singing of Norman G. Reddin’s rebel song ‘The Three Flowers’, about the United Irishmen Robert Emmet, Wolfe Tone and Michael Dwyer, drowns out the imagined sounds of war in Europe: ‘Nobody hears the stutter of buzz-bombs over London, the tok-tok of machine guns in Polish forests, the roar of tanks or the screaming of dive-bombers from the sands of Africa. And still the song goes on in the drenched green island.’\textsuperscript{157} Lines from the song interrupt the prose on three occasions in this section, and a verse from ‘The Bold Fenian Men’ is also quoted, as if to show on the printed page the ability of music to block out the consciousness of the war. These are brief interludes, however, and Ireland is generally keen to stress the impossibility of avoiding the effects of war. A short story ‘Inishtrahull’, published in the same volume, describes the experiences of a small island off the coast of Donegal during both world wars. The final lines read:

More rockets; distress signals thud as if someone is slamming a distant door. War and the rumour of war have returned to Malin Head and its green knoll in the Atlantic – prelude to more oil drums, more oil-stained planks, more bodies of drowned sailors strewn along rock-ribbed beaches under the black and hungry cliffs.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{155} For a comprehensive account of how Mozart’s music was appropriated by the Nazis, see Erik Levi, \textit{Mozart and the Nazis: How the Third Reich Abused a Cultural Icon} (Yale University Press, 2010).
\textsuperscript{156} Ireland, ‘Sketches from War-Time Belfast’, in \textit{From the Jungle of Belfast}, pp. 69-72 (p. 70).
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., p. 72.
\textsuperscript{158} Ireland, ‘Inishtrahull’, in \textit{From the Jungle of Belfast}, pp. 85-9 (p. 89).
In *Land Without Stars* Benedict Kiely also refers to the irregular appearance of driftwood and the bodies of sailors killed in the Battle of the Atlantic on a Donegal beach during the war: this scene similarly shows how the Second World War questioned the continued relevance of idealistic and isolationist nationalism. Ireland was clearly intensely weary of the repetitive, cyclical reappearance of war, but unlike other nationalist writers he did not attempt to turn away from its effects. Rather than joining the southern state in following a policy of neutrality, Denis Ireland proposed instead a detailed and convoluted anti-partitionist plan for the involvement of the whole island in the war. This he outlined in *The Bell*, following a lengthy debate on the matter of Northern Ireland in that magazine over the winter of 1943-44.

Following the publication of *Orange Terror*, in November 1943 *The Bell* published a reply to Ultach’s booklet. “‘Orange Terror’ A Demurrer’, appeared under the pseudonym ‘Ultach Eile’ and argued that the basis of partition, sectarian discrimination and civil unrest was economic rather than religious, claiming that ‘The persecution of the Catholics in the Six Counties arises from the scarcity of jobs and the system of Orange foremen under a government which derives its support from the conflict thus engendered.’ Ultach Eile conceded that Protestants lagged behind Catholic workers in political development, but criticised the tendency to cast Protestants as foreign and alien, asking that the term ‘Planter stock’ be retired. He reserved his strongest words for the ‘Six County Bosses’, however, and suggested that their attitude had had a direct bearing on Ireland’s place in the war:

> Had it not been for them an Independent Ireland would have arisen long ago, and the relations between the two free peoples would have been such good neighbour relations, that in the opinion of many people, including the writer, we should, whether wisely or not, have been in this war, whereas the mischief-makers have not been able to carry even their own followers into it. The flares of war have revealed them to people on both sides of the Channel as an anachronism.\(^{159}\)

\(^{159}\) ‘Ultach Eile’, “‘Orange Terror’ A Demurrer’, *The Bell*, 7.2 (November 1943), 137-142 (pp. 139-40, pp. 141-2, p. 142).
Orange Terror and Ultach Eile’s response provoked considerable reaction. The following month a piece by a student from Trinity College Dublin was published, entitled ‘A Protestant Visits Belfast’. From a northern family who had moved to Munster before his birth, Harry Craig wrote of reading Orange Terror that ‘The whole record filled me with humiliation.’ Deputed by his college friends to travel north, he assembled a collection of anecdotal evidence from a variety of informants which tended to support Ultach Eile’s economic analysis of the situation, and suggested that the lower level of political violence during the war was a result of the fall in unemployment. For Craig, the war offered the potential for cross-sectarian and cross-border co-operation but this had been quickly snuffed out by the Stormont administration, who liked ‘neither a shaking border nor a united people’:

A shipyard worker told me that: ‘When a large section of the Catholic population were carrying wreaths for the graves of their dead a Crossley tender pulled out in front.’ The bully-tactics again, as old as the Mournes, still yielding results. Other minor incidents, cleverly stimulated, renewed the friction and Stormont began to sleep more happily on the hatred it engendered.

The following February the Dean of Belfast waded into the fray, with “‘Orange Terror’: A Rebuttal”, which excoriated the original booklet’s ‘evil misrepresentations’, dismissed the idea that Catholics were being persecuted or excluded from the workplace, and mocked Craig’s piece, sarcastically inquiring as to whether he had spent a whole weekend in the city. In a letter published in the same issue Robert Greacen was also critical of Craig, arguing that visitors who spent mere brief spells in Belfast were unqualified to attempt an analysis of the situation, and claiming that well intentioned left-wing journalists were causing ‘incalculable damage to the cause of reconciliation which they so blatantly profess.’

In March 1944 The Bell carried an article under the name of the Ulster Union Club, giving the movement’s own reaction to this ongoing debate. Given that Denis Ireland had already contributed to the magazine, and was the President of the club, it is

160 Harry Craig, ‘A Protestant Visits Belfast’, The Bell, 7.3 (December 1943), 236-44 (p. 236).
162 Dean of Belfast, “‘Orange Terror’: A Rebuttal’, The Bell, 7.5 (February 1944), 382-93 (p. 389).
163 ‘Public Opinion’, The Bell, 7.5, p. 454. Cahir Healy also quoted from Craig’s article in The Mutilation of a Nation, p. 27.
likely that he was the writer of this response, entitled ‘Ulster: a Reply. The Strings, My Lord, Are False’. Describing the argument between Orange Terror and the Dean as ‘atrocity swapping’, Ireland complained that the exchange had contributed to the common misapprehension that all nationalists were Catholic. He dismissed the Dean’s claims that the Catholic minority found it easy to find work in Belfast on the grounds that these had not taken account of ‘abnormal circumstances of present war’, and on behalf of the club proceeded to address the prospects for Irish unity in the context of the war:

As an example of the difference between our constructive way of thinking and that unprogressive mentality behind and supporting the Dean of Belfast, it is only necessary to mention the war, since in war-time all policies necessarily issue in terms of military strategy. From the moment the French Republic collapsed in June, 1940, all our thinking was directed towards a plan whereby at any rate functional military unity could be secured in Ireland. Our attitude was that of standing on what Professor Savory calls our ‘nobility’, that is, remaining for the most part at home and withdrawing British and American forces, we Protestants of Northern Ireland should have said to our Catholic fellow-countrymen: - ‘We do not share many of your opinions about this war. But since, so long as Partition lasts, Ireland cannot be in it as a whole, or to any full degree – since, beyond making money out of war industry, we ourselves are playing only a minute fraction of a part in it, then we too will become neutral – on three conditions. First, that for an agreed period Northern Ireland remains a Federal State within an Irish national framework; second, unity of Defence having been achieved, the question of continuing the present policy of neutrality or of entering upon a defensive alliance with Great Britain to be decided by a united Irish parliament; third, that you introduce conscription for a National Army of Defence in the Twenty Six Counties at the same moment as we do in the Six. 

Following Irish unity on these lines, Denis Ireland argued, British and American forces would have been ‘released for service elsewhere’, a unified Ireland would voluntarily

164 Ulster Union Club, ‘Ulster: a Reply’, The Bell, 7.6 (March 1944), 474-84 (p. 475, p. 477).
165 Ibid., p. 480, p. 481.
have entered the war, and the northern province would then have been able to play a
major role in the war, rather than remaining ‘at home without even making a large scale
effort to defend her corner of the island’.\textsuperscript{166} From this extended hypothesis, one may
draw the conclusion that Denis Ireland believed Northern Ireland should have been
playing a greater role in the war.\textsuperscript{167} This belief clearly indicates his eccentricity to most
nationalist opinion.

Denis Ireland continued to dwell on Northern Ireland’s role in the Second
World War in post-war writings. In the punningly titled pamphlet \textit{Letters from Ireland}
(1945) he published a series of open letters to five real and symbolic figures: Winston
Bull’s New Manager’. The letter to Churchill, signed ‘Late Captain, Royal Irish
Fusiliers’ opened with the ominous sound of Orange drums, sounded to celebrate
‘Peace’ in Europe. Ireland went on to take issue with the British Prime Minister’s
famous victory broadcast hailing the fidelity of Northern Ireland during the war,
arguing that had partition not existed a united Ireland could have entered the war on the
side of the Allies. Denis Ireland ridiculed the idea of defending a country by dividing it,
and, in a sharply inflected parody of another of Churchill’s speeches, argued that:

\begin{quote}
...the Irish are only more British than the British themselves in defence of their
individual and national liberties. We, too, not only would fight, but have fought
before now, on the beaches, in the streets, and on the mountains – particularly
on the mountains, as you sir, as an English statesman, must well remember.\textsuperscript{168}
\end{quote}

In the letter to ‘John Bull’s New Manager’ (Clement Attlee, presumably) he was again
dismissive of the idea that the maintenance of partition was key to British security in
the event of another war, betraying a nationalist fear that in the immediate aftermath of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[166] Ibid., p. 482.
\item[167] The Ulster Union Club pamphlet \textit{The Defence of Ireland} (1942) had made a similar argument, but
suggested that a united Ireland’s entry into the war would be dependent on a free vote of the Irish people:

\begin{quote}
Irish national sentiment is there, a fact to be reckoned with. By using it Britain and America
could create a strong fortress in the Atlantic; by thwarting it, as they are doing at the moment,
they nullify the Atlantic Charter in the Ocean where it was born, and at the same time create a
psychological and political no-man’s-land at Britain’s doorstep.
\end{quote}

(Ulster Union Club, \textit{The Defence of Ireland} (Belfast: Ulster Union Club, 1942), p. 6)
\item[168] Denis Ireland, \textit{Letters from Ireland} (Belfast: Ulster Union Club, 1945) p. 7, p. 5, p. 6, pp. 7-8.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
war the unionist claim on Northern Ireland had been strengthened by Churchill’s victory speech.

Winston Churchill was, unsurprisingly, a pivotal presence in writing which addressed partition in the context of the Second World War. The strikingly titled *Churchill Can Unite Ireland*, by Dublin-born republican activist, novelist and memoirist Jim Phelan, was published in London in 1940 as part of the Left Book Club’s ‘Victory Books’ series: other titles included *Enlist India for Freedom!, Learn From France, The People’s War* and *Guilty Men*, the hugely popular polemical indictment of appeasement which appeared the same year. *Churchill Can Unite Ireland* is illustrative of the complex position occupied by Churchill at the intersection of debates over neutrality, partition and Anglo-Irish relations.

Phelan assumes almost total ignorance of Irish matters on the part of his intended British audience. He addresses readers in semi-humorous, gently patronising and sometimes overtly hostile tones, drawing frequent comparisons between the present actions of the Nazis in Europe with those past of the British in Ireland. Recalling such brutalities in the first half of the book, Phelan argues that the British people in their ignorance ‘did allow a man to do things in their name which Hitler has not yet surpassed’, and claims that ‘It is a cruel and terrible jest to make at this time – but when a speaker tries to tell the peasants of Galway or Tipperary of Nazi horrors the sincere and deeply-moving person generally exclaims that the murdering blanks are as bad as the English!’ He also attacks the pro-treaty forces during the Irish Civil War as ‘cunning fore-runners of the Nazi “persecuted minority racket”’ and a ‘Fascist mob – in emerald green uniforms’, and is dismissive of hostile British press coverage of Irish neutrality and potential collaboration with Germany.\(^{169}\) The figure of Churchill dominates the second half of the volume and is introduced at the opening of the chapter ‘Our Enemy the Friends’, the title of which exemplifies the paradoxical and unorthodox turn taken by the book:

Twenty-six years ago, in 1914, an Irish politico-financial gang ran a British politician out of town. No one who has read much about Ireland in the British press will be greatly surprised at that. What might be a little more surprising is that the leader of the Party responsible is now Lord Craigavon, that the town

was not Tipperary but Belfast, that the British politician was one Winston Churchill.\textsuperscript{170}

Phelan's erroneous reference here is to Churchill's infamous visit to Belfast in January 1912, when, as First Lord of the Admiralty in the British Liberal government he was booed on arrival, before his car was attacked and his effigy brandished by an a mob of loyalist demonstrators. Later that day he shared a platform with John Redmond at the Belfast Celtic Football Ground and was cheered by a crowd of five thousand as he spoke in favour of Home Rule. Churchill was not sympathetic to the nationalist cause but believed that Home Rule would strengthen the Empire and the bond between Great Britain and Ireland: at this early stage he saw this alliance as vital to the defence of the United Kingdom. Angry dockers hurled rotten fish at Churchill and his wife as they left Belfast.\textsuperscript{171} Hugh Shearman reports that Churchill's car had to make a detour on the way to the station, to avoid thousands of shipyard workers who had lined the route, their pockets filled with 'Queen's Island confetti' (rivet heads).\textsuperscript{172} Phelan's mistaken date of 1914 is also important, however. On 14 March of that year Churchill made a strongly anti-unionist speech in Bradford in England, calling for a peaceful solution to the escalating situation in Ulster, taking the Tory party to task for their indiscriminate use of military force and their hypocritical support for the Boers and arguing that the law in Ireland should be applied equally to nationalists and unionists without preference. As Phelan notes, Churchill was met with incomprehension 'when he tried to talk \textit{much the same stuff as is in this book}' (Phelan's italics).\textsuperscript{173} The Bradford speech seems to have been in wide circulation during the war: the fact that it was reprinted in full in the 1943 \textit{Capuchin Annual}, without introduction, and immediately following Conal Casey's anti-partitionist travel piece 'Journey in Ulster', is telling in itself.\textsuperscript{174} Under the heading 'A Statesman's View of Northern Ireland', Cahir Healy used an extract from the speech to open the pamphlet \textit{The Mutilation of a Nation}, whilst the speech was also reprinted in full in \textit{Churchill on Ulster}, a pamphlet published by the Socialist Party in Belfast in

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., p. 67.
\textsuperscript{172} Shearman, \textit{Not an Inch}, p. 100. Shearman adds that when Churchill visited Belfast many years later, however, 'he got a thoroughly friendly reception.' (p. 101)
\textsuperscript{173} Phelan, \textit{Churchill}, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{174} 'Twenty Nine Years Ago', \textit{Capuchin Annual 1943}, 502-512.
1943, the foreword of which stated that it was expressly intended as a riposte to a recent broadcast by the Northern Ireland Prime Minister, Sir Basil Brooke.\textsuperscript{175}

Reprinting the Bradford speech in these ways aimed to embarrass the unionist establishment by highlighting their erstwhile hostility to the now hugely popular British Prime Minister, who was perhaps the single most important icon of the British war effort: in 1943 the West Belfast Labour Party published a pamphlet entitled \textit{The Stormont Government: A Labour Indictment}, printing a speech made by Jack Beattie, Labour member for Pottinger, to the Northern Ireland House of Commons on 11 May of that year, in which he opposed a government motion of confidence in the cabinet of newly installed Prime Minister Brooke and feigned mock sympathy at the departed old guard:

Hardly one of the new government was to be seen in the bad old days when there was dirty work to be done. I don’t believe that one of them, with the exception of the new Minister of Labour, even threw a stone or attempted to crack Churchill’s skull when he came here in 1912!\textsuperscript{176}

The Socialist Party pamphlet \textit{Churchill on Ulster} also attempted to capitalise on the unionist hostility to Churchill in 1912, claiming of that year’s visit that ‘The Party which denied freedom of speech to a member of the British Government before it became the Government of Northern Ireland is not likely to worry overmuch about free speech for its political opponents after it became the Government.’ The pamphlet then quoted from a speech made by Beattie in 1942, in which he attacked the Northern Ireland government for having ‘played the part of a willing tool to that despicable element in England – the diehard Imperialists, who hated everything Irish, just as they hated everything Indian’ and indicted the Northern Ireland House of Commons as totalitarian, for bearing ‘more relation to Hitler’s Reichstag, with its membership of Storm-troopers, than to the Mother of Parliaments.’\textsuperscript{177}

Cahir Healy’s pamphlet \textit{The Mutilation of a Nation} also highlighted the 1912 visit, in a section entitled ‘How Belfast Received Churchill’, which contrasted the

\textsuperscript{175} Cahir Healy, \textit{Mutilation}, p. 3; Churchill on Ulster (Belfast: Socialist Party, 1943), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{176} Jack Beattie, \textit{The Stormont Cabinet: A Labour Indictment} (Belfast: West Belfast Labour Party, 1943), pp. 3-4. Beattie refers here to William Grant, then MP for Belfast, Duncairn, and Minister for Labour from May 1943-May 1944.
\textsuperscript{177} Churchill on Ulster, p. 3, p. 4.
recent invitation extended to Churchill by the Unionist Corporation of Belfast to become an ‘honorary burgess’ of the city with the threats made to his life three decades earlier. Healy then quotes from Hugh Shearman’s biography of Craigavon, Not an Inch, in which Shearman had claimed that ‘If Mr. Churchill had not been accompanied by his wife, he would have been spilled out of his car and would have had his entrails kicked out on the stones of Royal Avenue’, thereby turning the words of a government propagandist against the unionist establishment itself. Notwithstanding Churchill’s interventions in Irish affairs in the three decades since the Bradford speech, the troubled visit of 1912 and the speech of 1914 were gleefully appropriated by nationalist and socialist pamphleteers, who sought to highlight a perceived hypocrisy in the unionist government’s professed support for the British war effort.\(^{178}\)

In Churchill Can Unite Ireland Phelan took matters further, and expressed a hope that Churchill’s personality itself could effect positive change in Ireland. He saw Churchill as the only figure who could challenge what Phelan called the policy of ‘punctilio’, an attachment to deferential attitudes that kept vested interests in control of the British establishment, and identified a cultural shift in Britain, resulting from Churchill’s recent replacement of Chamberlain as Prime Minister. Phelan cited an article by H.G. Wells in Reynolds News, in which the writer had:

> ...scattered a few more frills behind which the English few have been hiding. 

> [...] He wrote like Fintan Lawlor. [sic]

> Now there is language at last that the people of Austria and Czechoslovakia and Ireland can understand. It may be that part at least of the change is due to the personal example of Winston Churchill.\(^{180}\)

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\(^{178}\) Healy, Mutilation, p. 4. Shearman, Not an Inch, p. 100.

\(^{179}\) Whilst admiring of Churchill’s role in the Second World War, St John Ervine remained critical of his visit to Belfast in 1912. Recalling how demonstrators held back from upending Churchill’s car when they spotted his wife sitting beside him, Ervine wrote that: ‘It is appalling to think of what our fate might have been twenty-eight years later if Mrs Churchill had not accompanied her husband. For those angry men would certainly have turned the car over, and the great orator who rallied his country in a day of dire disaster might have perished in a fatuous adventure.’ (Ervine, Craigavon: Ulsterman, p. 214)

The remarkable hyperbolic equation of Wells and Lalor is demonstrative of the extraordinary leaps in thought seemingly possible at this time, but what excited Phelan here was the loosening of British political discourse, the idea in fact that ‘the British are talking like the Irish at last’. As one of the ‘worst offenders’ in plain speaking he held Churchill largely responsible for this change in tone and approach. Having implied, with another extraordinary leap, that Churchill was in some way ‘Irish’ in character if not in nationality, Phelan belatedly began to work through the claim made in the title of his book. He suggested that if Irish talks were scheduled between Churchill, de Valera, Peadar O’Donnell, Craigavon, Jake Kilroy (or another representative of the IRA), Cathal O’Sullivan (to represent Labour in Éire), Pat Fox (to represent Labour in Northern Ireland), Sean O’Casey (to speak for the Irish Citizen Army and other adherents of James Connolly) and a random peasant (to represent himself), the result would be Irish unity. In Phelan’s hypothesis, Churchill would offer British and French troops to defend a united Ireland, and in answer to Craigavon’s inevitable protestations would ask the northern Prime Minister to prove his ultimate loyalty by acquiescing. ‘The abolition of the border’, Phelan suggests satirically, ‘will be dangerously complex and long-drawn out and generally difficult. It might even need three hours’ work and a dozen typewritten forms.’

I do not intend to comment on the historical accuracy or otherwise of Phelan’s argument: it is by turns deliberately hyperbolic and provocative, and his hypothetical flights of conjecture and imagination are at times as baffling as those of Denis Ireland. Like Ireland’s writings, Churchill Can Unite Ireland is illustrative of the curious and eccentric lines of reasoning made possible by the wartime context, whereby a confirmed republican could assert his faith in a British Prime Minister as part of a wider argument in favour of Irish unity. Along with the reprints of the Bradford speech, Phelan’s book also highlights the problematic relationship between the unionist establishment and Winston Churchill. Despite the repeated expressions of loyalty to the British war effort, unionist mistrust of the British government in London continued to percolate over the course of the war, partly due to Churchill’s perceived willingness to deal with de Valera. Eerily, the final lines of Phelan’s book (published in 1940), read: ‘Liberty does not grow on trees; it must be fought for. Not “now or never”. Now.’

These echo the words of the infamous telegram from Churchill to de Valera following

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182 Ibid., p. 120.
the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, which, it is implied, offered Irish unity in return for Éire’s entry into the war on the side of Allies, and read in part ‘Now is your chance. Now or never. A Nation once again.’

Since I have explored such a diverse range of publications in this chapter, I will conclude by examining the various cultural and political uses of one word, ‘bridgehead’, in works by writers of all shades of opinion in relation to Northern Ireland and the Second World War, in the hope of drawing together some of their arguments and concerns. As I noted in the second chapter of this thesis, Robert Greacen expressed a hope in the New Northman in 1942 that Northern Ireland could ‘act as the bridgehead between Ireland and Great Britain and [...] suck the best out of the English, the Gaelic and the Anglo-Irish cultures’, suggesting that the province might benefit from its singular geographical location. More equivocally, the historian J.C. Beckett wrote in 1943 that ‘Ulster’s highest duty is to maintain an Anglo-Irish bridgehead, or at least stronghold, a place where the typical Anglo-Irish virtues, not very attractive virtues, can be bred.

For others the word had more negative connotations, however. Greacen re-used his own optimistic sentiments in an article on ‘Drama Up North’ for The Bell in February 1947, but in the same issue Peadar O’Donnell’s editorial ‘Whose Bridgehead?’ argued that if the British government were to renounce the idea that Northern Ireland was a ‘bridgehead’ for the British Empire then Irish unity would quickly follow. Using the word in its original military sense, of ‘a fortification covering or protecting the end of a bridge nearest the enemy [...] also, any military position established in the face of the enemy, e.g. by a landing force’, O’Donnell thereby argued that the partition of Ireland was deliberately strategic. A subsequent article by the secretary of the Ulster Unionist Association, W. Douglas, responded angrily to the editorial. Douglas was keen to emphasise the critical role of the province in the Allied invasion of Europe:

183 Bowman, p. 246.
185 Letter from J.C. Beckett to John Boyd, 8 November 1943, John Boyd Collection.
It will be as the Bridgehead — that vital stepping stone between the great American Democracy and Europe — that Ulster’s name will go down in the history of the conflict. Across that stepping stone fully 400,000 American troops passed and with them came thousands of tons of war material — guns, tanks, aircraft, equipment of every kind.  

The capitalised appearance of ‘Bridgehead’ here differs again from Greacen’s conception, and credits the province with a greater role than is permitted by O’Donnell. In addition to its function as a staging post for this panoply of military hardware, it is implied that Northern Ireland is newly ideologically important, and is a ‘vital’ conduit for the flow of democratic ideas between America and Western Europe.

In *The Bell* of March 1951 Peadar O’Donnell again used the term, in an editorial ‘Pointer to an Article’ introducing Seán Ó Faoláin’s essay ‘Autoantiamericanism’, which warned against kneejerk resistance to the growing influence of American culture in Ireland. O’Donnell writes of Ireland sending its youth to join the expanding population of the United States, via the underworlds of the poorest parts of cities. ‘From those early squalid bridgeheads Irish exiles won their way on to the level of normal American work-a-day life.’ In the following issue the word appeared again, in ‘Fears of Ulster Protestants’, a combative dialogue between Revered F.S. Leahy of the Irish Evangelical Church and the republican activist and writer George Gilmore, in which the latter refers to Northern Ireland as ‘a Tory bridgehead statelet’.

The word clearly has many applications in relation to Northern Ireland. It is used approvingly and theoretically by the liberal poet Greacen, keen to encourage cultural exchange, as an anti-colonial term of opprobrium by nationalists and republicans, but is also favoured by unionist writers keen to secure the status of Northern Ireland as a British military necessity. In his 1949 study of Craigavon St John Ervine wrote that ‘No sensible person can, or does, deny that the maintenance of the bridgehead in Northern Ireland was a vital necessity of that war’, whilst in a speech to the Northern Ireland House of Commons in October 1946 Prime Minister Basil Brooke

189 ‘Pointer to an Article’, *The Bell*, 16.6 (March 1951), 5-7 (p. 6).
twice referred to Northern Ireland as a ‘bridgehead’. In the first instance he used the term in a strategic context, crediting partition with ensuring the safety of the whole island of Ireland:

It was a fact – and perhaps hon. Members do not know this – that this was the bridgehead, and that the British Army was standing ready to move to the rescue of the free state, should they have been invaded. That is what prevented these islands from suffering the horrors of war.

Brooke also used the word more symbolically, describing the province as the ‘bridgehead, the Rock of Gibraltar as it was called [...] the mainstay in the Battle of the Atlantic’. John W. Blake similarly deployed the term, claiming that, following the entry of the United States into the European war, Northern Ireland ‘provided a natural bridgehead between the Atlantic ports of North America and the western seaboard of Great Britain’, and that, as the first troops arrived:

Northern Ireland was now, so to speak, a bridgehead between the parts of the English speaking world. Whilst Eire [sic] was engaged in issuing a formal protest against the occupation of Irish soil by United States troops, Northern Ireland, full partner with Great Britain and the U.S.A. in war, was setting about the task of making the soldier from the New World feel at home.

He also reported that in June 1940 a brigade of Royal Marines was stationed at Milford Haven in Wales, ready in the event of a German invasion of Ireland ‘to seize a bridgehead in Eire [sic] through which reinforcements could be introduced from Great Britain.’ Blake, indeed, seems to have dwelt on the polyvalent, practical and theoretical significance of the word, claiming with some hubris in the conclusion of his account of the American influx, that Northern Ireland:

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191 Ervine, Craigavon, p. 578.
193 Ibid., col. 1971.
194 Blake, p. 46, p. 271.
195 Ibid., p. 157.
...might in the light of history conceive herself to be a meeting place of east and west. It was not wholly fanciful to think of Northern Ireland in this war as a land where the divergent ways of the eastern and western parts of the North Atlantic civilisation, which time, distance and environment had produced, could be brought together and perhaps become in some measure reconciled. [...] Geography and history, high strategy and current politics, had thus combined to enable Northern Ireland to come into her own as the Atlantic bridgehead.  

It is striking how closely Blake’s conception resembles Denis Ireland’s hopes for a united Ireland: in *Eamon de Valera Doesn’t See It Through: A Study of Irish Politics in the Machine Age* (1941) he argued that ‘we should remember the location of those four green fields in the Atlantic, not only as an outpost of European civilisation but also, and to an increasing extent, as the stepping-stone and connecting link between Britain and America.’ Denis Ireland does not use the word ‘bridgehead’, but also sought to exploit a geographical fortuity, claiming that:

...the facts of geography and invention already unmistakably demonstrate that Ireland’s real national destiny in the twentieth century is to become neither a museum piece nor a temporary lodging for exiles, but the link and intermediary between the Old World and the New.  

The historian Trevor Allen has noted that the codenames given to British and Irish cities during the war by German intelligence forces were often appropriate to the nature of the places they described: the steel-producing city of Sheffield, for instance, was known as ‘Schmelztiegel’ or ‘crucible’. Belfast was given the name ‘Etappe’, which in the context in which it was used meant ‘stage, or staging post in lines of communication’. Allen suggests that such a description ‘clearly fitted the entrance to Belfast Lough with its busy anchorages’, but the idea of such a ‘staging post’ also reflects the various attempts to fix Northern Ireland’s place in relation to the war.  

The terms ‘bridgehead’ and ‘staging post’ are illustrative of Northern Ireland’s political culture during the war years, emphasising the prevailing sense of uncertainty at

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196 Ibid., pp. 298-99.
198 Trevor Allen, *Storm Passed By*, p. 111.
this time. If, as I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, the province existed in a state of interregnum between 1939 and 1945, this was particularly visible in the written political culture of the time. Hostilities between nationalists and unionists may have subsided for the duration of the war, but the ongoing debate over partition and the treatment of the Catholic population was undoubtedly altered and complicated by the practical, ideological and psychological external pressures that were brought to bear on the province at this time. The role of Northern Ireland in the Allied war effort would seem to have cemented its place within the United Kingdom and strengthened the position of the unionist establishment, but officially commissioned works by Blake and Shearman which aimed to burnish the province’s war record suggest that the highly contingent nature of this newfound international stature had not gone unnoticed. The sheer enormity of the war and the pervasiveness of its effects in Northern Ireland posed a severe challenge to idealistic and isolationist nationalism in the province, demonstrated by the strained nature of the Ulster travelogues which appeared in the *Capuchin Annual*. The war years fostered a cross-generic and intertextual approach, exemplified by Ultach’s *Orange Terror*, which addressed the urban problems of the present by drawing together statistical data, polemical argument and visual material, and quoted at length from political opponents. This strategy is reflected in the works of nationalist, socialist and unionist writers: the use of quotation was particularly widespread at this time, sometimes to surprising effect. The adoption of Winston Churchill’s 1914 Bradford speech by nationalist and socialist pamphleteers is demonstrative of the curious patterns of debate during the war, whereby, interned in Crumlin Road Gaol during the later years of the war, Paddy Devlin was surprised to hear fellow republican prisoners praising the British for their part in the war against Hitler and Mussolini.\(^{199}\) The wartime publications of Denis Ireland and Jim Phelan show how the wartime context encouraged such extraordinary leaps in thought, as local issues were re-examined in light of international developments.

The multifarious uses of the term ‘bridgehead’ reflects the nature of the debate, whereby terms such as ‘quisling’ or ‘Sudetenland’, which were indelibly associated with the European conflict, were appropriated for use in very different arguments. The tendency of writers of all shades of political opinion to draw comparisons between the specific situation at home and newly febrile arenas of conflict elsewhere in Europe and

\(^{199}\) Devlin, *Straight Left*, p. 49.
further afield shows how the political geography of the province was reconfigured: whilst Bew, Gibbons and Patterson focus on the 'de-insulation' of the economics, politics and ideology of Northern Ireland during and immediately after the Second World War, the material I have examined in this chapter shows how a variety of politically inflected publications contributed to this process in cultural terms.
Conclusion

Victory in Europe was celebrated in Northern Ireland on 8 May 1945. The war in the Far East would continue for another three months: James Magennis’s night mission, a description of which opened this study, did not take place until the end of July 1945. On VE day the sun shone, as services of thanksgiving were held and masses were offered to future peace. Bunting appeared, flags were waved, and bonfires were lit. Huge crowds gathered outside Belfast City Hall to listen to Churchill’s Victory broadcast at 3pm. In Newtownbutler both Catholic and Protestant bands led a procession of servicemen through the village, but many nationalists took no part in the celebrations. An unnamed local historian describes the mixed reaction to the end of the war in Derry:

Opinion tends to be that Derry nationalists, while relieved that the war was over, found the sort of jingoistic patriotism that such occasions inspired to be alien. In a way too, it marked the end of an era during which Derry had enjoyed unprecedented activity and experienced a diversity of cultures from around the world. With the war over, Derry returned to anonymity and was once again relegated to the history books.

In retrospect, given the central place of Derry in Northern Ireland’s turbulent post-war history, the writer’s references to ‘anonymity’ and ‘the history books’ seem grimly ironic. Indeed, as Richard Doherty has implied, it is arguable that Derry’s role in the Second World War itself has hitherto been largely ‘anonymous’, since the city is more readily and indelibly associated with the Troubles.

The decision to focus in this study on material produced before the flaring of political violence at the end of the 1960s was deliberate: my aim, as stated in the introduction, was to examine the cultural impact of the war on Northern Ireland before this was displaced by more pressing concerns. In this brief conclusion I will consider

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1 The War Years: Derry 1939-45, p. 53.
2 McCusker, Castle Archdale and Fermanagh in World War II, 146.
3 The War Years: Derry 1939-45, p. 53. I have not been able to establish the name of the writer of this account.
4 Doherty, Key to Victory, p. 81.
some later writings which have attempted to draw connections between the province’s experience of the Second World War and the Troubles. Dennis Kennedy, eight years old at the time of VE day, recalls in his memoir Climbing Slemish that a bonfire was built at the end of his street in Lisburn, on which an effigy of Hitler was burned. With his mother, Kennedy travelled into Belfast the following day to witness raucous celebrations in the centre of the city. On the way home they heard the local RUC sergeant ordering people to ‘Put up that bunting.’ Kennedy observes that ‘Only one war was over.’ Clair Wills has written of her sense, when writing a cultural history of Ireland during the war, that she was measuring the country ‘against a chronology which isn’t really its own’, and anecdotes such as Kennedy’s illustrate the difficulties of incorporating the six-year-long Second World War into the open-ended, endlessly fraught and contested history of Ireland, or indeed vice versa. Whilst acknowledging these difficulties, it is also clear that it is no longer possible or credible to ignore the impact of the war on the course of twentieth century Irish history, north or south of the border.

This study has explored the works of writers and artists who have tried to register the impact of the Second World War on their lives and localities. In this respect, Kennedy’s view of the significance of the war to his life and those of his contemporaries is illuminating:

We were children of the war, and had lived through one of the most appalling periods in human history. Millions had died in conflict and in air-raids on civilian targets and in the systematic extermination of the Holocaust. Cities across Europe had been destroyed, and in Japan the atom-bombs had taken devastation to a new level of awfulness.

Yet we remained almost untouched by it. We had seen one or two nights of blitz from our bedroom window, and had wandered around smouldering ruins in Belfast, but there were no bombs in Causeway End.

[...]

The war taught us a lot. We knew all about Hitler and Mussolini, about Roosevelt and Stalin. We could show you Tripoli and Murmansk on the map, and Stalingrad and Caen, and Tokyo and Hiroshima.

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5 Dennis Kennedy, Slemish, p. 222.
6 Wills, That Neutral Island, p. 11.
We had met people very different from ourselves.\(^7\)

These recollections summarise one of the central concerns of this thesis: the unresolved contradiction between the idea that the war exposed the province to new external influences ('The war taught us a lot', 'We had met people very different from ourselves'), and the sense of literal and cultural isolation at this time ('Yet we remained almost untouched by it'). Kennedy's observations show how the historical importance and global scale of the war were felt in the province, whilst (for those outside Belfast and Derry, at least) its direct, destructive and fatal effects were muted.

The very magnitude of the conflict, and the moral imperative (often retrospectively) attached to the campaign against Nazi Germany, have undoubtedly complicated the ways in which the war has been debated in Ireland. As I have shown in the fourth chapter of this thesis, during the war and immediately after the conflict, both nationalist and unionist writers addressed the question of what the Second World War could mean for Northern Ireland with vigour and imagination. Since then, it seems, sectarian divisions have determined attitudes towards the events of 1939-45 within the sphere of political debate. For unionists and loyalists, the battles of the Second World War have never attained the same mythical status as the Somme, but some attempts were made to draw Northern Ireland's role in the Second World War into unionist rhetoric. In 1981 the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party Ian Paisley (who did not serve in the British armed forces during the war) berated the then Taoiseach Charles Haughey as a 'green aggressor and conspirator', and claimed that 'When our forefathers donned the British uniform and fought for King and Country, Mr Haughey's fellow countrymen used their lights to guide enemy bombers to their targets in Northern Ireland.'\(^8\) In 1989 the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party James Molyneaux, who served in the RAF during the war, took part in the D-Day landings, and arrived at Belsen three days after it had been liberated by the Allied Second Army, seemed keen, in his authorised biography, to draw parallels between his experiences during the war and his post-war political career. Most contentiously he compared working with the existing Nazi leadership at local level in Germany following surrender with his attempts to co-operate with nationalists during his time as a local councillor in Antrim: 'It went hard

\(^7\) Dennis Kennedy, \textit{Slemish}, p. 223.

with us as it sometimes goes hard with us nowadays when you see people who are in line with violence – Sinn Fein – and you have to sit in councils and work with them. It was the same feeling then. Another Unionist Party leader, Brian Faulkner, who worked in the family shirt factory during the war, admitted in his *Memoirs of a Statesman* (1978) that in retrospect it had been ‘foolish’ not to enlist in the armed forces, claiming that ‘medals and a military rank were valuable assets for political advancement in the post-war world, and lack of either was a serious obstacle to overcome.’ However, since the events of the late 1960s, and the escalation of political violence throughout the 1970s and 80s, the significance of the Second World War to the social, political and cultural life of Northern Ireland has become less and less apparent.

Such uncertainty is vividly sketched in an exchange in Glenn Patterson’s Belfast-set *Burning Your Own* (1988), in which a boy explains to the novel’s young protagonist why the fictional Larkview housing estate on which they both live was built:

‘Well, look, they grew up in the war, most of the people that bought houses on this estate. In the war or in the thirties. Not that much to fucking choose between the two if you’re from Northern Ireland. There were riots in the thirties, you know, things that make the stuff today look normal – house-burnings, killings, the lot. Bit like the war, only without the uniforms and on your own doorstep. The war had that going for it: by and by it happened somewhere else. And then, it wasn’t as bad as the first one – no trenches, or any of that shit, not the same danger of the men coming home all packed up in their old kitbags. And there was work too in the war, unlike the thirties. So, if you could put up with the blackout, the ration books, and the odd air-raid… well, things could have been worse. Still and all, they danced in the streets and sang when it was over. Because we’d won. Good old we.

‘But after the celebrations, when the rationing continued and the work didn’t, people started to catch themselves on. Whole areas had gone’ – he snapped his fingers – ‘phut! And there they were having to live in prefabs or

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with their relatives... Suddenly just winning didn’t seem to be enough. And it wasn’t only the usual sort complained. D’you see what I’m getting at?’

Mal looked as serious as he knew how, but his expression of understanding was hopelessly transparent.

‘People,’ Francy explained carefully, ‘will accept war if you can convince them that the hardship’s worthwhile. But they’re not going to be too happy when they find out the better world they’ve been fighting for’s just the same old world over again. Right?’

Satirising the narrative of the People’s War, Patterson also offers an earthy illustration of some of the ironies and inconsistencies in Northern Ireland’s experience of the Second World War: though Francy flippantly claims that ‘by and by it happened somewhere else’ he also emphasises the scale of destruction in Belfast resulting from aerial bombardment, saying that ‘Whole areas had gone’. This passage also questions how the significance for Northern Ireland of a series of local and international conflicts might be established and compared. Any sense of the estate as a product of the progressive programme of social change effected by the Second World War is undercut by the semi-humorous dismissal of the war as just another episode in the troubled history of the province (‘Not that much to fucking choose between the two if you’re from Northern Ireland’), whilst it is suggested that the violence of the late 1980s is of a lesser order than the sectarian riots of the 1930s (‘things that make the stuff today look normal’). Patterson also notes the lesser status of the Second World War in the province, when compared with the sacrifice of the First World War. Like Frank Ormsby’s poem ‘Some Of Us Stayed Forever’, Patterson suggests that the history of the province is more complex and extensive than the events of the late twentieth century have allowed.

Some of the writers and artists whose works I have examined detected echoes of their experience of Northern Ireland during the Second World War in the years of the Troubles. Colin Middleton claimed that the ‘tension, the repressed anxiety’ he felt in the early 1970s was reminiscent of the war years, whilst Roy McFadden wrote of the fires and petrol bombs in Belfast in August 1969 that ‘It’s almost like wartime again.

One measures food and remembers that rationed but keyed-up existence'. Given the awkward position of the Second World War in relation to the ongoing sectarian conflict, and the fact that the engagements were so different in nature, it is perhaps unsurprising that such comparisons are not more common. However, the Waterford-born travel writer Dervla Murphy also explored some connections between the Troubles and the Second World War in *A Place Apart* (1978), an account of a journey by bicycle around the province. She notes that in Belfast at this time references to ‘the war’ are made ‘quite unselfconsciously, just as the British might refer to their world wars’, and writes that the city ‘today is often compared with London during the Blitz. But at least the Londoners were united against an identifiable foreign foe and not exposed to the furtive exploits of their own society.’ She cites a report published by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission, stating that between 1969 and 1972 the province experienced the most widespread forced movement of populations to take place in Western Europe since the Second World War, as 60,000 people (eighty per cent of whom were Catholic) had to leave their homes.

It has perhaps often been easier for outsiders to draw links between the Second World War and the Troubles. John Depol, an artist and engraver who was stationed with the United States Army Air Force at Toomebridge Aerodrome in County Antrim during the war, returned to Northern Ireland in 1978 with his wife, and was dismayed by the changes in the physical environment that he saw:

The road past our former headquarters near the ancient stone bridge was now a highway. HQ and the rest of the aerodrome had disappeared except for a few Thorne huts and some brick remnants, and the concrete foundations, on which had stood the mess hall and Aero club. Brush and trees grew at the edge of these foundations, and several houses were built on the concrete slabs. [...] As we entered and left the larger towns, there were concrete forts out of the ports of which we saw scrutinizing eyes of soldiers and their automatic rifles aimed at us as we passed slowly by. We arrived in Belfast, but I did not recognize it. There were reels of barbed wire and rubble in the streets with armed patrols passing us on foot and others stationed in doorways. The inner

14 Ibid., p. 182.
city was cordoned off and passes were examined at checkpoints. How strange, and sad, for we could not see the city we had so well remembered in wartime.¹⁵

It is my hope that this thesis will encourage further exploration of these matters. American literature and military archives lie beyond its scope, but Depol's visual and written material suggests that the experiences of US service personnel in Northern Ireland during the war deserve cultural, as well as sociological, attention. The experiences of soldiers and refugees from other countries should also be considered.

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The main aim of this thesis has been to write a cultural history of Northern Ireland and the Second World War. To this end I have examined a range of sources, and, to encompass their sheer heterogeneity, I have avoided following any overarching theoretical framework. The breadth of the material I have explored is considerable – in addition to volumes of fiction, poetry, memoir and social and political history, I have looked at works of visual art, typed and handwritten manuscripts, periodicals, newspapers and magazines, ephemeral items such as the US army's guide for soldiers in the province, radio programmes, and small-scale literary and university publications of the time. The diversity of these sources is demonstrative of the ambition of the project: to consider the impact of the war on culture as a whole in the province. I have also sought to sidestep currents in critical evaluations of poetry in Northern Ireland, in the interests of recovering material occluded by the focus on the generation of northern poets, including Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, all of whom rose to prominence during the 1960s and 70s.

In each chapter of this study I have considered how artists and writers in Northern Ireland were animated by the wider cultural and historical context of the Second World War. Having related their work to developments in Dublin, the West of Ireland, London, Europe and America, I hope to have indicated how these artists and writers were uniquely placed to draw upon this variety of cultural traditions at this time. In the first chapter I considered how the war was described retrospectively in examples of autobiographical fiction and memoir, works which evoke the contradictory nature of

the province's experience of the war and which are demonstrative of the convergence of personal, local, provincial and global histories during the war years. Both Brian Moore’s *The Emperor of Ice Cream* and Benedict Kiely’s *Land Without Stars* are socio-historically valuable: I examined how the former has become a key text in factual accounts of the Belfast Blitz, and showed how both novels convey the awkwardness of the nationalist position in relation to the war. Conversely, and considering memoirs of wartime boyhood by Robert Harbinson and others, I explored how the war encouraged transgressions of traditional borders, boundaries and expressions of identity.

The second chapter examined the anxieties of Home Front poetry in Northern Ireland during the Second World War. I described the activities of a group of young poets at Queen’s University, which formed around Robert Greacen and Roy McFadden in the early years of the war. The efforts of this pivotal duo bridge the decades between Louis MacNeice’s poetic engagements with Ireland in the 1930s and the publication of the later generation of Northern poets. In the context of the mutually supportive community of writers in Belfast during the war, the emergence of Heaney and his contemporaries a quarter of a century later may be seen as less exceptional, and it is worth remembering that Greacen and McFadden were heavily feted by the press at the time. Wartime poems and other writings by Greacen and McFadden also present an opportunity to consider the impact of the Auden group on poetry in Ireland, an influence which, as Alan Gillis has suggested, has yet to be fully traced. The careers of Greacen and the older poet W.R. Rodgers in particular enable important connections to be drawn between literary communities in Belfast, Dublin and London.

In the third chapter which charted the effect of the war on visual art, I argued that the conflict encouraged artists to escape from the provincial strictures of portraiture and landscape painting. Past discussions of Colin Middleton’s oeuvre have tended to revolve around his stylistic variousness, whilst Gerard Dillon’s paintings have generally been appraised in terms of his sexual identity or nationalist beliefs: I have shown that the context of the Second World War enables new and fruitful links to be drawn between their work and contemporaneous British, European and American art.

The final chapter explores an idea which pervades the entire thesis – the ‘de-insulation’ of the province during the war years, as matters of international consequence were translated into local political debates. With a greater linguistic

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emphasis than the other chapters, I also describe the interpenetration of the literary and political spheres at this time. Examining the sub-genre of the wartime Ulster travelogue, I returned to a theme of the first chapter, that of nationalist unease and awkwardness in relation to the Second World War, and also emphasised the importance of eccentric and maverick figures to the cultural climate. If some of the material I have looked at is of questionable quality, it is all of socio-cultural significance, and illustrative of the unique cultural and historical pressures at work on artists and writers in Northern Ireland during the war. It is also worth noting that many of the writers with whom this study is concerned, particularly the poets, were very young, in sharp contrast, for instance, with the overwhelmingly geriatric composition of the Stormont establishment at the time. If the contested and fragmentary nature of the province’s experience of the war is reflected in both the content and the form of many of the texts I have discussed, the concentrated nature of the wartime artistic and literary community is reflected in the composition of the thesis itself, as figures such as Hewitt, Greacen, Kiely and Middleton recur across the chapters.

These explorations should provide grounds for a reappraisal of Northern Ireland’s cultural history: the archaeological research I have undertaken could be seen to constitute a cultural pre-history for Heaney and his contemporaries. It is striking how some late twentieth century critical concerns were anticipated by earlier writers: Greacen recalled being taunted with the term ‘Ulster Renaissance’ in Campbell’s café, whilst the use by writers of all convictions of the word ‘bridgehead’ can be seen to foreshadow Edna Longley’s conception of Northern Ireland as ‘a frontier-region, a cultural corridor, a zone where Ireland and Britain permeate one another.’

A central concern of this thesis has been the paradoxical situation whereby culture in Northern Ireland during the war years became more open to external influence, even as many artists and writers began to place huge emphasis on the local and the regional. The war brought new figures into Northern Ireland but also prevented people from leaving. In Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, Terence Brown draws on the work of Clifford Geertz, who argued in the essay ‘After the Revolution: The Fate of Nationalism in the New States’ that newly independent states in the twentieth century exhibited a tension between epochalism and essentialism, impulses which encouraged states either ‘to move with the tide of the present [or] to hold on to an

inherited course’. Brown argues that these terms are ‘highly illuminatory of the Irish experience since independence’, but Geertz’s distinction is also surely relevant to Northern Ireland’s experience of the Second World War. The tension between the two impulses can be observed in all the chapters of this thesis: in Kiely’s fuzzy topography, in John Hewitt’s regionalist vacillations, in Middleton’s Belfast surrealism, but perhaps most clearly in the political debate between those who believed in adhering to the neutral policy of the southern state and those who wished to show that Northern Ireland was fully involved in the British war effort, and was an active and morally righteous participant in the global war.

As I suggested in the first chapter of this thesis, in relation to the involvement of the southern fire brigades in fighting fires in Belfast following the Easter Tuesday raid of 15 April 1941, it is possible that the Second World War will be increasingly explored as a way of establishing a semi-official shared history in Northern Ireland. Narratives of the war have the ability to cut across sectarian boundaries, by emphasising the cross-community experience of destruction that, crucially, derived from an external source. In September 2005, to mark the sixtieth anniversary of VJ day, and six years after the memorial outside the City Hall had been unveiled, a mural of the Catholic seaman James Magennis appeared in the loyalist estate of Tullycarnet, East Belfast (Fig. 53). It replaced an Ulster Freedom Fighters mural, which had depicted a soldier with a skull’s head, and had included a silhouette of the grim reaper in the background. The new mural was unveiled by local MP and MLA, and future First Minister of Northern Ireland, Peter Robinson. Speaking at the time, the loyalist activist and politician Frankie Gallagher commented that:

When you know local history, it is not such a strange thing to happen. One of the challenges of this mural is education, it’s about learning local history. We spend all our years learning about English Tudors and all the rest of it and we don’t actually know what happened to each other across the divides. With taking this type of approach we are going to end up with a better understanding of each others’ perspectives within each others’ communities.

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20 Ibid., paras 11, 12, 13 of 17.
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