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<i>Dissertation title:</i> Hero or Sell-Out? Irish and British Opinions on Michael Collins during the Irish War of Independence, the Irish Civil War and later periods.		
<i>Supervisor:</i> Lester Mason	<i>Word count:</i> 11069	
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Hero or Sell-Out?
Irish and British Opinions on Michael Collins during
the Irish War of Independence, the Irish Civil War
and later periods.

Declan Lennon

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of a B.A. in Modern Historical Studies
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
May 2020

Abstract

It is not possible to state the significance Michael Collins had to the Irish Independence movement enough, fighting the British into submission with his counter intelligence and guerrilla warfare tactics as Director of Intelligence and later Director of Organisation of the Ira during the War of Independence alongside being one of only five Irish politicians to negotiate and sign the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 which created the Irish Free State. The aim of the research is to establish whether Irish and British opinions on Michael Collins and his achievements have altered. This question is being asked due to the significant events that occurred in Ireland during Collin's life and career in which he played a significant and influential role, the effect of these events also had a knock on effect on the formation of the Republic Ireland as a nation and the subsequent troubles that occurred between the late 1960s and the late 1990s. These events include; the Irish War of Independence fought from January 1919 to July 1921; the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921 which came into effect March 1922; the Irish Civil War which was fought between June 1922 and May 1923; and finally the death of Michael Collins which occurred on 22nd August 1922. In order to achieve these aims it will be required to consider and approach perceptions regarding Collins at the periods of the events previously discussed and compare and contrast with views about Collins today. With it now nearing 100 years since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and approaching 100 years since his death there is a need to refocus on his impact and achievements along with readdressing opinions held regarding Collins.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people, without whom I would not have been able to complete this research, and without whom I would not have made it through my degree. My dissertation supervisor Dr Lester Mason, whose insight and knowledge into the subject matter steered me through this research, has put up with my incessant e-mailing and for all his wisecracking despite supporting the wrong Merseyside team. My personal tutor Dr Alexander Scott who has provided the feedback and advice which has helped me improve my work throughout the degree, who has also lectured the most interesting and educating modules of my degree (and also supports the wrong Merseyside team). Lesley Stevens who has provided me with support and pointed me in the right direction throughout the three years. Professor Richard English of Queen's University Belfast for providing me with the inspiration for choosing my topic for this dissertation all the way back in my first year of university. Dr Ruan O'Donnell, University of Limerick for all his advice and source material recommendations. The members of the Facebook groups, 'The life and times of The Big Fella', 'Irish Military History' and '1916 Easter Rising', with all your book and source recommendations, advice and opinions. My Mother, Nain, Taid, Nanny and Uncle Ian, who have all pushed me to achieve my best work and pushed me to ensure I complete my degree. And my biggest thanks to my partner and my kids, sorry for being even grumpier than normal whilst I wrote this dissertation. To Kim thanks for all your support, encouragement, putting up with my moaning and keeping the kids occupied while I did my work, without which I would have stopped these studies a long time ago, you have been amazing.

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Introduction - Aims and Methodology

Michael Collins believed that British rule in Ireland had undermined everything that was Irish and simply wanted to turn Ireland in to a British province, and that in order to achieve this the British needed to erase Irish civilisation. Collins emphasises this point stating in his book *The Path to Freedom* that a continuation of British rule meant:

‘the destruction of our democratic Gaelic social system, the discouragement, the prohibition of all enterprise, leaving us only a slave life on the land, and the imposition upon us of an alien language, alien laws, alien ideas, made our subjugation complete. Our economic subjection was necessary that we might serve Britain’s purpose’.¹

Although many had deemed the 1916 Easter Rising a failure, Collins did not share this view, stating that the Easter Rising provided a catalyst for the Irish War of Independence ‘It appeared at the time of surrender to have failed, but that valiant effort and the martyrdoms which followed it finally awoke the sleeping spirit of Ireland.’²

Dissertation Structure

In order to fully address the question posed by this dissertation opinions on Collins will be analysed by studying three distinct periods in Irish history; firstly asking what views were held regarding Collins during his life, during the War of Independence and prior to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty; secondly by questioning how Collins was viewed following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and immediately following his death; and

¹ Michael Collins, *The Path to Freedom* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 1996). p. 47.

² Ibid. p. 53.

finally by questioning whether feelings towards Collins have altered through passing decades to today from the sentiments expressed at his death and the immediate aftermath. Chapter one shall focus on the first question posed, looking at how the British perceived Collins and his leadership of the Irish Republicans during the War of Independence, while also questioning how the Irish public and Irish politicians felt. The second chapter shall consider the opinions of the Irish public, politicians and British politicians regarding Collins and his involvement in the negotiation and signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Chapter two will also address how he was viewed following his subsequent assassination during the Irish Civil War. Chapter three of this dissertation shall address whether opinions of Collins have altered since the 1920s and whether the people of Ireland today hold differing opinions about the man. It will also examine whether depictions or references to Collins in popular culture have influenced the views on him. This dissertation aims to show that during the War of Independence Collins was regarded as a hero by the Irish population and the willingness of the British to negotiate had proved that Collins had defeated the mighty power of the British Military and subsequently the British viewed him as a terrorist and not a freedom fighter, or a legitimate political figure. It will also show that following the negotiations and the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 the opinions held by the Irish public and politicians altered and became divided and that Collins was deemed to have betrayed the Irish Republican movement. Finally, this dissertation shall prove that although Collins had been deemed to have betrayed the nation of Ireland in his negotiations and signing of the Treaty, through the passing of time and through the view of hindsight opinions of Collins have once again changed and that he has been returned to hero

status amongst the Irish population and simply forgotten amongst the British population.

Methodology

With regards to the methodology and approach adopted this research shall initially utilise an empirical-based exercise in reviewing primary source materials. The research shall rely on first-hand accounts of events and individuals who worked alongside and against Collins throughout his life; these shall include: works by Sir Winston Churchill regarding Ireland; British Prime Minister Sir David Lloyd George; and accounts from Collins' Irish political counterparts such as Eamon De Valera, Arthur Griffiths and Cathal Brugha. The analysis will also focus on secondary source material such as Tim Pat Coogan and his work *Michael Collins*.³ The research will also review newspapers from the time of the events including those in which Collins had a direct involvement: *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Times*, *The Freemans Journal* and *The Cork Examiner* (now known as *The Irish Examiner*). There will also be a concentration on whether primary sources and newspapers held particular agendas and biases towards or against Collins and also the Treaty. Other primary sources shall also be utilised in this research such as those available at the National Library for Ireland, for example letters between Collins and Minister for Home Affairs Austin Stack.⁴ It is worth stating despite the numerous works regarding Collins' life and career *The Path to Freedom* is the only book that Collins himself wrote, and unlike many politicians and military leaders there is no

³ Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins* (London; Arrow Books, 2015).

⁴ Michael Collins, 'Letter to Austin Stack' dated 26 March 1919 in *National Library of Ireland: Austin Stack Papers* <<http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000781221>> [Accessed 20 March 2020].

diary that has been discovered or published.⁵ There is a reliance on material from other individuals and sources such as first-hand accounts of those that worked and fought alongside as well as those opposed to Collins. Alongside accounts from close friends of Collins and letters from and to Collins stored in archives such as a letter from Collins' brother Patrick stored in the University College Dublin's archives.⁶ The narrative around the changing views on Collins will also be given added context and an historiographical setting through both a literary review and by constant reference to other secondary source material on the man and his legacy. As well as the Coogan publication cited above, these secondary sources shall include: Coogan's autobiography on Eamon De Valera;⁷ the research of Paul Bew in *Churchill & Ireland*;⁸ Margery Forester's book entitled *Michael Collins: The Lost leader*.⁹ There will also be a referral to articles that appear in newspapers today that focus on Collins' life and career.

The research that is being carried out in the dissertation has originality due to the void in research regarding the compiling of opinions and thoughts with respect to Collins from both the British and Irish collections. The main aim of this study is to explore attitudes about Collins during his lifetime and since, and to establish any constants in these attitudes and what views on the man have survived over the years, against changing or contrasting views. Only then can an accurate judgement about the legacy of Collins be established. There has been an abundance of research carried out by a

⁵ Collins, *The Path to Freedom* (1996).

⁶ Patrick Collins, 'Letter from Patrick Collins (brother) to Michael Collins concerning the possibility of Michael going to Chicago' in *UCD Digital Library: Papers of Michael Collins (1890-1922)* <<https://digital.ucd.ie/view-media/ivrla:11519/canvas/ivrla:11520>> [Accessed 30 March 2020].

⁷ Tim Pat Coogan, *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow* (London, Arrow Books, 1993).

⁸ Paul Bew, *Churchill & Ireland* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁹ Margery Forester, *Michael Collins: The Lost Leader* (Dublin; Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 2006).

number of historians in regards to Collins such as works as earlier mentioned by Tim Pat Coogan; and Margery Forester; along with research carried out T. Ryle Dwyer.¹⁰ The majority of the work however has been compiled in order to provide a narrative on the life of Collins, or a focus on Collins' guerrilla warfare and Intelligence tactics. This is where the research in this dissertation differs.

¹⁰ T. Ryle Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow: A Joint Biography of Collins and de Valera* (Dublin; Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 1999).

Chapter 1 - Views on Collins during his career, War or Independence and prior to the negotiation and Signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty

In his book Peter Hart discusses the mythology surrounding Collins, and states that there is a common misconception regarding Collins' intelligence and covert operations, he states that Collins did not receive any legitimate information regarding the British's actual tactics simply the times and dates of planned raids and names of spies employed by the British.¹¹ Hart also plays down Collins' influence further saying 'Collins was brilliant – although not quite the soldier and strategist of the standard portrayal – but we need to scrape away the layers of mythology and idolization that have encrusted his reputation, and we must be aware of the limits of his reach'.¹² When saying this Hart is stating that Collins' tactics do not live up to what has been written about him; Hart argues that the reason the war resulted in the British agreeing to negotiations with the Irish was due to the poor tactics of the British and not due to the superior tactics of Collins and the Irish. While Hart is in some respects correct, it is however, possible to view his work as holding a biased viewpoint. Hart is a renowned British military historian; whose views tend to lean towards a bias in favour of the British Military. There are several instances where the reliability of his work has come into question from other Historians such as Meda Ryan and Niall Meehan. Ryan questions Hart's work regarding the Kilmichael ambush.¹³ While Meehan discussed another of Hart's work regarding Protestant killings by the IRA and suggests Hart purposely omitted

¹¹ Peter Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland 1920-21: The Final Reports* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002). p. 11.

¹² Ibid. p. 13.

¹³ Meda Ryan, 'The Kilmichael Ambush, 1920: Exploring the Provocative Chapters', *History*, Vol. 92 No. 2, April 2007. pp. 235-249.

information to validate his argument.¹⁴ Thus, this must be considered when judging using Hart's work and that there may be a reason to question his work which may prove as unreliable.

Other sources with potential biased viewpoints include works by historian Tim Pat Coogan who has written an autobiography of Michael Collins, amongst other works on the man, as well as an autobiography of Eamon de Valera. In Coogan's work it is abundantly clear to see that he holds certain biases in his views. Coogan views the Irish War of Independence through very 'Irish-centric' rose-tinted glasses. Evidence of pro-Collins and anti-de Valera bias are also evident in Coogan's autobiography of de Valera where Collins is presented as the hero and his rival the more villainous character.

When focusing on newspapers and the press there is also a need to consider the bias or allegiances evident within the sources which discuss Collins. Newspapers in Ireland had an extremely significant influence and importance with 500,000 copies being sold on a daily basis.¹⁵ Newspapers cannot be mentioned without discussing the duress under which they were placed from both sides of the War of Independence; the British established a Public Information Branch located at Dublin Castle,¹⁶ while the Dáil Éireann created and operated a Department of Propaganda.¹⁷ Newspapers prior to 1920 were liable to censorship at the hand of DORA (Defence of Realm Act) which then became ROIA (Restoration of Order in Ireland Act). Newspapers were also suppressed,

¹⁴ Meehan, 'Examining Peter Hart', 2014. pp. 102-147.

¹⁵ Ian Kenneally, *The Paper Wall: Newspaper and Propaganda in Ireland 1919-1921* (Cork; The Collins Press, 2008). p. 1.

¹⁶ Kenneally, *The Paper Wall*. p. 12.

¹⁷ Kenneally, *The Paper Wall*. pp. 62-63.

prosecuted and received violent attacks and intimidation tactics by British forces, while the IRA also utilised intimidation tactics they did not however, have the legislative power such as that of the DORA or ROIA to wield. It was not unusual for newspapers in Ireland to be owned and run by Members of Parliament especially those in the IPP (Irish Political Party), this was the case for a significant number of provincial newspapers such as William Murphy who owned the *Irish Independent*.¹⁸ These newspapers voiced the beliefs of their owners who while they held nationalist views, were constitutionalists and did not condone the physical force used by the Republicans. The Irish independent voiced Murphy's concern and lack of confidence that the newly established Dáil would be able to deliver an independent Irish republic, and the newspaper publicly expressed his opinion that if the formation of the Dáil "*did not result in an Irish republic then it risked being ridiculed far more than being opposed*".¹⁹ Certain papers such as the *Irish Independent*, held strong views opposing the IRA and openly criticised the 1916 Easter Rising, the Paper regarded the Rising as "insane and criminal" using the Headline "Criminal Madness",²⁰ a sentiment voiced by many papers in Ireland, this was at a time just as the Irish Republican movement was begging to gain sympathetic support. However, it is possible that this criticism of the Rising and its leaders was due to the fear from newspapers receiving unwanted attention from British forces due to DORA. It is also stated by Lord Decies (who held the position of Censor of Newspapers), that DORA could be responsible for the lack of warmth reception in the press regarding the opening

¹⁸ Kenneally, *The Paper Wall*. pp. 101-102.

¹⁹ 'A Dail Eireann', *Irish Independent*, 22 January 1919. British Newspaper Archive, <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001715/19190122/017/0002?browse=true>> [Accessed 05 March 2020].

²⁰ 'Criminal Madness', *Irish Independent*, 4 May 1916, p. 2. <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001715/19160504/028/0002>> [Accessed 1 April 2020].

of the Dáil Éireann, saying “it would not suit them at this juncture to provoke interference of the Government by inflammatory articles”.²¹ Ian Kenneally states that Dáil members such as Collins, de Valera and Griffiths were all mindful of the need to cultivate relationships with the press in Ireland.²²

While focussing on political and military rivalries it is noticeable that possibly the most significant and one of the most studied rivalries in Irish political history is that between Eamon de Valera and Michael Collins. However, there was not always rivalry and distrust between Collins and de Valera, indeed in 1917 de Valera called a meeting attempting to unite all of Sinn Féin, IRB members and non-IRB members, de Valera’s rhetoric spoke that there is only one aim of the movement and that is of an Irish Republic.²³ It was also decided in the meeting that it was crucial that Arthur Griffith be removed as President of Sinn Féin, Collins fought more than any other IRB member to secure de Valera as the new President.²⁴ However, de Valera held very little trust in Collins and regarded him as a plotter.²⁵ During the fight for Irish independence Eamon de Valera and Collins shared very few political beliefs, apart from one, the need for Irish independence. While Collins believed that independence should be gained by engaging the British in combat and playing them at their own game, de Valera believed that independence should be gained politically rather than through warfare and that in order

²¹ Kew, National Archives, Colonial Office 904 167, file no 416, Lord Decies, *Press Censorship Reports*, January 1919.

²² Kenneally, *The Paper Wall* (2008). p. 3.

²³ Margery Forester, *Michael Collins*. p. 80.

²⁴ Margery Forester, *Michael Collins*. p. 81.

²⁵ Tom Garvin, ‘De Valera and Tories failed to see reality of republic’, *IrishTimes.co.uk*, 10 January 1997 <<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/de-valera-and-tories-failed-to-see-reality-of-republic-1.20561>> [Accessed 17 March 2020].

to gain independence by political means then the Irish Independence Movement must have support internationally. De Valera could see no better country to gain support from in terms of international influence than America, a country that had seen large numbers of Irish Immigrants arrive upon its shores from the early 18th century to the early 1900s.²⁶ It is the descendants of these immigrants who had formed societies such as the Friends of Irish Freedom (FOIF), an organisation in America that had been created in 1916 whose members included composer Victor Herbert and Judge John D. Moore.²⁷ The FOIF's members also included Judge William Cohalan who was very influential among both the Republican and Democratic parties.²⁸ Despite this respectable appearance, behind the FOIF lay the Clan nan Gael, a sister organisation to the IRB, which operated in a similar way to the IRB and supported Collins' belief that Irish independence would only be won through armed conflict.²⁹ During the first Dáil meeting de Valera had nominated an Irish delegate to attend the Paris Peace Conference.³⁰ However, due to Britain's objection both America and France would not accept an Irish presence at the Conference. It was this lack of international recognition that caused de Valera to feel it necessary to travel to America in order to rally influential international support for Irish independence by going 'over the head' of American President Woodrow Wilson and appealing to the American public.³¹ In June of 1919, four months after escaping Lincoln Prison de Valera departed Ireland in order to tour America, this

²⁶ H. Tyler Blethen and Curtis W. Wood, *From Ulster to Carolina: The Migration of the Scotch-Irish to Southwestern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998). p. 907.

²⁷ Coogan, *De Valera* p. 141.

²⁸ '100 years ago De Valera arrives in US as a hero but splits Irish America', *Irishcentral.com*, 17 January 2020 <<https://www.irishcentral.com/opinion/others/de-valera-hero-splits-irish-america>> [Accessed 18 March 2020].

²⁹ Coogan, *De Valera*. p. 141

³⁰ Coogan, *De Valera*. p. 133.

³¹ Earl of Longford and T.P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (London; Hutchinson, 1970). p. 83.

achieved several goals; it provided de Valera with access to meeting influential Americans such as the FOIF it also provided de Valera the opportunity to evade being recaptured by the British. Prior to departing de Valera initially offered the position of Acting President to Cathal Brugha but this was refused.³² The position was then subsequently given to Arthur Griffiths, a politician who many people regarded as too old to take on this responsibility, Griffiths much like Collins, was also distrusted by de Valera. However, this opinion regarding Griffiths age also shared by Collins himself (despite Collins and Griffiths holding similar political beliefs), as well as Harry Boland and Cathal Brugha. While in America it was being increasingly felt by the Dáil that de Valera had been losing touch with events in Ireland, this is confirmed by Coogan who states “He (de Valera) lost touch with the reality of the situation there for a crucial period”.³³ This is also proved by Forester in her book when writing “De Valera’s stay in America had inevitably affected his comprehension of the way the winds blew in Ireland”.³⁴ An indicative insight into the resentment felt by de Valera towards Collins was upon hearing of Arthur Griffith’s arrest in November 1920 and the position of Acting President being taken up by Michael Collins; de Valera immediately began planning his return to Ireland.³⁵ Another blow to de Valera that reinforced his decision to return to Ireland was his reading in the papers of meetings discussing peace between British Prime Minister Lloyd George and Collins. De Valera felt that if anyone was going to supervise peace negotiations with the British it should be himself.³⁶ Upon de Valera’s return to Ireland in the early hours of the morning on 23 December, he was met by trusted IRA members

³² Coogan, *De Valera*. p.

³³ Coogan, *De Valera* p. 193.

³⁴ Forester, *Michael Collins*. p. 187.

³⁵ Coogan, *De Valera*. p. 191.

³⁶ Coogan, *De Valera*. p. 191.

Batt O'Connor and Tom Cullen and when asked by de Valera how everything was going Cullen replied "Great! The big fellow is leading us and everything is going marvellous" to which de Valera hits a guard rail and replies "Big Fellow! We'll see who's the Big Fellow...".³⁷ Immediately following his return to Ireland de Valera found fault with how things had been run during his time away, and he especially opposed the methods in which Collins had fought the British.³⁸ After returning to Ireland during a meeting on Christmas Eve with Richard Mulcahy (IRA Chief of Staff), de Valera remarked "You are going too fast. This odd shooting of a policeman here and there is having a very bad effect, from the propaganda point of view, on us in America. What we want is, one good battle about once a month with about 500 men on each side".³⁹ This provides an example of the differing thoughts between Collins and de Valera on how the war against the British should be fought; it illustrates how Collins focused the efforts of the IRA into the disruption of the British in Ireland, while de Valera was distracted with gathering support from America and preoccupied with the 'self-image' of Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Movement on the international political stage. This also shows a prime example of the difference in opinions between the two men on how Irish independence should be gained. Dr T. Ryle Dwyer discusses the differences between Collins and de Valera and suggests that while as President, de Valera publicly portrayed a subdued individual, however, privately he held an assertive attitude and approach to situations. This was in contrast to Collins who privately supported a more constrained approach than he did privately.⁴⁰ One of the few occasions where de Valera and Collins both

³⁷ Coogan, *De Valera*. p. 196.

³⁸ Coogan, *De Valera*. p. 198.

³⁹ Dublin, University College Archives, *Mulcahy Papers Collection 'Interpolations to Pearce Beasley Mss'*.

⁴⁰ Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow*. p. 31.

agreed was about the decision to attack the Custom House in Dublin (one of the most impressive and imposing buildings that acted as a stronghold for the British in the city).⁴¹ Both agreed for different reasons; a lot of de Valera's focus was on gaining support internationally; de Valera believed that the raid would have the desired effect of gaining publicity across the globe. However, Collins' focus laid mainly on causing disruption to the British in Ireland and declaring war upon them. The raid upon the Custom House had both desired effects, however, it was deemed a failure as many of the IRA's best men were captured, six men were killed, and a dozen injured.

A less well documented rivalry, but equally as fierce was that between Collins and Cathal Brugha. Despite refusing the position of Acting President during de Valera's trip to America, Brugha had been overcome with jealousy at Collins taking honours (Acting President), that were deservedly his.⁴² Brugha being the elder of the two thought in polar opposite to Collins, Coogan states "Given the differences in their attitudes to almost everything that mattered Collins would inevitably have had to clash with the formulaic, rule-book approach of the older man".⁴³ Brugha's methods of warfare were extremely static which differed from the ever evolving and reacting tactics of Collins. Brugha still believed in fighting in terms similar to the way in which the Easter Rising was fought. Brugha intended to fight within the rules and opposed Collins use of ambushing as a method to fight the British, and Collins' penchant for baiting people proved particularly frustrating for Brugha. There is no more telling example of Brugha's defiance of Collins ambushing tactics that when selecting the British spy collective to be

⁴¹ Coogan, *De Valera*. p. 215.

⁴² Coogan, *De Valera*. p. 190.

⁴³ Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 70.

assassinated on the day known as Bloody Sunday. From the thirty-five selected individuals Brugha insisted on the rejection of fifteen due to lack of evidence, then on the 20th November the final list of those to be assassinated was compiled and placed inside Dick McKee's pocket (a member who had fought in the Easter rising, a close friend of Collins' and was asked by Collins to select his famous 'Squad'). Brugha insisted he looked at this list to ensure that nobody had been added since the prior meeting.⁴⁴ There were other occasions, particularly during Gaelic League meetings, where Collins delighted in purposefully infuriating Brugha with 'nit-picking' questions on events.⁴⁵ Following the deemed failure of the Easter Rising Brugha despised the IRB and considered the volunteers a defensive force, not offensive and should only be utilised if the British attacked the Irish population for example during the attempt to enforce conscription. There was no belief from Brugha that the IRB could ever mount to a campaign against the British. It was this dislike and disdain regarding the IRB with which de Valera found a mutual position with Brugha.⁴⁶ Brugha's thoughts differed from Collins' over the issue of assassinating G-men (G-men were British governmental intelligence agents or spies). Brugha was of the opinion that if a G-man was killed his information died with him and the next G-man that appeared in his place would be far more reluctant to provide the IRA with information.⁴⁷ There was also a lack of trust from Brugha regarding the younger Collins' control of the IRB; Brugha was all too aware of the hidden resources and power that the IRB held.⁴⁸ One of de Valera's earliest decisions following his American expedition was to request that Collins go to America, a

⁴⁴ O'Connor, *Collins and the Troubles*. pp. 179-180.

⁴⁵ Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 70.

⁴⁶ Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 71.

⁴⁷ Forester, *Michael Collins*. p. 126.

⁴⁸ Forester, *Michael Collins*. P. 126.

request greatly supported by Brugha, showing a great keenness to be rid of Collins from Ireland mostly due to his resentment towards Collins.⁴⁹ However de Valera found no other support for his request, and along with his refusal to leave Ireland it was decided that Collins' would remain.

During the early part of 1921 Lloyd George considered Collins as the extremist and de Valera as the slightly more constrained of the two. Collins, despite being the enemy and considered the more extreme between de Valera and Collins, was held in quite good regard by Lloyd George and colleagues during the War of Independence, even more so following the Treaty in a period when there was relative peace with the British. There was even an occasion during a dinner where British Secretary of State for War Worthington Evans spoke of his admiration of Collins' tactics and military genius to Field Marshall Henry Wilson which resulted in an argument between the pair that nearly ended in a fistfight.⁵⁰ However, Lloyd George's feelings towards Collins were not simply based on admiration but raised the question as to how he could put Collins' position and trust amongst the Dáil and IRA to the best use. The British Prime Minister was able to assess Collins' position amongst the other Dáil politicians through a network of British moles, and with the information he received he was able to inform his cabinet on 27th April that Collins and de Valera had 'quarrelled', but his information he received as to the reason for their quarrel was not correct and so Lloyd George informed his cabinet that it would be impossible for de Valera to enter negotiations with the British and return to Ireland without the Republic, for if he was to do so he may be shot by Collins

⁴⁹ Forester, *Michael Collins*. p. 187.

⁵⁰ Diary of Henry Wilson, 17 October 1921, quoted by T. Ryle Dwyer in *Michael Collins: The Man Who Won The War* (Cork; Mercier Press, 1990). p. 51.

and the IRA.⁵¹ Lloyd George then received further information which he fed to his cabinet that de Valera was in fact averse to war with the British and that he was simply overruled by the militants organised by Collins.⁵²

⁵¹ Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 220.

⁵² Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 221.

Chapter 2 – Views on Collins during the Treaty negotiations, the Civil War and the immediate years following his death.

It was during the Treaty negotiations that the rivalry between Brugha and Collins grew to its most fierce. There are several examples where Brugha goes out of his way in seeking to embarrass Collins; one occasion was in July of 1921 when Collins' Assistant Director of Intelligence Tom Cullen caused the expulsion of an innocent English civilian from Ireland. Brugha immediately seized the opportunity to bring the issue up with the Dáil Cabinet.⁵³ A second occasion where Brugha sought to embarrass Collins was two months following the Cullen episode when Brugha attempted to designate Austin Stack, a keen opposer of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and an ally through resentment towards Collins, as Deputy Chief of Staff to Chief of Staff Richard Mulcahy. Upon Mulcahy objecting to this appointment Brugha attempted to dismiss Mulcahy from his position by way of a letter full of animosity aimed towards Mulcahy and Collins. The letter stated 'Before you are very much older my friend, I shall show you that I have as little intention of taking dictation from you as to how I should reprove inefficiency or negligence on the part of yourself or the D/I (meaning Director of Intelligence Collins) as I have of allowing you to appoint a Deputy Chief of Staff of your own choosing'.⁵⁴ The matter was brought to de Valera's attention and a meeting was called between Mulcahy, de Valera and Brugha. The way in which de Valera dealt with that matter made it abundantly clear to Collins that while de Valera might not have been a participant or involved in the mud-slinging himself it was in no uncertain terms that Collins understood de Valera would do

⁵³ Coogan, *De Valera*. p. 205.

⁵⁴ Dublin, University College, *Mulcahy Papers Collection*, 'Brugha to Mulcahy', 13 September 1921.

very little to stop or impede others from doing so.⁵⁵ Sean Dowling, an officer in the IRA, stated regarding the relationship between Brugha and Collins, “Cathal Brugha hated Collins like poison...Brugha was Minister for Defence but he never did anything...Collins was so energetic that he had usurped many of Brugha’s functions; he sure was hated by him”.⁵⁶ De Valera recognised the tension and animosity between Brugha and Collins however, but made no attempt to resolve this issue. During a conversation between Mulcahy and de Valera, where Mulcahy complained regarding Brugha, de Valera stated to Mulcahy “You know I think Cathal is jealous of Mick. Isn’t it a terrible thing to think that a man with the qualities that Cathal undoubtedly has would fall victim to a dirty little vice like jealousy”.⁵⁷

While Collins and Griffith are credited or held responsible for the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, depending on the readers disposition, negotiations did not simply begin upon the delegation’s arrival in London. Negotiations had earlier commenced with a series of meetings in July 1921 between de Valera and Lloyd George. De Valera had taken a select few chosen individuals with him to London leaving out Collins (much to Collins’ disapproval), however, de Valera insisted on the meetings with the British Prime Minister take place alone.⁵⁸ De Valera chose to keep Collins informed regarding these meetings seemingly utilising the opportunity in order to achieve two goals; firstly to ensure that the Dáil remained informed of what was discussed; and secondly to ensure Collins was kept in his place and confirming that Collins knew in no uncertain terms that

⁵⁵ Piaras Beaslai, *Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland*, vol. II (Dublin; Phoenix Publishing Company, 1926). p. 292.

⁵⁶ Uinseann MacEoin, *Survivors* (Dublin; Argenta. 1987). p. 405.

⁵⁷ T. Ryle Dwyer, *Michael Collins: The Man Who Won The War* (Dublin; Mercier, 1990). p. 130.

⁵⁸ Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 221.

it was de Valera who was President, stating in a letter on 15 July to Collins regarding a meeting between Lloyd George and himself “the meetings have been between us two alone as principals”.⁵⁹ There had even been drafts of agreements drawn up by Lloyd George and proposed to de Valera, which he flatly rejected.⁶⁰

The level of distrust and disdain shown from de Valera and Cathal Brugha could hardly make for a worse framework for Collins and the Treaty delegation to be entering negotiations with the British. During a meeting of the Dáil in order to select the members of the delegation to London, it was Griffiths who was first selected by de Valera to lead the collective, a proposal voted against by Griffiths himself and Collins, however, de Valera held the deciding vote. Following Griffiths selection de Valera proposed that Collins be a member of the delegation, a proposal deeply and strongly opposed by Collins who insisted that it was a job for politicians, one of which (despite his role in the Dáil) he noted he was not.⁶¹ De Valera had several reasons in which to choose Collins as a part of the delegation: firstly it would rid Collins from the country and distance Collins from provoking any reaction should the British offer any unreasonable terms; secondly de Valera knew all too well the influence Collins held over the IRA and that Collins’ acceptance of any terms would encourage other IRA members to support the terms; the third reason de Valera had for sending Collins is probably the most discussed of the three reasons, that through his own negotiations with Lloyd George he was fully aware that there was little to no possibility of a deal that

⁵⁹ Eamon de Valera, ‘to Michael Collins’, 15 July 1921, No. 139, File UCDA P150/151 in Documents on Irish Foreign Policy <<https://www.difp.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=139>> [Accessed 30 March 2020].

⁶⁰ Coogan, *De Valera*. p. 236.

⁶¹ Forester, *Michael Collins*. p. 218.

included the northern counties or Ireland as a republic. It appears that, in an almost prophetic manner, de Valera understood that any deal between the British and Irish would create animosity and friction in Ireland, and was quoted by Dáil Éireann member and wife of the late Tom Clarke, Kathleen Clarke as saying “We must have scapegoats”.⁶² Collins grudgingly agreed to be part of the delegation, and as periods of imprisonment and years of pressure and stress had paid a price on the now ageing Griffiths, it was agreed later between Griffiths and Collins that the latter would in effect be leader of the delegation, however, Griffiths would still hold the official title.

A significant figure in the negotiations of the Anglo-Irish Treaty was Winston Churchill. A British politician who at the time of the Treaty negotiations held the position of Secretary of State for the Colonies. Churchill worked extremely closely with Collins and formed quite a relationship with him, despite their difference in opinions over political issues concerning Ireland they shared the same manic depressive tendency.⁶³ Churchill guided the Treaty through the House of Commons even when events in Ireland looked set to derail the venture.⁶⁴ Most of Churchill’s work regarding the treaty was not during the actual negotiations but at the home of Sir John Lavery where meetings between Churchill and Collins were held.⁶⁵ Churchill even hosted Collins in his own residency on the 30th October 1921 where both joked about the experiences they both shared regarding a price being placed upon their heads, with Churchill’s experiences during the

⁶² Debate in the Dáil Éireann Dublin, Vol. T No. 5, 17 December 1921 available at Houses of Oireachtas <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1921-12-17/>> [Accessed 10 March 2020].

⁶³ Paul Bew, *Churchill & Ireland* (London: Oxford University Press, 2016). p. 12.

⁶⁴ Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 238.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 238.

Boer War.⁶⁶ On that same day Lloyd George discussed with Collins the idea of a Belfast Parliament, sharing his belief that a Parliament in Belfast would be subordinate to a parliament in Dublin.⁶⁷ It is this relationship between Churchill and Collins that explains the reasons for Lloyd George trying to distance Churchill from the operation. Eventually a breakthrough emerged between Collins and Churchill, that saw Churchill fully committed to the Anglo-Irish treaty; that turning point came when Collins reassured Churchill that facilities for the Royal Navy in Ireland would be retained by Britain, along with the dropping of the demand for a republic was dropped.⁶⁸ The demand for an Irish republic was dropped as it was known by de Valera through his lengthy discussions with Lloyd George how slender the possibility or prospect of an Irish republic was.⁶⁹ During the negotiations British intelligence had described Collins as “the strongest personality of the party”.⁷⁰

Despite the majority of Collins’s dealings with the British occurring with Churchill, Lloyd George himself was not set against meeting Collins’, even insisting on one occasion that the only way a settlement may be possible is if himself and Collins met stating “No doubt he is the head and font of the movement. If I could see him a settlement might be possible”.⁷¹ The doubt in Lloyd George’s mind was whether the British public would allow their Prime Minister to enter discussions with Collins.⁷² During negotiations Lloyd George attempted to ‘divide and conquer’ the delegation when inviting Griffiths and

⁶⁶ Bew, *Churchill & Ireland*. p. 107.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 107.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 109.

⁶⁹ Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 240.

⁷⁰ Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 240.

⁷¹ Lord Riddell, *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference* (Paris: Gollancz, 1933). p. 238.

⁷² Ibid.

Collins to the home of Churchill. Lloyd George referred to Collins as an “uneducated rather stupid man”.⁷³ Thus during the meeting at Churchill’s home Lloyd George invited Griffiths to a private conversation upstairs and left Collins downstairs in negotiations in Churchill and Lord Birkenhead.⁷⁴

Robert Barton, Dáil Secretary of State for economic Affairs and part of the delegation, is quoted by Langford as stating that Lloyd George in a theatrical manner, held two envelopes up and said to Collins:

Here are the alternative letters I have prepared, one enclosing the Articles of Agreement reached by His Majesty’s Government and yourselves, and the other saying that Sinn Fein representatives refuse the Oath of allegiance and refuse to come within the Empire. If I send this letter, it is war – and war within three days...we must have your answer by ten pm tonight. You can have until then but no longer to decide whether you will give peace or war to your country.⁷⁵

This created an enormous amount of pressure on Collins, on top of the incredible stress he was under partaking in these negotiations. An indicator of this stress and pressure is the description by Churchill regarding Collins in those hours, “Michael Collins rose looking as though he were going to shoot someone, preferably himself. In all my life I have never seen so much pain and suffering in restraint.”⁷⁶ Collins noted that he did not take seriously the threat of war that Lloyd George made if the Irish delegation did not sign the treaty. Collins stated, “On the British side there was duress in that world

⁷³ Forester, *Michael Collins*. p. 238.

⁷⁴ Forester, *Michael Collins*. p. 238.

⁷⁵ Longford and O’Neill, *De Valera*. P. 164.

⁷⁶ Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis: The Aftermath* (London; Thornton Butterworth Limited, 1929). p. 241.

opinion pressed upon them to confirm their practice to their principles to make an honourable peace with us, if possible".⁷⁷ Coogan states that during the negotiations Collins had been studying Dominion states such as Canada, and from this he came to the conclusion that Dominion status was the single most viable settlement between the British and the Republic.⁷⁸

There is an obvious air of intrigue that surrounded Collins which also appeared through the press, this intrigue increased during negotiations, so much so that the *Daily Herald* printed an article stating a London Publishers was willing to pay him £10,000 for his 'reminiscences'.⁷⁹ The intrigue in Collins arose due to the mysteriousness surrounding him and also due to his elusiveness while being pursued by the British Forces. During the War of Independence, Collins had remained a relatively mysterious individual in respects of the British Forces and British population, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* described Collins as the "Most wanted man in the world" but also states that there is a public feeling of 'romance' with Collins.⁸⁰ The *Daily Herald* regarded Collins as 'The Elusive Pimpernel' stating "The mysterious Michael Collins must have a charmed life".⁸¹ Despite being a newspaper from London, the *Daily Herald* discussed Collins in seemingly a charming manner when saying "Everywhere you go in Ireland you hear the most

⁷⁷ Bew, *Churchill & Ireland*. p. 110.

⁷⁸ Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 263.

⁷⁹ 'Mike Collins, £10,000 Offer by London Publisher for His Reminiscences', *Daily Herald*, 15 July 1921, p. 5. <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000681/19210715/079/0005>> [Accessed 1 April 2020].

⁸⁰ 'Most "Wanted" Man In The World: Romance of Elusive Michael Collins', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 31 March 1921, p. 4. <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000563/19210331/050/0004>> [Accessed 30 April 2020].

⁸¹ J.M, 'The Elusive Pimpernel', *Daily Herald*, 24 March 1921, p. 4. <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000681/19210324/102/0004>> [Accessed 1 April 2020].

extraordinary rumours of the wonderful exploits of the ubiquitous ‘Mike’”.⁸² The *Western Morning News* also shared this pleasant and endearing way of discussing Collins, saying that he doesn’t possess the looks of what you would expect the ‘leader of bands of armed men in the hills’ apart from his sturdiness and his build.⁸³ The newspaper also goes on to romantically describe Collins stating “His black hair hangs carelessly over his brow and his eyes are of typically Irish blue”, and goes on further to suggest that if Collins was seen in person you would assume that he was a “light-hearted, happy-go-lucky fellow, with a keen sense of humour, bubbling with the joys of life...his smile disarms one”.⁸⁴ During the negotiations the press appeared to portray Collins in complete opposite to how Churchill had described him; the press implied that Collins showed great vitality and with great energy, this is apparent in a description by the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo* that said “He (Collins) appeared to be in very good spirits and in great haste”.⁸⁵ On 12 August both the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*,⁸⁶ and the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* reported the that a ‘close friend’ of Collins named Mr. Macartney had been asked “Is a settlement coming?” to which he replied “Of course it is. Dublin has no doubt about it nor has de Valera, Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins or any

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ ‘Michael Collins’ Personality’, *Western Morning News*, 11 October 1921, p. 4.
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000329/19211011/030/0004>> [Accessed 25 March 2020].

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ ‘Conferences in Downing Street To-day: Mr. Michael Collins Arrives’, *Northampton Chronicle and Echo*, 27 May 1922, p. 4.
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002130/19220527/052/0004>> [Accessed 6 April 2020].

⁸⁶ ‘New Crisis in the Irish Peace Negotiations’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 12 August 1921, p. 5.
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000576/19210812/038/0005>> [Accessed 5 April 2020].

of the leaders”.⁸⁷ Following the signing of the treaty the British press’ accounts varied incredibly with the *Lancashire Evening Post* saying “The Sinn Fein delegates were wreathed in smiles” and that Collins was “looking benevolence itself”.⁸⁸ This differs from the story told by the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* that states “At long last the Sinn Fein delegates came out, very depressed”.⁸⁹ The *Manchester Evening News* discussed how the rest of the world evaluated the agreement between the Irish and British, quoting a French Newspaper as saying “The agreement is a victory for Ireland but it is at the same time a triumph of common-sense”,⁹⁰ it also went on to quote the *New York Times* as saying “Nothing can really abate the deep satisfaction with which the entire world will receive the news that at last English political genius has found a way to settle a seven hundred years’ controversy”.⁹¹ It appears that internationally the Anglo-Irish Treaty was viewed as an achievement and the best result and compromise considering the situation, however, the people that seemed to disagree were the die-hard Republicans in Ireland who would not settle for anything other than a united Irish Republic. In July 1937 Frank O’Connor wrote an article for *The Scotsman* remarking that “Collins had

⁸⁷ ‘Optimism In Ranks of Sinn Fein’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 12 August 1921, p. 1.

<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000669/19210812/004/0001> [Accessed 7 April 2020].

⁸⁸ ‘The Irish Agreement’, *Lancashire Evening Post*, 7 December 1921, p. 4.

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000711/19211207/193/0004> [Accessed 2 April 2020].

⁸⁹ ‘London Day By Day’, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 7 December 1921, p. 6.

<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000250/19211207/171/0006>> [Accessed 2 April 2020].

⁹⁰ ‘What the World Thinks’, *Manchester Evening News*, 7 December 1921, p. 5.

<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000272/19211207/102/0005>> [Accessed 1 April 2020].

⁹¹ Ibid.

apparently inexhaustible physical energy, he was boisterously sociable and high-spirited, while his coolness in face of danger was almost superhuman.”⁹²

The reaction following the death of Collins in Béal na Bláth on the 22 August 1922 in the newspapers, were of a consistent nature from both the Irish and British prospective, such as the Irish newspaper the *Freeman's Journal*, which regarded the news of his death as 'terrible' and stated that it was the worst news that Ireland had ever heard “The terrible news we announce to-day will move Ireland as nothing has moved her in living memory”.⁹³ The *Dublin Evening Telegraph* dedicated its entire front page to Collins with the headline “He Will Live In The Rule of The People”.⁹⁴ The article also went on to say that there was mourning from ‘all sides’, suggesting that despite the political beliefs there was a strong respect for Collins and all he had achieved for Ireland.⁹⁵ The British newspapers such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* called Collins “A Fearless Soldier” and “A man of magnetic personality beloved by his countrymen”.⁹⁶ Forester says that young republican soldiers that had not fought with Collins expressed elation upon hearing of Collins’ death and viewed it as a victory.⁹⁷ However, Forester also further states that this was not true for all of the Republicans that fought against Collins in the Civil War, and

⁹² Frank O'Connor. 'Michael Collins: An Irish Revolutionary', *The Scotsman*, 01 July 1937. p. 15.
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000540/19370701/156/0015>> [Accessed 13 April 2020].

⁹³ 'Michael Collins Dead', *Freeman's Journal*, 23 August 1922, p. 4.
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000056/19220823/073/0004>> [Accessed 8 April 2020].

⁹⁴ 'He Will Live In The Rule of The People', *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 23 August 1922, p. 1.
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002093/19220823/001/0001>> [Accessed 10 April 2020].

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ 'Michael Collins Shot Dead', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 August 1922, p. 1.
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001947/19220823/007/0001>> [Accessed 6 April 2020].

⁹⁷ Forester, *Michael Collins*. p. 353.

that there is very few occasions in war internationally where the death of the Commander-In-Chief of the opposing forces has brought so much sorrow as that felt by the Republican soldiers.⁹⁸ De Valera upon hearing the news of Collins' death is reputed to have said "It's come to a very bad pass when Irish men congratulate themselves on the shooting of a man like Michael Collins".⁹⁹

The findings of this chapter will enable a conclusion to be reached with regards to how British politicians regarded Collins during the Treaty negotiation and approaches how Collins' rivalries with other Irish politicians grew fiercer due to the fractures that occurred in Irish Politics. The chapter also provided information regarding how Collin's participation in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty was regarded by Irish and British newspapers.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ T. Ryle Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow*. p. 329.

Chapter 3 – Post Civil-War Opinions on Collins.

Over the decades since Collins' death, de Valera during his three periods as Taoiseach and President of Ireland has attempted to bury the memory of Collins. An example of this was the erection of a memorial to Collins and Griffiths in 1923 at Leinster House in Dublin.¹⁰⁰ however, in 1939 under instruction from de Valera the memorial was dismantled only for a new one to be built in 1948 when de Valera had been succeeded as Taoiseach by John A Costello.¹⁰¹ Despite these attempts, Collins would not be forgotten, in the decades following his death Collins' would be idolised and immortalised through film the first instance being the 1936 film *Beloved Enemy*.¹⁰² Several Films followed such as the 1948 film *Portrait of Jennie* and the 1959 film *Shake Hands with the Devil*, both of which portray Collins in all but name.¹⁰³ It can be reasonably assumed these films use other character names, not Michael Collins due to fear of repercussions from the government under de Valera.

The most well-known representation of Collins is the 1996 film entitled *Michael Collins*, with the lead role played by Liam Neeson. The film was devised during the 1980s at a time of great trouble in Ireland and it was decided that the film would be too controversial and was not made until the mid-1990's. The film provoked an enormous reaction while some criticised the film for historical inaccuracies, such as the deaths of

¹⁰⁰ Anthony Jordan, 'Story of most elusive memorial revealed', *Irish Examiner*, 27 June 2008 <https://www.irishexaminer.com/viewpoints/yourview/story-of-most-elusive-memorial-revealed-66005.html> [Accessed 18 April 2020].

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Dermot McEvoy, 'Why Michael Collins and Hollywood was a match made in heaven', *Irish Central*, 24 January 2017 <https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/michael-collins-extraordinary-character-made-great-fodder-for-hollywood-movies> [Accessed 18 April 2020].

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Ned Broy and Harry Boland and the depiction of 'Bloody Sunday'. There was also an element of criticism that the film had glorified and romanticised the violence of the IRA.¹⁰⁴ Despite these criticisms the film was well received and extremely popular having earned four million pounds and was second only to the 1997 film *Titanic* in the all-time Irish box office.¹⁰⁵ The film was welcomed by the Irish public as it brought the subject of Collins and the struggle for Irish freedom to a large international audience and despite the inaccuracies it created a large interest Collins. In doing this the film makers successfully recreated the same sympathetic emotion for the Irish Republican movement in the 1990s as was felt at the time of the Irish War of Independence, but this time to a wider international audience. This created new fans and admirers of Collins, even reaching as far as the sporting world with such admirers as Sir Alex Ferguson.¹⁰⁶ However, It can be argued that while the film made for a good Hollywood action film, its aim of informing film goers about the truth behind the story of Collins was undermined by inaccuracies and misinformation, as many accepted the film uncritically, without questioning any of the detail. The director, Neil Jordan, in an interview, discussed how Collins was a personal hero of his and how growing up in Ireland during de Valera's premiership had a negative impression upon him. This, whether consciously or subconsciously, showed in the film with a bias towards Collins and the unfair demonisation of de Valera; this is (albeit to a larger extent) similar to the

¹⁰⁴ Phillip Malloy, 'It is the untold story of the country', *Irish Independent*, 31 August 1996. P. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Raita Merivirta-Chakrabarti, 'Between Irish National Cinema and Hollywood Neil Jordan's Michael Collins', *Estudios Irlandeses*, vol. 2, 2007. pp. 121-127.

¹⁰⁶ Danie McDonnell, 'Ferguson will have plenty of Irish support for this battle', *Irish Independent*, 7 May 2018 <https://www.independent.ie/sport/soccer/other-soccer/ferguson-will-have-plenty-of-irish-support-for-this-battle-36879983.html> [Accessed 15 April 2020].

sentiments expressed in Tim Pat Coogan's works. Journalist Michael Dwyer called the film 'the most important film made in or about Ireland in the first century of cinema;'.¹⁰⁷

Another representation of Collins is the 1991 film *The Treaty* which starred Irish actor Brendan Gleeson as Collins. While *The Treaty* did not receive the same box-office success as *Michael Collins*, it is however, widely regarded as more factually correct and it is felt that Gleeson played the role of Collins far better than Neeson did in *Michael Collins*, providing a far more accurate portrayal of Collins' character. The fact that this film was a joint venture between the Irish Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) and British Thames Television, both with different allegiances and biases meant that no single the bias proved dominant and both companies wanted to provide a neutral factual account of events.

With it nearing the hundred year anniversary of Collins' death and signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, it has been brought back to the forefront of peoples' consciousness and has started a refocus on the events in Ireland in the early 20th century. This has prompted the arrival of new productions that include new interpretations about Collins, and the passing of time since The Troubles has resulted in a reduced risk of accusations of glorifying IRA violence. One such television series is *Rebellion* produced by RTÉ which addresses the story of Collins in its second season. However, *Rebellion* is widely criticised for its historical inaccuracies (far worse than those evident in Jordan's film),

¹⁰⁷ Michael Dwyer, 'The big film about the Big Fella', *Irish Times*, 31 August 1996. P. 1.

while also attracting criticism for its dramatization of the events that occurred in Ireland.¹⁰⁸

Newspapers have consistently remembered Collins since his death, more so during The Troubles with many a comparison made between the IRA and IRB of Collins era and the Provisional IRA during the troubles. In 1970 the Irish newspaper the *New Ross Standard* described Collins as “the guiding genius of the guerrilla tactics employed”.¹⁰⁹ The *Irish times* newspaper held an online poll in December 1999 in order to discover who was felt by the Irish public to be the “Irish Person of the 20th Century”.¹¹⁰ The poll was carried out via “free-text-entry”, which meant voters could enter any name they felt rather than a predetermined list, and was won by Collins, giving an indication that at this time the Irish public still idolised Collins and acknowledged his achievements and contributions in the struggle for Irish freedom. The newspaper also held a poll for the “Greatest person of the 20th Century” and in a show of complete patriotic bias Collins also won that category beating such people as Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi.¹¹¹ However, despite the bias it still emphasises the previous point about the level at which Collins is still idolised in Ireland. There is, however, no doubt that with the Neil Jordan film *Michael Collins* only being released three years prior to the polls taking place, that this held an enormous influence over voting. Collins’ participation in the negotiations and feelings towards the Treaty still hold influence nearly a hundred years

¹⁰⁸ *Rebellion* (television programme) (Dublin: RTÉ One, 3 January 2016).

¹⁰⁹ ‘Guerrilla war against Tans’, *New Ross Standard*, 21 November 1970. p. 6.

¹¹⁰ ‘Michael Collins is voted Irish person of the century’ *Irish Times*, 31 January 2000
<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/michael-collins-is-voted-irish-person-of-the-century-1.239567>
[Accessed 10 April 2020].

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

on with Pro-Brexit Conservative MP for North Shropshire Owen Paterson even quoting Collins during a debate regarding Brexit in the House of Commons.¹¹² The *Irish Post* in 2020 featured an article discussing the fascination of Collins, and discusses how each year on Valentine's Day his grave is inundated with cards, flowers and gifts from individuals as far away as America.¹¹³ The article again provides an insight into how Collins is still romanticised, admired and idolised internationally and nationally in Ireland. Despite Glasnevin being the site of the graves of Eamon de Valera, Charles Stewart Parnell and Arthur Griffith, it is Collins' grave that still remains the most visited in the cemetery.¹¹⁴

With the arrival of the internet and social media, there has been a strong surge in websites and groups dedicated to and discussing Irish History and Collins, such as the website *Collins 22 Society*,¹¹⁵ and the Facebook groups; *Irish Military History*,¹¹⁶ *Life and Times of "The Big Fella"*,¹¹⁷ and *1916 Irish Easter Rising*.¹¹⁸ These groups have provided a platform for academic and non-academic individuals to exchange theories, partake in debate and to exchange knowledge and source material. It also provides the opportunity for these individuals to express opinion, thus reaching a far larger audience,

¹¹² Rachael O'Connor, 'Brexit MP quotes Irish revolutionary Michael Collins during Commons debate', *Irish Post*, 23 October 2019 <https://www.irishpost.com/news/brexit-mp-quotes-irish-revolutionary-michael-collins-commons-debate-172909> [Accessed 1 April 2020].

¹¹³ Rachael O'Connor, 'Flowers and gifts left on Michael Collins' grave for Valentine's Day', *Irish Post*, 14 February 2020 <https://www.irishpost.com/news/flowers-gifts-left-michael-collins-grave-valentines-day-179515> [Accessed 5 April 2020].

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Collins 22 Society, *Home*, 2014 <http://www.generalmichaelcollins.com/> [Accessed 12 April 2020].

¹¹⁶ Irish Military History [Facebook], <https://www.facebook.com/groups/IrishMilitaryHistory> [Accessed 13 April 2020].

¹¹⁷ Life and Times of "The Big Fella" [Facebook], <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1463872653828466> [Accessed 13 April 2020].

¹¹⁸ 1916 Irish Easter Rising [Facebook], <https://www.facebook.com/groups/333677994241> [Accessed 12 April 2020].

that is widely accessible across the world; it is no longer the “stomping ground?” of highly-read and highly-qualified academic individuals particularly historians. However, the reliability of theories and information shared on the pages must be questioned and taken lightly as the majority of information shared is not supported by references and thus any member of such groups must undertake their own research in order to formulate reliable and informed opinions. Social Media has also provided a platform for the placement of information of dubious academic worth and little more than propaganda with the intention of altering peoples’ perceptions or opinions.

When discussing Collins today there is always one question that is asked what would have happened if Collins had not been killed? Many individuals have theorised and attempted to figure what would have been different had Collins survived the Irish Civil War. Certain theories suggest that Collins would have fought harder than de Valera to end partition and would have achieved a united Ireland, and Dwyer confirms that Collins was far more insistent in forcing the partition discussion than de Valera.¹¹⁹ While others such as Andrew O’Connor suggest that due to the relationships that Collins formed in Britain during the negotiations and his financial background, Collins would have realised the positives of maintaining a relationship with their biggest trade partner, Britain and would have been very reluctant to break the very treaty he worked so hard to create.¹²⁰ However, Dwyer is correct when stating “It is pointless to speculate about what would have happened if Collins had lived...but he did not live long enough, and people cannot

¹¹⁹ Dwyer, *Big Fellow* p. 343.

¹²⁰ Andrew O’Connor, ‘If Michael Collins had not been killed: an alternative history of Ireland’, *Irish Times*, 2 January 2020, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/if-michael-collins-had-not-been-killed-an-alternative-history-of-ireland-1.4128746> [Accessed 10 April 2020].

be judged by what they might have done”.¹²¹ Retrospectively looking at the rivalry between Collins and de Valera, Dwyer states:

All too often the struggle between Collins and de Valera is presented in absolute terms, with one being totally right and the other completely wrong. That is a gross simplification. There were rights and wrongs on both sides.¹²²

Dwyer takes this further by stating “Each made a monumental contribution in his own way”.¹²³ Dwyer also attempts to defend de Valera from the villainization he receives by stating “The manner in which de Valera managed to overcome his earlier mistakes was a testament to his political skills.”¹²⁴

In 1966, forty four years after Collins had died, de Valera reflectively speaking and in full consciousness of how the Irish public felt regarding Collins, stated “It is my considered opinion that in the fullness of time history will record the greatness of Michael Collins and it will be recorded at my expense”.¹²⁵ De Valera made this statement aged 85, while realising that the story of de Valera could not be told without Michael Collins. This statement by de Valera clearly indicates respect and realisation of Collins achievements, and commitment to his country’s cause, despite this respect it does also have an air of resentment surrounding it towards Collins, resentment that Collins was so idolised by the Irish public and that he himself was disliked so widely. There is also the possible resentment that Collins is credited with the achievement of the Anglo-Irish Treaty when it had been de Valera who negotiated for so long with Lloyd George prior to Collins

¹²¹ Dwyer, *Big Fellow, Long Fellow*, p. 343.

¹²² Ibid. pp. 343-344.

¹²³ Ibid. p. 344.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 343.

¹²⁵ Coogan, *Michael Collins*. p. 432.

attending the negotiations. Winston Churchill in volume four of his series of books entitled *The World Title: The Aftermath*, expressed his respect and admiration for Collins stating:

He was an Irish patriot, true and fearless...We had hunted him for his life, and he slipped half a dozen times through steel claws... Love of Ireland still possessed his soul, but to it was added a wider comprehension. Whereas he had had only one loyalty, he now had two. He was faithful to both; he died for both... regard will be paid by widening circles to his life and to his death.¹²⁶

In 1978 Emmet Dalton (who had won the Military Cross military cross during the Great War, then later joining the IRA, followed by the Free State Army) discussed Collins' death on the RTÉ documentary *War and Peace*, he tells of when escorting Collins' body back to Dublin aboard a boat from Cork Quay, they passed a British destroyer which stopped to salute and sounded the Last Post.¹²⁷ This provides evidence of how respect was shown to Collins on both sides of the Irish Sea.

¹²⁶ Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis: The Aftermath* (London; Thornton Butterworth Limited, 1929). pp. 336-337.

¹²⁷ Chris Dalton, *Emmet Dalton remembers: Part 1* [video]. 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM32nOhOz1Q&t=8s&fbclid=IwAR19JX1s1bMiLw-J5JE6aT6C9n-FQMs4pUD89N_qhagQqHn72tTMobXbWWQ&app=desktop [Accessed 15 April 2020].

Conclusion

This research has explored the opinions held regarding Michael Collins, in order to explore those opinions three research questions were asked, the first of which asked what opinions were held of Collins during the War of Independence and prior to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The second question asked what Opinions were held following the signing of the Treaty, during the Civil War and Immediately following his death. Finally, the third question posed asked what opinions had been held regarding Collins following the Civil War to the modern day. A common theme that ran through this research and initially created difficulties was the question of bias; the majority of materials researched held to some degree a biased approach, for example, Tim Pat Coogan's work held a biased approach in favour of Collins and displayed de Valera in a villainous manner, while Peter Hart's work held a biased disregard of the achievements of Collins stating that his intelligence network was ineffective and Neil Jordan's film about Collins held the same biased approach as Coogan. Other sources such as Irish newspapers held their own political agendas according to the owners a lot of whom had been politicians.

This research discovered a consistency to Collin's and de Valera's political agendas, in that they simply shared the common goal of an independent Ireland but held different attitudes and approaches in how to achieve that independence. Collins believed in the disruption of the British operation in Ireland through physical force, fighting the British using intelligence and guerrilla war tactics, while de Valera believed that it could be gained politically and that creating a relationship with the USA would apply pressure

onto Britain resulting in Ireland gaining independence. There was a power struggle between de Valera and Collins; de Valera regarded Collins as a plotter and showed a resentment towards Collins. This resentment was partly due to the idolisation and trust the IRB and IRA showed towards Collins. It was also partly due to the affection the Irish public displayed towards Collins. Differences between the two were described by Dwyer who stated that privately Collins showed himself as rather subdued but publicly assertive while de Valera was the opposite, publicly subdued but more assertive privately. Through his own negotiations with Lloyd George, de Valera soon discovered that there was little to no possibility of attaining an Irish Republic and realised that whoever negotiated the treaty with Britain would return villainised for not attaining a fully-fledged Irish Republic or a United Ireland and thus sent Collins. This relationship between Collins and de Valera did not alter while Collins was alive and de Valera's resentment towards Collins remained until his own death, even his own words towards Collins some fifty years after his assassination held an air of hostility and resentment.

An even fiercer rivalry than de Valera and Collins was the rivalry between Brugha and Collins, as de Valera himself spoke of his thoughts of Brugha's jealousy towards Collins. Brugha's dislike of Collins grew from a deep dislike of the IRB following the Easter Rising. Brugha pounced at every opportunity to show Collins in a negative light, with constant attempts to undermine Collins and embarrass Collins in front of members of the Dáil; Brugha attempted to expose Collins as unable to carry out his job effectively. The way in which Brugha reacted to Collins' organisation of the assassinations on Bloody Sunday is evidence of these attempts at undermining Collins. Sean Dowling's description of

Brugha's hatred for Collins provides a deep insight into the relationship between them.¹²⁸

The majority of British politicians appeared to hold Collins in high regard, or at least respect was shown towards him, despite Lloyd George's assessment of Collins as unintelligent. Lloyd George believed that it was Collins and the IRA that controlled de Valera and that de Valera would be unable to negotiate with the British due to the risk of being shot. Lloyd George realised that negotiations needed to be carried out with Collins but feared how the British public would react to him negotiating with someone they viewed as a terrorist. The dispute between Worthington Evans and Henry Wilson, over the former's public admiration for Collins shows how divisive an individual Collins was. During negotiations a mutual respect and almost friendship developed between Churchill and Collins. Churchill would host Collins at his own dwelling where they would joke about the experience of having a price on their head. This respect Churchill held towards Collins became clearly apparent in Churchill's quote regarding Collins following Collins' death.

The press added to the intrigue and mystery surrounding Collins referring to him as the 'Most Wanted man in the World', 'The Elusive Pimpernel' and the 'mysterious Michael Collins'. British and Irish newspapers studied Collins with a sense of romance and charm discussing his extraordinary exploits in evading capture. This respectful view of Collins only increased following the signing of the Treaty, claiming it as a 'victory for Ireland'

¹²⁸ Coogan, *De Valera*. pp. 200-201.

and stating the entire world would receive the news with deep satisfaction. This romance and idolising of Collins by the press continued with comparisons being made between the Provisional IRA during the Troubles and the IRA under Collins, describing Collins' guerrilla tactics as the work of a 'genius'. The end of the millennium saw the Irish public and newspapers crowning Collins as the 'Irish person of the 20th Century'.

Depictions of Collins in film and television have only aided in the romanticising and idolising of him. It has given an even larger and wider audience the opportunity of knowing Collins, his love for Ireland and commitment to his country. Despite the historical inaccuracies and biased approaches, it has created interest and awareness in the subject of Irish history and the Irish struggle for freedom, something the Irish public have welcomed.

While awareness of Collins may have decreased during the 1950s, 1960s and the 1970s due to his absence from the Irish school's curriculum during de Valera's premiership opinions of him did not alter. With the arrival of the internet and social media these accounts and opinions were increasingly readily available and accessible, and it provided a platform for these opinions to be expressed.

It was the expectation of this research that opinions about Michael Collins would have altered over time, due to a number of factors, however, it is argued here that such opinions have generally remained the same, Public attitudes in Ireland towards Collins have remained consistent, as have more negative views of him, emanating from his

political rivals.. While it cannot categorically be said that Collins was loved and adored by all, it can be said he was and still is respected by the large majority of the Irish people with only small minority expressing a more negative opinion about him and his achievements for Ireland.

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