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Ireland and the first media war: digestible, cultural engagements of the Crimean War 1854-6

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Abstract

The Crimean War was the first ‘media war’: an international conflict experienced, not simply through the press and journals, but through a variety of ‘cultural dimensions’, including poems and ballads, and not after events had transpired but often during their occurrence. Yet its cultural historiography remains heavily Anglo- (and London-) centric, despite the war culturally impacting the entire United Kingdom. Within that Anglophonic Ireland’s popular or public response to the conflict was a mixture of martial and oftentimes imperial enthusiasm, and local or national interest, with a minority strain of criticism, opposition and nationalism. By providing fresh analysis of the same, this essay serves to both illustrate the ambiguous nature of Irish identity in the 1850s (in the wake of the Famine) – within the union and as part of the empire – and epitomise the often elusive, contradictory and paradoxical nature of the same, while also demonstrating the interest Irish people showed in the war; how that was outwardly manifest; and where that fits within the broader contexts of Ireland’s war memorialisation/commemoration tradition and the cultural impacts and legacies of war.

Keywords: Crimean War; Ireland; popular culture; media war; identity.

Introduction

Researchers of Anglophonic cultures can be forgiven for focussing their attention on Britain or America, for they have been historically and remain today cultural titans. However, the Anglophonic world does extend far beyond them and comprises portions of Africa, the Caribbean and Oceania, as well as Australasia, Canada and of course Ireland. The omission of the latter, especially from ‘British’ studies of modern warfare, has been an all too common feature of past and recent historical works. This is something that Catherine Switzer has argued in her study of Great War memorialisation in Ulster and Northern Ireland. In her opinion British studies on commemoration of the Great War have ‘largely ignored the island of Ireland and thus have left ‘a significant “gap”’ in that historiography. Like Adrian Gregory, she argues that too often English historians, claiming to be presenting a history of the British Isles during the Great War, have simply produced one of England.¹ The same can be said of all of Britain’s imperial wars of the long nineteenth century, and the Crimean War is no exception.

In 2009 Stefanie Markovits proclaimed the Crimean War to be the first ‘media war’. It was an international conflict that had been experienced, not simply through the press and journals, but through a variety of ‘cultural dimensions’, and not after events had transpired

¹ Switzer, Catherine, *Unionists and Great War commemorations in the north of Ireland 1914-1939*. Irish Academic Press, 2007, p. 3, citing Gregory, Adrian, *The Last Great War: British society and the First World War*. Cambridge UP, 2008.

but often during their occurrence.² Prior to that Ulrich Keller, in his visual history of that campaign, argued that while also being ‘a bloody and traumatic conflict which caused lasting changes in Europe’s political landscape’, the Crimean War produced many cultural manifestations and memorial ‘cushions’ to justify, humanise and ‘contain the disruptiveness of military violence’ – make it ‘digestible’.³ From literature to poetry and from printing to the fledgling medium of photography, the Crimean War not only influenced and infiltrated those cultural outlets but also consumed the British public from the start to finish; for better or worse.

Britain boasts an extremely large Crimean War historiography, with the war and more especially all manner of military aspects being the subject of literally thousands of books and articles since the 1850s. In spite of this the cultural and literary portion the same remains extremely small, with painting, due to its martial relationship, being the best documented. Works by J.W.M. Hichberger, Matthew Lalumia and Paul Usherwood, amongst many others, provide detailed, comparative and mutually supporting analyses of that medium, both during and long after the war.⁴ Other and far more numerous and diverse areas, such as news media, illustrations, public spectacles and visual technologies, poetry, literature, memorials and memory still remain under-researched, in spite of the efforts of Keller and Markovits, and also a handful of other academic and independent scholars, who will be documented throughout this article.

Yet what all of these fail to show or even make a fleeting reference to is the impact of the conflict in those fields throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (UK), beyond London and England. Passing references to the terms ‘Britain’ or ‘British’ can be found; not least of all in Keller’s and Markovits’ principal works, but even this geographic generalisation is not supported by wider comparative or even contrasting examples. Not only do the terms ‘England’ and ‘English’ and the geographical entities of London and England dominate the existing ‘British’ Crimean historiography but so do the sources. For example, except for the French periodical *L’Illustration*, which Keller utilises to add a French or Parisian comparison, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* is the only non-London (or English) source-publication utilised by both Keller and Markovits. Their focus is unashamedly Anglo-centric and such narrow foci do little to suggest the war’s broader geographical impact.

However, Keller and Markovits are not the sole offenders, merely the most prominent, as many of those other scholars, who have addressed the subject of Crimean War memorialisation and the war in long-term popular culture are equally culpable. A.L. Berridge, for example, in her very brief discussion of the physical legacy and long-term popular memory of the Russian campaign, solely refers to London and the memorials located in a dozen English towns.⁵ This is in spite of several hundred memorials and monuments to that

² Markovits, Stefanie, *The Crimean War in the British imagination*. Cambridge UP, 2009, p. 3.

³ Keller, Ulrich. *The Ultimate Spectacle: a visual history of the Crimean War*. Gordon and Breach, 2001, pp. ix-x.

⁴ Hichberger, J.W.M., *Images of the Army: The Military in British Art, 1815-1914*. Manchester UP, 1988; Lalumia, Matthew, “Realism and Anti-Aristocratic Sentiment in Victorian Depictions of the Crimean War.” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1983, pp. 25-51; Usherwood, Paul, “Elizabeth Thompson Butler: A Case of Tokenism.” *Woman’s Art Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1990-1, pp. 14-18.

⁵ Berridge, A.L., “Off the Chart: The Crimean War in British Public Consciousness.” *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, vol. 20, 2015, p. 13.

conflict being documented by the Imperial War Museum throughout both Great Britain and Northern Ireland.⁶ Those researchers who have looked beyond England's borders in the literary or cultural contexts, such as Ruth Brown, are exceptional.⁷

It is thus presently inferred by the small corpus of studies of the war's cultural, visual and literary history that the other regions of the UK – the country that fought the war against Russia, unlike the whole British Empire, which fought the conflicts in 1899-1902, 1914-18 or 1939-45 – did not actually respond to or experience the same. Not only is this wholly unfathomable, but it is also impossible to accept, given both the prominent and very real political, social, military and economic linkages in the Victorian period, between what today is called 'the four nations' of the UK: England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland.⁸ To these are added the diverse reportage of those bonds and common experiences of the war through the very cultural mediums that present-day historians have utilised and cited and quoted at length.⁹

Ireland's Crimean historiography is very small, while that of Scotland and Wales is essentially non-existent.¹⁰ However, since the early 2000s especially, efforts have been made to expand the former. David Murphy's and Paul Huddie's monographs, plus several other chapters and articles address Irish newspapers, correspondents, narratives and letters to the Anglophonic press, the war's poetry and balladry and visually-engaging events to varying degrees.¹¹ Memorials have received the most attention, not only in academic works but also in a dozen local history articles.¹² Despite this only Ruth Brown's unfootnoted article on the Russian trophy guns in *ICOMAM* has made some use of this corpus. Regardless, the Irish works have not only created a central mass around which future works can coalesce, but they have also made a meaningful and comparative regional contribution to the Anglophonic cultural and literary history of the conflict.

This is something that S.J. Potter has shown to be necessary to better understand the social, political and cultural realities of the historic UK and the Scottish, Welsh and Irish people's relationship with empire. Regional variances did exist in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and these were manifest through overt expressions of differing cultures, religions and perspectives.¹³ This essay seeks to develop this further, by bringing the two

⁶ IWM 'War Memorials Register' <http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/search> (accessed 09/01/2018).

⁷ Brown, Ruth Rhynas, "Canon to the Right of Them, Cannon to the Left of Them, Cannon to the Front of Them: the Crimean Trophy Guns in Britain and its Empire." *ICOMAM*, vol. 11, 2014, pp. 26-32.

⁸ Macdonagh, Oliver, "Introduction: Ireland and the Union, 1801-70." W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, Ireland under the Union, 1801-70*, v, 1989, pp. xlvii-lxv.

⁹ For example, the *Illustrated London News* and Nolan, E.H., *An Illustrated History of the War against Russia*. 2 vols, 1856-7.

¹⁰ However, E.M. Spiers' *A Military History of Scotland*. Edinburgh UP, 2014 and Matthew Cragoe's and Chris Williams's (eds), *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. University of Wales Press, 2007 do address the war briefly from a military perspective but no 'home front' studies appear to exist yet.

¹¹ See Murphy, David, *Ireland and the Crimean War*. Four Courts, 2002; Huddie, Paul, *The Crimean War and Irish Society*. Liverpool UP, 2015, plus Griffin, Brian, "Irish identity and the Crimean War." Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton (eds), *War: Identities in Conflict 1300-2000*. Sutton, 1998, pp. 113-24; *ibid*, "Ireland and the Crimean War." *Irish Sword*, vol. 22, no. 89, 2001, pp. 281-312, but also Bolster, Evelyn, *The Sisters of Mercy in the Crimean War*. Mercier Press, 1964.

¹² For a list of these see the bibliography in Huddie, *The Crimean War*.

¹³ Potter, S.J. (ed.), *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c.1857-1921*. Four Courts, 2004.

historiographies closer together within this limited space. Although the trend of Anglo-centric 'British' history does persist in many if not all historical periods and areas, efforts are emerging to look beyond 'Britain' and 'Ireland' individually at the broader historic and even contemporary UK levels. This has been done by Catriona Pennell in her study of the First World War, by Ian Friel in his maritime history of the British Isles and also by Naomi Lloyd-Jones and Maggie Scull in their 'Four Nations' study of modern 'British' history.¹⁴ While it is not necessary for all studies of Britain's imperial wars to have this focus, to wholly ignore all of the other regions of the country beyond England and London, can only severely limit if not actually distort the findings and argument of any historian. What will be shown through this essay is that Irish responses to the Crimean conflict epitomized the often elusive, contradictory and paradoxical nature of identity within the British Empire; Irish expressions of enthusiasm, support, and oftentimes 'British' and 'imperial' patriotism do not simply illustrate that Irish people 'turned British' during the war years.

Building upon previous works, this article aims to illustrate how Irish society, as a region within the UK and British Empire, responded to the Crimean War of 1854-6. In doing so it seeks to add to and complement the existing 'British' Anglophonic cultural and literary history of the Crimean War, but also illustrate that Anglophonic culture, relative to modern warfare, extends beyond the London metropolis and the cities and shires of England. This will be done by analysing the cultural and literary responses to the war by Irish society, as part of the UK, in three areas. These are newspaper editorials and published letters, poetry, and memorials. In doing so it will show: 1) how Ireland's responses compared to or contrasted with those of Britain or more appropriately London and England; 2) what factors influenced the Irish responses in the three areas; 3) where Irish responses to the war sit within broader cultural traditions and trends; 4) what specific contributions the Crimean War made to our understanding of Irish identity and Ireland's relationship with empire in the long nineteenth century.

Newspapers

For both Keller and Markovits the wartime press represents, not just a major conduit and purveyor of information to and between the public, in all its diversity, but also a major influencing actor. Through the agendas of certain editors or correspondents, the lack of censorship and thus the detailed nature of both correspondents' reports and in particular the published soldiers' letters home, but also the ability of the press to illustrate the news that they provided, through on-the-scene observers, the printed media represents the most important and influential medium of the war.¹⁵

Of 'the world's first war correspondent', W.H. Russell – an Irishman –¹⁶ and his reports, Markovits has said that his columns were 'read by thousands of Englishmen and women whenever they appeared', but that was only half the story. As the Irish example

¹⁴ Pennell, Catriona *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland*. Oxford UP, 2012; Friel, Ian, *Maritime History of Britain and Ireland c.400-2001*. British Museum Press, 2003; Lloyd-Jones, Naomi and Scull, Maggie (eds), *Four Nations approaches to modern 'British' history*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2018.

¹⁵ Both dedicated whole chapters to newspapers, their correspondents and their wartime coverage. See Markovits, *The Crimean War*, ch. 1; Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*, ch. 3.

¹⁶ For more see Murphy, *Crimean War*, ch. 6.

clearly illustrates, and no doubt a similar analysis of the Welsh and Scottish urban and rural papers would show, Russell's reports were reprinted at length by the various liberal, conservative, Catholic and Protestant newspapers. In fact, as has been both argued and clearly shown by Brian Griffin, Murphy and Huddie, the Irish press and journals covered the war with equal enthusiasm, and not only were letters from the front printed on a comparable scale, eliciting the same responses, but the Irish public were equally as infatuated with the conflict as their British peers. The press also had a profound impact upon the Irish Roman Catholic church's decision to send nursing sisters to the East.¹⁷ While an editorial in *The Times* on 30 September 1854 led with the heading 'What news from Sebastopol?' and declared that '[i]n every family, in every assembly of men, in every casual meeting, one thought, one question has swallowed up all others' – the war, several months earlier the *Dublin Freeman's Journal* declared that 'The war with Russia independently of all other considerations, has, in an eminent degree, fostered the desire of the masses to obtain information respecting the countries engaged in the contest'.¹⁸ It reported that '[t]o satisfy the almost insatiable craving, books, maps, and pictures innumerable are produced daily'.¹⁹

From the very outset the Irish press engaged with and gave considerable attention to the goings on in the East; both before and after Britain and France began to mobilise. The declaration of war at the end of March 1854 was greeted by most of the Irish press with positivity and support. In both Galway and Monaghan the *Vindicator* and the *Anglo-Celt* both expressed their contentment that the conflict, which they had waited for so long, had finally come and the proverbial night of uncertainty had finally come to an end.²⁰ Between March and September coverage of the events in the East and at home continued, but it was not until the Battles of the Alma, Balaklava and Inkerman, and through the commencement of the siege of the naval fortress of Sebastopol that the war came alive in the press. Across the island the Irish press greeted the Alma engagement with exuberance. The *Belfast New-Letter* declared that not since the Napoleonic Wars, had it been able to 'present to its readers a more noble or glorious memorial of military heroism in the cause of truth and freedom'.²¹ Ireland's role in it 'resonated with Irish audiences [who] had already developed their own, competing views about Ireland's place with the British empire'.²² And while the unity of the allies was also deemed a point worth stressing, especially in the wake of the Battle of the Alma, the focus was not simply put on the alliance between Britain, France and Turkey but also on the unity of the three British kingdoms – a recurring wartime theme. As the Catholic *Galway Packet* declared

it would be invidious to institute national comparisons when all fought so gallantly—
French, English, Irish, Scotch, and Turkish soldiers alike distinguished themselves on

¹⁷ For more see both Bolster, *The Sisters of Mercy*, ch. 2; Huddie, Paul, 'The Cloth and the Crimea: Irish Catholic Clergy as Chaplains and Nurses during the Crimean War, 1854-6' (MA thesis, University College Dublin, 2009).

¹⁸ *The Times*, 30 Sept. 1854.

¹⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 15 May 1854.

²⁰ *Galway Vindicator*, 29 Mar. 1854; *Anglo-Celt.*, 30 Mar. 1854.

²¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 Oct. 1854.

²² Bender's comments about the succeeding Indian Mutiny are equally applicable in 1854-6. Bender, J.C., "Mutiny of Freedom Fight? The 1857 Indian Mutiny and the Irish Press." Potter, *Newspapers and Empire*, pp. 92-108.

that eventful day, from which will date a new era in the history of the world.²³

In contrast to certain London or English newspapers, foremost amongst them *The Times*, Irish papers, except for the nationalist sheets, produced a relatively similar coverage of the war throughout; even when things were at their worst. What can be seen from the reports of Alma and Balaklava is that while the horrors of war were accepted a bright side would be sought by many. In the former case it was believed that even though the mournful list of casualties could not be ignored the public could rejoice in the ‘triumph’ and could engage in ‘heartfelt rejoicing for the escape of a relative or friend’, while after Balaklava ‘consolation’ could be drawn from the ‘sanguinary battle ... in which our cavalry were severely cut up’, because the enemy had suffered to a still greater extent.²⁴ But as in Britain, the Inkerman engagement altered the mood considerably – its toll resonated. In its 21 November edition the Belfast-based, Protestant *Northern Whig* sarcastically declared that it was ‘[b]y that happy chance which had hitherto ruled the war, [that] the British had to bear the chief brunt of the attack, which was evidently an attempt to repeat, with an interchange of parts, the battle of the Alma’. It lamented the wounding and loss of so many generals which showed ‘the fell nature of the struggle we are engaged in’.²⁵ In the western province of Connacht this opinion was also expressed, with the Catholic *Mayo Constitution* declaring that the ‘[t]hree bloody battles’ had ‘decimated our gallant band, reducing them to a forlorn hope’. Thus, those who had been ‘once besiegers’ had inexorably become ‘in truth besieged’.²⁶

Yet the papers rallied and, like their British counterparts, spent much of the war reporting on the interesting and engaging domestic events that captured the public’s collective attention and imagination. This included publishing soldiers’ letters from the East. In doing so they ‘provided a forum in which public and private voices mixed, as official “dispatches” were printed alongside personal letters from soldiers at the front’.²⁷ The importance of this function, as the contemporary Crimean nurse, Fanny Taylor argued, was to create a single nation-family, in which all could share in the joys and sufferings of the soldiers abroad and their families at home.²⁸

The importance of those correspondences has been argued by Markovits, who said that even though ‘Russell’s voice was the loudest, it was backed by a chorus in the newspapers of the day’.²⁹ Just as in *The Times* and other periodicals in England and broader Britain, the Irish papers provided a forum in which Irish (as well as English, Welsh and Scottish) voices, both public and private, mixed. As Griffin was the first to show, the ‘joint effect of these voices’, as Markovits termed it, was equally apparent in Ireland.³⁰ He argues that, ‘[t]he intense interest [of the Irish public] was not lost on the editors of Irish newspapers [or journals], who fed the public a stream of accounts of Irish bravery and printed hundreds

²³ *Galway Packet*, 4 Oct. 1854.

²⁴ *Galway Packet*, 4 Oct. 1854; *Northern Whig*, 14 Nov. 1854.

²⁵ *Northern Whig*, 21 Nov. 1854.

²⁶ *Mayo Constitution*, 28 Nov. 1854.

²⁷ Markovits, *The Crimean War*, p. 14.

²⁸ [Taylor, Fanny], *Eastern Hospitals and English Nurses: The Narrative of Twelve Months’ Experience in the Hospitals of Koulali and Scutari*. 2 vols, Hurst and Blackett, 1857, vol. 1, p. 2, n.

²⁹ Markovits, *The Crimean War*, p. 14.

³⁰ Markovits, *The Crimean War*, p. 14.

of letters written from the Crimea and the other areas of conflict by Irish soldiers and sailors'. Those letters 'ranged from rather formulaic accounts in which soldiers bragged of their deeds or those of their regiment and made light of the hardships which they endured, to quite graphic descriptions of the privations which were the daily lot of the Irish and their allied troops'.³¹ As Markovits puts it, they 'gave unfiltered access to the people's views'.³²

While criticism of the war's managements by the government and conduct by Lord Raglan in the Crimea was evident in Irish newspapers, as in British, not least of all due to the reprinting of Russell's scathing reports and an equally damning *Times* editorials, the principal difference between the British and Irish press was the existence of a section of anti-English, nationalist newspapers in Ireland. This uniquely negative element persisted in *The Nation*, the short-lived *Tipperary Leader* and *The Tribune* in Dublin, and within others. These papers were, as R.V. Comerford argued, characterised by a 'passion for open defiance'.³³ In 1855 *The Tribune* had no problem denouncing both Britain and France for entering the war, not for the liberty and freedom of Europe but rather for selfish reasons. In its opinion 'John Bull' was 'the very personification of egotism' and thus it gleefully lampooned the British bravado of 1854, the general boastful reputation fostered after Waterloo, and the wartime failures in the East.³⁴ However, during the war the reportage and 'responses to the imperial connection' of such papers were just as complex as those of their successors.³⁵ This ambiguity was no more so evident than in *The Nation*'s inclusion of notices of the injury and deaths of Anglo-Irish officers and the dispassionate printing of their letters; these were the same people it would, on other occasions, call 'Toadies' and denounce for holding Crowellian land titles.³⁶ Yet, however much those nationalist papers would denounce 'England' or the 'English Masters', they did not claim a sense of kinship with the Russians as they did with the Indian Sepoys only a couple of years later. This shows that Irish society did not experience any collective conflict of conscience during the war; as Russia, or more specifically, Tsar Nicholas I, was the enemy of all.³⁷

There were two primary reasons why the war became such a prominent feature of Irish life during the mid-1850s. First was the public's keen interest and desire to obtain as much information as possible, and second, like so many British papers and journals, Irish periodicals deemed it their duty to put their readers in possession of 'the latest intelligence on topics of such transcendent importance', even if that meant that they had to 'displace other matters of Irish or local interest'.³⁸ This eagerness of both the people to obtain news and papers to supply it saw newspapers become the primary arena of general discussion and argument by the mid-1850s, to the detriment of pamphlets, which had been produced in abundance during the wars with France.³⁹

³¹ Griffin, "Irish identity," p. 116.

³² Markovits, *The Crimean War*, p. 19.

³³ Comerford, R.V., *Charles J. Kickham: A Study of Irish Nationalism*. Wolfhound Press, 1979, p. 49.

³⁴ *The Tribune*, 10 Nov. 1855

³⁵ Lowry, Donal, "Nationalist and Unionist Responses to the British Empire in the Age of the South African War, 1899-1902." Potter, *Newspapers and Empire*, pp. 159-76.

³⁶ *The Nation*, 3 Oct. 1857.

³⁷ Huddie, *The Crimean War*, p. 92.

³⁸ *Galway Vindicator*, 4 Oct. 1854.

³⁹ Anderson, Olive, *A Liberal State at War: English Politics and Economics during the Crimean War*. Aldershot, 1994, pp. 82-3.

Poetry

Not only was the war experienced through the press, but also, as Markovits, Natalie Houston and Tai-Chun Ho have all shown, through the cultural dimension of poetry.⁴⁰ Prose was an important and prevalent cultural manifestation of interest in and tool of engagement with the war. Some ninety-six poems have been identified to date in a cross-section of the Irish press. These comprise themes of lament, tyranny, battles, peace, death, patriotism, Irish nationalism and unity, between Ireland and the rest of the UK and between the latter and its continental allies. The war represents an important occasion for the production and consumption of poetry, the development of styles and mechanisms and the emergence or elevation of individual poets. Not only was it a milestone in what Houston argues to be a period of ‘rapid growth in newspaper publishing’ and consequently ‘the increasing prevalence of verse’ in the public sphere, it was also another occasion in which, as Markovits put it, the ‘British’ people could march together in ‘syncopated lockstep’.⁴¹ It was one of poetry’s principal functions to facilitate this. Thus, it is perhaps most appropriate to begin the analysis with the theme of patriotism and unity.

The unity of the UK and its allies could be treated separately (just the three kingdoms) or together (Britain and its (or the three kingdoms and their) allies). One example of this was poem ‘The Islesmen of the West’, which was penned by an author known only as J.J.W and appeared in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1855. This publication, affiliated with Trinity College Dublin, was host to at least a dozen war poems between 1854 and 1856, as it boasted a regular poetry column, like many Irish newspapers and periodicals at the time. Houston has also and perhaps rightly argued, given Markovits’ focus, that ‘because most studies of poetry in the periodical press have tended to focus on particular poets or on the selection processes of particular journals, relatively little attention has been paid to the history of poetry published in large-circulation general newspapers’.⁴² This argument for greater attention to the press as mediums for the promotion and dissemination of Victorian, and in this instance wartime, poetry is given credence by the fact that it was through newspapers and journals, both provincial and national, that most Irish Crimean War poetry and some ballads were primarily disseminated.⁴³ ‘The Islesmen of the West’ was especially definitive in its depiction of wartime unity by giving each of the three kingdoms as well as France, the Ottoman Empire and even Russia their own stanza.⁴⁴ Even though the war was fought between four empires this did not stop some Irish poets and ballad-writers from placing Ireland in amongst them, as an almost equal or even superior belligerent.

As in the works of William Makepeace Thackeray and the Shore sisters, lamentation, expressed by mothers and sweethearts, was another common theme and technique in Irish

⁴⁰ Markovits, Stefanie, “Giving Voice to the Crimean War: Tennyson’s ‘Charge’ and Maud’s Battle-Song.” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2009, pp. 481-503; Houston, N.M., “Newspaper Poems: Material Texts in the Public Sphere.” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2008, pp. 233-42; Ho, Tai-Chun, “The Afterlife of Thomas Campbell and ‘The Soldier’s Dream’.” *19*, vol. 20, 2015, pp. 1-18.

⁴¹ Houston, “Newspaper Poems,” p. 234; Markovits, *The Crimean War*, p. 123.

⁴² Houston, “Newspaper Poems,” p. 233.

⁴³ For more on this, in addition to an analysis of wartime ballads, see Huddie, *The Crimean War*, pp. 106-10; Murphy, *Ireland and the Crimean War*, ch. 6.

⁴⁴ *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. 44, no. 263 1854, pp. 604-5.

verse. For Markovitz '[t]he idea of home was one that "sought to translate "natal" loyalties into a larger love of country", thus, who better than women, 'who reigned over the domestic sphere, to attempt this often-complex act of translation'.⁴⁵ Yet in Ireland such works merely continued a longstanding tradition of laments most common in the emigrants' voice, although laments for soldiers and sailors, not related to a particular war, also existed.

The origins of the oral traditions in Ireland at that time stemmed from the Gaelic bard tradition. Thus, it might not be surprising to find words from the Irish language or anglicised version of them in a number of works. The presence of such words was often due to the poem or songs being originally in Irish and subsequently translated. Padraic Colum argued that such spelling often did not 'represent the real sound' of the Irish words and thus crippled their meaning and the impact of their message, but that did not stop Irish poets including such words.⁴⁶ One Ulster poet, Thomas Hamilton Maxwell Scott, went so far as to portray himself as a medieval, Irish bard reciting his poems on his harp. So important an aspect of his work was the idea of being a Gaelic minstrel that two of the six poems in his published wartime collection referred to this: 'The Irish minstrel's address to his harp' and 'The minstrel's hymn on the restoration of peace'.⁴⁷ The six poems contain an almost equal measure of Irish and British references and are extremely patriotic.

Irish wartime poetry was comparable to that produced in Britain, in the language, techniques, iconography and meter that were used, but it differed substantially in one important area: authorship. Irish works were more commonly anonymous, although some pseudonyms and initials were used. A further contrast is that, unlike in Britain or even elsewhere in the empire, e.g. Australia, only a single collection of poems was published in Ireland during the war. Namely Thomas Scott's *The Crimead* (no doubt evoking Homer's *Iliad*) in 1856.⁴⁸ Together these traits suggest the medium's amateur nature in Ireland.

What is perhaps most curious about the Irish context, and again this is only made evident through a comparative analysis between prose and verse (something that is wholly absent in the British historiography), is that the majority of critical and more especially nationalist expressions came in the form of poems rather than street ballads. This might be explained by two things. First, the war generated a positive interest amongst lower-class Catholics who traditionally produced and consumed ballads. This kept songs relatively positive and patriotic in their outlook and themes and focussed on heroism, victory and peace. Second, the war occurred during the shift towards more middle-class nationalism.⁴⁹ And while the nationalist verse of the 1850s more often demonstrated what K.T. Hoppen terms a 'latent nationalism', which was subtler in its language and shared much with those British poems and songs which were critical of the conduct of the war, harsher and more traditional nationalist verse was also produced.⁵⁰ These appeared primarily through the pages of Ireland's foremost nationalist newspaper, *The Nation*, but also the short-lived *Tipperary Leader*, and often heralded the end of the empire or castigated 'the British' for their military

⁴⁵ Markovitz, *The Crimean War*, p. 128.

⁴⁶ Colum, Padraic (ed.), *Broadsheet Ballads*. Maunsell & Co., 1913, p. xvi.

⁴⁷ For more see [Scott, Thomas], A student, Queen's College, Belfast, *The Crimead*. Shepherd and Aitchison, 1856.

⁴⁸ A copy of this is held in the special collections of the library at Queen's University Belfast.

⁴⁹ Huddie, *The Crimean War*, p. 109.

⁵⁰ Hoppen, K.T., *Ireland since 1800*. 2nd ed., Longman, 1999, pp. 2-3.

failures, through poems like ‘Doubt & darkness’.⁵¹ Many verses expressed joy or a lack of care at the catastrophes and losses which the British Forces suffered in the East. ‘A dirge for England’, written by O’N, and published in *The Nation* in February 1855 was likely to have been written during or just after the first Crimean winter. It relished that Britain’s pride had been severely damaged due to the systemic failures there and hoped that through a weakening of ‘English’ power those who were subjugated by it might become free.⁵²

Despite that minor nationalist element, most Irish people, evident by their rush to enlist, their cheering of the regiments through the streets and their voluntary contributions to various wartime funds, were relatively content within the union with Britain at that time. What is evident from most Irish poetry is that Irishness was not incompatible with Britishness during the Crimean War.

Memorialisation and commemoration

In stark contrast to the major memorials before the 1850s, which tended to be ‘either grand architectural features or statues of the commanders in suitably warlike poses’, the physical, cultural outputs of the Crimean War took on a very different focus.⁵³ Taking the famous ‘Guards Memorial’ at Waterloo Place in London as the principal example (the campaign’s *de facto* British national monument), Berridge notes that the sculptor, John Bell, put the focus not on officers or glorious battle deeds but rather on the men themselves’. In her estimation his work ‘is strikingly different from any that preceded it, and has set the pattern for all that would follow’, because the sculpture ‘honours sacrifice rather than victory, and these figures make clear exactly whose it was’.⁵⁴ This is most certainly true, but what can also be seen from a broader analysis of British and Irish memorials is how widespread the manifestation of this change was, both physically through the memorials, but also through overt public sentiment.

Those memorials, substantial in number and varied in both composition and geographical location, were influenced by and formed part of several traditions and trends. These were the traditions commemorating major military figures with public monuments and lesser commissioned men, often from prominent landed families, with funerary pieces in churches, as well as the popular Victorian trend of positively-influential public sculpture, which by the mid-1850s was substantially advanced in Britain and emerging in Ireland.⁵⁵ While these practices continued long after the war with Russia, they were influenced by that substantial shift in the popular attitude towards the common soldier.

Many public monuments were erected to those lost during the war and to commemorate the peace, but the Russian naval cannon captured and retained as trophies, and the funerary monuments erected primarily in Anglican churches, represent the majority, in both Britain and Ireland. The reasons for the latter’s restriction to that denomination was

⁵¹ *The Nation*, 16 Dec. 1854.

⁵² *The Nation*, 24 Feb. 1855.

⁵³ Berridge, “Off the Chart,” p. 12.

⁵⁴ Berridge, “Off the Chart,” p. 12.

⁵⁵ Huddie, *The Crimean War*, p. 110.

firstly the centuries-old Anglican tradition of funerary monuments and secondly the social prominence of Anglicans in Irish society.⁵⁶

Despite their numerousness and diversity, evident from the Imperial War Museum's online database, only a handful of 'British' studies have been undertaken relative to the war's memorials, and these principally refer to the cannon.⁵⁷ The same can be said of the Irish historiography, despite Murphy and Huddie documenting a conglomeration of memorials located all over the island.⁵⁸ This is not surprising given the guns' prominence within the public space. They can be found in town squares and city parks, outside courthouses and even beside churches. Through the efforts of Murphy, Huddie and Noel St John Hennessy, not only do we know that some thirty-one guns came to Ireland after the war, but we also know the origin and in certain cases legacy stories for many as well.⁵⁹

The hundreds of captured Russian cannon and mortars which were given to towns and cities of the UK and empire by the government after the war also form part of the new mentality espoused by Berridge.⁶⁰ Not only were the cannon issued as trophies of the war, but in many if not most localities they were seen to represent the memory of all those who had died. This was most clearly expressed by the mayor of Londonderry during the presentation of the city's gun on 8 January 1860.

We cannot omit to remark that in that eventful war some of Derry's bravest sons, and Erin's most valiant heroes, took noble part, and shared a victor's grave. With feelings, then, of gratification, solemnized by such reminiscences, we accept this Gun, as at once a trophy of victory, and a tribute to the memory of the departed.

Between 1857 and 1859 municipal councils in towns such as Coleraine and Trim, and cities such as Dublin and Londonderry, petitioned the War Office, directly and indirectly, to obtain a 'portion of the Trophies of the late war' like 'the Municipal Authorities of several Cities and Towns in the United Kingdom'.⁶¹ In total eighteen urban councils in Ireland sought and successfully obtained cannon and, in the case of Dublin, two mortars and a supply of shot and shell to be placed next to the guns. The Dublin case offers the clearest Irish example of how complex or fleeting responses to the guns could be. What can be seen from the limited British memorials historiography is that while numerous municipal authorities sought and received Russian trophy guns from the government, or were gifted them by the same, and the majority received them with enthusiasm and ceremony, there were also cases

⁵⁶ For more see Huddie, Paul, "'That Woe Could Wish, or Vanity Devise': Crimean War Memorials in Dublin's Anglican Churches." Ciarán Wallace and Lisa-Marie Griffin (eds), *Grave Matters: Death and Dying in Dublin 1650-2000*. Four Courts, 2016, ch. 4.

⁵⁷ These are Brown, "Canon to the Right of Them;" Berridge, "Off the Chart;" Bartlett, Roget and Payne, Roy, "Britain's Crimean War Trophy Guns: The Case of Ludlow and the Marches." *History*, vol. 99, no. 337, 2014, pp. 652-69.

⁵⁸ See Murphy, *Crimean War*, pp. 223-8; Huddie, *Crimean War*, pp. 110-23; 253-5. See also Huddie's articles "Augustus Stafford O'Brien Stafford MP: Contested Hero of the Crimean War." *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 44, 2012, pp. 54-6 and "'Removing Some Big Guns:' The story of Dublin's Crimean War Trophy Guns from 1857 to the Present." *Dublin Historical Record*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2014, pp. 6-18.

⁵⁹ See also Hennessy, N. St. John, "Crimean-War Guns." *Irish Sword*, vol. 19, no. 78, 1995, pp. 334-43.

⁶⁰ For more on the origin and debates relative to these see Bartlett and Payne, "Britain's Crimean War Trophy Guns," pp. 653-60.

⁶¹ Huddie, "Removing some big guns," p. 8.

of a contrasting nature. For example, Dundee Council initially refused the gift of a gun from the government, while there is no record of Belfast ever requesting one, despite the hopes expressed by the *Belfast News-Letter* in February 1857.⁶²

In Ireland this contrasting level of engagement, even when a local authority did seek and obtained a gun or guns, was seen in the cases of Cork and Ennis. Cork City was the first Irish council to seek trophies; it appears to have made an appeal in the early to mid-months of 1857 and received two cannon directly from England via steamer on 18 July. Additionally, the civic ceremony that followed was the biggest in the country, and included prestigious guests like Prince Napoleon of France and the Piedmont-Sardinian consul.⁶³ In stark contrast, the following year, the gun which had been requested by Ennis Town Council became the focus of definite Catholic-nationalist orientated agitation, but that agitation was immensely parochial in nature. Thus, the ‘storm of protest’ against the ‘British trophy’ that was won through the victories of ‘England’ and was declared by some to be an insult to the Catholic and patriotic spirit of the town, which began in January 1858, had ceased by the end of February. This followed the council’s decision to place it at an alternative location. Thereafter the official inauguration ceremony was ‘a pleasant affair’.⁶⁴

While the trophy guns sit within the mid-Victorian trend of public monuments, the memorials erected in Irish churches after the war represent a midpoint in the changing Irish and British funerary monument trends. This was the move from the large and heavily ornate marble plaques of the Napoleonic era, which were few in number, to a much larger number of plaques, which were both smaller and far less ornate. They also manifest the beginning of increasingly egalitarian marital monuments. Although some British Crimean era works, such as the Coldstream Guards memorials in St Paul’s Cathedral, only included the names of officers, all Irish regimental plaques included the numbers of NCOs, privates and drummers lost through death and disease in the East. While they did not give their names, it was still a new departure, and can be argued to represent the newly emerged popular respect for the common soldier, also manifest through the Guards Memorial. The newly inclusive regimental memorials represent the first step towards the regimental, parish and county rolls of honour that emerged after the Boer War, and which were produced on a massive scale after the Great War. The stone plinths erected outside Tralee Courthouse are an exception to this, as they include the names of all ‘the men of Kerry who fell in the service of their country’.⁶⁵

The memorials produced after the Russian war were still primarily commissioned as marble plaques – a traditional medium – and came in a variety of styles: pagan, heraldic, architectural, medallion and heroic relief, with all, generally, being imbued with a variety of militaristic symbolism.⁶⁶ However, the alternative mediums which were more prominent after the Boer War and later the Great War – stained-glass windows and brass plaques – can also be seen as emerging in the half decade after the Crimea War. By the end of the century windows had become increasingly popular for both individual officers as well as regiments, because, as Keith Jeffery argued, people sought to erect something that was a ‘practical thing

⁶² Brown, “Canon to the Right of Them,” p. 27; *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 Feb. 1857.

⁶³ Huddie, *The Crimean War*, pp. 112-13.

⁶⁴ Huddie, *The Crimean War*, pp. 115-16.

⁶⁵ Huddie, *The Crimean War*, pp. 121-22.

⁶⁶ Huddie, *The Crimean War*, pp. 122.

of tangible benefit for the bereaved'.⁶⁷ Although brass plaques became the most common format at the end of the century, most likely due to the entrance of the middle classes into the military who could more easily afford them, only one was erected after the Crimean War, to the Connaught Rangers in Galway. Much like the cannon in the public spaces, Irish church monuments, had 'a strong functional purpose'. Being 'replete with meaning and message' they expressed a 'national gratitude' and 'patriotism', and more often aimed to 'educate the public and inspire devotion'.⁶⁸ Although their meaning and inspiration may have waned over time, together the cannon and church monuments, coupled with the conglomeration not documented here, still represent Ireland's physical cultural legacy of the Crimean War.

Conclusion

The Crimean War was one of the most important European conflicts between 1815 and 1914, and its cultural impacts and legacy in the Anglophonic archipelago of the UK were evident, important and lasting, to varying degrees in the different regions of the same. Irish popular or cultural responses to the conflict were a mixture of martial and oftentimes imperial enthusiasm, and local or national interest, with a minority strain of criticism, opposition and nationalism. These responses were manifest in the editorials of newspapers, poetic writings and physical memorials. As well as being a distinct period in Ireland's relationship with the UK and the empire, the war also stands as a notable period for a variety of traditions, trends and practices during the wider nineteenth century and beyond. These include the beginning of an era which saw a broadening of the Irish newspaper industry and mid-way in century-long transition from a Protestant-dominated press to an increasingly Catholic and later nationalist one, the decline of popular poetry and the emergence of a public monument movement.

Ireland in the nineteenth century was simultaneously a bulwark of the British Empire and an undermining force, and while this dichotomy was just as much the case during the years of the Crimean War, the former was, at least implicitly, far more pervasive. Irish enthusiasm for the war also stemmed partly from a profound localism and sense of national identity. This expression of 'Irish' identity in various arenas during the war was not (in the majority or cases) an expression of nationalism, but rather an expression of national pride within the UK, comparable to that expressed in Wales and Scotland. Irish expressions of enthusiasm, support, and oftentimes 'British' and 'imperial' patriotism during the war do not simply illustrate that Irish people 'turned British' during the war years, but rather epitomize the often elusive, contradictory and paradoxical nature of identity.

The Crimean War formed a central part of what was an Anglophonic Irish social life in the 1850s. During which a large cross-section of Irish people demonstrated an often extrovert enthusiasm and support for it, often with 'British', 'Irish' and 'imperial' sentiments. Such feelings or interests were manifest across the island, through a variety of cultural and visual mechanisms, in a manner comparable with those documented to date in London and England. As well as offering comparisons and contrasts to the British cultural and literary history of the Crimean War Ireland's response also clearly illustrates the complex and

⁶⁷ Jeffery, Keith, "Echoes of War." John Horne (ed.), *Our War: Ireland and the Great War*. RIA, 2008, pp. 268-9.

⁶⁸ Murphy, Paula, *Nineteenth-Century Irish Sculpture: Native Genius Reaffirmed*. Yale UP, 2010, pp. 32, 34.

manifold responses of an Anglophonic society to an international conflict in the nineteenth century.

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