
John J. Horgan, the author of *Parnell to Pearse*, describes himself, with wry self-deprecation, as playing a part in the events he describes in that book as “only that of the Chorus” in a Greek tragedy. A few lines later, perhaps thinking that he might have overplayed the self-deprecation, he rejects the notion that he had been only a hurler on the ditch and - in a characteristically vivid metaphor - notes that history grows slowly, like a coral reef, and that its components are many, varied, and sometimes individually insignificant.

Although many aspects of his personal and public life are dealt with in considerable detail in this memoir, he would probably have been the first to agree that all writing has a purpose, and that an author’s conscious or unconscious selection of what to include (and what to omit) leaves clues for others to assess. This essay is, in part, such an assessment, and as such deals with much interesting material that – for whatever reason or reasons – does not appear in his book. But it also explores much of the half-century following the end-date of this book which, although it concludes with the events of 1918, was written in the 1940s by a man, born in 1881, who was publicly and journalistically active until the mid-1960s.

With the benefit of additional archival material illustrative of the period covered by his memoir, and much material available for the later years, some of the narrative gaps in *Parnell to Pearse* can be filled out, some of its emphases modified, and some significant changes of opinion identified. At the same time, the evidence of the later years reinforces, if anything, the agenda of his memoir – an agenda he took little trouble to hide – and amplifies the influence of elements of his personal history on the direction and strength of his engagement in public life.

Two of these elements, in particular, stand out in sharp relief. The first is his parentage. His pride in his nationally mixed ancestry – although his grandfather was a Cork farmer and later a businessman, his solicitor father married an Englishwoman, and he himself made a similar choice – is transparent. He saw in his own family tree the combination of a sturdy English constitutional and civil liberties tradition with a nascent Irish nationalism, and believed – probably correctly – that this contributed a unique strand to Irish public life, often unacknowledged or minimised in the
competition and conflict between the more visible Irish, English and Anglo-Irish traditions. In his case, this issued in a passionate and unrepentant commitment to the spirit and politics of John Redmond which lasted for years after Redmond’s death, and in an openness to, and understanding of, Northern Unionism which was rare, if not unique, amongst Irish nationalists of his generation and which was equally long-lived. Until quite late in his life, he was describing himself with precision and not a little pride as “a nationalist of an older and more moderate school.”

His was a nationalism which was primarily constitutional, political and economic: and it was a nationalism from which the traditional underpinnings of ethnicity and culture were noticeably absent.

The second is his urge to communicate via the written word. The initial stirrings of this are evident in the memoir: the production of a family newspaper while still a school-boy, his early engagement with D.P. Moran and The Leader, his brief and inglorious debut as a playwright in 1905, his pamphleteering, his biographical writings, and his general readiness for verbal fisticuffs. “Had fate so willed”, he wrote, “I might have become a journalist.” But to a significant degree he actually became one, although this aspect of his career was masked by the anonymity which shrouded some of his most significant journalism in later years.

Not all of it, even when signed, is easily traceable, except by inference. His papers in the National Library include a riposte by the provost of Trinity College, Dublin, Professor Traill, to an article he had written about the National Board of Education in an unspecified periodical. “You write”, Traill told him, “in absolute ignorance.” He was an early admirer of D.P. Moran and The Leader. His eagerness to get into print, and his unfamiliarity with the protocols of journalism, are evidenced by a letter to him from Moran after Moran’s periodical had published one of his letters. Moran wrote to express his approbation of the letter but also advised him to moderate his enthusiasm: “I would not dream of payment for inserting it”, he commented gently.

Although his memoir goes into considerable detail about his political activity between the late 1890s and 1918, it does not over-state it, and omits some interesting

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1 The Round Table 37 (146) March 1947, p. 160.
2 Parnell to Pearse, p. 78.
3 Traill to Horgan, 21 July 1901, NLI
4 Moran to Horgan, 31 July 1905, NLI
aspects of his background and this period of his life. His father’s papers and diaries, on
which he based part of *Parnell to Pearse*, have not survived, but there is ample
evidence elsewhere that his involvement, as he describes it himself, was was bred in
the bone. Not only was his father one of Parnell’s lieutenants, but his uncle John, also
a solicitor, was an energetic supporter of another Irish MP Denny (*check name*),
before emigrating to Australia. There, he made a name for himself as a scourge of the
landed gentry of Western Australia, winning a notable by-election victory in Perth in
1888 on a platform of opposition to the governor and rich landowners.

Michael Joseph Horgan, JJ’s father, was also the first in a line of Horgan
coroners that seems to have been virtually hereditary, stretching for a period of about
a century from the second half of the nineteenth century. One of M.J. Horgan’s
inquests was into a case in which the coroner himself had more than passing interest,
and which made judicial history. Ths was into the hanging of Dr. Philip Cross, who
had been convicted of the murder of his wife. M.J. Horgan had been made aware of
the case by a British MP who suspected foul play after Cross, who had signed his own
wife’s death certificate, married their children’s governess in London very shortly
afterwards. Mrs Cross’s body was exhumed after some public pressure, in which
Horgan participated. , and her husband was later convicted on evidence that the body
contained arsenic. The case made medico-legal history, and it aftermath included a tart
refusal by the English executioner, James Berry, to return to Ireland for the inquest
unless the coroner agreed to pay his expenses.5

M.J. Horgan was succeeded by his eldest son John, as noted in *Parnell to
Pearse*, in December 1914; but his younger son Michael (who died in 1925) was also
a deputy coroner for a time, and John J. held the post until his resignation in 1967,
shortly before his death, a period of more than half a century. After a brief lacuna,
John J’s son Ivor was appointed to the same post in 1973, and held it until 1979,
shortly before his own death in 1980. Nor were their roles purely administrative:
Michael Joseph Horgan was actively involved in the preparation of a Coroner’s Bill
which Tim Healy steered through the Westminster parliament in 1881; J.J. Horgan
performed a similar function in relation to a Coroner’s Bill in Dail Eireann in 1925.

Coincidentally or not, all the three coroners for the Cork region appear to have
been closely involved in the Irish party politics of the era. John J. Horgan’s papers in

5 James Roughead (1941), *The Murderer’s Companion*, New York, The Reader’s
Club, pp. 287-88.
NLI include the acknowledgment from Tim Harrington MP of his membership subscription for the Central Branch of the UIL, dated October 1892. His fellow-coroners, McCabe and Murphy, were also members, and, until they joined him in simultaneously resigning from the UIL in 1919, as will be noted later, were linchpins of the movement in the city and the country generally. J.J. Horgan’s involvement in the League was far from nominal, and it is altogether probable that but for his personal and professional engagement in his native city, particularly in the second decade of the twentieth century, he would have played as great a role in the events of that period as many of his Dublin-based contemporaries. His father’s illness in 1909 (he died in 1917), as his own memoir attests, also tied him to his practice and the city.

Although he was listed as a speaker for the initial meeting of the National Volunteers in Cork in 1913 he was not apparently present on that occasion. What is more interesting is that for some years during this period, but not referred to in his memoir, is that he was simultaneously involved with the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the United Irish League. He is listed as a member of a special “Watch Committee” set up in June 1914, and he is referred to again in documents from August of that year, and he presumably remained active until his resignation is recorded on 16 October 1918, just before the election, whereas he is also listed as National Director of the Cork leadership of the UIL in 1916. Presumably the membership of both the AOH and the UIL was fluid during these years, as each organisation strove to influence the other.

He is on record as criticising the focus on Home Rule to the exclusion of the more complex, but ultimately equally significant, structural and political issues involved in self-government. “The agitation for home rule so engrossed our thoughts and energies”, he said at one point, “that we had not time to consider or discuss the vital elements of Home Rule itself.” He was less than fair to himself: a year earlier,

6 Detail TBC
7 Cork Examiner, 1 February 1919.
8 WS 91 J J Walsh check detail with JB
9 Ibid. AOH Second Degree Meeting Book. It was not publicly known until early the following year.
he had already thought it necessary to address, albeit cautiously, one of the issues lurking just beneath the surface – female suffrage.

One recent analysis of the 1918 election argues strongly that the decision of the Irish Party at Westminster to agree to the exclusion of Ireland from one of the reform bills which would have extended the franchise to young men and women was one of the factors in its downfall, as Sinn Fein and other activists for such a change were able to pin the blame on the Irish Party for resisting it and the generational cleavage they (and their opponents) assumed and hoped would accompany it.12 Writing in 1911, the young solicitor-activist was already conscious enough of this dilemma and its political dimensions.

“Whatever one’s views about votes for women”, he mused, “one is certainly entitled to be consulted before this principle is adopted by an Irish parliament. Anyone who knows the strong conservative undercurrent in Irish politics would certainly be surprised if a Female Suffrage Bill passed the Irish parliament at all. It certainly would not do so on the first journey...I should hope to see an Irish Parliament adopt adult suffrage before it was many years in existence.”13

He was an early and constant advocate of proportional representation, and went to London in 1912 as part of a delegation of the Irish Proportional Representation Society in an attempt to persuade the British government to include PR in its Home Rule Bill. The delegation included such luminaries as the Rev. J.O. Hannay, better known as the writer George Birmingham, and Mr E.A. Aston, Secretary of the Irish Society.14 Almost half a century later, he pleaded the same cause at a public debate in University College Cork in late 1959, during the first attempt by Fianna Fail to replace PR with the so-called ‘straight vote.’15 He was equally active in commercial affairs: in the same year (1912) as his foray to London as part of a delegation on proportional representation, he was instructing his firm’s London agents in the successful prosecution of stall-holders at an international exhibition for selling goods described as Irish which had been produced elsewhere.

15 As a student in UCC at that time, I attended the debate.
He was later personally and actively involved in the development of a specifically Irish trademark – Deanta in Eireann – and of the Industrial development Association.

His new home in Lacaduv, on the Lee Road, was more than just a house: it was also, particularly during a period when developments in Irish politics were attracting attention from bien-pensants in England and further afield, a sort of reference point or visual aid where visitors from abroad might take the temperature of the new Ireland that, it was confidently expected, would follow the introduction of Home Rule. One of these was Harold Begbie, a willing pro-Home Rule propagandist of the Liberal persuasion, who stayed at Lacaduv around this time. His book, published in 1914, describes the scene with warm approval. Noting that the company included both Catholics and Protestants, he went on:

The whole atmosphere of that house, with its babies and flowers, its pets and toys, its music and literature, its hospitality and its cheerful domesticity, was quite charming and convincing; one could not mix with the family and its guests, and could not share in that kind and hospitable life, believing for a moment in the wicked calumny of Catholic intolerance. ¹⁶

John J. Horgan had a relationship with J.J. Devlin in Belfast that was certainly geographically unusual, and indicates his early interest the politics of the Northern part of the country. Correspondence between him and Devlin in the period up to 1917 shows not only that they were politically close, but that Devlin regarded him as an important ally, and vice versa.¹⁷ He had already achieved some prominence as an opponent of religious discrimination by becoming, in 1902, secretary to the Catholic Shareholders Committee of the Great Southern and Western Railway Company, where he was instrumental in achieving the introduction of a new system of recruitment by competitive examination (prior to which employees had been selected exclusively from a small number of schools).¹⁸ In March 1911, Devlin was asking him for details of Cork demographics to enable him to refute Unionist allegations about sectarianism in the South;¹⁹ in June 1916 Devlin was advising him that his

¹⁶ Harold Begbie, The Lady Next Door, London 1914, republished Dublin (UCD Press) 2006, foreword by Patrick Maume. Begbie’s host, with a slightly less roseate view of human nature, remarked of his guest’s book later that it was “good of its kind, but its kind is not usually good.” (Quoted in Patrick Maume’s introduction, p. xiii)
¹⁷ NLI, MS 18,271. I am indebted to John Borgonovo for these and related references from NLI papers and the Cork Examiner relating to Horgan during this period.
¹⁸ Leland, p. 171.
¹⁹ Ibid., Devlin to Horgan, 2 March 1911.
attendance attend at a UIL Directors meeting would be of vital importance; and a month later the compliment was returned, Horgan telling Devlin “how much we realise the sacrifice and statesmanship shown by the Northern Nationalists and particularly by yourself.”

Although he had – as noted in his memoir – declined an invitation from Redmond to stand for the Cork City constituency in 1909, and another invitation in June 1914 to join the Irish Volunteers Provisional Committee, he remained a valued confidant of Redmond’s. Redmond wrote to him in December 1915 asking for his advice on attending a recruiting meeting in Cork, and Horgan advised him strongly against it, warning that it would be regarded as “tantamount to a peace treaty” with William O’Brien. His election to the Cork harbour Commissioners in 1912 underlined the growing influence he wielded in his native city.

More interestingly, his memoir downplays to some extent the nature and degree of his participation in public controversy and other nationalist activities in the period between 1916 and the end of the Civil War. He combined with Redmond in his outspoken opposition to the 1916 executions: a letter signed by virtually all the UIL leadership in Cork protested that the shootings and arrests were “having a most injurious effect on the feelings of the Irish people, and if persisted in may be extremely prejudicial to the peace and future harmony of Ireland, and seriously imperil the future friendly relations between Ireland and England.” In private, he went even further, indicating the degree to which even moderate nationalists were being radicalised by the executions:

“The reasons for the wretched rebellion are as clear as daylight. They are (1) the way which Carson and Co. were permitted to break the law with immunity. (2) The distrust of Ireland and the tinkering with Home Rule. On both these counts the English misgovernment of this country stands indicted before the world and the sooner they make up their minds to settle the Irish question in the only way it can be settled – namely full and immediate self-government – the better for England and Ireland.”

20 Ibid., Devlin to Horgan, 30 June 1916.
21 Ibid., Horgan to Devlin, 1 July 1916.
22 NLI, MS 18,270, draft reply, Horgan to Redmond, 4 December 1915.
23 Letter to the Editor, Cork Examiner, 11 May 1916.
24 J.J. Horgan to Col. Maurice Moore, 31 May 1916, NLI MS 18,273 (Colonel Maurice Moore Papers).
He was recorded by the RIC Special Branch as having been selected as a city delegate to the 1917 National Volunteer Convention in September 1917, but by 1918 the wind had left the Irish Party’s sails, and the squabbles about abstentionism were probably only the symptoms of a deeper malaise. In a final flurry of activity, brave but ineffectual noises were made by him and others about Ireland’s claim for representation at the Peace Conference, and for a pact with Sinn Fein to that end, but eventually he recognised the writing on the wall.

Some time before his resignation from active political engagement in 1919 he had in fact approached the Catholic Bishop of Cork, Dr. Daniel Cohalan, and successfully persuaded him to try and effect such a national pact between the Irish Party and Sinn Fein. This proposal – which shows in itself how far he was willing to go to support that Sinn Fein initiative, even if only as a temporary expedient – was rejected out of hand by John Dillon, and this rejection was largely responsible for his own resignation from the party. His disillusion with the Irish Party, however, was not only related to Redmond’s death and Dillon’s obduracy, but was also to some degree now secondary to his antipathy to the Ulster Unionists, whom he described as being “primarily responsible” for the sad state of Ireland. His now vocal opposition to conscription in 1918 and 1919 (he was secretary of Cork’s anti-conscription campaign) earned him a chiding from one of his local political rivals, a Cork Harbour Board member named Haughton, who reminded him of pro-enlistment sentiments he had uttered, no doubt under the influence of his strong attachment to the Redmonds, in the headier days of 1914. Willie Redmond had actually sent him a Christmas card in (date not stated: MS 18,269) with the defiant message: “I am going for the Irish Brigade! I can’t stand asking fellows to go and not offering yourself!”

As the Irish Party imploded, his political energies sought other outlets. Again he turned to journalism, this time to the Jesuit periodical Studies, to which he first contributed an article in memory of Redmond in 1917. He was represented in its pages almost every year between then and 1941, writing on subjects as varied as

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25 RIC Special Branch report from Cork, 29 August 1917. (Where archived?)
27 Cork Examiner, 1 February 1919, reports a UIL meeting at which he and a number of other UIL leaders all resigned their positions.
28 Cork Examiner, 21 February 1919.
29 Cork Constitution, 18 April 1918.
President Wilson and the Peace Conference, and Ireland’s place in world affairs. Nor were his interests narrowly political: he apparently visited the Ford plant in Dearborn Michigan, in or around 1921 and was highly impressed by the scale and method of its operations, about which he also contributed an article. The company employed his firm as its legal agents when they set up business in Cork, and indeed its local manager bought Clanloughlin, the original Horgan family home on the Lee Road, at auction in 1927: it was bought back by James B. Horgan, JJ’s brother, a number of years later. His articles also evinced a growing interest in the structures of national and local government, and included observations on prohibition in the US (in both 1925 and 1931), on Switzerland (1938) and Sweden (1939)

None of this seemed to interfere unduly with his legal and political activities after the collapse of the Irish Party – Although he had been for some time Crown Solicitor, an important source of income, there is also some evidence that he may have covertly helped the Republicans during the War of Independence, legally and with propaganda advice. Various memoranda written by him, including one entitled “The Plundering of Ireland” were among documents seized by the RIC in a raid on Eamon de Valera’s house in Mount Merrion in date (?).\(^{30}\) He defended one or two of the IRA prisoners who were sentenced to death, and appeared occasionally as a solicitor before the Dail Courts, acting both for plaintiffs and defendants.\(^{31}\) He was a patron of the Tomas McCurtain Memorial Fund when it was established in March 1920,\(^{32}\) although in this he was in conspicuously non-Republican company – both the Catholic and Church of Ireland bishops were also patrons. How much of this coincided with his employment as Crown Solicitor is, at this stage, impossible to determine.

The cathartic experience of 1918 had not only helped to detach him from the remnants of the Irish Party, but had moved him some distance towards Sinn Fein’s position. Although this did not manifest itself in terms of overt political allegiance, his contemporary correspondence with Erskine Childers demonstrated a marked evolution in his strategic, if not necessarily his constitutional, thinking. Responding to a plea by Childers in late 1918 to support Sinn Fein, not least because the “follies,

\(^{30}\) NA, Kew, CO 904/23, RIC Epitome of de Valera’s seized documents.
\(^{31}\) JB check
\(^{32}\) *Cork Constitution*, 31 March 1920.
betrayals and crimes of English policy have made Sinn Fein inevitable even if it had no innate strength”, Horgan replied warmly:

I quite agree with all you say. It is the absolute duty of men like myself who care more about Ireland than we do about party to give Sinn Fein full support in its demand for self-determination. I urged this publicly and privately on the party before the election without avail. Dillon was too busy labelling all Sinn Feiners as pro-German and Bolshevists to have time for constructive thought.33

His depth and strength of his relationship with Childers during this period is barely alluded to in his memoir. It was still unmistakeable, as an incident during the occupation of Cork by the Republican forces during the Civil War attests. In the course of this occupation J.J. Horgan met Erskine Childers by chance in the Grand Parade in the city, a stone’s throw from Horgan’s office at 50, South Mall. The two, as already noted, had been correspondents since at least 1917. In October 1919 Childers sent the British MP Wedgewood Benn to Horgan in Cork so that the British politician could see “the condition of the country under military law.”34 In April 1921 Mary Childers was writing to him also, to sympathise with him on the death of his wife Mary.35 The correspondence continued throughout 1921, with J.J. Horgan expressing occasional agreement with articles by Childers in the Catholic Bulletin and Studies, and suggesting a “need to talk”.36 After Childers’ execution in November 1922, Horgan got a letter from his widow in which she revealed that before his death Childers had spoken of him, and this prompted him to write in reply. He had, he said, not wanted to write earlier because he felt that it would have been an intrusion on her grief, but that he had seen him during the occupation of Cork “haggard and tired and much in need of rest.” Accepting that the two men had not seen eye to eye recently, he added: “No Republican has ever more stoutly upheld his honour and the sincerity of his motives than I have”.37

33 Horgan to Erskine Childers, 30 December 1918, TCD MSS 7848 (Childers MSS) 2.XII. I am indebted to Dr. Brian Murphy OSB of Glenstal Abbey for this and other references to the Childers papers.
34 Childers to Horgan, 1 October 1919, TCD MSS 7848 (Childers MSS) 2.XII
35 The children of John and Mary Horgan (nee Windle) were Ivor (1909-1980), Michael Joseph (1910-1969) and Madoline (b. 1915), matriarch of the family for more than three decades. John J. Horgan remarried, in 1923, Mary Brind, with whom he had two children: David (1924-1999), and Joan 1926-1962))
36 Horgan to Erskine Childers, 24 August 1921, TCD MSS 7848 (Childers MSS) 2.XII
37 Ibid., Horgan to Mary Childers, 29 December 1922.
What he did not tell her, and could not have brought himself to tell her, was that on that occasion Childers, with the Republican forces staring defeat in the face, had asked his Cork friend to keep two things for him – some papers, and a revolver. Horgan accepted the papers, hid them in a filing cabinet in his office, and in all probability later destroyed them. Taking responsibility for the revolver was, however, a bridge too far, even for a man he liked and respected: it was undoubtedly the weapon that had been given to Childers by Collins, and for the possession of which Childers was later tried and condemned to death.

Although we do not have his own word for it, it seems very likely that his patriotic fervour of the 1917-1919 period was to a considerable extent attenuated by the outbreak of the Civil War, an event that would have revived his Redmondite sympathies. He was, interestingly, silent about the Treaty at the time that it was enacted, although his later writings returned to it with a metronomic frequency. A possible inference is that he was, at the time, genuinely unsure about what the future might hold. Events, however, were to leave him with little option. One such event was in September 1922, when he found himself officiating at an inquest into the death of an IRA man, Timothy Kenefick, who had been killed by national troops three days earlier. The inquest was taken over by the IRA, who proceeded to select their own jury, which promptly and understandably returned a verdict of “wilful murder (...) by national troops”. Caught in the middle of this unpromising situation, the Coroner reminded the jury that they had heard only one side of the case, and – with no doubt little expectation of success – suggested an adjournment, which was not agreed to.

The end of the Civil War re-kindled his political ambitions, and he undoubtedly felt the need, and the opportunity, to spread his wings further than the confines of the Cork Harbour Board, of which he was had been a stalwart for a decade already. His political connections with the Free State government my not have been formal, but he was plainly seen as a Redmondite available for co-option – an opinion which would have been buttressed by his already formidable reputation for independence and civic spirit. As it turned out, civic duty and political ambition failed to converge and may even have militated against each other. In February 1925 he was

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38 Horgan revealed this many years later to his protege and long-time associate, Liam St. John Devlin, in private conversation. Liam St. John Devlin interview (28 December 2008).
appointed as Chairman of the Intoxicating Liquor Commission by the Minister for Justice, Kevin O’Higgins.\(^{40}\) This Commission reported in double-quick time, recommending that the ratio of public houses to population should be approximately 1:400 – a ratio unobtainable at the time, and no doubt a recommendation deeply unwelcome to publicans who, then and for many years afterwards, exercised a pivotal role in Irish political life. Possibly encouraged by this indication that he was being considered for a national, as opposed to a purely regional role in public life, he put himself forward - undoubtedly with Cumann na nGael support, which was similarly afforded to a number of other ex-Nationalist candidates - for nomination by the Seanad as a candidate in the 1925 Seanad election. Unsuccessful here, he was put forward again by the Dail, and this time he was selected a creditable eighth of the 38 candidates nominated by the Dail, ahead of such luminaries as Henry Harrison (Parnell’s former secretary), and Darrel Figgis.\(^{41}\) His willingness to accept a nomination, implying as it did a fairly whole-hearted acceptance of the Treaty and the structures it created, suggests strongly that the trenchant views he was to express in later years in condemnation of this constitutional solution to the Anglo-Irish political log-jam were at this stage far from settled.

It was a unique election, conducted on a country-wide basis with the electorate restricted to voters aged over 30.\(^{42}\) In the event, he polled respectably, with more than 80\% of his votes coming from the Cork area, but even at that he polled slightly behind other, better-connected Cork candidates such as George Crosbie of the Cork Examiner, and was eliminated on the 23rd count. Even if he had managed to escape from the tangles of localism that characterised this election, there would have been other, powerful forces ranged against him: the Licensed Grocers’ and Vintners’ Protection Association, which would have not been unaware of the threat to their members from the Intoxicating Liquor Commission, was one of the best organised lobbies in this election, would not have been impressed by his candidacy, and and succeeded in getting both its own candidates elected.

Electoral failure did not mean that he was short of other outlets for his talents. The same year saw him take up the reins as the anonymous Free State correspondent

\(^{40}\) Dail Debates, Vol 10, (10 February 1925), col. 93.
\(^{41}\) Dail Debates, Vol. 12 (8 July 1925), col. 2163.
\(^{42}\) Information about this election comes from John Coakley (1925), “Ireland’s Unique Electoral Experiment: The Senate Election of 1925, Irish Political Studies 20 (3) September 2005, pp. 231-269.
for The Round Table, the prestigious journal devoted to the politics of the Commonwealth. He was already well acquainted with the journal and its editors. In May 1921 Name? Dove, who had just been appointed editor, went to Ireland to observe at first hand the outcome of the War of Independence with Lionel Curtis, who had played an important role in the Treaty negotiations and in the formulation of Dominion status. His 1921 article on Ireland was very significant of its kind. Like many other political, intellectual and cultural tourists of the era, they stayed with Horgan at Lacaduv in Cork, and this inaugurated a relationship which led to the appointment of Horgan in 1925 as the anonymous correspondent in the Fee Stateb (later the republic) for the journal. Over a decade later Curtis, then a member of the Round Table editorial board, wrote to ???Harding enclosing what was evidently a manuscript of one of Horgan’s articles and describing his erstwhile host: “Horgan is a very able person and was Crown Solicitor at Cork before the Treaty, and Dove and I were once nearly murdered in his company....Please treat Horgan’s name as especially confidential in the matter for people’s lives, as you know, are not always too safe on the other side of St. George’s Channel.”

Curtis’s admiration for Horgan was to be put under serious strain later on, but it is safe to assume that when Horgan began his series of articles for the journal in 1925 he was highly ranked by this exclusive group of British intellectuals and Dominion advocates. His reputation with them would have been enhanced by from his commercial connections with Northern Ireland. From 1924 until the late 1950 he was a director – and, for much of the period chairman - of the drapery firm Robertson Ledlie Ferguson, which owned an eponymous store in Belfast, Todds in Limerick, and the Munster Arcade in Cork. As a Cork-based director of what was one of the few companies with substantial establishments on both sides of the Border at the time, he would have visited Belfast more frequently than many businessmen in the Republic, and it is a reasonable assumption is that he would have made the acquaintance, during this period, of Jack Sayers of the Belfast Telegraph, who was to become and remain a friend of his for several decades. Sayers had also contributed occasionally and anonymously to The Round Table from Northern Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s, and

43 The Round Table, Vol. 11.
44 Curtis to Harding, 26 July 1932, Curtis papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Mss Curtis 90.f.63. I am indebted to Dr. Deirdre Mcmahon for this and other references to the Curtis/Round Table papers.
textual evidence suggest that many of the references to Northern Ireland in Horgan’s contributions were influenced by insights contributed by Sayers.

His contributions to the Round Table spanned a period of more than four decades. His editors introduced him to their readers, with some circumspection. “The fact that the south west corner of Ireland has always been an exceptionally restless region gives a peculiar interest to the article that follows. It sets out the views of an Irishman who lives there, and at the same time enjoys unusual opportunities of personally gauging the situation in other parts of the country.”45 The veil thus drawn over the name of the author barely survived the self-revelations in the first section of his article, which contained sufficient detail about him to unmask his identity, at least in the eyes of anyone familiar with Irish public life in the preceding decade. While his anonymity was, at least technically, preserved, in time it became an open secret in political circles.

From the start, there is evidence of the absence of a party line in his writing. He could describe some of W.T. Cosgrave’s actions as “fatuous”;46 and remarked of his fellow-Corkonian J.J. Walsh that “his ignorance of economics is reputed to be only equalled by his knowledge of political organisation.”47 But he warmly praised personalities as disparate as Thomas Johnston and Ernest Blythe, even as he warned his readers about the skulking presence of de Valera in the wings. He expressed a passionate belief in a federal solution to the problem posed by Ulster Unionism, even as that possibility evaporated, and this theme was to become, together with his equally early opposition to official policies in relation to the Irish language, a leit-motif of his coverage of Irish affairs for the next four decades.

a harsh critic of de Valera’s policy in relation to the revival of the Irish language, in particular because he saw as undermining an already inadequate educational system, he was prepared to give successive Fianna Fail governments credit where he felt it was due, so much so that Nicholas Mansergh thought he was “uncritically enthusiastic” about de Valera.48

45 The Round Table 15 (60), December 1924- September 1925, p. 749.
46 The Round Table 16 (62), December 1925-September 1926, p. 587.
47 Ibid., p. 588.
48 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Nicholas Mansergh to Dermot Morrah, 23 January 1950, Mss Curtis 98 ff.217a,b. I am indebted to Dr Deirdre McMahon of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, for this and other references to the Curtis papers.
Although he later served as a member of the Town Tenancy Commission under Mr Justice Creed Meredith, his public service activities were thereafter largely confined to his native city and county. They were none the less significant for all that, and may be said to have centred largely on his membership of the Cork Harbour Commissioners, on which he served for more than half of the twentieth century. Elected for the first time in 1912, he was Chairman of the Board from 1923 to 1925, and was a major figure in the proceedings of the 1927 Tribunal on Ports and Harbours (1927-27). Simultaneously, the Cork Progressive Association asked him to draft a new system of municipal government for the city of Cork, which was enshrined in legislation in 1929 and later used as a template for local government for the whole country, including Northern Ireland, where it reached in 1942. His views on local government mirrored those he held in relation to the structure and principles that should govern the Harbour Commissioners: he chafed at the brake on progress created by stalemates between competing interests and by management structures where top-heavy membership led to stalemate, and indeed his ideas on local government were somewhat anti-populist in that he saw a powerful managerial system – still in existence – as the best bulwark against short-termism and jobbery.

The advent of the Fianna Fail government in 1932 was to put Cumann na nGael and its successor, Fine Gael, out of office for 16 years. Fianna Fail’s brand of nationalism, and in particular its irredentism and its passionate but also mechanistic approach to the revival of the Irish language, stirred the embers of controversy in this former member of the Gaelic League and long-time advocate of a gradualist and constitutionally-based approach to the vexed problem of Northern Ireland and its million Unionists. By the mid-1930s his opposition to the new government’s language policy (and in particular to its blinkered and eventually doomed attempt to ensure that instruction in all infant classes in primary schools would take place through the medium of the Irish language) was attracting the attention of foreign newspaper correspondents, who found him readily available for comment. Denis Gwynn, a friend for many years, wrote many years later that “his first attribute was his

50 Mary Leland (date), A History of the Cork Harbour Commissioners, p. 171. Some of the other details about his work with the Commissioners are also taken from this valuable overview.
51 He is quoted on this topic as “an influential Cork businessman” in a United Press newsagency report published widely on 10 February 1936, for instance.
unflinching moral courage on any issue that seemed to him important even if it meant provoking opposition where none existed before.”\textsuperscript{52} Paradoxically, the other side of this occasionally combative temperament was a rare skill in brokering peace deals in one or other of his capacities as a solicitor, a member of the Harbour Board or of the Cork Chamber of Commerce. In 1934, the Federated Union of Employers and the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union agreed that all dock disputes should be referred to him as referee: ‘the result was a virtual total absence of dock strikes in Cork for about 30 years’\textsuperscript{53} He found himself engaged, at around the same time, with the redoubtable Fianna Fail TD Martin Corry (from whose particular brand of politics he could hardly have been more removed), when he agreed to act as referee in a dispute between tenants in Cobh and their English landlord. The dispute, which had already exhausted two arbitrators, eventually ended with acceptance of his arbitration finding that there should be a one-third reduction in the rents paid by about 500 tenants.\textsuperscript{54}

By the beginning of the second world war, he had achieved a prominence and a reputation for independence that prompted an unusual query from the American Minister in Dublin, David Gray, who asked him privately for his assessment of the condition of the Irish Defence Forces. World War 11. His report to Gray was brief but informative, praising the Irish army as a highly disciplined and efficient force which “would resist any attack on the country from whatever direction.”\textsuperscript{55} He expressed concern about the armed section of the local security force, which he thought might prove “a dangerous experiment”, but his final piece of advice evidently came from the heart. “All this is of course qualified by the fact that if England is defeated we cannot hope to make any effective resistance to invasion and will have to accept a servitude such as we have never known. Let us pray this will never happen.”

The following year, quite unexpectedly, he lost his seat on the Harbour Board. This was not due to anything he had said or done, but to a concerted lobbying campaign on behalf of another candidate which had disturbed the normal tranquillity of the electoral process for this body. There is some evidence that he experienced this keenly as a rejection, and indeed that he was to a degree depressed by it, at least until

\textsuperscript{53} Leland, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{54} Martin Corry TD30Dail Debates, 27 April 1966.
\textsuperscript{55} Horgan to David Gray, 10 September 1940, USNA, Maryland, 8410.20/27
his re-election to the Board of the Harbour Commissioners in 1949. However, it also prompted a reaction that had one substantial long-term consequences. This was his memoir, *Parnell to Pearse*, which was composed at intervals between then and its publication in 1948.

His role in the management of Cork harbour after his re-election to the Board – he was to serve one of the longest terms as Chairman in the history of the Board, from 1949 to 1961 – was marked by substantial progress in the recovery of the port after World War II. He presided at meetings with authority. He was not impatient, because he enjoyed the role, but he could be brusque if he felt that an undue attention to detail was impeding the flow of business. And he played a major role in the development of the Verolme Cork Dockyards, of which he was a director, and which brought a much-needed fillip top the harbour area in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

His retirement, when it came, was handled with dignity, as he handed over to Tom Doyle, then Chairman of the chamber of Commerce. He remained a member, and sat as part of a troika with his old acquaintance and political rival, Seamus Fitzgerald, and his younger protege, Liam St. John Devlin, who himself was to play a major role, not only in the Harbour Commissioners (as the Board was to become) but in Irish public administration generally. Although he later turned down an invitation from Devlin to become a temporary vice-Chairman – it would in any case have been a retrograde step as he saw it – the Commissioners agreed unanimously to name a new wharf after him. It was a surer route to remembrance than another proposal made at the time – that one of the new liner tenders would be named after him. At a time when the days of the liner trade into Cobh were patently numbered, this honour would have been singularly short-lived.56

Although he could be scathing about the Irish language and de Valera’s policy on Northern Ireland, nothing appeared to engage his ire more than the declaration of the first inter-party government that it would no longer regard Ireland as a member of the Commonwealth, and its decision to formally declare Ireland a Republic. It was a theme to which he returned on numerous occasions. These actions, he wrote, ensured “the permanent disruption of Ireland”57. He lamented that Patrick McGilligan, the Minister for Finance and the only member of that government with any knowledge of Ulster, “unfortunately …does not seem to have inoculated his

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56 Personal interview, Liam St. John Devlin, Baltimore, 29 December 2008.
57 The Round Table, Vol 39 (153), p. 47.
colleagues with [his] sane ideas.” Warming to his theme, he declared in the following issue that it was a “dishonest volte face” and that it was “tragic that the gratuitous introduction of a foreign political formula should now ensure the permanent division of the country.” The government, he concluded, “in order to achieve their momentary aim of outflanking Mr de Valera…have poisoned the wells of Irish political life, destroyed the raison d’etre of the Fine Gael Party, made our Northern border permanent and international, and reduced Ireland to a position of international impotence.”

His fulminations about the Costello government’s decision to leave the Commonwealth (or, more precisely, to declare the Republic, given that various obiter dicta of both de Valera and Costello had put Ireland’s the exact status of membership in doubt anyway) created alarm in some influential circles. The historian Nicholas Mansergh, later Smuts Professor of the History of the British Commonwealth at Cambridge University, wrote privately to his friend Dermot Morrah early in 1950 criticising the Irish correspondent of the Round Table as adopting the standpoint of “an unrepentant Redmondite who believes that everything went wrong in 1916.” This was more a caricature than a characterization, in that it exaggerated and distorted Horgan’s profound political antipathy to the Rising and its effects, and ignored much that was positive in his assessments of post-1922 Ireland.

Mansergh preferred to see a logic in the statements of Irish delegates to the Commonwealth Relations Conference at Bigwin in Canada in September 1949 that secession from the Commonwealth made cooperation easier – a policy whose logic was not, to put it mildly, self-evident. Accordingly, he suggested that although Horgan should not be dropped, additional articles should be commissioned from time to time from “other points of view” (he instanced Terence de Vere White and Professor W.B. Stanford of Trinity College). Lionel Curtis, the historian and another member of the Round Table editorial board, or ‘moot’, who only four years earlier had been expressing his confidence in Horgan to Ivison Macadam, the editor of the

58 Ibid., p. 48.
59 Ibid., pp. 151, 153.
60 Check ref
61 Mansergh to Morrah, 23 January 1950, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Mss Curtis 98 ff.217a,b I am indebted to Dr. Deirdre McMahon of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, for this and other references to the Curtis papers.
62 Ibid.
Round Table, now wrote to Morrah to express his “entire agreement” with Mansergh’s letter. It is worth noting that Curtis’s role in the Treaty negotiations and in the formulation of Dominion status had been very significant, and that he was, not least for these reasons, a strong admirer of W. T. Cosgrave. Ironically, Horgan’s information about the Bigwin Conference had come in part from Curtis himself, who wrote to tell him that ”we let [the Irish delegates] blow off about partition with the result that they realized that the rest of the delegates felt that it was hardly practical politics to ask the British government to send troops to shoot down Ulstermen unless they became republicans….Having got partition off their chests the Irish never mentioned it again.”

Once demolished, Horgan’s confidence in any non-Fianna Fail administration was difficult to rebuild. He derided the same government’s attitude to NATO - “we do not want to fight even against Communism, believing that we should be fools to do so when someone else is prepared to fight for us” – and depicted Mr Costello as someone who “regards Mr de Valera as a more immediate menace than Stalin.” His anti-Communism, on the other hand, while it was fairly typical of the Cold War era, did not make him an uncritical supporter of ecclesiastical politics. He plainly admired Noel Browne’s attempt to introduce major health care initiatives, argued in specifically theological terms against the bishops’ condemnation of Browne’s scheme, and pointed out mordantly that “the real objection, never publicly discussed, was the undoubted fact that it would have seriously interfered with the income of the medical profession.” He saluted the electorate for returning Browne and his colleague Dr. Michael ffrench O’Carroll at the subsequent general election and, when Browne lost his seat in 1954, observed that “if the doctors rejoice at the disappearance of their bête noire, the public may well mourn his defeat.”

His piquant commentaries on Irish political, economic and social life during these years were further enlivened by thumbnail portraits of many of the protagonists and their institutions. Fianna Fail, he observed at one point, was “less a political party

63 Curtis to Macadam, 4 September 1946, Mss Curtis 90 f.110.  
64 Curtis to Horgan, 30 December 1949, Bodleian Library, Mss. Eng. Hist. c871 f.186  
66 Ibid.  
68 The Round Table, 44 (176) (September 1954), p. 397.
than an act of faith in Mr de Valera”,69 whose “ceremonial tomfoolery”70 in paying a formal visit to the German legation on Hitler’s death he deprecated. Returning to the Taoiseach later, he observed:

Mr. de Valera’s opponents are fond of suggesting that he is an apt student of Machiavelli, while his supporters cherish the view that he is a second Einstein. Both views are exaggerated. He is merely an extremely competent and very wily politician.71

De Valera’s principal rival, John A. Costello, whose political sins against the Commonwealth he had already itemised, was “a dogged character with small political experience and less judgment”;72 Costello’s successor, James Dillon, despite the fact that his views on Irish in the schools and on the importance of the Commonwealth connection were found admirable, was equally skewered. “If he suffers from exaggeration and a tendency to repeat himself, these are sound political weapons which nearly every Irish leader since O’Connell has used with effect.”73 Oliver Flanagan’s “speciality is monetary reform through the printing press;”74 the Labour Party was “a strange mixture of Victorian liberalism and what may perhaps be described as Catholic Socialism imperfectly understood and applied”;75 the Anti-Partition League was “a body of noisy cranks”;76 Conor Cruise O’Brien was “an idealist intellectual theorist ill equipped to deal with practical problems”;77 C.J. Haughey, whose Succession Bill the Round Table correspondent, as a solicitor, found particularly objectionable, “has had no legal experience and has clearly been influenced by his civil service advisers”;78 and Jack Lynch, whose inexperience in dealing with his first Cabinet post in education he had noted in 1957, was saluted a decade later as “a quiet, soft-spoken Cork man of clear intelligence and integrity.”79

His observations on O’Brien were in relation to the Congo episode, but he had earlier had dealings with him in relation to the controversial publication of a book on

69 The Round Table, 35 (140), September 1945, p. 313.
70 Ibid., p. 3309
71 The Round Table, 37 (147), January 1947, p. 282.
72 The Round Table, 50 (198) march
73 Ibid., p. 280.
74 The Round Table, 38 (150), march 1948, p. 198
75 The Round Table, 44 (175), June 1954, p. 276.
76 The Riund Table, 44 (174), March 1954, p. 185.
77 The Round Table, 52 (206), p. 188.
78 The Round Table, 55, (217), December 1964, p. 97.
79 The Round Table, 57 (122), January 1967, p. 122.
partition by Michael Sheehy. “Divided We Stand: A Study in Partition,” to which he had contributed a characteristically pugnacious foreword. The thesis of foreword reflected that of the book – that it was, in Sheehy’s words, “the most childish of evasions, the most ignoble of pretences to place the responsibility for Partition on England, and to ignore the many and fundamental differences which more than adequately explain the political division of Ireland”.  

This book, as the Faber and Faber archives testify, had a long gestation and an ill-starred birth. It was sent originally to the publishers in 1953 and, when the publishers asked Horgan to suggest someone who would read the book for factual and historical detail “with a scholarly and sympathetic eye”, he wrote confidently to Donal O’Sullivan, whose book on the Irish free State and its Senate had also been published by Fabers, and who was also married to the widow of one of Horgan’s older brothers. His optimism was misplaced: O’Sullivan did as requested, but told the editor at Fabers who had accepted the book, Charles Monteith - an Ulsterman – of his “strongly adverse criticism” and of his belief that the book would “become the target of unanswerable criticism, and ...would not redound to the credit of anyone concerned.” This led, not unnaturally, to a falling-out between O’Sullivan and Horgan, who regarded O’Sullivan’s actions as (in O’Sullivan’s words) “black treachery”.

Although O’Sullivan’s diagnosis was coloured by a deep antipathy to the unfashionable but well-argued political views of both men, which antipathy would of course have been widely shared by the political establishment of the time, his prognosis was accurate enough. Although it was reviewed favourably by the Belfast Telegraph, the Sunday Press published “a page of hysterical nonsense” about it, and not even the Cork Examiner, over which Horgan might have been expected to exercise some influence, obliged – it published a “schizophrenic” review written by

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81 Sheehy, op. cit., p. 102.
82 O’Sullivan to Monteith, 7 February 1954, Faber Archive CM 17/35. I am grateful to the CEO of Fabers, Mr. Stephen Page, and the company’s archivist, Mr. XXX Brown, for permission to reproduce this and related material.
83 Horgan to Monteith, 5 May 1955, ibid.
the company chairman, Tom Crosbie, who in Horgan’s view was “truly mad”! The company chairman, Tom Crosbie, who in Horgan’s view was “truly mad”! 84 Mansergh, whose pique at Horgan’s attacks on John A. Costello had evidently by now evaporated, reviewed it favourably in the Chatham House journal *International Affairs*, and Professor R. Dudley Edwards of UCD contributed similarly to the National University Graduates Review. However, although the *Sunday Times* decided not to publish the favourable review it received from Frank McDermott, and most of the newspapers in the Republic “refused to discuss Sheehy’s thesis and devoted themselves to abuse and innuendo”, Browne and Nolan’s shop sold out its allocation rapidly. 86

As part of his efforts to publicise the book and its thesis, Horgan also contacted Conor Cruise O’Brien, then still attached to the department of External Affairs in Iveagh House (and who had been, as a civil servant, the first Director of the Irish News Agency, charged after 1949 with the task of disseminating Mr. Sean MacBride’s views on Partition to the world). O’Brien wrote to him to say that while he knew and respected Horgan’s views on Ulster, he was “sorry in some ways...that you lent the authority of your name to Sheehy’s book which I think overstated some true things and painted rather too flattering a picture of the Ulster side.” 87 O’Brien, whose views would later evolve to a point where they left the then heretical views of Sheehy and Horgan far behind, was simultaneously suggesting to the Irish Ambassador in London, Frederick Boland, that he should try and neutralise the effect of the book: Boland, while endorsing this tactic, was not optimistic: “John J. Horgan has been running his course so obstinately for so long that I don’t see him being easily deflected from it at this late stage”. 88 Although a meeting was planned, at which Horgan promised to tell O’Brien “the full story of Sheehy’s book (in which Radio Eireann played an unconscious part)” 89 the meeting appears not to have taken place or, if it did, was not minuted. A decade later, the book and its attendant controversy were still not forgotten. In the mid-1960s Professor Desmond XXXX of University College, Dublin, entertained the present writer, then a young journalist, to dinner in the University Club in St. Stephen’s Green in the course of which he passed , without

84 Ibid.
85 Horgan to Monteith, 5 January 1956, Faber Archive CM 17/35.
86 Horgan to Monteith, 23 May 1955. Ibid.
88 Boland to Conor Cruise O’Brien, 13 July 1955, ibid.
89 Horgan to Conor Cuise O’Brien, 19 July 1955, ibid.
comment, a rumour that the publication of the book had been subvened by MI5 - a rumour for which the material in the Faber archives provide no evidence whatsoever. His most unalloyed praise, however, was reserved for Sean Lemass. From the early 1940s on, he is saluted as the ultimate realist, as disinterested, patriotic, as the possessor of “the only inquiring mind in government”\(^90\), as “by far the ablest and most dynamic of de Valera’s lieutenants”, \(^91\) who, as Taoiseach, was a “forthright and audacious”\(^92\) leader who had earlier had the courage to reverse industrial policy and confront the “parvenu industrial magnates of modern origin”\(^93\) and who now was “both ready and willing to bury de Valera’s past policy [but] does not desire that it should be given a public funeral.”\(^94\)

. Even before independence, he had been closely involved and interested in the evolution of local government structures (Studies) and in later life used to speak warmly of a role he played in the evolution and drafting of the Cork City Management Act, which was the foundation stone of the managerial system of local government in Ireland – a system more or less explicitly designed to remove real power from the hands of reputedly venal elected representatives in the lowest tier of government.

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\(^90\) The Round Table, 44 (175), June 1954, p. 280.
\(^91\) The Round Table, 76 (172), March 1956, p. 280
\(^92\) The Round Table, 52 (209) December 1962, p. 68.
\(^93\) The Round Table 51 (202) March 1961, p. 177.
\(^94\) The Round Table, 53 (209) December 1962, p. 69.