Comparative Reflections on Cartoons as Snapshot, Narrative and Source.

Throughout the 20th century, cartoons relentlessly appeared in all sorts of newspapers. This paper argues that, in both Britain and Ireland, the range and impact of public sphere cartoons acting as a cultural record for researchers, is a diverse one that can be broken down into 3 functions: narrative, snapshot and context/voice – the latter representing a methodological approach that differs from historians' traditional and sparing use of cartoons in a referential way. Some comparative analysis will also be offered of differing contexts and approaches in mainland Britain as opposed to Ireland during the periods featured.

The chapter presents two original case studies to illustrate in more detail the vibrant culture of cartooning throughout the 20th century – sports cartoons from the Great War, and a discussion of cartoons from the Cold War – offering reflections on comparative style and content of the two case studies.

In the case of World War One, types of truth enhancements indicate respective attachment to, or detachment from, Imperial institutions – a comparative point between mainland Britain and Ireland that reached a high point in 1916, the year of the Easter Rising, and reflected in cartoon discourses on national issues connected with conscription. Here, professional footballers are criticised for playing sport instead of joining the army to fight in the war, showing contrasting images of muddy fields - the football pitch and the battlefield.

When turning to World War II, cartoon traditions in Britain marked a return in some respects to the acerbic traditions of James Gillray, most notably in the work of David Low. Works such as The Harmony Boys (1940) and, most famously, The Rendezvous, invoke the eighteenth-century illustrator's bitter commentaries on the Napoleonic Wars such as his depiction of Napoleon and Pitt dividing up the world in The Plum Pudding in Danger. Gillray, indeed, provides a recurrent reference point for the visual iconography of political and military struggle throughout the twentieth century, appearing in Leslie Illingworth's 1967 cartoon of the Cuban missile crisis, showing Lyndon Johnson and Brezhnev dividing up the world between them.

In this second case study – of Cold War – examples demonstrate a feature that cartoons are strong on, namely the personalisation around a character or characters and the caricature process for leaders. Although the issues raised during the Cold War were actually more important politically than the personalities, cartoons adapted the discourse into a conflict between personalities. These characterisations continued through to the end of the 20th century: political satire, cartooning and comic strips still provided inspiration for diverse strands of creativity.