

Illuminating The Irish Free State: Nationalism, National Identity, And The Promotion Of The Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme

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ILLUMINATING THE IRISH FREE STATE: NATIONALISM, NATIONAL
IDENTITY, AND THE PROMOTION OF THE SHANNON
HYDROELECTRIC SCHEME

by

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Marquette University,
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ABSTRACT
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This dissertation focuses on the ways in which the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme influenced perceptions of Irishness in the fraught context of postcolonial nation building. The Irish Free State, established by a treaty with Great Britain in 1921, faced the difficult task of maintaining order and establishing stable institutions for the new state. One of the government's most audacious efforts to achieve these objectives was to construct the largest hydroelectric dam in the world on the River Shannon in 1925 with the help of German contractors from Siemens-Schuckert. The first half of the dissertation deals with several ideological issues brought to the fore by the Scheme. I will demonstrate how the Free State government usurped the project as a symbol of its own political success, and the ways in which the education system and the Catholic Church responded to the demands of modernity. The presence of hundreds of German engineers and their families, and the absence of any real participation by the British, provided an unparalleled opportunity for the Irish to explore concepts of "otherness" and race—hot-button issues in the interwar period. Regional tensions similarly allowed various Irish people to define themselves within the national community, as the people of Limerick distinguished their community from Dublin, Cork, and the Gaeltacht. The second half of the dissertation deals specifically with the promotional campaigns designed for tourists and women.

The Shannon Scheme served as a nexus where interwar and postcolonial issues converged and provided a space for the Irish to examine intricate facets of their local and national identities. In discussions about the dam, politicians, electricians, journalists, priests, and citizens articulated theories about politics, religion, education, race, and gender. By focusing on the *promotion* of the Scheme, I can reconstruct the ideal image of Irishness its advocates sought to cultivate, with Irish, imperial, and international audiences in mind. I argue that Ireland's former colonial status dictated the particular contours of identity formation, but that perceptions of nationalism, modernity, and Irishness were multifaceted and shaped as much from within national boundaries as they were by global responses to the new state demonstrating autonomy.

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This project originated in 2008 as the result of an independent readings course at Central Washington University. Many people since then have contributed to my conceptualization of the larger work by reading drafts, commenting on presentations, or discussing ideas about how I might link hydroelectricity to broader cultural and political themes in Irish history. While at CWU, I worked with a number of professors whose suggestions and interest in what I was doing helped shape the initial direction of my research. This included Roxanne Easley, Daniel Herman, and Jason Knirck, who all read drafts of my thesis and provided thoughtful advice for continuing the project as a doctoral student. Jason demonstrated exemplary skills as a mentor and his faith in me proved invaluable. I am grateful for his wiliness to continue to engage my work, challenge me as an historian, and remind me to laugh at myself every now and then. Both Jason and his wife, Mari, have been incredibly generous with their time and their encouragement and friendship have been not only been steady, but they also have been tremendously reassuring.

At Marquette University, my development as a student of history was directed by Timothy G. McMahon, whose patience, careful editing, and suggestions for new avenues of research made this work come together. His focus and persistence kept me on track and I am thankful for the many hours he put in as my advisor reading drafts and commenting on chapters. Alan Ball's comments on the broader themes addressed in this work were insightful and helped me expand the scope of its postcolonial focus. Michael Cronin from Boston College, who graciously agreed to participate as an outside member of my committee, provided important suggestions for presenting the Shannon Scheme in the larger context of what the Free State government hoped to achieve during this period. To these three—my dissertation committee—I am incredibly appreciative. In addition to these scholars, I would like to thank Lezlie Knox, Irene Guenther, Michael Wert, Daniel Meissner, Julius Ruff, and James Marten for modeling what it means to be a professional historian. During my time at Marquette, a number of graduate students made the entire process both intellectually stimulating and socially more enjoyable. Charissa Keup, Karalee Surface, Bethany Harding, and Jeff Ramsey made up a strong cohort that I was honored to be a part of in the department. In addition, Matt Costello and Alyssa Klubeck were particularly encouraging of my work and their friendship will be one of the greatest things I take away from graduate school. Ken Shonk and Mandy Townsley have discussed this project at length with me and their perspectives were fresh and interesting.

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I am immensely grateful to my family and friends for the support I have received throughout my educational journey and for being incredibly understanding of the unusual pressure this put on my time. My parents, Randy and Lori, set high expectations for me and taught me the value of receiving an education. Breeana, Mark, Brandon, and Kindra have been wonderful outlets to express my triumphs and tribulations associated with the process and their constant support meant more than they will ever know. Diana Ferguson, Wanda Dupre, Ruth Dozier, and Colin Ramsey's interest in my progress and career has been comforting and a wonderful source of motivation. Angie Salter and Kate Brown have tolerated so much and let me talk more history than they probably wanted to hear. Taking breaks from the dissertation to grab a cuppa or catch a hockey game with Bairbre Chiardha kept me sane and reminded me to enjoy the small things in life. Ryan, who has only known me as a dissertator, took everything in stride and was a constant source of happiness and support as I edited drafts.

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INTRODUCTION

Will it [the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme] mean in the long run the emergence of a new type of Irishman, alert to apply to his own purpose every modern discovery and every improved method, yet cherishing at the same time the ideals of the legendary past and drawing his mental sustenance from Gaelic culture?¹

—M. G. Palmer, January 12, 1930

With this insightful question, M. G. Palmer captured the essence of what the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme meant to Irish society. The seemingly contradictory notions of tradition and modernity in many ways shaped the development of the Irish Free State and perceptions of Irishness in the interwar years.² Political leaders and citizens alike had to ask themselves if Ireland was *Irish* merely because of its Gaelic heritage, or if being Irish could simultaneously take on more progressive and modern connotations. For postcolonial societies engaged in nation building, this debate was pervasive, and the degree to which each has sought a balance between what came before and the desired trajectories of the post-independence states is critical to fostering national identities. Indeed, while nationalist dogma that advocated severance from colonial control undoubtedly looked to the past for legitimacy, inevitably populations in newly independent states must confront the present and the future when the goal of independence is achieved. The inherent problem with this dialectic is that it can appear that traditions must be sacrificed in the name of modernity; that the balance is in practice

¹ M. G. Palmer, “The Shannon Stirs New Hope in Ireland: Popular Imagination Has Been Fired by the Harnessing of Its Historic Waters to Make Industries Grow,” *New York Times Magazine*, 12 January 1930; Patrick McGilligan Papers, University College Dublin Archives (UCDA) P35d/15(15).

² The Irish Free State was established by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, though the state did not come into existence until December 1922 with the adoption of the Constitution of the Irish Free State. It replaced the self-proclaimed Irish Republic of 1919 and had dominion status within the British Empire. The six counties of Northern Ireland opted out of the Free State, which was refashioned the modern state of Ireland in 1937 when citizens voted to replace the Constitution.

a zero-sum game.³ However, as a study of the Shannon Scheme and its promotion demonstrates, these themes were negotiated and addressed in ways that did not make them necessarily incompatible. The Free State harnessed the project in the name of nation building in an attempt to cultivate a particularly Irish modernity. Janus-faced on the surface, this type of modernity was unlike industrialism elsewhere because the government promised not to sacrifice agriculture (tradition) for the sake of industry (modernity). The questions that beg to be asked are why the Free State adopted the Scheme for this purpose and how it struck a balance between a nationalist ethos that emphasized connections to a Gaelic past and modernization that would propel the nation in new directions.

While a few entrepreneurs and engineers had speculated on the possibility of harnessing the River Shannon prior to the 1920s, many nationalists contended that the British had resisted developing Ireland's resources in order to stunt industrial growth for their own colonial purposes. Inspired by new developments in hydroelectricity and the potential for its implementation under an Irish government, Thomas McLaughlin, an engineer and graduate of UCD, picked up on these earlier speculations and made them a reality when he took a job in Berlin working for Siemens Schuckert in December 1922. Using the close connections he had with former classmates turned politicians, McLaughlin facilitated conversations between Siemens and the Free State. He received a

³ The term "modernity" will be used in place of "modernization" or "industrialization" as its definition more broadly encompasses technological, political, and cultural progress. While modernity incorporates modern and industrial projects, such as hydroelectric development, the concept is more expansive in its outlook by also considering transformations in consciousness concerning how the modern present came to differ from past traditions and values. Similarly, modernization and industrialization, though related, are not synonymous given that modern luxuries, including electricity in the home, did not necessarily have industrial functions. See Joe Cleary's essay "Ireland and Modernity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-24.

positive response from government ministers after presenting his ideas in December 1923, which in turn led to the publication of a White Paper in March 1924. This report laid out the conditions for submitting a proposal to develop electrical power in Ireland. Later that year, Siemens' proposal, *The Electrification of the Irish Free State: The Shannon Scheme Developed by Siemens-Schuckert*, was handed over to a committee of four European experts charged with evaluating its merits before it was finally presented to the two houses of Free State legislature, Dáil Éireann and the Seanad, for approval. After debates over the cost, size, and technical aspects of the project, the Shannon Electricity Act of 1925 signaled the official sanction needed for construction to begin. This massive undertaking put excessive demands on the already extensive portfolio of the Department of Industry and Commerce. In an effort to ease this burden and more effectively orchestrate the sweeping promotional campaign, the Electricity (Supply) Act of 1927 transferred the management of the project and the distribution of electricity to one government entity: the Electricity Supply Board (ESB). Part of this semi-state body's responsibility was to nationalize the electricity industry in Ireland, meaning that the small producers were bought up by the government, leading some to interpret this as a manifestation of socialism. In addition, the ESB was charged with selling the Scheme to the public, which, especially in areas outside of Dublin, had little experience with electricity and needed to be educated on its benefits.

Although revolutionary in many ways, the Shannon Scheme was not responsible for introducing electricity to the island. In fact, as Maurice Manning and Moore McDowell have noted, "the first electric light in Ireland was an arc lamp outside the

office of the *Freeman's Journal* in Prince's Street, Dublin, in 1880.”⁴ The novelty did not, however, inspire many industries, and as the authors claimed, “in retrospect it is hard to be enthusiastic about the progress of electrification in Ireland prior to independence.”⁵ When the Free State government took over in 1922, one hundred and sixty separate suppliers managed the nation's electrical needs.⁶ However, these unconnected entities, with the exception of the Dublin Corporation, mainly catered to local industries, and “over a quarter of them had fewer than five consumers.”⁷ The introduction of the Shannon Scheme, therefore, transformed the way people thought about electricity because it revolutionized the daily business of running homes and factories in places that had previously been outside the range of these small electricity suppliers.

Commissioned by the government as part of its state-building agenda, the Shannon Scheme was an unprecedented and audacious venture in national electrification. It was the largest civil works project of the time in Ireland, and it briefly was the largest hydroelectric dam in the world. This undertaking, facilitated by the power station built at Ardnacrusha on the Shannon River, enabled Ireland to create the first national electrification grid in Europe. The Shannon Scheme was also a watershed in Irish history because it played a fundamental role in the Free State's efforts to establish political and economic independence from Britain. Constructed by a combination of German engineers and workers from Siemens, alongside Irish laborers, the Shannon Scheme

⁴ Maurice Manning and Moore McDowell, *Electricity Supply in Ireland: The History of the ESB* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984), 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶ “The Shannon Scheme Project,” in *Siemens in Ireland, 1925-2000: Seventy-Five Years of Innovation*, by Gerald O'Beirne (Dublin: A & A Farmar, 2000): 41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

stood at the forefront of modern engineering. However, this project could be seen as a major break from the desired agricultural paradise proclaimed by Irish nationalists, since electricity was generally associated with industrial development. The ways in which Cumann na nGaedheal, the governing political party, promoted electricity emphasized the challenges of its attempted reimagining of Irish national identity to incorporate industrial and technological modernity. By linking the Shannon Scheme to the cause of nation building, the Free State government and its supporters sought a delicate balance that celebrated agriculture as Ireland's greatest industry, with the caveat that in order to compete with other 'butter-producing' nations, such as Denmark, it was necessary to modernize.

The context in which the government undertook this expansive project, in the hopes of competing with other European nations in the interwar period, indicates the Scheme's truly remarkable genesis. The Irish Free State was founded in the midst of violent struggle and opposition to government. From undermining British representatives during the Land War of the late-nineteenth century to a nationalist uprising on Easter Monday 1916, there was a pervasive trend in Ireland to challenge political legitimacy. This period of contestation did not end with the culmination of the Great War, but rather escalated in response to the postponement of Home Rule—a constitutionally modest program that had been the prime goal of Irish nationalists to break the bonds of British colonial rule—bringing Irish nationalist forces into conflict with British troops during the War of Independence from 1919-1921.⁸ Though the Anglo-Irish Treaty was designed to

⁸ For more on Home Rule, see Alan O'Day's *Irish Home Rule 1867-1921* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). See also Alvin Jackson's *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003).

pacify the situation, it proved to be extremely divisive to the nationalist movement in Ireland. Pro- and anti-Treaty factions fundamentally disagreed over the terms of this treaty and fought a devastating Civil War from 1922-1923, dividing families and communities for generations following the ceasefire. The loss of the northern six counties as a result of the Treaty and the subsequent Boundary Commission only further compounded this traumatic memory and legacy of violence because a united Ireland has been essential to nationalists' definition of the nation. The pro-Treaty victors of the Civil War, most of who were represented politically by the Cumann na nGaedheal party, adhered to maintaining the Treaty as a matter of honor and as a source of their own legitimacy. The anti-Treaty faction—reconstituted as Fianna Fáil in 1926 and led by the putative republic's president Eamon de Valera—protested against the Free State government's willingness to accept terms that required elected officials to take an oath of allegiance to the Crown and that fell short of granting a republic. Thus, the Shannon Scheme must be considered not only as a means to break from tradition by demonstrating the new nation's independence in the postcolonial period, but the project also linked the state to the past by perpetuating the Irish revolution's legacy.

On the surface, depicting early-twentieth century Ireland as a place marred by war, violence, and skepticism of, if not outright objection to, government might seem to be a valid assessment. Yet, the 1920s prove problematic to such a sweeping generality. The decade also ushered in an era of dramatic change, political stability, and technological innovation. Electrification was all the rage in Europe, but the new Irish government understood that such an extensive and costly endeavor carried risks. Still not recovered from the devastation of the Civil War—literally in terms of infrastructure, but

also psychologically as the postcolonial nation sought to break the bonds of a pervasive inferiority complex—the Free State embarked on the Shannon Scheme because it viewed electrification as a cure to this despondency: one that would spark not only Irish industries, but also the Irish imagination. In many ways, Cumann na nGaedheal also exploited the project as a means to bolster the party’s claim to the revolutionary mantle. Fianna Fáil, as the strongest voice of opposition, chastised the governing party for its attention to big business and its seemingly pro-imperialist attitudes at the expense of *real* Ireland—the small farmers who were struggling to pay land annuities to Britain. De Valera’s party accused Cumann na nGaedheal of betraying the revolution by moving away from the nationalist ethos that celebrated Arthur Griffith’s model for economic independence as a necessary part of the Irish-Ireland movement.⁹ The notable achievement that was the Shannon Scheme has therefore been mired in relative obscurity, as the emphasis on Cumann na nGaedheal’s shortcomings, made possible by Fianna Fáil’s impressive grasp on politics from 1932 until its fall in the most recent spring election of 2011, persisted through most of the twentieth century.

Historical interpretations of Cumann na nGaedheal have largely echoed Fianna Fáil’s claims that the government and its policies were stagnant and anti-industrial. Thus, one group of historians, including Mary Daly and John Regan, have argued that Cumann na nGaedheal was conservative and lacked the initiative or desire to transform Ireland in any meaningful way. Daly has claimed that

⁹ Founded in the 1890s, the Irish-Ireland movement was a manifestation of cultural nationalism that advocated a preservation of Irish heritage, including language, culture, and literature. Douglas Hyde’s 1892 article, “The necessity for de-anglicising Ireland,” expresses the tenets of Irish-Irelanders. See Timothy G. McMahon’s *Grand Opportunity: The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

The late nineteenth-century stirring of Irish nationalism through language revival and the adulation of traditional peasant society was explicitly antimodern in its approach and saw a new Ireland as rejecting the materialism of an urban industrialized society. The Cumann na nGaedheal government subscribed to these values by endeavoring to focus Irish economic destiny on agriculture.¹⁰

She stressed the inefficiency of the government's policy to delegate decisions to committees that never produced reports or that chose to disregard appeals for economic assistance for years at a time. Tariff reform was a particularly heated issue in this context, as some people supported the establishment of tariff walls in order to protect Irish industry, while others rejected it because they feared Britain would retaliate and Irish agriculture would suffer. As Daly argues, in order to solve this dilemma, Cumann na nGaedheal leaders sat on issues or took minimal action to appear as if they were doing something, such as placing tariffs on economically unimportant goods, like rosary beads. In *The Irish Counter-Revolution 1921-1936*, meanwhile, John Regan described the Free State period as explicitly counterrevolutionary and proposed that Cumann na nGaedheal leaders actually reversed some of the gains of the revolution.

Several historians have challenged this historiography by reassessing Cumann na nGaedheal, and they have contended that it was neither as anti-industrial nor as anti-modern as previous historians claimed. Jason Knirck's recent research on the party indicates that Cumann na nGaedheal was not the counterrevolutionary force portrayed by Regan. Knirck investigated the complexities that shaped decisions made by Free State leaders, whom he depicts as more pragmatic than their successors in Fianna Fáil.¹¹ He

¹⁰ Mary Daly, *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity, 1922-1939* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 174.

¹¹ Jason Knirck, *Afterimage of the Revolution: Cumann na nGaedheal and the Irish Revolution* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

stressed the state-building agenda of the party and the ways in which Cumann na nGaedheal sought to maintain its connection to the revolution, all the while attempting to establish faith in government institutions and provide stability. Ciara Meehan has contributed to this reinterpretation of Cumann na nGaedheal in her book entitled *The Cosgrave Party: A History of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33*. Meehan's work has addressed a substantial gap in the historiography of the Free State by focusing on the innovations of the party and its leaders in matters of electioneering, which she deemed "both inventive and impressive."¹² According to Meehan, "the emphasis in the historiography of the period 1927-1932 on Cumann na nGaedheal's problems and failures has meant that achievements are largely forgotten," including in her list the Shannon Scheme, the Statute of Westminster, and President William T. Cosgrave's trip to the United States.¹³ Both Knirck and Meehan have made great headway in analyzing Cumann na nGaedheal in its own right by demonstrating that the party was not as inactive as historians like Daly and Regan claim.

Further, the debate between tradition and modernity affects interpretations of not only Cumann na nGaedheal, but of the Irish nationalist tradition of which the party was just one variant. D. George Boyce has outlined that "the chief characteristics of nationalism in Ireland have been race, religion, and a strong sense of territorial unity and

¹² Ciara Meehan, *The Cosgrave Party: A History of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33* (Dublin: Prism, 2010), 119.

¹³ Meehan, 138. She noted the significance of the Statute of Westminster 1931 which established legislative equality among the dominions of the British Empire. This meant that the dominions were independent and bound only by their own laws. When Fianna Fáil won a majority in 1933, it used the Statute of Westminster to legally disassemble the Anglo-Irish Treaty and draft a new constitution. In addition to this boon for Free State foreign policy, Meehan discussed Cosgrave's propaganda tour to the United States and Canada in 1928. In addition to addressing the House of Representatives, Cosgrave visited New York, Chicago, Washington, and Ottawa to promote the accomplishments of the Irish government.

integrity; and in all its modes it has been profoundly influenced by the power and proximity of Britain.”¹⁴ Since both leading political parties of the Free State were nationalist in outlook, it was not unusual for both to appeal to the anti-modern aspect of nationalism that emphasized the Gaeltacht as pure and untouched by British influence.¹⁵ Most famously in a speech broadcast in 1943, then-President de Valera proclaimed,

The Ireland that we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit—a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. The home, in short, of a people living the life that God desires that men should live.¹⁶

Historians have also used similar rhetoric employed by romantic nationalists to characterize the nationalist movement as decidedly anti-British. For example, Lawrence McCaffery suggested that

In their [nationalists’] efforts to de-Anglicize Ireland they attacked British values. They portrayed the Irish as spiritual people finding beauty in the things of nature. In contrast, Englishmen were coarse materialists. Industrialism was a cruel monster devouring the human spirit. Urbanization corrupted men’s personalities. Utilitarianism was a vulgar justification of avarice. Without the presence of the British and their perverse culture, Ireland would be a rural paradise.¹⁷

Indeed, for much of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, nationalists painted Ireland as the direct opposite of Britain. If the latter was considered modern, industrial, and forward-looking, Ireland was anti-modern, agricultural, and dedicated to tradition.

¹⁴ David George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 19.

¹⁵ The Gaeltacht are Irish-speaking regions of the west that were also predominately agrarian.

¹⁶ Eamon de Valera, “The Ireland That We Dreamed Of,” speech delivered March 17, 1943, in the RTÉ Libraries and Archives, http://www.rte.ie/laweb/11/11_t09b.html [accessed May 5, 2009].

¹⁷ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, “Irish Nationalism and Irish Catholicism: A Study in Cultural Identity,” *Church History* 42, no. 4 (December 1973): 533.

Historians and literary scholars have also used this argument to explain elements of Irish nationalism. The legacy of this anti-British trope among Irish nationalists was highlighted by Declan Kiberd, who traced it to the Norman invasion: “Ireland was soon patented as not-England, a place whose peoples were, in many important ways, the very antitheses of their new rulers from overseas.”¹⁸ Joe Cleary has built on Kiberd’s interpretation by suggesting that colonial ties to “modern” Britain meant that “from the nineteenth century onwards, Ireland acquired a refurbished reputation as a national culture distinguished by its supposed antipathy to the modern.”¹⁹ Unlike other national schemes, such as the language revival, which had historical links to Irish nationalism, hydroelectricity lacked origins in a Gaelic past. Industrial development and the modernity associated with the Shannon Scheme were generally negatively associated with Britain and its polluted cities and urban polity. If, as some historians suggest, nationalists were obsessed with demonstrating that the Irish were not British, then the Shannon Scheme surely proved challenging to Cumann na nGaedheal leaders who were deeply influenced by nationalist ideology, but they were also committed to the national electrification project. In order to make electricity, which had obvious connections with British industrialism, compatible with Irish nationalism, the government promoted it as the vanguard of something modern yet still Irish.

Some scholars have begun to re-evaluate the degree to which Irish nationalism is associated with tradition and have found that modernity was not necessarily incompatible with nationalist thinking. Timothy McMahon’s study of the Gaelic Revival discussed the

¹⁸ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Random House Press, 1995), 9.

¹⁹ Cleary, 10.

ways in which the Gaelic League, whose goal was primarily to promote the Gaelic language and other elements of traditional Gaelic culture, encouraged industrial development in local and national festivals. Since many Irish nationalists were also Gaelic Leaguers, McMahon's claim that Irish nationalists favored industry marks a significant departure from other historians' works on Irish nationalism. He has argued that

Gaelic Leaguers offered two main justifications for their intense interest in Irish industries. First they believed that their work on behalf of the language could not succeed unless native Irish-speakers stopped emigrating. . . . Second, League activists in the English-speaking districts felt the need to refute the so called 'bread-and-butter' argument against learning Irish, that is, that studying the language would not result in any (material) benefit for the country.²⁰

As evidence that linguistic revival was compatible with material improvement, the Leaguers "argued that national revivals elsewhere in Europe had taught them that language and industrial movements inevitably went hand in hand."²¹ McMahon stated that in the planning of festivals, there was a "yearning to invigorate industry and agriculture, thus reinforcing the economic ideals espoused by the League."²² Mike Cronin, on the other hand, has accused the Gaelic League of promoting "a historical and traditional embrace of Ireland's ancient culture," though he also recognized that the majority of the Irish people, many of whom supported the nationalist movement, were not anti-industrial either.²³ A series of festivals called Aonach Tailteann were sponsored by the Free State and designed to promote Irish traditional games. According to Cronin,

²⁰ McMahon, *Grand Opportunity*, 143.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 172.

²³ Mike Cronin, "Projecting the Nation through Sport and Culture: Ireland, Aonach Tailteann and the Irish Free State, 1924-32," *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no. 3 (July 2003): 398.

“one of the most popular events was the industrial pageant through the streets of Dublin, which allowed Irish firms to demonstrate their traditionalism and nationalism, as well as their adherence to modern industrial methods.”²⁴ Not only were Irish nationalists supportive of industry, but the public was also quite receptive and curious about modern industrial development. McMahon and Cronin have pointed to the ways in which modernity and tradition coalesced to complement the objectives of cultural nationalism. This translated to the political arena occupied by Cumann na nGaedheal, given that many of its leaders were deeply devoted to the Gaelic Revival.

The consequence of defining nationalism in terms of tradition or modernity was that it had tangible effects on perceptions of Irish national identity. According to Patrick O’Mahony and Gerard Delanty, “National identity is located in the space between the collective cultural identity of the nation’s people—what they consider themselves to be and desire to become—and the political identity that transfers the substance of cultural identity into values that underpin political activity.”²⁵ Hence, national identity and nations are not concrete entities, but rather they continuously evolve to fit the needs of successive generations. O’Mahony and Delanty also make an important observation about Irish nationalism in that it “on the whole *did* choose the kind of society it wanted albeit in a conflictual, constrained and uncertain way, and its choices are revealed in the fluctuating fortunes and evolution of its code of national identity.”²⁶ The insight that Irish identity was created in a “conflictual” way paralleled the methods used by Cumann na

²⁴ Ibid, 402.

²⁵ Patrick O’Mahony and Gerard Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History: Nationalism, Identity and Ideology* (Houndmills, Great Britain: Macmillan Press, 1998), 2.

²⁶ Ibid.

nGaedheal to promote the Shannon Scheme. These methods juxtaposed conservatism and agricultural predominance with progressivism and industrial modernity. The Shannon Scheme highlighted the tension between agriculture and industry that persisted under the post-1932 Fianna Fáil government when “there was in much of the country a deep urge toward self-sufficiency, a conviction that the life of an Irish small farm represented a purity and decency of life that could set Ireland apart from the more commercial societies that surrounded her.”²⁷ Finally, these authors suggest that “an inclusive code of national identity, emphasizing what the condition of ‘being Irish’ means and what the society should do to fulfil this condition, provided the symbolic basis for conservative practices.”²⁸ The Shannon Scheme stands uneasily amidst the characteristically conservative policies of the government, and it is thus crucial to understanding the evolution of Irish national identity in the early days of independence.

The tension between a homogenous national sense of Irishness shaped by modernity and a separate, distinct local identity is the subject of Mark Maguire’s article “Constructing Culture in the West of Ireland: Representations of Identity in Text and Space.”²⁹ He is concerned with the Abbey Fishermen, who made their livelihood on the River Shannon, and the ways in which the development of the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme enabled them to shape their own identity based on tradition. Maguire employed postmodern concepts to argue that texts, space, and discourse contributed not only to power-knowledge in the Foucauldian sense, but also provided “legitimizing categories to

²⁷ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 112.

²⁸ O’Mahony and Delanty, 11-12.

²⁹ Mark Maguire, “Constructing Culture in the West of Ireland: Representations of Identity in Text and Space,” *Limina* 6 (2000): 85-99.

indigenous and marginal peoples.”³⁰ Using William Lysaght’s 1968 text, *The Abbey Fishermen: A Short History of Snap-Net Fishing in Limerick*, Maguire argued that there was no “fishing identity” based on tradition until after the coming of the Shannon Scheme which “had to encapsulate a particular version of the past—development could not occur at the expense of tradition.”³¹ According to Maguire, this was especially relevant “in a country with few economic prospects and a troubled position betwixt modernity and tradition, development allowed people to think in terms of a modern Ireland.”³² Maguire concluded that the myth lamenting the destruction of local culture in the name of progress brought by the Shannon Scheme demonstrated that alternate traditional identities can be created in response to modernization and not necessarily replaced by it. He complicated the tradition/modernity dialectic as it relates to identity formation by suggesting that perceptions of traditional Irishness can also be defined as a consequence of modernity—rather than inevitably falling prey to it. In considering the promotion of the Scheme then, it is important to keep in mind the multiplicities of Irishness that sprang from modernity and were not part of the state’s official vision. It is against these varied meanings of Irishness that the Free State government invoked the Shannon Scheme to refine its own take on national identity—one that simultaneously looked to tradition and modernity

In *Postcolonial Dublin*, Andrew Kincaid offers a creative approach to the relationship between modernity and Irish nationalism by arguing that town planning and

³⁰ Ibid, 87.

³¹ Ibid, 90.

³² Ibid.

architecture were reflections of postcolonialism. In response to scholars who suggest that the Free State was antimodern, Kincaid claimed, “the leaders of the postcolonial state *were* engaged in a modernization project, a project that, like nationalism, cannot be dismissed out of hand as simply nativist or reactionary.”³³ Kincaid also argued that “the strategies through which Irish nationalist leaders and movements won legitimacy were highly innovative. Nationalism is not inherently an anti-modern movement, despite the inward-looking and past-centered portrayal many contemporary critics and historians give it.”³⁴ He proposed that “efforts to shape the physical growth of Dublin and to regulate its architecture were attempts to define what nationalism was, what the function of government ought to be, and whom the state should aid.”³⁵ The same could be said of the Shannon Scheme. Similar to town planning, hydroelectricity emphasized that “nationalism is the product of modernity. Those who live with it also live with its paradoxes, pushing forward while remaining troubled about their legacy to the past.”³⁶ In an effort to deal with these paradoxes, Kincaid suggested that in order “to appeal to its constituents, to afford them continuity and community in the face of unavoidable change, nationalist leaders are forced to dress their rhetoric in the garb of the past.”³⁷ This is precisely what the Cumann na nGaedheal government did in its promotion of the Shannon Scheme.

³³ Andrew Kincaid, *Postcolonial Dublin: Imperial Legacies and the Built Environment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 61.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

The inclusion of the Shannon Scheme in studies on the history of architecture in Ireland complements Kincaid's argument. Paul Lamour's 2009 publication, *Free State Architecture: Modern Movement in Architecture in Ireland, 1922-1949* mentioned the Scheme as one of only "two very notable departures from conventional historicism . . . in the mid-to-late 1920s."³⁸ The Modern Movement was exemplified by "the use of new structural techniques, mainly reinforced concrete and skeletal steel framing, and the subsequent and gradual departure from historical revivalism."³⁹ Lamour saw the Shannon Scheme as a break from the revivalist styles of Irish architecture because "the modernism of the Shannon Scheme was characterised by its austerity of form and resolute and powerful functionalism," reminiscent of approaches to modernism in Germany—with a focus on large windows and a lack of ornamentation.⁴⁰ Since the Irish government commissioned Siemens-Schuckert to develop plans for the Scheme, this conclusion is not unwarranted. The significance of Lamour's discussion of the project lies in his contention that modern Irish architecture and engineering were only in nascent stages by the early 1920s, and foreign expertise was necessary to design the monumental work. Though Lamour is unconcerned with the project as an example of nation building, he does indicate that while the Scheme provided evidence for Irish architecture's focus on more traditional styles, it also demonstrated a willingness to embrace new and modern forms that would later be replicated. Modernism as a movement in architecture was certainly not synonymous with modernity, but its overlap in tension between new and old forms is

³⁸ Paul Lamour, *Free State Architecture: Modern Movement in Architecture in Ireland, 1922-1949* (Kinsale, Co Cork, Ireland: Fandon Editions, 2009).

³⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 17, 8.

relevant as a cultural component of modernity—and as Kincaid would argue—also reflective of the modernization associated with nationalism.

Historian Andy Bielenberg and art historian Éimear O’Connor have engaged the Shannon Scheme from still another angle: art. The main reason for the project’s importance in the history of Irish art is that Seán Keating, one of Ireland’s most famous and prolific artists in the twentieth century, was among several people who were personally attracted to the idea of capturing the modernity of the Scheme. Not initially commissioned by the Free State, Keating recorded the construction in progress and painted about life at the site. However, according to Bielenberg’s article, “Keating, Siemens, and the Shannon Scheme,” the Free State was eager to obtain his work for propaganda purposes. Bielenberg stated that “the series of paintings marks a transition in Keating’s work from his earlier concerns with cultural and political nationalism to the whole business of state-building.”⁴¹ O’Connor, who is quickly becoming the leading expert on Keating, has published several works concerning his influence on Irish culture and politics. In *Seán Keating in Context: Responses to Culture and Politics in Post-Civil War Ireland*, she argued that Keating was particularly concerned about developing a uniquely Irish form of art and advocated “for Irish artists to return to the West of Ireland . . . [because] a new school of art could not be born from the ashes of any aspect of the ascendancy.”⁴² O’Connor saw his work on the Shannon Scheme as an expressed hope for

⁴¹ Andy Bielenberg, “Keating, Siemens, and the Shannon Scheme,” *History Ireland* 5, no. 3 (Autumn, 1997): 45.

⁴² Éimear O’Connor, *Seán Keating in Context: Responses to Culture and Politics in Post-Civil War Ireland* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009), 10. The term Ascendancy in Ireland generally refers to a group of Protestant elites and landowners (members of the Church of Ireland and the Church of England) who exercised considerable control over political, economic, and social affairs, largely at the expense of Roman Catholics who made up the majority of the population.

the future of the Free State, but she also highlighted Keating's personal acknowledgment of "a positive alliance between modernity and Socialism," a message the government certainly would not have appreciated.⁴³ Bielenberg and O'Connor emphasize the value of art as a cultural reflection and commentary on political issues, in addition to being a critical component in identity formation.

Largely as a result of Keating's association with the project, art historians have, therefore, turned their attention to other images of the Shannon Scheme and the visual manifestations of nation-building. In the 2009 publication, *Ireland in Focus: Film, Photography, and Popular Culture*, Sorcha O'Brien contributed a chapter entitled, "Images of Ardnacrusha: Photography, Electrical Technology, and Modernity in the Irish Free State."⁴⁴ She compared Sean Keating's paintings of the Scheme to collections of photographs taken during its construction. Arguing that the former was favored in promotion because it was considered more traditional and less "avant-garde" than photographs, O'Brien labelled this perceived tendency as a reflection of the Free State more generally. She concluded that "the poor currency of the Shannon Scheme photographs can be attributed to their creation as overtly technological images within a culture concentrating on imagining the self in terms of nature and romantic tradition, rather than technology and modernity."⁴⁵ To support this claim, O'Brien compared a photograph of a man standing in a penstock tube to the same image in the form of a woodblock print that appeared in a monogram letter in the chapter on "Power Supply in

⁴³ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁴ Sorcha O'Brien, "Images of Ardnacrusha: Photography, Electrical Technology, and Modernity in the Irish Free State," in *Ireland in Focus: Film, Photography, and Popular Culture*, ed. Eóin Flannery and Michael Griffin (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 71-85.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 85.

the Irish Free State” in the *Official Handbook of the Irish Free State*, published in 1932. While she noted the neo-Celtic design of this government publication, including a cover reminiscent of the Book of Kells, she suggested that a woodblock print was chosen over the photograph upon which it was based because the technological aspects of the Scheme could “only be rendered ‘safe’ by representation in a traditional form, mediated by an established and legitimized fine artist.”⁴⁶ O’Brien’s assumption that it was the medium of photography, not its portrayal of technology that was problematic, was further supported by the lack of any photos in other chapters of the *Handbook* not related to technology, such as language or flora. However, the fact that paintings, hand-drawn maps, and woodblock prints account for all of the images in this one publication was more indicative of the aesthetics of the piece as a whole, and less a stance on modernity on the part of its publishers, as O’Brien contends. Indeed, the plethora of photographs depicting progress on the Shannon Scheme published in Irish newspapers, and their inclusion in technologically-advanced slide shows and movie reels designed explicitly for promotional purposes demonstrated that the Free State was equally open to defining Irishness based on notions of “technology and modernity” as it was to “nature and romantic tradition.” More probably the Cumann na nGaedheal-led government applied utilized neo-Celtic designs in the *Handbook* in an effort to draw on traditions, not because it was influenced by a visual culture that O’Brien viewed in terms of “reluctance to engage with the ideological questions the use of technology brings,” but because it was acutely aware that its ten-year legacy in power needed to be bolstered by an association

⁴⁶ Ibid.

with an established Irish past while it was being challenged electorally by a party—Fianna Fáil—equally intent on laying claim to that past.

Tricia Cusack, affiliated with the Visual and Cultural Studies program at the University of Birmingham, also focused on images of the Shannon Scheme in “Shannon Riverscapes: Myth and Modernity in the Making of Ireland.” This chapter was part of a larger work, *Riverscapes and National Identities*, published in 2010 in which Cusack argued that “riverscapes have been employed in diverse ways to bolster national identity and belonging,” with an emphasis on “how the powerful symbolism of the river continues to be invoked for myth-making.”⁴⁷ She defined riverscapes as “the river itself and its human fashioning,” along with “second-order representations such as painting” and the author demonstrated an awareness of the varieties of nationalism over time and space, including the ways in which different religions utilized riverscapes.⁴⁸ Cusack contended that “riverscapes of the Shannon depicted both the mythical-religious and modern aspects of Irish identity so the river served as an ideal metaphor for the nation’s Janus-faced gaze to the past and the future.”⁴⁹ She compared a nineteenth-century watercolor by George Petrie to one of Keating’s most famous allegorical paintings of the Shannon Scheme to show that the river concurrently represented the mythical past and the modern nation-state. Cusack, along with other art historians, has made a convincing case for the power of images and art in shaping national identities. The Shannon Scheme has been well-represented in these studies, which indicates that viewing the massive undertaking had a

⁴⁷ Tricia Cusack, *Riverscapes and National Identities* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 158.

profound effect not only on the artists, but also on their audiences who were exposed to multiple layers of meaning in each representation.

Moreover, the Shannon Scheme featured prominently in other cultural narratives as well, including works of fiction, plays, and other literary forms. Michael Rubenstein has recently addressed this curious process whereby “works of art and public works . . . are imaginatively linked in Irish literature of the period for reasons having to do with the birth of the postcolonial Irish state.”⁵⁰ In *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial*, he analyzed characterizations of Irish identity and public utilities, including electricity, in literature as transformative sites of modernization between 1922 and 1940. Rubenstein’s chapter on the Shannon Scheme considers Denis Johnston’s play *The Moon in the Yellow River* as a critical commentary on the establishment of the Irish Free State and its consolidation of power through electrification. The play debuted in Ireland in 1931, just a few years after the completion of the Scheme, and was set near Dublin, where a fictitious hydroelectric station was being erected. As Rubenstein noted, Irish audiences found stereotypes of nationalists and the Free State government so distasteful that a riot broke out on opening night.⁵¹ He argued that Johnston’s status as a middle-class Protestant (‘West Briton’) and “hostility to the public utility in his *The Moon and the Yellow River* reveals mainly his dismay in the face of the transfer of power—from one power station to another, and from the Protestant Ascendancy to the Irish Catholic majority.”⁵² Thus, Rubenstein has contributed to the historiography of the

⁵⁰ Michael Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 158.

⁵² *Ibid*, 14.

Shannon Scheme by highlighting the ways in which literature not only responded to, but also engaged with, the political and cultural tensions inherent in nation building.

Cathy Leeney also considers the cultural milieu of modernity as a lens for playwrights to view society in *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939: Gender and Violence*. Her chapter on Mary Manning, an actress, playwright and editor of the Gate Theater's journal in Dublin, devoted a great deal of attention to the ways in which an atmosphere of change and transformation shaped her writings. Leeney contended that "the issue of Irish identity had become a post-colonial burden compromising the future of the country, and is over-taken in Manning's work by a crisis of gendered identity and personal fulfilment."⁵³ According to the author, Manning "was aware of the disruptive influences of modernity: the Shannon Electrical Scheme . . . in fact all the ways in which Irish life was becoming more and more like life anywhere else."⁵⁴ But Manning's awareness reflected a deeper understanding of how endeavors like the Shannon Scheme factored into evolving understandings of nationalism and national identity as a result of a struggle between tradition and modernity. Leeney acknowledged that the playwright "recognised the gap between these often energizing developments and the discourses of nationalism, in which Ireland's 'traditional values' were deployed to re-affirm political and social stagnation and isolationism."⁵⁵ Just as Johnston emphasized a sense of skepticism towards change in *The Moon*, so too does Manning, but instead of lamenting a shift in power away from the Ascendancy, Manning lamented the narrow confines of

⁵³ Cathy Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010), 128.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 135.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

masculine nationalism that did not allow the youth to flourish. Though her plays did not engage the Shannon Scheme directly, Manning's satirical perspective on the Free State and its limits, as critiqued by Leeney, provide a cultural complement to the politically and economically driven histories of the same period.

In spite of this recent interest among art historians and cultural commentators, the Shannon Scheme itself remains understudied in Irish historiography. Many historians refer to the project as an anomaly in a period of strict financial orthodoxy, but they do not elaborate on the reasoning behind the government's pursuit of this anomaly as an exception to the rule. Those who focus on more general aspects of the period rarely do more than mention the project, and those who do address it in greater detail have a tendency to dismiss it as a radical, but unrepresentative exception to Cumann na nGaedheal's policies. In the aforementioned *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity 1922-1939*, Daly argued that the government "clung to economic orthodoxy and the party's economic and social policies were characterized by procrastination," yet she glossed over the impact of hydroelectric power on the process of industrialization.⁵⁶ To be sure, she described the Scheme as a "major economic intervention," but only briefly noted its role as a monopoly and an opportunity to provide much needed employment.⁵⁷

The dominant narrative classifying Cumann na nGaedheal as conservative and backwards-looking has influenced the ways in which historians have characterized the Shannon Scheme in the context of modern Irish history. While some mention the project as an example of nation building or modernization, the majority labels the Scheme as a

⁵⁶ Daly, *Industrial Development*, 37.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 29, 77.

hiccup in an otherwise unpopular history of Cumann na nGaedheal policymaking, in which cutting old age pensions and teachers' salaries were the most notorious. However, in characterizing the project as an anomaly, historians have missed the significance of the Scheme as anything more than an aberration in modern Irish history. J. J. Lee's classic, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* discusses the project as it related to finance, though the author did concede that "major government initiatives were confined to the Shannon Scheme for the generation of electricity, and the establishment of the first sugar beet factory at Carlow, both ventures depending heavily on imported expertise."⁵⁸ Martin Mansergh concurred with Lee by arguing that apart from these works, "few major development projects were undertaken," as a result of Cumann na nGaedheal's "ultra-orthodox" economic policy.⁵⁹ Dermot Keogh's influential work, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Revolution and State Building* dedicated only a few lines to the Shannon Scheme as "a symbol of the new state's road to modernization."⁶⁰ However, Keogh did not elaborate on this loaded statement, but rather depicted the Scheme as inconsistent with Free State policymaking alongside the Agricultural Credit Corporation and national radio. He concluded that "with few exceptions, therefore, the government of Saorstát Éireann was far from being innovative."⁶¹ Finally, Alvin Jackson's definitive work on two centuries of Irish history, *Ireland 1798-1998: Politics and War* stated that "the

⁵⁸ J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 120.

⁵⁹ Martin Mansergh, *The Legacy of History: For Making Peace in Ireland* (Douglas Village, Cork: Mercier Press, 2003), 368.

⁶⁰ Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Revolution and State Building*, rev. ed. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), 37.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

government . . . did little to aid industrial development—except indirectly through its programme of electrification.”⁶²

There is certainly truth to the assertions that the Free State government typically adhered to the financial policies it inherited from the British government. During this period of nation-building, Cumann na nGaedheal embraced economic orthodoxy, generally focusing on balancing the budget and limiting government interference in the economy. According to one contemporary observer, “the most important and most gratifying feature of the budget is that it balances.”⁶³ Similarly, J. J. McElligott, who later replaced Joseph Brennan as secretary of the Department of Finance, noted that if the government “refuses to attempt a balance, its claim to govern—its power to govern—is largely gone” and that a failure to balance the budget would lead to “an arrestation of national development.”⁶⁴ Brennan’s retirement was actually the result of tensions in the Department over the Shannon Scheme, as Finance Minister Ernest Blythe uncharacteristically accepted the Department of Industry and Commerce’s lead, much to Brennan’s disapproval.⁶⁵ As Regan has persuasively argued, the frugal economic policies the Free State inherited from Britain shaped the relationship between the Department of Finance and the rest of the government. He stated that “such dogged determination as the Cumann na nGaedheal leadership demonstrated in their resistance to deficit borrowing

⁶² Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: Politics and War* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 283.

⁶³ George O’Brien, “The Budget,” *Studies* (June 1925): Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35a/8.

⁶⁴ J. J. McElligott, “Necessity for Balanced Budgets,” confidential Finance memorandum from the Department of Finance, September 16, 1931: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35a/11.

⁶⁵ Ronan Fanning, *The Irish Department of Finance 1922-58* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1978), 189.

placed restraints on the programmes they could introduce and ultimately framed their propaganda.”⁶⁶ Regan also acknowledged that “with the exception of Patrick McGilligan’s proposals for the Shannon hydro-electricity scheme in 1925, the writ of the Department of Finance ran through all departments.”⁶⁷ Even if, as Lee contended, the government subscribed to the belief “that if Finance looked after the book-keeping the economy would look after itself,” this fiscal orthodoxy does not explain the controversial decision to fund the Scheme.⁶⁸ This was no drop-in-the-bucket at 20% of the national budget revenue, and exception or not, this must be accounted for in order to view Cumann na nGaedheal and the development of the Free State from a nuanced perspective.

In order to create a significant rise in demand for electricity to pay for the Scheme and to justify the creation of the national grid, the Free State embarked on a massive national promotional campaign under the direction of the Electricity Supply Board. Recently, a few historians have addressed the more general topic of electrification and the history of the ESB in Ireland. Michael Shiel’s *The Quiet Revolution: The Electrification of Rural Ireland* gave a brief overview of the Shannon Scheme, including a section on “Promotional Strategies.” While Shiel noted that promotion was a critical task for the ESB, he chose to focus on the success of promotions instead of detailing the strategies.⁶⁹ In *Electricity Supply in Ireland: The History of the ESB*, meanwhile, Maurice Manning

⁶⁶ John M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution 1921-1936: Treatyite Politics and Settlement in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999), 147.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Lee, 112.

⁶⁹ Michael Shiel, *The Quiet Revolution: The Electrification of Rural Ireland* (Dublin: O’Brien Press, 2003).

and Moore McDowell offered a comprehensive history of the ESB from its origins in 1927 to its role as a supplier of electricity in the late 1970s.⁷⁰ Manning and McDowell included several chapters on the Shannon and the process by which the ESB was established, but they did not investigate the promotional strategies used by the Free State government or the ESB in their efforts to increase the demand for electricity, and, therefore to make the project a profitable investment.

Andy Bielenberg's collection of essays, *The Shannon Scheme and the Electrification of the Irish Free State*, and Michael McCarthy's *High Tension: Life on the Shannon Scheme* are the two most prominent studies on the Scheme itself.⁷¹ While these works draw on extensive research and provide a better understanding of the project's general history, they do not sufficiently address the broader historical significance of the Scheme in terms of politics or culture. Instead, the contributing authors focused on labor issues among German engineers and Irish workers, living conditions on the site, and engineering aspects of the Scheme. These studies form an invaluable foundation for my work and I hope to contribute to this growing historiography by specifically addressing how the Shannon Scheme was used to promote a modified Irish identity that did not challenge the conservative and agricultural traditions of Irish nationalism.

It is the contention of this study that the Shannon Scheme functioned outside of its obvious purpose of providing electricity; it was inherently political because it shaped perceptions of the Irish Free State, the Cumann na nGaedheal party, and the elusive concept of national identity. Its importance also transcended its place in the narrow

⁷⁰ See Manning and McDowell's, *Electricity Supply in Ireland: The History of the ESB*.

⁷¹ Andy Bielenberg, ed., *The Shannon Scheme and the Electrification of the Irish Free State* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2002).

confines of Irish history as an example of nation building in a postcolonial society and as a model for the ways in which modernity was contested in the interwar period. Electricity was the symbol of modernity in the 1920s, and its influence spanned multiple spheres including politics and domestic life. Since many facets of Irish society were caught in the tentacles of the Shannon Scheme, it serves as an instructive case study of top-down propaganda concerning what the state wanted people to think and of bottom-up responses that engaged this official narrative. The pervasiveness of opposition and skepticism about the Scheme necessitated a widespread promotional campaign that dually operated as a pedagogical tool and as a means to bolster Cumann na nGaedheal's reputation. To avoid retracing the work of the scholars who have contributed much on the history of the engineering aspects of the Scheme, its place in art and architectural studies, and its role in rural electrification, therefore, I will focus specifically on the promotion of the Shannon Scheme as a contribution to Cumann na nGaedheal's attempts to re-imagine Irishness and by rebuilding the nation in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Balancing official publications with unofficial press commentary and individual observations of the Shannon Scheme, this study will trace the ways in which promoting the grand national venture shaped a sense of Irishness and redefined Irish political culture. The influence of the project on Cumann na nGaedheal's nation-building efforts exemplified the tradition/modernity debate within Ireland, but also underscored the significance of this debate in terms of the nation's place in a global system. In order to get at the crux of how and why the *promotion* of the Scheme wielded such a powerful grasp on Irish politics, economics, and culture, it is necessary to address both the intellectual drives behind the promotional campaign, and the practical nuts-and-bolts

sorts of propaganda that developed in response to these ideas. Part 1 will focus on the ideological issues promoters faced in attempting to posit the Scheme as a necessary national project that would reorient Ireland's future to modernity and progress. Chapters 1 and 2 deal with political rhetoric and Cumann na nGaedheal's responses to opposition as the party sought to establish its legitimacy by linking the success of the Shannon Scheme with its success. Chapter 3 addresses questions of racial identity in portraying the Scheme as an *Irish* accomplishment, and the ways in which promotion emphasized a complete lack of British influence, yet could not ignore the presence of the German engineers who were crucial to its construction. In fashioning the Scheme as a means to shape an Irish national identity, its promoters engaged the anti-British rhetoric of Irish nationalism, while simultaneously bolstering the role of the Irish to overcome the perceived threat that the dam could be seen as more of a German than Irish accomplishment. Chapter 4 identifies the ambivalent role of religion and the Church's conflicting stance on what electrification under the Shannon Scheme meant for a nation heavily steeped in Catholicism. As the primary provider of education in the Free State, the Church's role underscores the dual functions of electrical education as both an intellectual endeavor to redirect technological instruction and as a practical means of distributing information about electricity to the public. Chapter 5 serves as a transitional section to Part 2 on the basic components of the promotional campaign by highlighting the tensions between national rhetoric about the dam and the regional experiences of those who lived and worked near the construction site in Limerick. Chapters 6 and 7 provide a detailed analysis of the promotional campaigns directed toward two particular audiences—tourists and women—selected as both potential consumers of electricity and

arbiters of national identity. Matters of politics, race, religion, and education factor prominently in how promoters targeted each of these groups and demonstrate that advertising the Scheme had as much, if not more, to do with ideological discourses on modernity as with selling electric current.

While appropriated as a symbol of the tradition/modernity debate, however, the Shannon Scheme surpasses a cursory discussion on the respective merits of agriculture and industry. Electrification became a national symbol in Ireland. It demonstrated the scope of the government's vision and what the Irish people could accomplish—significantly, without British assistance. Keen to dissociate modernity from Britishness, the Free State government sought to dispel the myth that Ireland was a land of poets while technological progress happened elsewhere. This is not to say that in promoting the Shannon Scheme and the modernity that would come in its wake, that the Irish could not maintain elements of Irishness that celebrated Celtic heritage or an affinity for the fine arts. The Irish Free State was modern because of the Shannon Scheme and it was also more independent because of it—the *Irish* achieved what the British never had in electrification. Initiated at a critical point in nation building, the Scheme contributed to redefining what it meant to be Irish by projecting an image of modernity that was harmonious with tradition. Whether or not the “new Irishman” prophesied by M. G. Palmer actually maintained an ideal balance between the modern and the legendary past is something different altogether. What matters here is that the Cumann na nGaedheal government relied on this rhetoric in promoting the Shannon Scheme.

CHAPTER I

PARTY POLITICS PART I: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Great days are ahead of every nation that is developing electricity.¹

—Thomas Edison, “Future of Electricity,” *Leitrim Observer*, 6 October 1928

Never before or since has an Irish government taken such a calculated risk and never before had a single economic project assumed such importance as a fundamental act of nation-building.²

—*Irish Times*, 6 April 1976

Inherently political for the Irish Free State government, the Shannon

Hydroelectric Scheme represented one of the greatest risks undertaken by Cumann na nGaedheal’s leaders in the 1920s. The politicization of this project was especially significant considering the tumultuous years leading up to the establishment of the Free State and the subsequent reputation gained by Cumann na nGaedheal, the leading political party for a decade, as stagnant and anti-industrial. The deep fissures that manifested themselves when the revolutionary movement split into pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty factions became cemented during the devastating Civil War from 1922 to 1923. In its wake, the pro-Treaty victors, represented politically by Cumann na nGaedheal, faced the daunting task of uniting the new nation in the wake of violence. One of the ways the party sought to establish its political legitimacy and promote a sense of shared Irishness was to construct the Shannon Scheme.

The government and its supporters justified the project in language designed to resonate with a community steeped in the rhetoric of the Irish revolution. For example,

¹ “Future of Electricity,” *Leitrim Observer*, 6 October 1928.

² An anonymous historian for the Electricity Supply Board (the semi-state organization established by the Irish Free State government in 1925 to deal with distribution and promotion related to the Shannon Scheme), *Irish Times*, 6 April 1976, quoted by Lothar Schoen in “The Irish Free State and the Electricity Industry, 1922-1927,” in *The Shannon Scheme and the Electrification of the Irish Free State*, ed. Andy Bielenberg (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2002), 47.

courage and bravery were usurped from the battlefield and assumed by Cumann na nGaedheal leaders to describe their visionary commitment to the future as demonstrated by national electrification. Further, government officials and a sympathetic press used rhetoric to establish a link between the success of the party and the success of the Shannon Scheme. However, opposition to the project, particularly criticism originating from Fianna Fáil, meant that the hydroelectric scheme became tied up in public Irish political discourse—an opportunity made possible by the establishment of the Free State. Political jockeying about the Shannon Scheme and the government’s response to naysayers were representative of the processes by which the Irish Free State and, later, the Irish Republic established and maintained democratic traditions and institutions. While some historians, including John Regan, point to the peaceful transfer of power when Fianna Fáil took over the government in 1932 as Cumann na nGaedheal’s “finest moment” in its struggle to gain political footing, the party experienced an underappreciated victory with the success of the Shannon Scheme.³ The culmination of this achievement for the party occurred at the opening ceremony in 1929, when political pageantry was on full display, and for a brief moment, Cumann na nGaedheal regained the upper hand over its opponents. While political motivations cannot be separated from the discussions of the project’s wider implications that will form the basis of subsequent chapters, this chapter will focus primarily on the ways in which the Shannon project was exploited and discussed by political leaders, the press, and interested parties for partisan purposes. By uncovering the forces responsible for the politicization of national

³ Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution*, 279.

electrification in the Irish Free State, one can better recognize the Shannon Scheme as a key cog in the machine of nation-building in the 1920s.

Post-Civil War Nation-Building

Jason Knirck has recently argued that Cumann na nGaedheal was committed to three specific policies of the revolution: maintaining an anti-colonial outlook, making the new state “Irish,” and demonstrating sovereignty.⁴ The Shannon Scheme was representative of Knirck’s assessment of the broader political landscape in the sense that the project was promoted as a means to achieve all of these political objectives. As Mike Cronin has stated, “beyond the business of politics, the creation of the instruments of governance and order, and the complexities of independent Ireland’s place within international and Anglo-Irish affairs, many Irish politicians and administrators sought to embody the ethos and image of the new state on a variety of public stages.”⁵ The Shannon Scheme was precisely this kind of public stage for Cumann na nGaedheal leaders to demonstrate that their party remained committed to select revolutionary ideals.

A central feature of the post-Civil War period, in which the Cumann na nGaedheal government was attempting to build a new nation, was the issue of Ireland’s postcolonial status and relationship with Britain. As the political faction that stood by the Anglo-Irish Treaty, Cumann na nGaedheal lay open to criticism for its apparently pro-British position. However, as the leaders of an Irish government, its members sought out means to highlight the Free State’s separation from Britain. In order to do this, promoters of the Shannon Scheme not only situated the project as one that lacked British influence,

⁴ See Knirck, *Afterimage of the Revolution*.

⁵ Cronin, “Projecting the Nation,” 396.

but also one that deserved recognition from other nations as an outward sign of what the Free State could achieve once it broke the bonds of colonization.

In demonstrating independence from Britain, Ireland was concurrently taking part in defining Irishness as a manifestation of that separation. In his work on Irish tourism, Eric Zuelow has contended that “prior to independence, Irish nationalism was largely predicated on the need to define Ireland in opposition to England. Gaelic language and culture provided a powerful contrast with English culture.”⁶ After 1922, however, Zuelow has detected a shift in emphasis for understanding perceptions of Irishness in this period: “the national interest debate assured a transition from an older separatist identity to a newer state-building one; Irish identity could no longer be defined in opposition to England, now it needed to draw people together and focus them on the task of building a unified state.”⁷ Cumann na nGaedheal’s promotion of the Shannon Scheme, however, qualifies this characterization of Irish identity formation in the 1920s significantly. While the government clearly spoke the language of state-building when it talked about the project, it did so alongside anti-British rhetoric in its promotional campaigns. Irish nationalists, including Arthur Griffith, constantly blamed Britain for stunting Ireland’s economic growth in order to preserve markets for British coal and manufactured products. In an article discussing the former colonizer’s impressions of Ireland’s hydroelectric development, the writer stated that

Great Britain has now followed the Saorstát’s example in arranging for a supply of electricity to all corners of the country. There is a famous saying in the North

⁶ Eric Zuelow, “National Identity and Tourism in Twentieth-Century Ireland: The Role of Collective Re-imagining,” in *Nationalism in a Global Era: The Persistence of Nations*, ed. Mitchell Young, Eric Zuelow and Andreas Sturm (London: Routledge, 2007), 156.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

of England to the effect that ‘What Liverpool and Manchester do to-day, London thinks about to-morrow.’ That saying has now been taken over by the Free State with a slight change: ‘What the Saorstát does to-day, England thinks about to-morrow.’ It is in connection with electrification.⁸

This claim represented a dramatic shift, redefining Ireland’s position vis-à-vis Britain as a post-colonial relationship. As Chapter 4 on race will show, cultivating a distinctly Irish identity and demonstrating separateness from Britain, even if that meant courting the Germans, characterized the way the Shannon Scheme was promoted to the rest of the world.

Lauded as an achievement of the Free State government, the Shannon Scheme demonstrated what an independent Ireland could achieve on its own. Kevin O’Higgins, minister for home affairs and vice president of the executive council described the project in a 1927 election manifesto as “a vindication of Irish Nationalism, of all our struggles to secure mastery of our own house.”⁹ Demonstrating sovereignty was critical not only in terms of negotiating the Free State’s relationship to the British Empire—something with which O’Higgins was also centrally involved, but state spokesmen also considered it necessary to earn this recognition from the international community. In *Electricity Supply in Ireland: The History of the ESB*, Maurice Manning and Moore McDowell argued that “the Shannon Scheme was seen both at home and abroad as a concrete, tangible proof of Ireland’s independence and separate statehood.”¹⁰ Quoting the *Financial Times*, Manning and Moore highlighted the connection between the Shannon Scheme and the initiative of the Free State government:

⁸ *Star*, 14 September 1929.

⁹ Quoted in Regan, *The Irish Counter Revolution*, 264.

¹⁰ Manning and McDowell, 51.

For half a century the country under the British regime toyed with the suggestion of harnessing the Shannon. The British are a hardheaded and practical folk, but they jibbed at such a venture. Then the Free State came into being, and ardent untried administrators, remembering that they had always been accused of being dreamers, seized on this chance of showing what they can do.¹¹

According to Andy Bielenberg, “the Shannon Scheme became the central icon of industrial development and modernity for the new state, and the keystone of the state-building project in the economic sphere.”¹² As a result, the Scheme became “the flagship of nation-building and economic modernization. As such, it became part of a legitimizing process for the government.”¹³

This legitimizing process was especially difficult because, by the end of the Civil War, revolutionary violence had seemingly become an essential expression of Irish nationalism, which according to Regan, the Free State government worked to counter.¹⁴ Knirck’s analysis of the language of revolution, however, has led him to conclude that “the ideas, rhetoric, and legacies of the revolutionary period hung heavily over the new government and were often invoked in creating and defending its policies.”¹⁵ The promotion of the Shannon Scheme certainly fit this latter reading, as this political rhetoric was deployed by supporters of the project to fashion the undertaking as a distinguished event during the revolutionary period. In doing so, the Scheme gained legitimacy within Irish nationalist circles, but it also lent credence to the Cumann na nGaedheal party which was attempting to situate itself within the Irish revolutionary tradition throughout the

¹¹ Manning and McDowell, 53.

¹² Bielenberg, 124.

¹³ Bielenberg, 125.

¹⁴ See Regan’s *The Irish Counter Revolution*.

¹⁵ Knirck, *Afterimage of the Revolution*, 15.

1920s. D.L. Kelleher's entry on "The Shannon Scheme" in *The Limerick Anthology* included a nuanced view of the national electrification project as the party attempted to define where the venture fit within the legacy of the Irish Revolution.¹⁶ The entry described transformations in people's mental outlooks and in the physical environment near Limerick, and concluded that "the scheme that made a new and bloodless revolution in Ireland begins here."¹⁷ Not only did electrification spark remarkable change in Ireland in a way divorced from violence, but "the Shannon Scheme is evolution-revolution, more subtle than any before it. It is partially, a psychological move, a diversion from the battles of the baser, if more idealistic order. It may, by this finesse, drive some of the despair out of the new country."¹⁸ The Shannon Scheme was not only revolutionary—it was a panacea to the revolutionary ills that preceded it.

The War of Independence and the Civil War left many Irishmen disillusioned with the institution of government. Some saw the Shannon Scheme "as an act of faith by the governed in the future of the state, something which was urgently required after the psychological demoralization of the Civil War."¹⁹ Others, such as the American journalist M. G. Palmer, argued that the Shannon Scheme "captured from the first the popular imagination, and there are shrewd judges who maintain that the part it played in stimulating the nation to struggle out of the slough of despond into which it had sunk during the civil war was well worth all the millions of dollars that could have been

¹⁶ For a summary of the historiographical debate concerning Cumann na nGaedheal's relationship to the Irish Revolution during the Free State period, see Jason Knirck's *Afterimage of the Revolution*.

¹⁷ D. L. Kelleher, "The Shannon Scheme," in *The Limerick Anthology*, ed. Jim Kemmy (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996), 254.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Manning and McDowell, 18.

expended on the scheme.”²⁰ However real prosperity could also coexist with mental regeneration, as E. MacAnroai claimed, “surely if ever a project merited attention it is this one. . . . Here we have [the] promise of an economic Utopia which the last generation could not even dream of.”²¹ Likewise, an article on the Shannon Scheme employed revolutionary rhetoric to describe the anticipated positive economic change. It declared “the whole enterprise is a momentous one and it is almost certain to be the means of revolutionising the whole industrial life of Ireland and making our economic future one not only of security but of tremendous progress and prosperity.”²² Instead of focusing on the conflict of the proceeding decades, Cumann na nGaedheal redirected the attention of those interested in the Shannon Scheme to the reality of sovereignty and away from past violence that brought about political independence.

Calling on the nation’s citizens to take an active part in making sure that the Scheme was a success cannot be divorced from the party’s need to establish political legitimacy. Participating in a national project as grand as electrification encouraged unity and a common sense of Irishness deliberately fostered by the party. The decade Cumann na nGaedheal controlled the government was crucial to healing the wounds of the Civil War, and the party lost no time in using the Shannon Scheme to project an image of itself as the party of the nation. During Cosgrave’s administration, the government was largely supported by the Farmers’ Party, so much so, in fact, that *Honesty* deemed it was

²⁰ M. G. Palmer, “The Shannon Stirs New Hope in Ireland: Popular Imagination Has Been Fired by the Harnessing of Its Historic Waters to Make Industries Grow,” *New York Times Magazine*, 12 January 1930; Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/15 (15).

²¹ *Sunday Independent*, January 4, 1925.

²² “The Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 5 July 1925.

“Cumann na nGaedheal’s little sister.”²³ The Labour Party represented its major opposition, particularly on issues of social reform, and it generally took a more liberal stance on issues impacting Irish workers. As Knirck has demonstrated, “Cumann na nGaeheal claimed a willingness to stand up to sectional interests, while implicitly portraying its Farmers and Labour opponents as hostage to their particular constituencies.”²⁴ Contrasting itself with Fianna Fáil, the reconstituted anti-Treaty party, which formed in 1926, Cumann na nGaedheal spoke of modernity and progress to suggest that, unlike this nascent rival, it had moved beyond the violence of the Civil War.²⁵ The 1927 election provided Patrick Hogan, minister for agriculture, an opportunity to contrast the optimism of his party with the pessimism of Fianna Fáil. He professed, “The policy of defeatism, of lack of confidence of frightened pessimism and cynicism was being steadily urged especially by the Republicans. They were attempting to break the morale of the people.” In classifying members of Fianna Fáil as “Republicans,” Hogan was making a clear connection to the Civil War. He was even more explicit as he explained that the spread of pessimism in Ireland came about because the opposition “failed to do [bring down the Free State] by arms, and now they were trying to do it by other methods, by preaching defeatism, depression, despondency. Why? Because they were defeatists themselves, because they were not worth while, because they had no nationality in their bones.”²⁶

²³ “Cumann na nGaedheal’s Little Sister,” *Honesty* 6, no. 133 (10 September 1927): 9.

²⁴ Knirck, 134.

²⁵ Led by Eamon De Valera, the most significant Irish politician in twentieth-century Ireland, Fianna Fáil did not agree to enter government until 1927.

²⁶ “Defeatist Policy: Pride and Confidence Needed,” *Irish Independent*, 2 June 1927.

In the minds of some supporters of the Scheme, Cumann na nGaedheal's courage in undertaking the project stood in sharp contrast to the defeat of the anti-Treatyites during the Civil War and provided ample justification for relegating Fianna Fáil as backwards-thinking and anti-progressive. A University College Dublin lecturer in Classics wrote a letter of congratulations to the minister for industry and commerce, Patrick McGilligan, upon the passage of the Shannon Scheme in the Dáil, in which he predicted that the project would "give new heart and courage to the country to see the great work initiated." In the same letter, he linked this language of courage to the memory of the Civil War as he expressed "how great has been my pride and admiration in the way you have piloted through the Shannon Scheme against all malignity of the Anti-National and the revolutionary forces in the country and the deadweight of ignorance and stupidity."²⁷

However, modern historians have typically attached these anti-progressive labels to Cumann na nGaedheal, including John Regan who argued that "Fianna Fáil was prepared to embrace the future all the while the Treatyites remained attached to their own vision of the *status quo ante* revolution."²⁸ Mary Daly, whose work has focused on Irish industrialization, similarly has viewed Cumann na nGaedheal's platform as "increasingly out of step with modern economic realities."²⁹ Ciara Meehan has noted that "what it [Cumann na nGaedheal] did in those early years, is remembered mostly in negative terms," but her work has also highlighted the achievements of the party and measured its

²⁷ "Letter of Congratulations to McGilligan on Pushing the Shannon Scheme through," 1925: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/106.

²⁸ Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution*, 381.

²⁹ Daly, *Industrial Development*, 55.

successes based on the context of the 1920s rather than what came after.³⁰ Meehan argued that the party should not be seen as one in decline, but rather as one that was adaptive to change, including modern electioneering tactics like dropping leaflets from an airplane and using talkie films to reach rural voters. She acknowledged the Shannon Scheme as one of the party's "greatest achievements" and "a triumph for the Free State, for Cumann na nGaedheal and for the concept of nation-building."³¹ Though she framed the Scheme as a means for the party to project a more progressive image of itself, she curiously did not discuss it in the larger context as an election issue, which it certainly was by 1927. The promotional campaign of the Shannon Scheme reveals that Cumann na nGaedheal's relationship to "modernity" was far more complex than most historians have acknowledged to date.

The language of courage, which in recent memory had much to do with violence, was adopted by Cumann na nGaedheal to mean bravery in the political realm. President Cosgrave proudly declared of the Scheme that, "There is a chance to bring light to the dark places, to replace drabness with brightness, to economise time and labour, to increase production." Never tiring of employing the rhetoric of the nation, he emphasized that the entirety of the Free State would be lifted out of the darkness of the past and propelled into a brighter future with projects like the Shannon Scheme. The head of the party praised his fellow Cumann na nGaedheal leaders for this transformation by announcing, "We have given the example of courage and confidence, and all we ask is

³⁰ Meehan, *The Cosgrave Party*, 25.

³¹ Meehan, 58-59.

that our example will be followed.”³² The years after Cumann na nGaedheal fell from power, Cosgrave maintained this appeal to courage when speaking at Ballaghaderen in 1933 when he stated “Cumann na nGaedheal was the party of courage. . . . Cumann na nGaedheal followed the great national tradition of courage.”³³

Government sympathizers echoed this new rhetoric, which distanced Cumann na nGaedheal from the violence in the recent past, by speaking of the Shannon Scheme as a risky, but successful, national project that perpetuated the revolution. The *Limerick Leader* republished a leading article from the *Financial Times*, which claimed that “the Free State is as yet only a little over two years old, it has passed through a severe international crisis, but it has the courage and resolution to tackle the problems of industrial power in a manner that may enable it in this respect to show us a lean pair of heels.”³⁴ As the project was in the initial stages of negotiation in the Seanad, Senator John Thomas O’Farrell of the Labour party expanded the language of courage to the entire government when he stated, “I hope that in this vital period of our industrial and political history we shall have sufficient vision and courage to take whatever risks may be involved in this scheme. No project worth anything was ever achieved without risk of some kind. In this matter the risks are more than counterbalanced by the great results to be achieved in the future.”³⁵ The *Irish Independent* contended that the government officials who supported the project “would push forward with the same spirit of

³² “Shannon Scheme: Great Nation Asset,” *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1927.

³³ *Irish Independent*, 20 January 1933.

³⁴ “The Shannon Scheme—Beginning of a New Epoch,” *Financial Times* quoted in the *Limerick Leader*, 23 March 1925.

³⁵ John Thomas O’Farrell, “County Boards of Heath Accounts Order, 1924. Shannon Scheme—Motion by Sir John Griffith,” Seanad Éireann Debates, 31 March 1925, vol. 4.

confidence and courage in which they undertook . . . the inauguration of the great power scheme” in developing Ireland’s natural resources.³⁶ George Ryan, President of the Executive Council of the Chamber of Commerce in Limerick, acknowledged that “many problems have engrossed the attention of the national government which required courage and energy to initiate. But I think we must all agree that the conception and development of the Shannon Hydro Electric Scheme required greater courage and firmer resolution than any other to accomplish.”³⁷

Even the *London Times*, which did not conceal its skepticism about the Scheme, still recognized the important role the project played for a government set on establishing peace and unity after a period of prolonged warfare. In an article published in 1929, a correspondent in Dublin speculated that “many thoughtful Irishmen,” were willing to look past the unknowns of the Scheme and appreciate that “the mere fact that something great has been built up after such a long period of destruction and wastage in Ireland is in itself sufficient justification for the government’s adventure.”³⁸ According to this reporter, the Scheme was successful and vindicated based solely on its being built. By placing it within the historical context of the previous decade, the correspondent illuminated the real difficulties faced by Cumann na nGaedheal in rebuilding and reimagining the nation. The paper also ran a letter to the editor in which the author adopted the ubiquitous theme of courage in declaring that “the Shannon Scheme is a

³⁶ “Shannon Scheme: Great National Asset,” *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1927.

³⁷ “Business Men Visit Limerick—Chambers of Commerce—Views on Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 2 October 1926.

³⁸ “The Shannon Scheme: A National Adventure,” *Times* (London), 21 October 1929. Hereafter, the *Times*.

courageous enterprise.”³⁹ Regardless of whether the Scheme met the financial, social, or industrial goals set forth by the party, the paper declared that it was already a victory for a nation that had to overcome so much in the first decade of its existence.

Among the many adverse effects of prolonged warfare on Irish society, the press identified an underdeveloped economy as one of the most significant challenges to be tackled by the new government. *The Limerick Leader* claimed that “for many years the vital needs of our country have been viewed through a screen of bitterness and intolerance which darkened and distorted the perspective of the economic problems which sought for immediate attention.”⁴⁰ However, the paper found optimism in plans for the future when it recognized that “to-day the new spirit which has arisen is fast dispelling the shadows of war and hatred and clearing from our horizon the mists which have so long obscured from our vision the crying need of the country for examination of its economic condition with view to their amelioration.” Citing the Shannon Scheme as one example of this campaign, the newspaper concluded that there was a new spirit in Ireland that “has clarified the atmosphere and shown us the urgent need for the development of our resources and the raising of our country from the depression of years to a condition of industrial prosperity.” Instead of dwelling on a recent past characterized by hostility, the newspaper hoped that the nation would turn its attention to solving practical problems, and it expressed hope that the Shannon Scheme was a step towards achieving this goal.

³⁹ James O’Conner, “Irish in Great Britain,” Letter to the Editor, *Times*, 17 March 1928.

⁴⁰ “A New Spirit,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 March 1925.

Robert N. Tweedy, member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers and the president of the Engineering and Scientific Association of Ireland, heartily supported the government and the Shannon Scheme as symbols of optimism—something he saw as an elusive sentiment for the Irish whose lives had been dominated by warfare and loss. In a toast to the Free State at his organization’s meeting, Tweedy exclaimed that “it is not so difficult now to be an optimist. It has become fashionable. That feeling is going to be increased until there are no more pessimists in this county.” He went on to say that “he was not going to talk politics, but they had thrown up people in Ireland and should continue to throw them up, who were capable of carrying on the state to the heights which similar states had attained.”⁴¹ Tweedy alluded to a strategy used by supporters of the Shannon Scheme, which will be discussed in greater detail below: by comparing electrification in Ireland to other small European nations, promoters hoped to silence critics who struggled to counter the opinions of international experts.

To both an Irish and an international audience, the Cumann na nGaedheal government promoted the Shannon Scheme as a symbol of national pride, and as a testament to the initiative and achievement of the Free State’s leadership. One of the party’s primary objectives after the Civil War was to foster a sense of unity, putting itself forward as the party that supported national interests over factional ones. Language used to describe the Shannon Scheme reflected this emphasis on the nation *and* the link between the success of the project and the success of the Cumann na nGaedheal government. Newspaper articles, Dáil debates, and election campaigns echoed such rhetoric by claiming that the Shannon Scheme was one of the great achievements of the

⁴¹ “Reasons for Optimism,” *Irish Independent*, February 15, 1927

Free State's leadership. Similarly, electricity came to symbolize the dawning of a brighter future for the Irish people, with Cumann na nGaedheal at the forefront. While this inculcation of national pride was critical for the new state, it was equally important to the government to draw in international observers, who could report that Ireland was a modern nation, worthy of a place among other independent status of the world. The Shannon Scheme became emblematic of what the Free State could do for its citizens' standard of living, and what it could accomplish in the absence of British influence and in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Throughout its time at the helm of government, Cumann na nGaedheal sought to foster a sense of unity as a central feature of the party's strategy to move beyond the legacy of violence and towards more productive purposes. One of the ways in which the governing party did this was by trumpeting that the Shannon Scheme would benefit the entire nation, enabling leaders to equate the national scope of the project with the aims of the party. Thus, employing the adjective "national" in speeches and literature about the scheme as often as possible, Cumann na nGaedheal hoped to usurp the project as a means to transform its own image by underscoring the party's commitment to the nation as a whole.

Supporters of the Scheme emphasized its national scope in an effort to appeal to the Irish people as a unified body. Cumann na nGaedheal was often presented as the national party, who in looking out for the best interests of the entire nation, piloted through the most extensive national electrification project in country's history. While the following chapters will present contradictory interpretations of the dam in both regional and local contexts, the governing party tried to present a view of the project as strictly

national. Positing his own party as the one that had the interests of the Free State at heart, Cosgrave claimed that Cumann na nGaedheal leaders involved with the Shannon Scheme “might well have been pardoned if they had been awed by its magnitude and if they had lost heart before the many difficulties which presented themselves.”⁴² He went on to praise the project using the language of nation: “when the work has been completed...we will have a national asset of the highest importance.”⁴³ In a similar vein, the *Limerick Leader*, quoting the *Financial Times*, had contended two years earlier that “the Shannon Scheme is not merely a local affair—it means the electrification of the whole of Southern Ireland—energy for business, manufacturing, and domestic use, brought to virtually every door, on terms that may well fill us with prospective envy.”⁴⁴

Discourses also highlighted national participation as essential to the project’s success, such that purchasing electricity for homes and businesses was practically a patriotic imperative that demonstrated political support for Cumann na nGaedheal. As one newspaper predicted in 1925, “it will be every citizen’s duty to do his full share in trying to make the scheme a success.”⁴⁵ McGilligan confirmed that the government “had no doubt of its success; but, in order to make it a stupendous success, they would require the cooperation and zeal of the people of the country.”⁴⁶ The national community was also a feature in a newspaper article on the Scheme published one month before the

⁴² “Shannon Scheme: Great National Asset,” *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1927.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ “The Shannon Scheme—Beginning of a New Epoch,” *Financial Times* quoted in the *Limerick Leader*, 23 March 1925.

⁴⁵ “The Shannon Scheme,” unknown newspaper, 28 May 1925: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/15 (3).

⁴⁶ *Irish Independent*, 4 October 1928.

Electricity Supply Bill was passed in June 1925. The article stated that “the government has laid solid foundations of national progress; its ambitions for the future are high and unselfish. It desires now to give to the world an impressive—may we say, a spectacular—proof of its own and the people’s new spirit of enterprise and independence. For this purpose it has adopted the Shannon Scheme.”⁴⁷ Across the Atlantic, the project found supporters in American writers for the Pawtucket-based *Rhode Island Times*. They confirmed the belief that “spectacular” was by no means an over exaggeration by attributing supernatural powers to the party: “as if by a magic wand the benefits of the great Shannon power station are expected to raise the Irish Free State to the level of the most modern states in the world.”⁴⁸ At the annual conference of the Surveyors’ Institution in Belfast, L. Smith Gordon from Dublin read his paper on “The Industrial Development of Ireland,” in which he claimed that “the whole future of the country depended industrially on the Shannon Scheme. The Free State government had shown remarkable imagination and had recognized what was necessary for the county to prosper upon an industrial basis.”⁴⁹

Indeed, making electricity available to everyone, not just to Dubliners, motivated the government to back plans to dam the River Shannon rather than to undertake a smaller project on the River Liffey for several reasons. First, the River Shannon, located in the West of Ireland, allowed the government to present the project as a national one

⁴⁷ “The Shannon Scheme,” unknown newspaper, 28 May 1925: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/15 (3).

⁴⁸ “The Shannon Flows On,” *Rhode Island Times*, in a collection of newspaper clippings on the Shannon Scheme from the United States sent by T.C. Smiddy to Fitzgerald, Desmond Fitzgerald Papers, UCDA P80/514, August 10, 1929.

⁴⁹ “Irish Industrial Development,” *Times*, 21 June 1929.

since the magnitude of the Scheme permitted it to erect the first national electrification grid in Europe. Second, politicians firmly rejected the Liffey Scheme on the grounds that it would only benefit the residents and industries near Dublin and in no way could supply electricity to the entire nation. As notes in the papers of the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Patrick McGilligan, suggest, “the aim of the Shannon Scheme is the electrification of the whole Free State and as far as possible a cheap and abundant supply of electricity for all, not only the town dwellers, but also the rural population.”⁵⁰ Though power lines were initially only built to towns with 500 or more people, the hope of its promoters was to generate enough support for the project that the electric current from the Shannon Scheme would be affordable and accessible to every homeowner and business person in Ireland. On President Cosgrave’s tour to the United States in 1928, he delivered a speech at a banquet hosted by the Irish Fellowship in Chicago and discussed the wider implications of the Shannon Scheme. He claimed, “We have high hopes in this scheme, not only in its immediate effect upon industrial development, but in the social sphere, that it will brighten the lives of the people, economize time and labour, and place at their disposal even in the remote places conveniences and comforts which they have not hitherto known.”⁵¹ As the second half of the dissertation will show, promotion directed towards women and tourists underscored particular elements of the national appeal of electrification.

⁵⁰ Untitled notes on the Shannon Scheme, [n.d.]: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/28,

⁵¹ *With the President in America: The Authorised Record of the American Tour* (Dublin: O’Kennedy-Brindley, 1928), 77.

Defining the Nation: Agricultural vs. Industrial

Despite attempts to emphasize the nation in the party's rhetoric, agrarian interests expressed doubt that the government really had farmers in mind when it initiated the Scheme. As a result, Cumann na nGaedheal invested considerable energy defining the contours of the national community and countering the notion that project was a means to industrialize Ireland at the expense of agriculture. This was yet another reflection of the tensions between tradition and modernity when it came to perceptions of Irishness in response to national electrification. The fact that Ireland was an agrarian nation was a persistent theme in the rhetoric of Irish nationalists. In fact, Ernest Blythe, Minister of Finance, acknowledged that "agriculture is the back-bone of the economic life of the nation."⁵² Similarly, on the third anniversary of the Free State, Kevin O'Higgins, Minister for Justice and Vice President of the Executive Council, similarly noted that "this state is based on the farmer. The Government that would seek the prosperity of the State and ignore that fundamental fact would be building on sand. The farmer is the base of our economic pyramid, and if we can not induce prosperous conditions at the base then any prosperity that may exist higher up is unsound and artificial."⁵³ Modern historians, including J. J. Lee, have noted that this was a formidable task since "the [Cumann na nGaedheal] government had little appeal for the small producers of the country, whether agricultural or industrial."⁵⁴ However, the government wanted to appear to be responding

⁵² Ernest Blythe, "Election Address from Blythe to the electors of County Monaghan," Ernest Blythe Papers, UCDA P24/505, 1923.

⁵³ Kevin O'Higgins, Speech written for the 3rd anniversary of the Free State, c. late October 1925: Kevin O'Higgins Papers, UCDA P197/142.

⁵⁴ J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 283.

to national interests and not sectional interests in its promotion of the Shannon Scheme. O’Higgins had this in mind when he affirmed that “it is not for the sake of maintaining this country in a purely pastoral condition— simply the producer of flocks and herds—that we have entered upon the Shannon Scheme, for instance, and decided upon a very considerable expenditure on that scheme.”⁵⁵ O’Higgins indicated that Cumann na nGaedheal government was committed to progress, yet recognized the significance of agrarian issues in Ireland.

To assuage the fear that the Shannon Scheme would only promote industrial development and lead to overcrowded and polluted cities as it had in Britain, promoters spoke of Irish industrialization as a limited and carefully coordinated endeavor. In Ireland, as Terence Brown has argued, “there was in much of the country a deep urge toward self-sufficiency, a conviction that the life of an Irish small farm represented a purity and decency of life that could set Ireland apart from the more commercial societies that surrounded her.”⁵⁶ Instead of positing them as oppositional forces, one foreign professor who visited the site observed that the project was “destined definitely to create in the Irish Free State an industrial arm which will prove a very effective complement to the great agricultural side for which the Irish Free State is famous.”⁵⁷ Gordon Campbell, the secretary for the Department of Industry and Commerce, argued that “it has been a great mistake to refer to agriculture as something different from industry. It is itself the first and most important of industries and the only one vital to mankind but since the two

⁵⁵ Kevin O’Higgins, Speech in Dáil Éireann to Finance Committee, 1926 Tariff Commission Bill, 2nd Stage, June 30, 1926, vol. 16.

⁵⁶ Brown, 112.

⁵⁷ *Star*, 28 September 1929.

have been unhappily divorced in theory we must refer to them as separate interests in order to study how to reunite them.”⁵⁸ In another memo, Campbell elaborated by stating that “the argument is not that an agricultural country should aim at becoming an industrial country but at a better balance between the two forms for production.”⁵⁹

Related to this idea of balancing agriculture with industry, Cumann na nGaedheal highlighted the economic and political dangers of depending solely on agriculture. Economically, the party suggested that agriculture depended on many factors out of farmers’ control, including disease, weather, and trade relationships. Thus, it was beneficial for farmers to support industrial development, like the Shannon Scheme, in the event that such uncontrollable forces hindered the export of agricultural produce, as was happening in the 1920s. Politically, the government was concerned about the brain drain resulting from the fact that university-educated individuals could not find employment to match their training in Ireland. Campbell noted that

It is a matter of opinion how far political instability may have its roots in a failure to adjust economic opportunity to native intelligence, imagination and sensibility. But if a nation is to depend on agriculture, it must produce mainly a population of farmers, men of patience, endurance, thrift, and modest intellectual aspirations. If it produces other types it must export them at an early age if it is not to risk the continual inner ferment of disappointed and distorted minds denied by circumstances their adequate exercise.⁶⁰

The government did not wish to produce a nation that consisted of only farmers. While he recognized that “the idea is prevalent to a dangerous extent if industry goes up agriculture

⁵⁸ Gordon Campbell, “Preliminary Notes on Planned Economics,” 1927: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35b/10 (1).

⁵⁹ Gordon Campbell, Memo on Industrial Development, 9 July 1927: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35b/10 (8).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

goes down,” Campbell believed that “a saner view would be that both must go up and that policy must be devised with that object.”⁶¹

Promoters also assured the agricultural community that Irish industrialization would not lead to polluted and overcrowded cities like Birmingham or Manchester. At a conference of the Engineering and Scientific Association, Laurence Kettle, the City Electrical Engineer of Dublin, stated “many Irishmen view with dismay the prospect of Ireland becoming an industrial country, but this is merely because they generally regard England as a fair specimen of industrialism.” However, he claimed that “English industrialism will not be the model, not because it is English, but because it is inefficient and out-of-date, and totally unsuited to modern requirements and modern ideas.”⁶²

Making Ireland distinct from Britain was a key feature of the Free State’s agenda and Patrick McGilligan noted that “whatever the origins of the peoples of these islands may have been, the Irish people constitute a unit fundamentally distinct from the people of England. They are attached almost more than any other people to their language and culture and to everything that characterises their distinct nationality.”⁶³ The Shannon Scheme was depicted as a means of establishing difference between Ireland and Britain because it did not follow the model of English industrial development. Thus, modernity was reformulated along Irish lines to emphasize a distinct sense of Irishness and to distance itself from the negative associations farmers made with British modernity. In the

⁶¹ Gordon Campbell, Minutes responding to Patrick Hogan’s memo, 18 January 1927: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35b/9 (1).

⁶² Laurence J. Kettle, “Back to the Land: Being a Paper read before the Engineering and Scientific Association of Ireland, on 24th November 1919,” reprinted from *The Irish Builder and Engineer* (Dublin, Sackville Press, [n.d.]): Seán MacEntee Papers, UCDA P67/910.

⁶³ Patrick McGilligan, “Mr. McGilligan’s Radio Talk to the U.S.A.,” 9 November 1930: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35b/108 (1).

article published in the *Star*, the writer noted that “there are few small towns in Ireland which cannot boast of having had, at one time or another, a number of industries.” The article depicted the decay of small towns, but wondered “is there no hope for the small town? It may be bold to assert that there is, and that the hope lies in the Shannon Power Scheme.”⁶⁴

Keeping the National Community Intact: Stemming the Tide of Emigration

Cumann na nGaedheal’s efforts to promote itself as the party that represented the entire scope of national interests could not overlook a glaring rupture in the body of the national community: emigration. This was certainly not a new problem in Ireland; since the time of the Famine, young people looking for work fled to places like the United States and Britain for employment in order to support their families. As Michael McCarthy has noted, forty-three percent of all Irish-born citizens lived in other countries during this period.⁶⁵ Historians have evaluated the significance of emigration in terms of how it helped shape Irish perceptions of themselves and their nation.⁶⁶ With so many thousands of people leaving each year, it was challenging to reinforce the positive aspects of Ireland that made people proud of their heritage and interested in building a better future. The Shannon Scheme afforded an opportunity for the Irish to celebrate their nation’s accomplishments and provided an incentive for people to stay in anticipation of a brighter tomorrow, or so Cumann na nGaedheal hoped. Electricity’s capacity to influence national identity in this way was best stated in an article in the *Star* which

⁶⁴ *Star*, 11 May 1929.

⁶⁵ McCarthy, *High Tension*, 155.

⁶⁶ See Kerby A. Miller’s *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

exclaimed, “at last, however, the emigration tide is being stemmed. The Shannon Scheme is proving to be the keynote of a change such as Ireland has never known before. When an Irishman takes off his coat now, it is to work, and not to fight.”⁶⁷ This reference to pacifism linked the Shannon Scheme to Cumann na nGaedheal’s broader goals to distance Ireland from the violence of the revolution and replace aggressive behavior with progressive efforts to rebuild the nation. Mike Cronin noted that “this projected image was an attempt to move beyond the hostilities of the revolutionary period and create Ireland anew.”⁶⁸

Emigration hit the agricultural industry hard in particular since farm workers were rarely needed year round, and young people often took their chances abroad, where they were paid poorly, but could depend on more consistent work. A commission looking into Ireland’s resources stated that “the labour problem is one of the greatest problems in farming in the west.”⁶⁹ Comparing Irish and German farms, one engineer concluded that “the dullness of life in the country, the hard working conditions and low wages which agriculture could only afford to pay, combined with the attraction of life in the towns and cities first cause a shortage of labour and a corresponding rise in its costs.”⁷⁰ As Senator O’Farrell noted,

Our principal industry has been the rearing of young men and women at big expense, and when they are of any use to the country, exporting them to a foreign market, and their stamina and brains go to build up other States. We could remedy

⁶⁷ *Star*, 7 September 1929.

⁶⁸ Cronin, “Projecting the Nation,” 396.

⁶⁹ Sir Henry Grattan Bellew, Minutes of Evidence of the Commission of Enquiry into the Resources and Industries of Ireland, Third Session, January 1920: Ernest Blythe Papers, UCDA P24/2.

⁷⁰ Siemens-Schuckert, *The Electrification of the Irish Free State: The Shannon Scheme* (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1924): Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/5.

that, I take it, to a great extent by developing to the full the resources of our own country. This, I think, is the first real step towards that development.⁷¹

He also stated that this pattern of sending children abroad to work “tended to develop a very undesirable and slavish mentality. You cannot remove that in a few years. You will never remove it unless you take some large comprehensive measures calculated to capture the hearts and the imaginations of the people.”⁷² In a speech to members of the Institution of Electrical Engineers and Engineering and the Scientific Association of Ireland, Dr. P. W. Sothman, the chief electrical engineer for the government on the Shannon Scheme, said that “one of the surest ways of stopping emigration and stopping the waste of Ireland’s manhood, was to provide the country with cheap light and power.”⁷³ Thus, the Shannon Scheme, which itself temporarily employed over 5,000 workers at one time, was widely viewed as a solution to the massive emigration crisis that faced the government in the 1920s because it would provide industrial jobs in the countryside.

Stemming the tide of emigration was an essential part of Cumann na nGaedheal’s promotion of the Scheme because keeping the national community intact was a necessary feature of nationalist ideology and, thus, had wide patriotic appeal. In a government publication, the author alleged, “the argument that we cannot afford a Shannon Scheme, that it is too big for us is simply a policy of defeatism. It certainly is not the spirit which will build up a nation. It is also not the policy which will appeal to youth that has only

⁷¹ John Thomas O’Farrell, “Shannon Electricity Supply Bill, 5th Stage,” *Seanad Éireann Debates*, vol. 5, 25 June 1925.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Irish Independent*, 22 September 1926.

one alternative to reconstruction namely emigration.”⁷⁴ Those who criticized the project were judged to be unpatriotic because the only other alternative was to embrace the situation in which able-bodied Irish workers were forced to leave their homeland in search of employment. This practice of labeling all behaviors that did not support the scheme as unpatriotic was a common technique used by Cumann na nGaedheal to champion electricity.

However, stemming the tide of emigration as a promotional theme contradicted other strategies that promised electricity would improve the efficiency of homes, farms, and factories, and, thus would require less labor to do the same amount of work. For example, Siemens acknowledged that “Ireland is no doubt, as were all other countries, faced with the problem of lessening the dullness and hardship of the farmer’s life, and in addition with the problem of labour on the farm. The remedy abroad is electrification and no doubt in Ireland it will serve the same end.”⁷⁵ Similarly, in a letter to a secretary of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, McLaughlin noted that “labour seems to be our farmer’s greatest trouble and I presume he would welcome anything which would make him less dependent on it and at the same time cheapen production.”⁷⁶ This statement directly contradicts the government’s claims that electricity would reduce emigration and thus provide more laborers to the farmer. Presumably, farmers would benefit from either situation since reduced emigration also drove down the costs of labor as more workers

⁷⁴ “The Shannon Scheme,” government publication, [n.d.]: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/10.

⁷⁵ Siemens-Schuckert, *The Electrification of the Irish Free State: The Shannon Scheme* (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1924): Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/5.

⁷⁶ Thomas McLaughlin, Letter to Fred Allen, Secretary of the Power Section, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 28 May 1923: Eoin MacNeill Papers, UCDA LA1/P/24.

competed for fewer jobs. Regardless of whether or not electricity would ensure a stable workforce or make that workforce obsolete, the focus remained on improving conditions for the farmer. Even some members of the Dáil agreed that electricity allowed workers “more opportunity to increase their outputs and affords more time for leisure and imposes less stress on the workers than depending on their own energies.”⁷⁷

Unity Beyond the Free State—Partition and the North

Cumann na nGaedheal’s decision to highlight unity as a central feature of its political campaign extended beyond an approach to their political rivals, reaching across the boundaries of the Free State itself. In this sense, the government addressed not only those who made up the majority of the body politic (farmers) and those who threatened to leave it (emigrants), but it also had to acknowledge a specific group of Irish people who were excluded from the state entirely. Though partition was a reality since the Government of Ireland Act in 1920, opponents of the Anglo-Irish Treaty argued that nationalists who signed that document were responsible for giving up the northern six counties of Ireland. The Boundary Commission, which had met between 1924 and 1925 was supposed to determine the precise boundary between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State. However, when the press got word that only small transfers were to be made on both sides, the report of the commission was suppressed and the existing border remained in place.⁷⁸ Some nationalists laid the failure to bring back even part of the North at the door of Cumann na nGaedheal. So when the party began to speak of the

⁷⁷ Theodore Stevens, “1924 Shannon Scheme in True Perspective as Stated in Parliamentary Debates,” 19 December 1924: Richard Mulcahy Papers, UCDA P7/C/62.

⁷⁸ For more on the Boundary Commission, see Paul Murray’s *The Irish Boundary Commission and Its Origins, 1886-1925* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2011).

Shannon Scheme as a great unifier, this led some, including members of the party, to speculate on the possibility of the dam as a means to bring Northern Ireland into the national fold.

During the Dáil debates over the Shannon Scheme, Cumann na nGaedheal T.D., George Wolfe, expressed his optimism “that by the energy we show in taking up and working these additional industries and by the energy we show in establishing those works, we may offer an inducement to our hard-headed brethren in the North, who respect hard work and successful work, to come in.”⁷⁹ The press also portrayed the Shannon Scheme as a means to reconnect with the North. For example, at a basic level, the *Limerick Leader* speculated in 1926 that “eventually it may be found possible to export current to Northern Ireland.”⁸⁰ The *Limerick Leader* also suggested a spirit of competition with the North, which did not necessarily inspire hope in reunification. The paper described how “hard-headed business men in Northern Ireland, for instance, are said to be rather uneasy lest the project will revolutionise the industrial life of the twenty-six counties to such a marked favourable extent as will out ‘Ulster’ completely in the shade.” According to the paper, this concern over industrialization in the Free State could have serious effects on Northern Ireland’s economy:

Our great electrical project already seems in fact, to be placing a damper on enterprise within the domain of Sir James Craig’s Parliament. Those manufactures in which Belfast has been so largely specialising are now being badly hit by foreign competition and many who might otherwise launch new schemes, we are told, are kept from doing so by the tremendous possibilities which they think the Shannon Scheme will present to the Saorstát.⁸¹

⁷⁹ George Wolfe, “The Shannon Scheme. Motion by the Minister for Industry and Commerce—Resumed Debate,” Dáil Éireann Debates, vol. 10, 3 April 1925.

⁸⁰ “Importance of Cheap Power,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 March 1926.

⁸¹ “Things that Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 5 September 1927.

Like others who emphasized the Free State as an example to other nations, the *Limerick Leader* suggested that “the wiser heads in Belfast, as a writer on the subject points out, ‘are watching the progress of the Shannon Scheme with breathless interest.’ They can see in advance that the harnessing of our noble waterway will mean an immense advantage to Southern Ireland.” Instead of bringing the North back in, though, the paper speculated that the Shannon Scheme would result in emigration to the Free State: “One of their number has actually ventured the prophecy that ‘we may be migrating to the Free State in 1930, or little later.’”⁸² Nevertheless, the *Irish Independent* reported that Dr. P. W. Sothman, Chief Government Engineer, remained optimistic that “the Scheme’s success would be the glue that would solidify into the unity of North and South in Ireland.”⁸³

At a dinner hosted in Limerick by the Electricity Supply Board, Cosgrave addressed the significance of unity ten months before he made it a key feature of his speech at the opening ceremony. In the article highlighting the event, the *Irish Independent* focused on the “National Effects of the Shannon Scheme,” and ran the byline, “Power Next Year, President on Part it will Play for Unity.”⁸⁴ The article reported that Cosgrave admitted to the difficulties in solving problems like the boundary, and he suggested that the solution to many of these issues could be found in the utilization of resources. According to the *Independent*, Cosgrave “believed the success of the Shannon Scheme would play an important part in the unity of Ireland,” in the sense that expertise and industries were needed in every county, and everyone could agree to support that

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ “Injustice of the Electricity Act,” *Irish Independent*, 6 October 1927.

⁸⁴ “National Effects of Shannon Scheme, *Irish Independent*, 10 September 1928.

endeavor.⁸⁵ Reporting on this same event, the *Clare Champion* stated “that the Shannon Electricity Scheme, in addition to conferring widespread benefits on the people of the Free State, might play an important part in bringing about the removal of the boundary between North and South was the belief expressed by President Cosgrave.”⁸⁶ Similarly, the *Sunday Graphic*, an English paper, speculated that “President Cosgrave, speaking perhaps with his eyes turned to the North, has expressed the belief that the success of the Shannon Scheme will play an important part in the ultimate unity of Ireland.”⁸⁷

In 1930, Dr. Thomas McLaughlin, the young Irish Engineer employed by Siemens who brought its plans to the Free State government and was appointed managing director of the ESB, was asked at a meeting of the Irish Centre of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, “will the Shannon Scheme be ultimately the means of ending Partition?”⁸⁸ He expressed “to have some hopes that it will,” since ““electricity...knew no boundaries.”” McLaughlin spoke in terms of Belfast and Dublin becoming “interconnected” through electricity as a means to provide cheaper electricity. According to the *Limerick Leader*, “he felt that the realisation of that simple economic fact by the people of the North and South must result in inter-connection. His ambition in connection with the Shannon Scheme was to see inter-connection between North and South.”⁸⁹

Interconnection and reunification are separate issues: while McLaughlin may have hoped

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “The Shannon Scheme—Industrial Development to Follow,” *Clare Champion*, 15 September 1928.

⁸⁷ Valentine Williams, “Begone, Celtic Twilight: A Young Irishman’s Dream Lights the Face of a New and Hopeful Ireland,” *Sunday Graphic*, 16 September 1928.

⁸⁸ “Shannon Scheme—Will it End Partition?—Dr. McLaughlin’s Ambitions,” *Limerick Leader*, 1 November 1930.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

for the latter, his words indicated that the former was perhaps a more realistic goal for the Free State and for him as the marketing director for the ESB, charged with selling the current and making the Shannon Scheme a paying venture.

Although some scholars of the period, including Rubenstein, have suggested that while the Cosgrave administration appealed to a desire to reunite with the North, this was not a principal objective for Cumann na nGaedheal leaders or promoters of the Shannon Scheme. According to Rubenstein, “Cosgrave pointed to the Shannon Scheme as the economic solution to partition, implicitly arguing that modernization was the best and most realistic strategy for reunification, over and against the armed struggle. Shannon electricity, Cosgrave announced, would not only reunite Northern Ireland and the Free State but also reunite opposing forces within the Free State by vindicating the decision, in 1922, to go along with the Anglo-Irish Treaty.”⁹⁰ Rather, the failure of the Boundary Commission in 1925 coincided with the initiation of the project, which over time, became an outlet for talking about reconnecting with the North. Linking the Shannon Scheme to the North, therefore, was not an objective from the outset, but rather an attempt to reclaim political footing on the issue of partition after the Boundary Commission collapsed under the watch of Cumann na nGaedheal leaders. Depicted as the “Boundary Commission fiasco” by J. J. Lee, the realization of partition was a difficult fact for the Cumann na nGaedheal government to face when it was trying to sell itself as a national party committed to the nationalist ideals of the revolution.⁹¹ Ciara Meehan has argued that the Free State government had invested a great deal in the commission, and its failure

⁹⁰ Rubenstein, *Public Works*, 147.

⁹¹ Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, 151.

resulted in “undermining the Treaty and consequently Cumann na nGaedheal. That the commission, which was the culmination of three years’ research and preparation by the Free State, did not deliver a solution to the problem of Partition was a blow to Cumann na nGaedheal’s policy of image projection.”⁹² However, Cosgrave and other members of government did not seriously pursue extending the national electrification grid to the north, so their rhetoric about reunification was more a means to reclaim political legitimacy lost over the boundary than a change in policy towards the North.

Nevertheless, some observers in the North expressed their opinions on the project. They praised the Free State for the undertaking and credited the government for having the courage to see the project through. Major Stanley grounded his opinions on the Shannon Scheme on the experience he had on the commission that studied the use of Northern Ireland’s natural resources. The words he used to describe the project at a Technical Conference held in Limerick in 1928 echoed promoters’ efforts to speak of the project in terms of courage and hope for the future. Elucidating the shift between the traditional and the modern, Stanley explained, “the Irish people had been blamed for living in the past, but everybody looking at the Shannon Scheme would see that their eyes were now turned to the future and in it there was a breadth of vision and a courage that augured well for the future of the country.”⁹³ Likewise, at a luncheon coinciding with a visit by Lieutenant Colonel W. A. Vignoles, director of the British Electrical Development Association, Sir Robert Baird, D.L., who served as president of the Advertising Club of Ulster, lauded the Free State for “its broad vision in harnessing great

⁹² Meehan, *The Cosgrave Party*, 66.

⁹³ “Fallacies Exposed—Dr. McLaughlin and Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 June 1928.

forces that have been going to waste through the centuries.”⁹⁴ Similarly, J. A. Scott addressed the group and noted that “the Free State has set Ulster an example,” and called for Ulster “to do better.” These comments, though intended to foster a healthy competitive spirit, were not meant to challenge the Free State government or its accomplishments. Instead, as H. L. McCready, former president of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, put it “Ardnacrusha was a wonderful piece of engineering. The electricity would give every little village a chance to develop industry”—a sentiment Cumann na nGaedheal never tired of expressing its promotional campaign.⁹⁵ However, not all northerners viewed the Shannon Scheme’s potential benefits for the Free State with such optimism. For example, Joseph Connellan, Nationalist MP for South Armagh, expressed frustration with his own “government of negation,” and said that they were so divorced from the South that they could not avail of the Shannon Scheme though the Shannon belonged as much to the North as to the South.”⁹⁶ Nationalists from the Irish Free State and the North were unable to make this dream a reality—though it did provide for intriguing political commentary and enabled Cumann na nGaedheal to address partition in a way that elided the embarrassment of the Boundary Commission.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which the Shannon Scheme became a part of the political milieu of the 1920s. The post-colonial situation coupled with a need to restore order after the Civil War led the Cumann na nGaedheal government and its

⁹⁴ “Saorstát Shows the Way—North Praises Shannon Vision,” *Irish Independent*, 25 October 1929.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ “Catholics Demand Fair Play,” *Irish Independent*, 1 June 1929.

supporters to emphasize the party's own courage, commitment to the nation, and desire to maintain unity. These strategies, while not unique to the promotion of the project, reflected that the Scheme was more in sync with Cumann na nGaedheal's attempts to maneuver within a revolutionary framework. Rather than interpreting national electrification as an exception to the party's policies, an analysis of the language used to talk about the dam reveals that the whole venture aligned with what Cumann na nGaedheal hoped to achieve politically. The next chapter will continue a discussion of party politics by explaining the specific ways in which Cumann na nGaedheal linked itself to the success of the dam. Although oppositional forces threatened to undermine this association by criticizing various aspects of the project for political reasons, the party's responses to these concerns suggested both an offensive and defensive approach to the promotion of electricity.

CHAPTER II

PARTY POLITICS PART II: PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES

The Shannon Scheme has been the most spectacular achievement of the government.¹

—“Fighting Points for Cumann na nGaedheal Speakers & Workers,” General Election 1932

The ways in which the Cumann na nGaedheal party attached itself to the fate of the project ensured that the decision to go through with national electrification was not simply a political resolution: the Shannon Scheme itself was politicized. The government and its supporters praised Cosgrave’s administration for making the project a reality. There was no doubt that the Scheme was Cumann na nGaedheal’s darling and the party never tired of taking credit for it. However, not everyone was impressed by this kind of political grandstanding and some expressed doubts about the project’s cost, size, and technical details, often to exact political advantages for themselves. In response to such criticisms, Cumann na nGaedheal was able to reaffirm its justification for the undertaking and launch attacks of its own on the opposition. This chapter will explore the various promotional strategies and political rhetoric employed by promoters to fashion the Scheme into a political issue.

Cumann na nGaedheal and its supporters were conscious to link the success of the Scheme with the success of the party. A member of the Industrial Trust Company from Dublin presented material on industrial development in Ireland at a meeting in Belfast in which he argued that “the whole future of the country depended industrially on the Shannon Scheme. The Free State government had shown remarkable imagination and had

¹ “Fighting Points for Cumann na nGaedheal Speakers & Workers,” General Election 1932, (Dublin: Temple Press, 1932); Richard Mulcahy Papers, University College Dublin Archives, P7/C/42.

recognized what was necessary for the country to prosper.”² The stakes faced that government had faced were stressed in one article written at the opening of the dam that acknowledged,

In the face of much ill-informed and destructive criticism the government went steadily ahead with the Shannon Scheme. With the progress of the work the gloomy prophesies of the critics were proved to rest upon no more secure foundation than the ardent hope for a failure of the scheme which would bring down not only the government but the whole fabric of the Saorstát.³

Cumann na nGaedheal leaders, who made themselves inseparable from the project, embraced the political implications of its outcome. They were well aware of the negative effects failure could have on them politically. As work strikes at the site demonstrated, “the Free State will intervene without further delay, since its prestige is involved with the success of the Shannon Scheme.”⁴ Evidence for the party’s use of the language of nation in its promotion of the works can be found in government sponsored publications, the press, memorandums, parliamentary debates, and election propoganda. Even Siemens, the German firm, supported the government in recognizing the advantages to be had from putting the project forward as a national one. In its publication, *The Electrification of the Irish Free State: The Shannon Scheme*, the company was certain that only “a government which has before its eyes a ‘national scheme’ to be carried out in the interests of the whole people . . . will develop the Shannon.”⁵

One of the most explicit forms of propoganda crafted by the government was the 1932 publication of the *Official Handbook of the Irish Free State*. Complete with

² “Irish Industrial Development,” *Times*, 21 June 1929.

³ “A Triumphant Success,” *Star*, 27 July 1929.

⁴ “Irish Labour Disputes: Shannon Scheme Still Delayed,” *Times*, 12 October 1925.

⁵ Borgquist, et al., “Report of the Experts”: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/5.

pictures, simple tables, and maps, this collection of essays contained thirty-three chapters on diverse topics relating to social, political, and economic issues. The non-technical language employed suggested that the audience for this book was the general public, which was expected to note the impressive accomplishments of Cumann na nGaedheal over the course of the previous decade. The publication date is significant given that it was the year of the general election through which Fianna Fáil won a majority in the Dáil and took control of government for the first time. Though the *Official Handbook*, an overt piece of propaganda aimed at voters, may have failed to convince a majority of its intended audience that Cumann na nGaedheal was worthy of continued support, the publication pointed to all of the party's major accomplishments over the course of the previous decade. Contributors to the volume included prominent government officials, university professors, and heads of organizations like the National Gallery of Ireland and the Agricultural Credit Corporation. With broad themes ranging from agriculture to religion, the inclusion of a chapter on "Power Supply in Ireland"—essentially the Shannon Scheme—spoke volumes of its importance in the minds of Free State leaders. Penned by McLaughlin himself, the chapter emphasized the national scope of the project. This effort was greatly aided by the inclusion of a map of Ireland depicting the connectedness and extent of transmission lines. McLaughlin embraced the opportunity to address the national scope of the project by detailing the practical applications of electricity in the home, street lighting, and small industries such as "bakeries, printing works, garages, creameries, etc."⁶

⁶ *Official Handbook of the Irish Free State* (Dublin: Hely's LT.D., 1932), 162.

The Shannon Scheme was connected to Cumann na nGaedheal most specifically by attributing the former's success to particular members of the party. McGilligan, in his role as minister for industry and commerce, received the most praise in this regard. As the parliamentary debates got underway in 1924, one parliamentary correspondent praised the minister for he "has studied it deeply, appreciates it thoroughly, expounds it clearly, and advocates it enthusiastically." The reporter extended his adulation further by exclaiming that McGilligan "realises quite obviously that he is on to a great big task which is practicable, and that such a success is within the bounds of possibility as would literally drench him in glory." Noting the young age of many government leaders, the correspondent summed up his report by acknowledging the difficulties ahead, but wondered, "what young man would not revel in such a tremendous opportunity? So I content myself with patting him on the back and wishing him a full tankard of success."⁷ George Ryan of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce pronounced that "a large tribute is due to the ability, energy, and resourceful manner in which the Minister of Industry and Commerce so ably assisted by his chief of staff accomplished the difficult task of inaugurating this stupendous undertaking."⁸ The *Freeman*, published between 1927 and 1928 as a mouthpiece for Cumann na nGaedheal, referred approvingly to the *Irish Times*'s description of McGilligan as a "'tour de force' in the Dáil, when he explained the scheme at great length and answered some expert criticism without the aid of a single note."⁹ The *Star*, another paper which supported the party, also pointed to youthfulness in

⁷ Commerce in the Dáil. Irish Industry and Commerce: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/15 (1), circa 1924.

⁸ "Business Men Visit Limerick—Chambers of Commerce—Views on Shannon Scheme," *Limerick Leader*, 2 October 1926.

⁹ "The Sponsor of the Shannon Scheme," *Freeman* 2, no. 10 (13 October 1928): 7.

exclaiming, “Young as he was and still is, Patrick McGilligan blazed forth his enthusiasms to the world” making the Shannon Scheme “a unique opportunity . . . all made possible through the initiative and tenacity of Mr. McGilligan.”¹⁰ Similarly *People’s Weekly*, retrospectively celebrating his career in 1948, gushed that “towering gigantically over all the works of construction and reconstruction which loomed on the horizon in the opening decade of the new Irish Free State was one that kept Patrick McGilligan nailed to his desk in Industry and Commerce. This was the Shannon Scheme—that colossal job of work which won for McGilligan an almost legendary reputation as a man of vision and bigness of mind.”¹¹ Linking individual ministers, such as McGilligan, to the project reinforced the idea that Cumann na nGaedheal leadership was a necessary element in reorienting the Free State towards the future. The unique characteristics of party members were what ensured progress in the new nation.

Connecting the Shannon Scheme to the vision of Free State leadership was quickly taken up by the party and press. In a memorandum from the Department of Industry and Commerce, the government official, based on conversations with Canadian and American electricity experts, claimed that “it soon became apparent that the success or failure of a large scale electrical supply depends . . . mainly on the intelligence, energy and vision with which distribution is conducted.”¹² J. J. O’Sullivan, Minister for Education, spoke at a meeting of the University College Scientific Society and claimed

¹⁰ “The Shannon Scheme: Mr. McGilligan Justifies his Faith in the People,” *Star*, 11 January 1930.

¹¹ “Men Behind the Budget: A Portrait of Patrick McGilligan,” *People’s Weekly*: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/128, April 17, 1948.

¹² Memorandum from Department of Industry and Commerce, “Shannon Scheme: The Distribution and Sale of Power National Archive,” NA S4/735, 14 December 1925.

that “not merely was this [the Shannon Scheme] the work of science, engineering, great contracting firms, and men of imagination, but that the government to which he belonged could claim a little credit for it.”¹³ The press relayed the message that the Scheme inspired hope in the current government and promised a brighter future for the Irish people. For example, the *Star* declared that “harnessing the great Irish waterway is itself an assurance that the faith and vision of the government in undertaking this gigantic scheme is to have a triumphant vindication.” Undeterred by ongoing criticism of the Scheme, the paper confidently predicted at its opening that, “President Cosgrave’s government was to score yet another triumph by the overwhelming success of the Shannon Scheme.”¹⁴ M. G. Palmer, writing for the *New York Times*, praised Cumann na nGaedheal leadership for not only taking on the project, but for ushering the Free State into a new era of progress, with thoughts toward future ambitions. He gushed:

It is the ambition of the new rulers that the industrial leeway lost in the age of steam shall be more than made good in the age of electricity, and the weirs and the turbines of the Shannon Scheme are to them more than granite and steel: they are the outward sign of transforming forces liberated by the treaty settlement that are destined to create an Ireland that need no longer turn wistfully to the past for its golden age.¹⁵

The promise to transform Ireland into a forward-thinking and progressive nation was not something that came in the wake of the Scheme’s completion. As the project was underway, Cosgrave himself acknowledged the transformative power of the Shannon

¹³ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Clare Champion*, 2 March 1929.

¹⁴ “A Triumphant Success,” *Star*, 27 July 1929.

¹⁵ M. G. Palmer, “The Shannon Stirs New Hope in Ireland: Popular Imagination Has Been Fired by the Harnessing Of Its Historic Waters to Make Industries Grow,” *New York Times Magazine*, 12 January 1930; Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/15 (15).

Scheme when he declared that “if our people realise and grasp the opportunity the whole face of the country will be changed.”¹⁶

Though large segments of the British press and public were critical of the Shannon Scheme, others expressed support for the Free State leaders by emphasizing the benefits of having young men in positions of power. The *Financial Times*' traveling correspondent in the Free State, W. H. Harland, stated that the Shannon Scheme was “literally a test project for the Free State,” and demonstrated that “the vigorous youth who are the driving force behind the nation look to its triumphant culmination as a vindication of their industrial courage.”¹⁷ Harland described Cosgrave and his colleagues as “the shrewdest of psychologists. They have thrown on their shoulders no easy task of breaking what is in reality an enormous inferiority complex, and the Shannon Scheme is one—and probably the most vital—of their methods of doing it.”¹⁸ The *Sunday Graphic* also heaped praise on the government when it claimed that “in shackling the Shannon ... the Cosgrave Administration has shown a high sense of responsibility as a modern government. It rejected smaller and less audacious alternatives to embark on an enterprise of this magnitude, and thus make the new force available to the future, as well as to the present generation of the Irish.”¹⁹ In doing so, the paper proclaimed that the government “has sounded a clarion call of confidence in the nation's destinies.” If this ringing endorsement of the Cosgrave Administration was not enough, the article went on to

¹⁶ “Shannon Scheme: Great National Asset,” *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1927.

¹⁷ “The Shannon Scheme—Striking British Tribute,” *Clare Champion*, 5 November 1927.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Valentine Williams, “Begone, Celtic Twilight: A Young Irishman's Dream Lights the Face of a New and Hopeful Ireland,” *Sunday Graphic*, 16 September 1928.

praise the government's negotiating skills with the Germans, such that the Free State "was able to profit by German industrial depression to impose exceedingly stiff conditions upon the contractors: indeed, no dealer at the Ballinasloe Horse Fair ever drove a harder bargain."²⁰ Even British experts on electricity expressed support for the Scheme, including Llewellyn B. Atkinson, former president of the Institute of Electrical Engineers, when he stated that it "was more than an engineering scheme—it was an economic and psychological gesture that Ireland was coming into line with modern industry."²¹ Writing to the *Leitrim Observer*, Englishman C. Montague Grimley spun the relative inexperience of the Free State leaders in a positive way when he wrote about "the young appearance of Ireland's legislators and guardians of the peace; youth seems to have taken the reigns [sic] of government into its own hands."²² For Grimley, this was not a negative attribute for "it may be in-experienced, but there is no doubting its enthusiasm and enterprise. Under its sway, Ireland may well forge ahead, the Shannon Scheme already threatens to materialise before Britain's regional electricity scheme is in operation. There, perhaps is a portent for the future."²³

In addition to the press, other elements of popular culture echoed Cumann na nGaedheal's rhetoric in its celebration of what was considered the greatest engineering feat ever undertaken in Ireland. For example, Sylvester Boland's folksong "The Shannon Scheme," written in 1927 heaped praise upon the Shannon Scheme and Free State leaders

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "What the Shannon Scheme will do," *Irish Independent*, 31 January 1929.

²² C. Montague Grimley, *Leitrim Observer*, 6 September 1930.

²³ Ibid.

who made it possible. Boland went to great lengths to craft catchy rhymes in his commemoration of the project, opening the song with,

If I were Homer, the ancient roamer,
I'd write a poem on a noble theme,
And I'd sing the story and praise the glory
Of that wondrous project, The Shannon Scheme.

This praiseworthy “wondrous project” was a “noble theme,” according to Boland, because its benefits were wide ranging, from greater employment, mechanization of agriculture, and increased commerce to personal enjoyment to be had from electricity in every home. He used the collective “our” to speak of Irish homes, reinforcing the idea that the Shannon Scheme would be a boon to the entire nation. Boland was clear that the responsibility for providing equal access to these benefits lay with government leaders. Though written two years before the flood gates opened, Boland expressed confidence by ending the song on a note of celebration,

So lads and lasses, fill high your glasses,
And drink a toast to that noble scheme,
And praise those statesmen,
Those wise and brave men
Who boldly tackled The Shannon Scheme.²⁴

In labeling Cumann na nGaedheal ministers “brave,” Boland drew upon post-Civil War rhetoric on courage whereby government officials became heroes not from violence, but by providing a better future. According to a booklet introducing *Around the Hills of Clare*, the collection of folk music in which Boland’s song appeared, “traditional song played an important part in the lives of the people, not only in providing entertainment but also in recording, reflecting and commenting on the aspects of their day-to-day lives

²⁴ Sylvester Boland “The Shannon Scheme,” performed by Nonie Lynch, *Around the Hills of Clare*, Music Traditions Records, MTC331-2, CD, 2004.

and experiences.”²⁵ Boland’s folksong demonstrated how popular culture often reflected and complemented top-down propaganda celebrating government achievements.

Just as folksongs were aimed at a popular audience, so too were the retirement announcements and obituaries in the press of prominent government officials or engineers who worked on the project. In these notices, newspapers reflected a rhetorical device employed by Cumann na nGaedheal to shape the Scheme’s image as the most significant enterprise in the 1920s. When the *Times* (London) reported Cosgrave’s retirement from politics in 1944, the paper placed the Shannon Scheme in between improving the judiciary and starting the National Defence Force among his accomplishments.²⁶ This brief notice, covering the decade Cosgrave led the Free State government, indicated the magnitude of the project in the minds of outside observers. Similarly, obituaries mentioning the relationship of individuals to the electrification of Ireland are telling. That an entire person’s life, covered in just a few short paragraphs, was defined in some way by the Shannon Scheme speaks volumes about its significance as a political issue. In the obituaries of Major Leo Zinovieff and Dr. Arthur Rohn, the *Times* mentions that highlights in both of these men’s lives were their involvement with the Scheme. Zinovieff, whose life was punctuated as a member of the Russian Duma, close ties to the royal family, service in World War II, and marriage to a princess, was remembered in Britain for his work on “the Shannon Scheme in Eire.”²⁷ Rohn had a distinguished career as a teacher, academic dean, and author, but the final line of his

²⁵ Jim Carroll and Pat Mackenzie, “Singing in West Clare” in an accompanying booklet, *Around the Hills of Clare*, performed by various artists, Music Traditions Records, MTCD331-2, CD, 2004, 1.

²⁶ “Mr. Cosgrave to Retire: General Mulcahy as Successor,” *Times*, 19 January 1944.

²⁷ “Major Leo Zinovieff,” *Times*, 1 October 1951.

obituary read that, “he was one of the engineers who went to Ireland to study the Shannon power scheme and give his advice on the proposed construction.”²⁸ When a popular engineer from Galway passed in 1952, the *Connacht Tribune* remembered that “he qualified as an engineer in the early twenties at the University College, Galway. His first post was on the Shannon Scheme at Ardnacrusha.”²⁹

The obituaries of political figures who opposed the Shannon Scheme even cited their criticism as a major moment defining the lives of these individuals. Mr. John O’Conner, a nationalist M.P., was eulogized by the press for supporting “different methods, of the present Shannon electrification scheme.”³⁰ After the infamous suicide of the independent parliamentarian and writer Darrell Figgis, the *Times* reported that he “was a vigorous critic of the government’s Shannon Scheme.”³¹ Figgis, whose wife notoriously committed suicide in the back of a cab and whose lover died a year later as a result of complications from an abortion, was tormented by grief and filled his car with carbon monoxide to kill himself soon after. That the paper thought it relevant to mention his position on the Shannon Scheme, in light of the spectacle caused by his death, is noteworthy. In 2006, the *Irish Independent* wrote an article on Figgis and wondered why this “hero was written out of Irish history.”³² The paper noted that while “Figgis features in many accounts of the Howth gun-running and of drawing up the Free State constitution, very little is known of his life after he became a T.D.” Mentioning one’s role

²⁸ “Dr. Arthur Rohn,” *Times*, 4 October 1956.

²⁹ “Death of Popular Galway Engineer,” *Connacht Tribune*, 23 February 1952.

³⁰ “Mr. John O’Connor, K.C.” *Times*, 2 November 1928.

³¹ “Death of Darrell Figgis,” *Times*, 28 October 1925.

³² “The Hero who was Written out of Irish History,” *Irish Independent*, 23 April 2006.

in supporting or opposing in one's obituary reinforces the notion that the project had attained relevance in the public imagination during the period of Cumann na nGaedheal's leadership of the Free State. The dam was a recognizable topic in the minds of not only the Irish, but of foreigners as well, because it represented a great national undertaking: an image shaped by political rhetoric and propaganda throughout the 1920s.

Challenges to Cumann na nGaedheal's National Image and Political Success

Although the government went to considerable lengths to shape a positive view of the Shannon Scheme in its promotional campaign, those living near the site did not always share an optimistic outlook on the dam, and their dissatisfaction had the potential to undercut Cumann na nGaedheal's efforts to establish itself as the party of the nation. Protests against the Scheme were problematic because they exposed fractures in national unity and hindered the project's completion. J. K. Prendergast, resident engineer on the site, wrote to Professor Rishworth, the chief engineer, that he could not understand why residents near the construction were refusing to leave their homes. He stated that "it is quite unusual that habitations, which are situated so close to the work and whose value is negligible as compared with the importance of the work, should not be cleared before operations are started."³³ What the engineers and Irish government officials failed to recognize was that strong local ties to one's home and property might trump one's "national" sensibilities. Prendergast noted that this attachment was so strong that, in some cases, it led to violence. He told Rishworth that "messengers and watchmen who were sent to communicate our proposals have been abused."³⁴ Similarly, he reported to his

³³ Letter to Professor Rishworth from Resident Engineer, NA SS 13934/27, 23 June 1927.

³⁴ Ibid.

superior that “after the last blasting, farmer Boyle was so excited that he wanted to assault our engineer because his house had been damaged.”³⁵ Patrick Boyle, who lived near Ardnacrusha, caused considerable trouble for the engineers, including £900 in delay fees by refusing to leave his home, and he warned them “that if any accident happened, the engineers employed on the tailrace building site would not go back to Limerick alive.”³⁶ Whereas Cumann na nGaedheal hoped to promote the Shannon Scheme as a national project, local residents in Clare and Limerick were prepared to defend their homes from these bearers of modernity. As Chapter 5 on regional issues will explore, their tendency to resort to violence suggests that some locals certainly did not buy into propaganda depicting the Scheme as a harbinger of peace or a national asset.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Siemens itself represented a potential threat to Cumann na nGaedheal’s efforts to promote the Shannon Scheme as a national undertaking. Since the ESB was a semi-state body and electricity was nationalized by the Free State government after it bought out smaller electricity suppliers, Siemens was the only corporation that could make a claim on the project in Ireland. For example, in November 1927, Herr Ernsweiller from Siemens wrote to McGilligan, “I can assure you that I am following the progress of the work with the fullest attention, I am perfectly aware of the fact that our name is bound up with the success of the Shannon Scheme. It is far more for us than just a business problem, even national interests are at stake.”³⁷ Statements such as this indicated that Germans appropriated this symbol of Irish national identity as an

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Quoted in McCarthy, *High Tension*, 101.

³⁷ Letter from Herr Ernsweiller to Patrick McGilligan, NA ESB 6/11, 2 November 1927.

integral part of their identity as leaders in electrical development and hydroelectricity. In the minds of Siemens's engineers, it was no stretch of the imagination to view the Scheme as a *German*, not an Irish, accomplishment. This was particularly important for the German firm in the interwar period. Siemens, a company that specialized in electrical engineering, had a tainted relationship with the previous German government as a major aircraft supplier during World War I. As Gerald O'Beirne and Michael O'Connor argue, "For the House of Siemens, the execution of the Shannon Scheme was the one single event that marked the reappearance of the firm on the world electrical scene following the gloom of the Great War and its aftermath."³⁸ The company hoped to promote the Shannon Scheme in terms of what it could achieve in order to attract new business internationally. In Chapter 4 below, I will investigate the ways in which this dual identity complicated Cumann na nGaedheal's efforts to talk about the Scheme as an Irish endeavor.

Political Objections

Cumann na nGaedheal also took heat from other political parties, which expressed their concerns about the Shannon Scheme on the stump, in parliament, and to the press. Across the board, critics voiced their doubts about the cost of the Scheme since maintaining good credit was seen as a fundamental feature of the government's financial policy. In fact, disputes between the Departments of Finance and Industry and Commerce plagued the project from the outset and resulted in one of the few instances in the 1920s when Finance lost its grip on an Irish political issue. Caution about the expense of the

³⁸ Gerald O'Beirne and Michael O'Connor, "Siemens-Schuckert and the Electrification of the Irish Free State," in *The Shannon Scheme and the Electrification of the Irish Free State*, ed. Andy Bielenberg (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2002), 99.

project was compounded by the recent expenses of the Civil War and a strict adherence to British economic theory which stressed the need to maintain a balanced budget. Other attacks on the project dealt with the presence of Germans at the site, British foreign policy concerns, and technical aspects of Siemens' proposal. While German and British interests in the project will be discussed at length in Chapter 4 on race, disputes over technical details will be omitted due to the fact that these discussions were largely relegated to specialists within the field of engineering. When technical matters were brought up by interested parties with engineering backgrounds in parliamentary debates, other members of government were quick to admit their own lack of expertise and instead referred to the findings of the international experts discussed below. Within the Dáil and Seanad, opposition to the Scheme often stemmed from representatives' personal financial ties to projects that were proposed on the River Liffey.

Among these critics was the National League, founded by William Redmond and Thomas O'Donnell in 1926. Advocating for a close relationship with Britain, the party attracted many former members of the Irish Parliamentary Party, ex-servicemen, and some Unionists who did not support Cumann na nGaedheal's policies. The National League's stance on the project was not always clearly articulated for voters. For example, when Redmond passed judgment on the hydroelectric project, he vaguely noted, "the way in which the government had handled the Shannon Scheme... was open to severe criticism."³⁹ Although it is likely that Redmond elaborated on this point at his campaign stop in Co. Monaghan, the fact that the *Irish Independent* felt it adequate to summarize his comments in this succinct way indicated that the public was aware of negative

³⁹ "Origin of Partition—Captain Redmond's View," *Irish Independent*, 18 March 1927.

assessments of the project and did not need specific details. At an address in Navan leading up to the 1927 general election, Mr. William Fallon, a National League hopeful for Co. Meath, criticized what he referred to as “the Shannon ‘mystery’” and told the gathered crowd that the project “was the first attempt at Leninism outside Moscow.”⁴⁰ The Electricity (Supply Act) of 1927 established a state managed electricity industry under the direction of the ESB, and Free State’s decision to nationalize was not welcomed by all members of the community who cited this as an example of socialist tendencies that threatened national stability in Ireland.

In Labour’s role as the major opposition before Fianna Fáil entered government, it offered criticism of the project that focused on improving working conditions at the site, decentralizing industries, addressing threats to Shannon fisheries, and, like the National League, combating what was viewed as “state socialism.” While grateful for opportunities for Irish employment, Labour argued that too much money was being spent to employ German engineers while Irish workers on the Scheme struggled to make a living wage.⁴¹ Others complained that other governmental business had suffered because of the project. Thus, Daniel Morrissey, Labour T.D., who would later join Cumann na nGaedheal and Fine Gael, criticized McGilligan’s apparent obsession with the Shannon Scheme when he told members of the Dáil, “I believe the Minister has been compelled to give so much of his time to the Shannon Scheme for the last couple of years that other aspects of his administration have been neglected and ignored.”⁴² When the National League and

⁴⁰ “National League: In Meath,” *Irish Independent*, 2 May 1927.

⁴¹ For more on Labour’s views on the Shannon Scheme, conditions at the site, and the workers’ strike, see McCarthy’s *High Tension*.

⁴² Daniel Morrissey, “Nomination of Members of the Executive Council,” Dáil Éireann Debates, vol. 21, 12 October 1927.

Labour attempted oust Cumann na nGaedheal by agreeing to a voting pact in 1927, the resulting failure contributed to the demise Redmond's party the following year.

Though largely supportive of Cumann na nGaedheal decisions, some members of the Farmers' Party wished to see the money being spent on the project put to use in alleviating agricultural problems. In the Dáil, Deputy Michael Heffernan of the Farmer's Party expressed his concern over the estimates put forward by the experts and argued that the project would be more expensive than McGilligan expected. He stated:

It is quite possible, from an engineering point of view, to remove the Dublin mountains and that it would be quite possible to put them back again. An estimate might be put up for doing that, but the estimate might be very easily and would be very probably wrong from the point of view of cost. I say it might take the whole resources of the world to do it but, from an engineering point of view, it is possible. I believe from the engineering point of view the Shannon Scheme is possible. I will not say that I am doubtful, but I am not satisfied, from a financial point of view, that the estimates can be relied upon.⁴³

However, as Denis Gorey, Farmers' member turned Cumann na nGaedheal T.D., put it during the election campaign of 1927, "the margin that had divided the Farmers' Party and the Government Party had always been so slight that one had to know it was there to notice it. The farmers' outlook was identical, their views on political issues were the same, and their policy on agricultural and national development were the same."⁴⁴ The Farmers' Party was careful not to undermine Cumann na nGaedheal and, instead, worked with the government to promote the scheme as a means to modernize farms and make Irish agricultural goods competitive in European Markets.

⁴³ Michael Heffernan, "Dáil in Committee. Shannon Electricity Bill, 1925—Second Stage," Dáil Éireann Debates, 8 May 1925.

⁴⁴ "In Fighting Mood," *Irish Independent*, 19 May 1927.

For the Free State government, embarking on such an expensive project ensured that the cost of the Scheme would be at the forefront of most political criticism lobbed at Cumann na nGaedheal. Clann Éireann, a republican party that broke from Cumann na nGaeheal 1926 after the failure of the Boundary Commission, tended to side with Sinn Féin on issues of protectionism and Ireland's relationship to the British crown. Led by Professor William Magennis of the National University of Ireland, the party experienced little electoral success and eventually offered its political support to Fianna Fáil in 1947. At a meeting in Longford, Clann Éireann candidate Patrick Brett of Mullingar referenced the cost of the Shannon Scheme, but emphasized where the money was going as the chief reason for his disapproval. He claimed "6 ¾ millions of Irish money were going into German pockets while Ireland was on the verge of starvation through poverty."⁴⁵ Several days later in Watergrasshill, Brooke Brasier, an Independent candidate, similarly professed that "the money spent on the Shannon Scheme would have been better spent on establishing an Irish line of steamers controlled by Irishmen alone."⁴⁶ Despite dramatic differences in these parties' general stances vis-à-vis Cumann na nGaedheal in this period, their concerns about the Scheme often overlapped, particularly in relation to the project's cost and nationalization of the electricity industry, but like all other political issues, their motivations for voicing these opinions followed party lines.

Fianna Fáil's Position

The most significant threat to Cumann na nGaedheal's goal to present itself as the party for the whole nation in this period came from the party's nascent opposition: Fianna

⁴⁵ "Clann Éireann—A Policy of Peace," *Irish Independent*, 7 May 1927.

⁴⁶ "Poorer Every Year," *Irish Independent*, 17 May 1927.

Fáil. Unlike the National League, the Farmers' Party, and the Labour Party, Fianna Fáil's political dilemma had always been how to discuss the Shannon Scheme once construction was already underway. The abstaining anti-Treatyites of Sinn Féin did not reorganize until 1926, so the reconstituted party did not exist when the Shannon Scheme received parliamentary approval in 1925. Therefore, the party could not fall back on a track record of official opposition, and, instead, assumed an oppositional stance that retrospectively posited the project as a mistake that was doomed to fail. In 1926, the *Catholic Bulletin* outlined the political hurdle Fianna Fáil would have to overcome when it noted that the party "will have to fight...the argument that the oath did not prevent the passage of the Shannon Electricity Act, the Land Bill of 1923, and the Agricultural Acts of which so much has been heard. To make an impression on the country, Fianna Fáil must prove that the oath is a definite barrier to economic progress."⁴⁷ In the party's first election season in 1927, Stephen Jordan, T.D. for Galway, spoke to how the party would deal with these issues at an event in Tuam. He stated that

Fianna Fáil would not go in for super grand schemes like the Shannon Scheme, which could be done without for some time, and the government had now admitted that it was a failure. What Fianna Fáil had to consider when they got into power was whether it would be better to do away with it altogether or carry it on, as so much money had gone into it. He believed at the moment the better thing for them to do would be to carry on with it (hear, hear). But if they had been free in 1921 to carry on the scheme then proposed, they would have taken on afforestation, drainage, and attended to the needs of the agricultural tenant farmers, not the farmers represented by the so-called Farmers' Party, because that was a party [f]or landlords and ranchers.⁴⁸

Like others who questioned the project, the cost of the Scheme was also taken up by Fianna Fáil in its political attacks on Cumann na nGaedheal. For example, speaking of

⁴⁷ Kevin, "Sacrifice and Salvation," *Catholic Bulletin* 16, no. 9 (September 1926): 901.

⁴⁸ "Fianna Fáil T.D.'s at Tuam," *Connacht Tribune*, 8 October 1927.

the government party Countess Constance Markievicz declared “their greatest failure to run a business on paying lines is the Shannon Scheme. Foreign contractors and sweated labour extorted from starving workers could not insure financial success, so robbery is being resorted to. There is no prosperity for anybody in the Free State except for the government and its hangers on.”⁴⁹ According to Frank Fahy, Fianna Fáil T.D., “the Shannon Scheme...was a good scheme, but it was premature, and the money spent on it might have been used in starting industries and relieving the poverty all over the country which exists, and particularly so in the West of Ireland.”⁵⁰

At an event in Tullamore, Eamon de Valera, leader of the opposition, told the crowd that “In the development of power they would have started with the Liffey and have had the Shannon Scheme for a great big reserve in the end when Irishmen would have been trained to carry it out.”⁵¹ He repeated this line of thinking at Nenagh a year later when he claimed that his party

would not have dealt with it [hydroelectric power] in the same way as it was being done now. They would have started the Liffey Scheme where they would not have to wait for a few years. They could train their own engineers, and as they went on to develop other places and link them up in a general scheme they could have their own engineers trained to do it instead of having to bring over Germans. At the beginning they would probably have to bring in experts, but commonsense dictated that they should do it on the smallest scale possible and educate their own people.⁵²

⁴⁹ “Fianna Fáil—Meetings in Dublin,” *Irish Independent*, 30 April 1927.

⁵⁰ “Fianna Fáil—Mr. F. Fahy, T.D., On Policy,” *Clare Champion*, 21 January 1928.

⁵¹ “Compilation of de Valera’s Comments to the Independent 7 January 1926-May 1927,” McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/11, 1 February 1926.

⁵² “Compilation of de Valera’s Comments to the Independent 7 January 1926-May 1927,” McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/11, 16 May 1927.

As a master of political doublespeak, de Valera told a crowd at Wexford that “he was not against the Scheme,” in 1926, but that he believed more employment would have been obtained with protective tariffs.⁵³ However, in 1927, he professed to a gathering in Longford that “as to the question of the Shannon Scheme...his Party did not approve of it.”

The *Irish Independent* covered a meeting at Carrickmacross, where Fianna Fáil T.D. Sean Lemass reportedly shared his opinion of the Shannon Scheme, revealing that “he considered that the Free State government should not have embarked on such a big undertaking under prevailing circumstances, contenting themselves with the Liffey or some smaller one.”⁵⁴ He was also concerned that “the fact remained that there was a vast amount of Irish money paid towards it, and should the scheme eventuate as its promoters expected, the whole of the 26 counties would be largely dependent on it for light and electric power.”⁵⁵ This rhetoric echoed the national language used by Cumann na nGaedheal leaders who emphasized the national grid as a means to unify the Irish people in the wake of many years of war and violence. However, this was not Lemass’s intention. Instead, he spun the national scope of the project to expose the danger it posed to the public when he proposed, “so long, however, as the present connection with England lasted the Free State could not escape the consequences of England being involved in war with foreign Powers. What might happen to the Shannon Scheme in such an event?” Answering his own question, he played upon the fears the war-weary Irish

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “Fianna Fáil—The Shannon Scheme—Air Raid Possibilities,” *Irish Independent*, 7 May 1927.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

when he speculated that “a successful air raid on the headquarters of the scheme could leave the industries in every city and town paralysed and a reign of darkness all over the country.”⁵⁶ Rather than the Scheme being a major impetus for developing industries, and both the provider of light and figurative usher toward a brighter future, Lemass expressed Fianna Fáil’s position that the project was both too grandiose, and its size threatened national security and economic prosperity.

Beyond financial questions or concerns about the Scheme’s size, however, one of Fianna Fáil’s most caustic criticisms of the project came in an election pamphlet in 1932, which listed the Shannon Scheme as one of twelve instances which made Cosgrave’s government “The Greatest Failure in Irish History.” The pamphlet rejected the notions that Cumann na nGaedheal and the Shannon Scheme were successful and represented the Irish nation by declaring “the whole project has been marred by incompetence, stupidity, spleen and waste, for which the main responsibility rests on Mr. Patrick McGilligan, minister for industry and commerce.”⁵⁷ In the same year, Fianna Fáil exclaimed “Every possible mistake that could have been made by inexperienced greenhorns was made by the government in their handling of the scheme.”⁵⁸

Grandiosity remained at the heart of Fianna Fáil’s criticism even after winning control of the state in 1932. The new minister for finance, Seán MacEntee, claimed that Fianna Fáil “had come into power as a result of the outrageous and impossible promises and schemes which were dangled before the people. In 1927, the Cumann na nGaedheal

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “The Greatest Failure in Irish History,” Fianna Fáil election pamphlet, 1932: Seán MacEntee Papers, UCDA, P67/348.

⁵⁸ Untitled Fianna Fáil publicity material, 1932: Seán MacEntee Papers, UCDA, P67/350 (15).

Party went to the country with this as their programme—the hydro-electric development of the Shannon, the reconstitution of the dairying industry of this country on a new basis and the establishment of a beet sugar factory.” Along with the Drumm battery, MacEntee described “the success of that government’s practical policy is expressed by the four schemes . . . as precious a collection of white elephants as ever drove their unfortunate owners to the verge of insolvency.”⁵⁹

While both the Farmers’ Party and Cumann na nGaedheal gained reputations for looking out for the interests of large farmers and ranchers, Fianna Fáil assumed the role of speaking on behalf of the small farmers and reiterating their concerns about the Scheme. For example, the opposition accused the Cumann na nGaedheal leadership of being too distant from agriculture to understand its needs. Fianna Fáil’s 1932 election campaign pondered, “the President of the Executive Council, the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Defence, the Minister for Industry and Commerce, the Minister for Agriculture, the Minister for Education, the Minister for Justice, and the Minister of Land and Fisheries—this whole business Government, except hair—did one of them ever grow anything in his life?”⁶⁰ Fianna Fáil asserted that Cumann na nGaedheal, therefore, was “blind to the farmers’ needs . . . always made the farmers pay . . . had no sympathy for the farmers . . . [and] always used its majority against the farmers.”⁶¹ As this example revealed, Fianna Fáil invoked the farmer in its criticism of the project as a means to assert

⁵⁹ Seán MacEntee, “Central Fund Bill, 1932—Committee and Final Stages,” *Seanad Éireann Debates*, 22 March 1932, vol. 15, no. 10.

⁶⁰ Fianna Fáil publicity material, 1932: Seán MacEntee Papers, UCDA P67/350 (15).

⁶¹ *Farmers—You’ve had 5 Hard Years . . . Surely That’s Enough! 1932 Fianna Fáil Election Campaign* (Dublin: Cahill and Co., Ltd, Dublin, 1932): Seán MacEntee Papers, UCDA P67/350 (24).

that it was the party who represented farmers in a broader sense, including those with fewer financial and political resources.

Fianna Fáil also called into question Cumann na nGaedheal's assertion that the scheme had the potential to build up the national community by reducing the outflow of manpower. For example, at a speech in Cavan on September 5, 1926, de Valera claimed that "it was not that he was afraid of its magnitude or anything of that kind, but that it was not time for grandiose schemes when the country was being bled white by emigration." He also argued that the scheme "would not serve the purpose of providing work to keep the young people at home" and "if intended as a means of providing work for Irishmen at home . . . [it] was wholly unsuitable, as the best part of employment was given to foreigners, engineers and others."⁶² This was a reference to the fact that German engineers were contracted to oversee the project, which the government argued was necessary given the state of Irish education in technical fields.

Responding to Specific Criticism

Cumann na nGaedheal and its supporters could not allow criticism to go unanswered, so they embarked on their own campaigns to counter condemnation and allay concerns about the Shannon Scheme. From the moment the government introduced Siemens' proposal to parliament for approval in 1925 until the project's completion four years later, promoters regularly addressed the kinds of opposition to the Scheme described above. While the party and the press had an offensive strategy for promoting the project as an example of Cumann na nGaedheal's courage and status as a national party, responding to critics was part of a defensive strategy to deal with misconceptions

⁶² Notes on de Valera's speech at Cavan on 5 September 1926: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/11 (6).

and offer alternatives to matters open to interpretation. The stakes were high when it came to the effects of criticism. Senator Oliver St. John Gogarty, chastising a colleague who had expressed a desire for the contract to go to a British firm in order to maintain Ireland's credit, declared, "if Stephenson had an exacting a critic as the Shannon Scheme has in Sir John Keane, there would never have been a steam engine."⁶³ Criticism was a threat to progress and the success of the Scheme. Speaking to the effects of negative coverage in the press, Professor Magennis acknowledged the hurdle ahead in the project's promotion not only within Ireland, but also to an international community:

I wonder if a great deal of the mistrust and the misgivings expressed in newspaper comments and letters to the editors is not part of our national vice: that because this is in Ireland and that an Irish government is going to do this thing for Ireland, there must be something wrong with it; that, in fact, it is inferior. Curiously enough, as has often been remarked by foreign critics of our people, while they are boastful and arrogant as regards the country and the race, they are very prone to disparage the individual Irishman. "Can nothing good come out of Nazareth?" is to be modified into "Can nothing good come out of the Free State?"⁶⁴

As Minister for Industry and Commerce, McGilligan bore the most responsibility of all Cumann na nGaedheal leaders to respond to negative comments or problems associated with the Scheme. He also used the Dáil and Seanad as forums to address criticism of the project and defend the government's decisions. In justifying the merits of the project in the Dáil, he was characteristically direct. For example, when Michael Heffernan, Farmers' Party T.D. for Tipperary, suggested that comments made against the project by Irish engineers could be sound and that "there may be something in their

⁶³ Oliver St. John Gogarty, "Shannon Electricity Bill, 1925—Fifth Stage," *Seanad Éireann Debates*, vol. 5, 25 June 1925.

⁶⁴ William Magennis, "Dáil in Committee. Shannon Electricity Bill, 1925. Second Stage," *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 11, 8 May 1925. Magennis was an Independent before he led Clann Éireann, which was founded in January 1926.

criticism,” the minister quipped, “There might be, but there is not.”⁶⁵ McGilligan gained a reputation for being able to speak at length about technical aspects of the project without notes, leading one Senator “to congratulate the Minister on the exceedingly lucid manner in which he has, in a short time, explained the position.”⁶⁶ An article in the American newspaper the *Christian Science Monitor* praised McGilligan for the role he played in making the Shannon Scheme a reality and claimed “no one, perhaps, symbolizes the new Ireland of which he spoke more completely than himself.”⁶⁷ The author further mentioned that in the Dáil “he has been called the ‘Electric Hare’—not only for his swiftness of debate, but for his grasp of the intricacies of the Shannon electricity scheme—the biggest piece of national reconstruction attempted in Ireland for generations—which he has just piloted to success.”⁶⁸ Reflecting on past criticisms in 1948, McGilligan told a reporter that “the only objection to it [Shannon Scheme] came from those people who were sulking in their tents outside,” a reference to Fianna Fáil members who refused to enter the Dáil until 1927. However, in a film commemorating the project in the 1960s, McGilligan expanded his list of opponents when he recalled with bitterness that “the outside papers were completely against us.”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ “Dáil in Committee. Shannon Electricity Bill, 1925—Second Stage,” Dáil Éireann Debates, 8 May 1925.

⁶⁶ John Thomas O’Farrell, “County Boards of Heath Accounts Order, 1924. Shannon Scheme—Motion by Sir John Griffith” Seanad Éireann Debates, vol. 4, 31 March 1925.

⁶⁷ Irish Free State Industry Grows and Nation’s Finances Also Soar: Success of Shannon Scheme Big Help Commerce Minister Declares, Special to the *Christian Science Monitor*, July 24, 1930: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA, P35d/15 (16).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “40 Light Years From Parteen,” A programme to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Electricity Supply Board (Radio Telefís Éireann Production: 1967).

Other members of Cumann na nGaedheal participated just as vigorously in a war of words with naysayers over the Shannon Scheme. Concerns over the cost of the scheme were widespread and crossed party lines, so promoters addressed these issues specifically in their campaigns to counter criticism. Rural communities were outspoken about this and the government recognized that “it is only natural that criticism of this Scheme should come from the Irish farmers, the farmer everywhere criticises any expenditure not directly devoted to agriculture and his criticism in this instance based on his inability to see how this scheme will benefit his class.”⁷⁰ As to rumors circulating that people would have to pay for the project even if they did not use electricity, the government clearly answered, “the Scheme is not costing the taxpayer one farthing. Farmers and other non-users of electricity are not contributing one penny towards the cost, only the users of electricity are paying for the Shannon Scheme, and in addition to electricity being seen as a luxury available to wealthy farmers, the price they are paying is definitely cheap.”⁷¹ In an effort to overcome the perception that electricity was a luxury for large farmers and urban dwellers, R. N. Tweedy, an Irish engineer and supporter of the Free State government, delivered a speech stating that “The Shannon Scheme is not a luxury . . . it is the greatest economic necessity that this country has ever seen.”⁷² Promoters focused on rural communities as a top priority, where access to electricity was most limited, and as one government official claimed, “the first lines will be built out to farmers which offer

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ *Fighting Points for Cumann na nGaedheal Speakers & Workers, General Election 1932* (Dublin: Temple Press, 1932): Richard Mulcahy Papers, UCDA P7/C/42.

⁷² *Irish Independent*, 17 December 1929.

the best opportunity of making the lines a paying proposition.”⁷³ The *Anglo-Celt* reported “that the current will only be available in villages of 500 inhabitants, it naturally follows that the farmers who reside two or three miles from places possessing this population could only have their homes illuminated if they went to the expense of getting the cables run out that journey.” This was an expense that the article contended “would probably amount to more money than their families would spend in a generation on acetylene, oil, or any other sort of illuminate.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Cumann na nGaedheal continually reassured rural residents that they would not be burdened with the cost of the scheme if they did not purchase the current.

Speaking at Ballyhaunis in the lead up to the 1927 election, William Sears, Cumann na nGaedheal T.D. addressed the cost of the scheme by deflecting attention to money spent elsewhere. Given the heavily agrarian makeup of the crowd, Sears focused on agricultural issues and discounted the cost of the project when he stated, “large sums have been expended on the Shannon Scheme and on the sugar beet scheme, but many more millions were being devoted to the purchase and division of ranches in Connaught. The government must continue this good work.”⁷⁵ By using the conjunction “but,” Sears escaped the need to justify the cost of the project to an audience who likely had doubts that the money spent on the undertaking would benefit them in the same way or in the immediate sense of land redistribution. Making a speech to a tough crowd in Waterford, John Daly, T.D. for Cork East, responded to heckling about the Shannon Scheme that

⁷³ Notes on the Shannon Scheme [n.d]: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/28.

⁷⁴ *Anglo-Celt*, 16 May 1925.

⁷⁵ “Cumann na nGaedheal—National Credit,” *Irish Independent*, 3 May 1927.

“everyone who opposed the government was anti-Irish. ‘The man or woman,’ he said, ‘who does not vote for Cumann na nGaedheal is a renegade.’”⁷⁶

The 1927 election also provided a format for the government to counter accusations that it failed to address the needs of small farmers in general. For example, Kevin O’Higgins, who served as Minister for Justice and Vice President of the Executive Council, referenced the Shannon Scheme with an emphasis on how it would impact rural communities. He charged Fianna Fáil and others who criticized the scheme with ignorance and asked “did they not think that with power available cheaply there would be men of sufficient enterprise and initiative to come forward and start industries to give employment to the second, third, and fourth sons of small farmers?”⁷⁷ O’Higgins spoke of the scheme’s significance to small farmers even though the government believed that electricity would initially only benefit them indirectly by bringing industrial employment to the countryside. Cumann na nGaedheal needed backing from farmers in order to stay in power, so it was necessary for the Shannon Scheme to be reconciled with the agrarian focus of Irish nationalism. Cumann na nGaedheal educated the agricultural community in the uses of electricity while simultaneously expressing the need for improving Ireland’s industrial outlook in order to gradually redefine Ireland along “modern” lines.

A month later, O’Higgins again used his quick wit to put down negative comments made from a man in the crowd who was upset by what he called the low wages of workers at the site. O’Higgins quickly quashed the critic’s concern suggesting that “Thirty-two shillings seems to be enough to enable that man to get drunk,” which

⁷⁶ “Cheering and Booing—A Lively Gathering,” *Irish Independent*, 16 May 1927.

⁷⁷ *Irish Independent*, 30 May 1927.

was met by cheers from the crowd. Blanketing opposition with this line of thinking, he said, “I don’t say this in any bitterness, that most of the people at meetings through the country who talk to me about that 32s. were drunk.”⁷⁸ Meanwhile, according to the *Irish Independent*, Denis Gorey, T.D. for Carlow-Kilkenny, told a gathering at Callan, “not one of its [the Scheme’s] critics had brains to realise the great benefit it would mean to the country.”⁷⁹ Just as post-Civil War rhetoric classified the opposition as stupid and unpatriotic, O’Higgins’s and Gorey’s comments reflected a tendency to dismiss disapproval of the government’s handling of the project as personal faults of the critics.

Cumann na nGaedheal leaders dealt directly with criticism expressed by those who claimed the party did not value Ireland’s traditional agricultural heritage and was out of touch with the needs of farmers. In order to incorporate industrialization and modernization into the nation’s agrarian ethos, members of the government emphasized the centrality of farming and posited the Scheme as a means to enhance the profession. However, alongside these positive affirmations of benefits, the farmers’ concerns, like those of many others, were dismissed by Cumann na nGaedheal as stupid and out of touch with modern realities. For example, the author of a government booklet on the project charged that the farmer’s

opposition to the Scheme can only mean one thing, that is that he never wants to reach the same level of the farmer in other lands, he never wants electricity for he should be clear on this point, electricity either comes to him through the Shannon Scheme or it never comes at all. The only method of bringing electricity to the farm is through a national network such as is proposed under the Shannon Scheme.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ “Egg-Throwing and Stampedes: Turmoil at Big Meetings,” *Irish Independent*, 6 June 1927.

⁷⁹ “In Fighting Mood,” *Irish Independent*, 19 May 1927.

⁸⁰ “The Shannon Scheme,” government publication, [n.d.]: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/10, [n.d.].

Comparing Ireland with other nations, especially smaller European ones like Denmark, was common in propaganda that reached Irish farmers. The publication suggested that the farmer's decision to support the project was based on two extremes as "he must either support this scheme or be content to remain in indefinite darkness." Only a national scheme could bring electricity to the farmers since of the ninety-one power stations in Ireland, only fifteen were utilizing water power and it was estimated that the total could "never supply farmers living in the country."⁸¹

Promoters aided an effort to respond to Fianna Fáil's criticism that it neglected rural constituencies by gently mocking de Valera's obsession with celebrating the Gaeltacht. In "40 Light Years From Parteen," the filmmakers presented a cartoon of de Valera as a symbol of pessimism, attempting to stave off the waves of agricultural success, enterprise, and industry with a traditional piece of farm equipment: a pitchfork. In the cartoon, De Valera responded to these three threats to traditional agrarian ethos by lamenting "it can't be stopped."⁸² In this way, de Valera's party was presented as anti-modern, which did not bode well for Ireland's economic future.

Apart from opposition expressed on the stump and during election seasons, critical and politically motivated views espoused in the press also threatened to undermine the party's rhetoric of "national" success and progress for all of Ireland. Worried that the public did not understand some of the views expressed by the opposition, McLaughlin took to the press to answer critics of the Scheme and published a booklet as a means to educate the public on the merits of the scheme in non-technical

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² "40 Light Years From Parteen."

language. The *Irish Independent* set up his publication well with a headline reading, “Is the Shannon Scheme a Wildcat Scheme,” and a subhead asking “Is it based on recklessness or on reason? Is it too large, too costly, too uncertain in its results?”⁸³ Warning its readers, “Don’t be misled by wild propaganda statements,” and calling on them to read McLaughlin’s pamphlet, “The Shannon Scheme in its National Economic Aspect,” the paper promised that having the correct information would lead to widespread support for the electrification project. It encouraged its readership to buy the pamphlet for six pence and “Examine the facts and judge the merits for yourself.”⁸⁴ Still, three years later, McLaughlin continued to stress the need to awaken what he referred to as “the electricity consciousness’ of the Irish” through promotional campaigns designed to educate the public about the benefits of electrification.⁸⁵

In another article, appearing just as the Scheme came online in October 1929, a Dublin correspondent for the *Times* published a lengthy article entitled, “The Shannon Scheme: A National Adventure.” The reporter surmised that the significance of the undertaking outweighed the perhaps unrealistic goals to promote the national electrification grid. The article indicated that “the government’s ideal of a completely electrified Free State is not likely to be achieved for many a long year. Indeed, it is not impossible that the citizens may be required to make a certain amount of financial sacrifice for the luxury of the financial undertaking.” This statement not only called into doubt the likelihood of achieving Cumann na nGaedheal’s national electrification goals,

⁸³ “Is the Shannon Scheme a Wildcat Scheme?” *Irish Independent*, 30 May 1925.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Valentine Williams, “Begone, Celtic Twilight: A Young Irishman’s Dream Lights the Face of a New and Hopeful Ireland,” *Sunday Graphic*, 16 September 1928.

it actually negated the entire endeavor by suggesting that electricity would not be cheaper and more available to Irish citizens, but that they would have to pay more to have their homes wired because of the Scheme. With articles such as this one in mind, the author of a government booklet on the Shannon Scheme that addressed opposition specifically lamented that he “had occasion to be ashamed of the ignorance, suspicion, timidity or gross indifference to facts which they have almost with exception displayed.” Taking on the view that the project was too expensive and “an enormous liability, too great for a young and struggling state,” the author curtly replied “that seems to me to be a perverted point of view.” He elaborated on this point by placing the Irish example in an international context:

The whole world over recognise that cheap and abundant electricity is in these days the life blood of the state and if this state were even in its death-throes which is very far from the case it would be committing suicide to neglect what every State—and this the most timorous, suspicious and credulous citizen must admit to himself—has concentrated on as a vital necessity. So much for the need of the Scheme—the earlier the better.⁸⁶

Reiterating the rhetoric of the “life blood” of the nation, Cumann na nGaedheal notes on the Scheme supported its monopoly on electricity by stating, “we could not be responsible for handing over this first great national enterprise to a private company. We could not be responsible for handing over the life blood of every industry in the country to a private body. We are of the opinion that the life blood must remain in the hands of the State.”⁸⁷ By responding to opposition in such grave language, the Free State

⁸⁶ Text of a government booklet on the Shannon Scheme, March 1925-July 1931: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/10.

⁸⁷ “Notes on the aim and object of the Shannon Scheme,” [n.d.]: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/28.

government sought to solidify its position as the protector of the nation's "life blood" and equated critics to betrayers of Ireland's future.

Pro-government newspapers also lent space to supporting the project and dealing blows to the opposition. For instance, as the Electricity Supply Bill was passing through the Dáil, the *Leader* targeted the *Irish Times* for its critical position on the Scheme. Despite the latter's efforts to negatively affect the project, the *Leader* gleefully exclaimed "Yet the scheme still lives. There is certainly no general outcry against it." Humorously, the newspaper continued its diatribe against the arguments published in the *Irish Times* by labeling them "a clever way of persuading simple and unthinking people," using rhetoric that O'Higgins and Gorey would employ two years later.⁸⁸ Addressing the threat of local opposition, the *Star* chastised a "rambling orator" at a meeting who felt the government had neglected the Gaeltacht in pursuing the Shannon Scheme by spewing a "lying statement" which it considered "an excellent example of the dope which is usually handed out at anti-government political meetings." Stupidity, according to the paper, was the only explanation for the man's claims, which it characterized as "an index of the mentality behind what masquerades as the latter day Gaelic League."⁸⁹ The only excuse for opposition to the Scheme and the party according to the Cumann na nGaedheal and its supporters was lacking mental capacity. While perhaps less sophisticated than focusing on the merits of the project and the accomplishments of the Free State government, this tactic effectively ended the conversation with the opposition. Debating relative levels of

⁸⁸ "The Shannon Scheme and Its Critics," *The Leader*, J6 June 1925: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/15 (4).

⁸⁹ "Dope From Non-Political Platform," *Star*, 12 July 1930.

stupidity plunged politics into the realm of *ad hominem* attacks and this digression, which, though amusing to apologists, could in no way alter the discussion.

The *Limerick Leader* also chastised critics for lacking the optimism and support of the government that would ensure the project's success. For example, the paper lamented that "just now when the scheme is about to be definitely advanced to the stage of practical initiation all the yappers are in full cry against it."⁹⁰ Instead of acknowledging any merits in these claims, the paper stated that "their methods and their objections, however, bear their own condemnation and refutation and there need be no fear, whatever, that the government will be deflected from their intention to translate into actuality a scheme that has behind it the full and cordial approval of the sincere, thoughtful and progressive people of the country."⁹¹ As the following chapters will demonstrate, the press's support for Cumann na nGaedheal and the Shannon Scheme was essential to the success of both, and by castigating all negative interpretations of the project as unpatriotic and hostile, the press that backed the party also facilitated the latter's attempt to fashion itself as one that was committed to national interests and the future of the Free State.

Folk songs also addressed critics who spoke out against the project. The *Limerick Leader* printed the lyrics to Maolmora's song "The Great Shannon Scheme," which was sung to the tune of "The Mountains of Mourne." The song attacked criticism and dismissed doubts about the project as "hulabaloo."

Now, Jimmy, my boy, there's a thing you must hear,
That I've read in the papers quite lately, my dear,

⁹⁰ "In Full Cry," *Limerick Leader*, 30 March 1925.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

There's very great nonsense of late in the Press
 To put, if they can, this big Scheme in a mess.
 Sure, everyone thought, when this great Scheme came out,
 That right-minded men would support it, no doubt;
 'Tis too bad entirely that they'd disgrace
 At the Shannon's great power going to waste in the sea.⁹²

This song relied on similar language used by politicians and the press to dismiss opposition as stupid, since “right-minded men,” would have stood by the Shannon Scheme.

One of the ways the public showed its support for the government's actions was by writing letters to politicians expressing a sense of hope about the future as a result of the project. For example, in 1925, James Carr, secretary of the Limerick United Trades and Labour Council forwarded the “Council's resolution in favour of the Shannon Scheme,” to Daniel Morrissey, Labour T.D. Writing to recognize this acknowledgement, Morrissey informed the Council that he was,

In cordial agreement with your Council's views as to the bright future that lies ahead of the country as a result of the Shannon Scheme. Our Party, as you know, ha[s] faith in our country rising to a high plane of social and industrial life. We look forward with great hope for the light and power which the magnificent river will provide. By means of both, I trust we shall have the vision to see clearly how the power is to be applied in creating flourishing industries for the good of our nation and the well-being of our people.⁹³

Concluding with the widely shared frustration regarding critics of the Scheme from certain circles within the government, Morrissey voiced, “we are not impressed by the croakings of interested pessimists, for we regard the scheme as the first big step to

⁹² Maolmora, “The Great Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 18 April 1925.

⁹³ Letter to James Carr from Daniel Morrissey, dated 7 April 1925, reprinted in the *Limerick Leader*, 29 April 1925.

progress and prosperity.”⁹⁴ These kinds of letters were ubiquitous in the 1920s and local and regional papers publicized them as a means to counter criticism and keep track of public bodies that had thrown their support behind the government.

The government and its supporters also relied on two specific strategies to undermine attacks on the project: highlighting the project’s merits in light its having been approved by a committee of international experts and situating national electrification in Ireland in comparison to other nations at the time. Appealing to technocracy and likening Ireland to the small nations in Europe were strategies widely employed by Cumann na nGaedheal throughout the 1920s to gain legitimacy in an international context, which was one of the most important ways in which the party sought to maintain the legacy of the Irish Revolution. For example, weariness about fiscal matters led the government to hire a commission of experts to assess the merits of the initial proposal put forth by Siemens Schuckert. In the *Report of the Experts*, they found that “the electrification of Ireland must not be regarded as a purely business affair but as a great national economic question.”⁹⁵ They went on to explain the specific benefits to be had across Ireland in agriculture, industry, and private homes. When making arrangements for these continental experts to visit Cork and Limerick, McGilligan’s secretary noted that the minister was particularly “anxious that any hospitality so arranged should not take on a political colour or be made to look like an endeavour to get political support for a

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Walter Borgquist, Eugen Meyer-Peter, Thomas Norberg Shulz, and Arthur E. Rohn, “The Eelctrification of the Irish Free State—The Shannon Scheme: Report of the Experts Appointed by the Government,” (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1924); Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/5.

proposal which is intended to [be] consider[ed] solely on its merits.”⁹⁶ From the beginning, McGilligan and others were careful to ensure that whatever the experts decided about the scheme, their findings would not be tarnished by accusations of political maneuvering. As a result of this caution, Cumann na nGaedheal leaders enthusiastically called out critics of the project for assuming to know more than these internationally acclaimed experts in the field of electrification.

Members of the Dáil and Seanad who supported Siemens’s proposal and wished to expedite the process whereby the government accepted it often cited the reputation and skill of this team to silence critics. For example, Senator John Thomas O’Farrell backed the government’s proposal when he stated that “the firm of Siemens-Schuckert have made a report and, in order to make the position doubly sure, four international experts—men of international repute—have examined into the reliability of the report of the German firm and its practicability, taking all the circumstances into consideration, for the development of the Saorstát.”⁹⁷ To O’Farrell, these men and their opinions were beyond reproach for “it must be borne in mind that these experts have no financial axes to grind. It is absolutely immaterial to them whether the scheme is adopted or not. The experts cannot be accused of ulterior motives. These men, in my opinion, would be very jealous of their international reputations before making a recommendation on a scheme which in the future might turn out to be badly devised.”⁹⁸ Professor and T.D. Michael Tierney concurred with O’Farrell and said that it was not the responsibility of the house to

⁹⁶ “Appointment of the Experts. Letter to D. Sullivan from Gordon Campbell,” Shannon Scheme Collection, National Archives, SS/309, 7 October 1924.

⁹⁷ John Thomas O’Farrell, “County Boards of Heath Accounts Order, 1924. Shannon Scheme—Motion by Sir John Griffith” Seanad Éireann Debates, vol. 4, 31 March 1925.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

question “all kinds of minor details in connection with a scheme which we are not really competent to discuss,” but rather they only needed to examine “the report of those four experts of high European reputation before us...[and] make up our minds whether that report, in fairly plain language, recommends or does not recommend the scheme.”⁹⁹

Questioning the experts, in Tierney’s opinion qualified not as intelligent criticism of the scheme, but rather the “subterintelligent” kind that plagued other kinds of criticism found in the press.¹⁰⁰

Supporters of the project also backed the experts as a means to address criticism of the project. For example, the *Financial Times*, based in London, noted that the scheme “has had to run the gauntlet of two Swedish and two Swiss experts,” and expressed hope “to see a good volume of helpful comment concentrated on the scheme and carping remarks kept in the background. It will benefit nobody if the Free State plunges blindly into an ill-considered enterprise, but it would be no less a serious mistake if the chance were missed of adding immensely to Ireland’s industrial efficiency and social comfort.”¹⁰¹ Similarly, speaking to a crowd in Limerick, Father Philip argued that

With regard to technical points . . . I have one safe guide: the unanimity of the experts. The matter has been considered and decided for the ordinary man in the street like you and me by the unanimous verdict of international experts. These are the four men, two of whom are actually in charge of the State Electric Works in Norway and Sweden; and the other two are Civil Engineers who have directed the design and carrying out of big water power stations in Switzerland and ought to know their business.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Michael Tierney, “The Shannon Scheme. Motion by the Minister for Industry and Commerce—Resumed Debate,” *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 10, 3 April 1925.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ “The Shannon Scheme—Beginning of a New Epoch,” *Financial Times* quoted in the *Limerick Leader*, 23 March 1925.

¹⁰² “In Full Cry,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 March 1925.

Like Tierney, who questioned the wisdom behind criticism found in the press, Philip supposed that “the views of these widely-experienced experts, one would naturally think, out carry much greater weight than the criticisms of men who have neither training nor experience to fit them for undertaking work of the kind and on which they talk and write so cocksurely.”¹⁰³

Despite such appeals, parliamentary debates were temporarily stalled in both houses by deputies who believed a commission made up of Irish experts should reexamine the original report and consider its merits. On 31 March 1925, Sir John Griffith, an Independent member of the Seanad, put forth a motion to form a special commission to examine the “Report of the Experts” and other matters dealing with financial and technical aspects of electricity consumption in Ireland. He suggested that this committee be “composed of persons appointed by competent bodies, such as the Council of the Institution of Civil Engineers of Ireland, the Council of the Irish Centre of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, the Associated Chambers of Commerce, and the Irish Farmers' Union.”¹⁰⁴ While some senators expressed support for this motion as a means to get more information on the project, others, including the Earl of Mayo, viewed the committee as an attempt by those who were prejudiced against the scheme to delay the project. Mayo declared, “My opinion of this matter is that if we are going to have a government at all, we had better trust them, and if this motion that is now before the Seanad were to be passed, it would delay this matter which has been before the

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Sir John Purser Griffith, “County Boards of Health Accounts Order, 1924. Shannon Scheme—Motion by Sir John Griffith” Seanad Éireann Debates, vol. 4, 31 March 1925.

government for over a year. What is the use of delaying. After all, we know a great deal about it.”¹⁰⁵ Senator O’Farrell believed that “the proposal to submit the question to another Commission, composed, at least half composed, of avowed enemies of the scheme, is really grotesque.”¹⁰⁶ Placing the debate in the context of other government business, O’Farrell observed what later historians, including Mary Daly, would identify as a tendency of the Free State government to avoid making productive decisions by sending matters to be lost in the shuffle of committees. He declared, “we seem to have gone absolutely Commission mad. At the present time we have a Commission on National Health insurance, a Commission on Old Age Pensions, a Commission in connection with the Irish language, the Greater Dublin Commission, the Liquor Traffic Commission, a Poor Law Commission, and last, but not least, some sort of Alcoholic Commission.” O’Farrell deduced that “the whole motion is superfluous, and it is only trying to delay and eventually spike the whole scheme.”¹⁰⁷

In the Dáil, meanwhile, Professor Magennis thought that a parallel proposal to set up a committee to check the findings of the international experts was ridiculous. Like O’Farrell, he was frustrated by the state’s tendency to rely on committees to debate the minutest matters of a proposal without ever reaching a definitive conclusion. Instead, opportunities for change were lost in an endless cycle of discussion. For example, Magennis told the Dáil that Deputy Baxter’s proposal to “sit in judgment upon men who are great European experts in a very special line of work, in which there are very few

¹⁰⁵ Earl of Mayo, *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ John Thomas O’Farrell, *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

great specialists,” did not make sense.¹⁰⁸ He expressed doubt that those who were not convinced by the international experts would be satisfied to “set up a committee and let one expert examine another.” Instead, the judgment of that committee would be subject to criticism, and Magennis speculated that they would “set up another committee to investigate that committee’s findings, and so on *ad infinitum*.” Echoing O’Farrell’s sentiments about setting up such a committee, Magennis concluded that “this is logic run mad.”¹⁰⁹ Magennis accused Deputy Baxter and Deputy Heffernan of supporting the formation of a committee so that the Farmers’ Party could “pronounce judgment upon” the proposal. Baxter replied that Magennis himself was interested in doing so, to which the latter responded in the third person, “Deputy Magennis does not meddle with things of which he has not some little elementary knowledge.”¹¹⁰ At the same session, McGilligan acknowledged the purpose behind Baxter’s appeal was to delay the project and not to seek more information when he facetiously interpreted the deputy’s request to “give us time to consider and people will believe eventually that we have considered.”¹¹¹

In addition to appealing to experts, another persistent theme in Shannon Scheme propaganda adopted by Cumann na nGaedheal and its supporters was to compare the availability of electricity in Ireland to its spread in other small European nations. This stratagem proved challenging to naysayers, regardless of their political leanings, since every party demonstrated a desire to advance Ireland’s international reputation. Cumann

¹⁰⁸ William Magennis, “Dáil in Committee. Shannon Electricity Bill, 1925—Second Stage,” Dáil Éireann Debates, 8 May 1925.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Patrick McGilligan, “Dáil in Committee. Shannon Electricity Bill, 1925—Second Stage,” Dáil Éireann Debates, 8 May 1925.

na nGaedheal had the advantage of comparing electricity figures and standards of living in countries like Norway, Sweden, and Denmark to argue that the Shannon Scheme was necessary in order to compete economically. Additionally, in an effort to overcome negative comments about the role of the government in initiating the Scheme, the *Irish Independent* supported Cumann na nGaedheal propaganda by suggesting that foreign governments developed electricity alongside electricity producers. However, rather than viewing the Shannon Scheme adversely as a state monopoly, the newspaper celebrated the role of the party by noting that “it was evident that the government of the Free State was bound to bring up and be responsible for the offspring of its own initiative and courageous ardour.”¹¹²

Even before construction wrapped up at the site, the government claimed that the Shannon Scheme made Ireland a model for other countries. Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote to the Irish government asking for plans and documents concerning the engineering aspects of the project. Writing in October 1929 to E. A. Lawlor, the public relations officer for the ESB, Roosevelt, in his official capacity as Governor of New York, expressed interest in the project and wanted copies of the Electricity Supply Act of 1927 and all relevant parliamentary debates.¹¹³ Many people, including Thomas McLaughlin, believed that Roosevelt later based the Tennessee Valley Authority on information he gathered on the Shannon Scheme.¹¹⁴ Foreign tourists to the site were critical in

¹¹² “Industrialism in Ireland: Electricity and Gas,” *Irish Independent*, 1 February 1927.

¹¹³ IEEE Global History Network, “Milestones: Shannon Scheme for the Electrification of the Irish Free State, 1929,” accessed 13 December 2013, http://www.ieeeahn.org/wiki/index.php/Milestones:Shannon_Scheme_for_the_Electrification_of_the_Irish_Free_State,_1929#cite_note-refnum2-1.

¹¹⁴ “40 Light Years From Parteen.”

establishing Ireland as a model, especially journalists who wrote articles about Irish hydroelectricity in their newspapers. In an article published in the Scottish *Greenock Telegraph*, the paper claimed

The Shannon Power Scheme could cause Scotsmen to reflect if not bite their lips. This little country, recently in the throes of a bloody civil war, has gone ahead and left Scotland standing. [The] . . . island has shown how things should be done. Is there any reason to delay the setting up of a national parliament in Edinburgh?¹¹⁵

According to this view, Ireland was an example for other nations to follow, and the Free State tried to impress the one country it was trying to separate itself from the most: Britain. As the *Irish Independent* informed its readers, the Scheme “laid a firm foundation for confidence, both at home and abroad, in our capacity to realise those economic developments of wide national scope and effect.”¹¹⁶

Opening Ceremony

Finally, the politicization of the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme marked every phase of its development—from debates concerning Siemens’s proposal to Fianna Fáil’s awkward attempt to embrace the project once it took over the reins of power in 1932. However, one of the most profound moments in which the interconnection between politics and national electrification in Ireland was put on display was at the opening ceremony at Ardnacrusha. This event illustrated the extent to which Cumann na nGaedheal assumed responsibility for the project’s success and briefly silenced the opposition, whose criticism the government was forced to contend with an the entire decade. Instead of viewing the Shannon Scheme as an exception to Cumann na nGaedheal’s policies, a closer look at this extraordinary event makes manifest the

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ *Irish Independent*, 23 July 1929.

importance that the party attached to the undertaking as a means to lay the groundwork for future industrial development, economic growth, and confidence in an independent government.

On that rainy afternoon in July 1929, President Cosgrave made clear to his audience the government's plans to promote the project's potential to raise the standard of living for all Irishmen, and the unity that would entail:

Henceforward the Shannon will be harnessed in the service of the nation: distributing light, heat and power throughout the Saorstát; increasing at once the comfort of our homes and the productive capacity of our farms and factories.¹¹⁷

Expanding on this theme, Cosgrave affirmed his, "happy conviction that it marks a great step forward in the advancement of our country and in confident hope that it is only the first, though perhaps the most significant, of many such steps." The *Limerick Leader* printed the names of many in attendance, including the "ministers, high placed officials, and Army chiefs," who accompanied the president. As demonstrated in this chapter, the Shannon Scheme was a key feature of Cumann na nGaedheal's platform, so it was not unusual that Ernest Blythe, minister for finance, Patrick McGilligan, Minister for Industry and Commerce, Richard Mulcahy, Minister for Local Government, or the Ministers for Justice and Education, the Parliamentary Secretary, and Speaker in the Dáil would have come to Limerick to mark this day as a political victory for the party. In addition to these key party leaders, over 200 officials made the trek from Dublin, including Labor T.D.s, Senators, members of local governments, as well as foreign dignitaries from all countries with representatives in Ireland. However, perhaps the most noteworthy guests were "the opposition in the Dáil...represented by Mr. Eamonn de

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Valera, looking remarkably well, Mr. Sean Lemass, and some 15 other members of the Fianna Fáil Party.” Their presence was crucial precisely because it demonstrated just how large the Shannon Scheme loomed in Irish political culture. Fianna Fáil deputies were the project’s most vociferous critics, lamenting what they called the error made by Cumann na nGaedheal leaders in pursuit of what they characterized as a white elephant that was doomed to fail. As M. G. Palmer put it, writing for the *New York Times*, “to many persons the decision of Eamon de Valera to attend the ceremony with a representative body of his hearty supporters was even more remarkable than the diversion of the Shannon from its original bed.”¹¹⁸ The opposition, which rarely shared the stage with its political rivals in this period, was in many ways forced to swallow its condemnation of the national scheme and could no longer question the prospect of its fruition as a means of political maneuvering after this day in July 1929. Palmer explained the significance of this for Dev, who

Maintained the attitude that, while Fianna Fáil is in the Dáil, it is not of it, and his adherents are under an embargo strictly enforced by the party whips, not to fraternize with members of other groups. In the Dáil dining room they eat at their own tables, and when the parliamentary golf club was started last year Fianna Fáil members who put down their names were compelled to withdraw them.¹¹⁹

So, as Palmer observed, “That the stern, unbending Fianna Fáil leader should consent to a ‘joy ride’ from Dublin to Limerick in company with ministers whom he still professes to regard as ‘a usurping junta’ indicates that Mr. De Valera who, in other days gibed so bitterly at the Shannon Scheme, has discovered that it is likely to be such a good asset, politically as well as economically, that even at some cost to his feelings he must stake a

¹¹⁸ M. G. Palmer, “Irish Censorship Lost Teeth in Dáil,” *New York Times*, 28 July 1929.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

claim to a share in it.”¹²⁰ Dev’s backtracking continued in the early 1930s, when he announced that “in my opinion, the Shannon Scheme was started as a big show. Originally it was badly done, but at the same time it was a step in the right direction. We give them every credit for it. Where they failed was in the management of the scheme. I believe what they want there is expert direction, which they have not got in the Electricity Supply Board.”¹²¹

A Bridgetown man by the name of Brud Skehan was fourteen years old when he rode his bike to the ceremony. Unlike the papers at the time, which tended to emphasize the large crowds in attendance, Skehan reflected in 2012 that the crowd appeared very small. He attributed this to “a bit of hostility at the time towards the Cumann na nGaedheal government and only the real blues turned up.”¹²² No doubt this insightful political analysis benefits more from hindsight and was probably not at the forefront of a fourteen year old’s mind, who came to see exciting things happening at a construction site. Again though, this personal memory differed considerably from the *Limerick Leader’s* reporting in 1929 that “on this great occasion party differences were forgotten, and men of divergent views stood shoulder to shoulder. It is fervently to be hoped that we will see more of this spirit.”¹²³ While others have speculated about the possibility of the Shannon Scheme as a means to unify the Sinn Fein split, the evidence suggests that Cumann na nGaedheal leaders continued to promote the dam as a political success for the party in order to distinguish itself from Fianna Fáil rather than to draw its opposition

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ *Irish Independent*, 13 February 1932.

¹²² “Looking back on 85 Years at Ardnacrusha,” *Clare Champion*, 2 August 2012.

¹²³ “Clare Searchlights,” *Limerick Leader*, 27 July 1929.

closer.¹²⁴ Despite the hopefulness of the *Limerick Leader* for reconciliation, the rhetoric, tone, and spectacle surrounding the ceremony echoed Cumann na nGaedheal's attempts to establish itself as a forward-looking party of reason and progress. Cosgrave told the onlookers that "the country too will always take pride in the magnificent installation.... It has been demonstrated in this convincing, visible, form that Saorstát Éireann can carry out, rapidly, efficiently and economically, a Hydroelectric Scheme on a scale as large as any in Europe." He also spoke of laying "a firm foundation for confidence, both at home and abroad," and this language, though appealing to inclusiveness, was decidedly partisan because this convincing, visible form was made possible by Cumann na nGaedheal initiatives and the party never tired of reminding the public that while it was laying these foundations, Fianna Fáil was attempting to destroy them.

According to the *Irish Catholic*, "President Cosgrave was presented with a Parker Duofold pen. The marble slab on which the switch was mounted was fashioned after the style of the Parker desk outfit with a socket for the pen."¹²⁵ Although it is not known what Cosgrave did with this rare piece of memorabilia, the ESB Archives collection on the Shannon Scheme includes a photograph of the commemorative pen, which depicted the effort to replicate the socket Cosgrave switched on to open the Shannon Scheme in 1929 (See Figure 2.1).¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Rubenstein, *Public Works*, 147.

¹²⁵ "The Shannon Scheme, Waters Turned into Canal," *Irish Catholic*, 27 July 1929.

¹²⁶ ESB Archives, Photograph, "Commemoration Switch and Pen," 20 July 1929.



Figure 2.1: “Commemoration Switch and Pen,” ESB Archives

Introduced in 1921, the Parker Duofold pen, made in Janesville, Wisconsin, bore responsibility for making “the Parker Company one of the greatest pen-manufacturers,” and the decision to sell prototypes with red ink was considered a “risky venture for the company.”¹²⁷ However, the need to address technological issues led the company to replace the Duofold with the Vacumatic design in 1932. By happenstance, the pen’s popularity between 1921 and 1932 coincided with significant milestones for the Cumann na nGaedheal government: the first date corresponded to the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the second marked the successful transfer of political power to Fianna Fáil. In retrospect, Cosgrave’s gift was a fitting reminder of the risks taken and recognition received for both Cumann na nGaedheal promotion of the Shannon Scheme and Parker’s marketing success with the Duofold model.

Some government officials and employees of the Electricity Supply Board did not think this ceremony opening the sluice gates granted the pomp and attention they believed the dam deserved. Several encouraged the government to consider planning

¹²⁷ “Parker Duofold, 1921-1933,” accessed 22 February 2014, <http://parkerpens.net/duofold.html>.

another ceremony to mark the moment when electric current was dispersed throughout the country. Robert Tweedy, a prominent engineer in Ireland discussed above, submitted a proposal mentioning that “the underlying intention of the inaugural ceremony is to implant in the memories of the citizens of the Free State a fitting conception of the true nature of the undertaking...conceived at a time when the thoughts of our people had been turned overlong into channels leading away from the constructive pursuits of peace, and pressed forward to material being by the determination and farsighted statesmanship of courageous realists.”¹²⁸ One cannot miss the praise heaped on Cumann na nGaedheal as constructive and courageous, all at the expense of Fianna Fáil. Tweedy also speculated about an inaugural week of activities with lectures, demonstrations, souvenir books, and interestingly enough, a light display in which Nelson’s Pillar, of all things, would be transformed into a “Pillar of Light.” Similarly, McLaughlin understood the importance of pageantry in the promotion of the project. Three months after the official opening ceremony, he wrote a personal letter to McGilligan about the possibility of “a national function to celebrate the bringing to fruition of the Shannon Scheme,” planned for February 1930. He proposed that Thomas Edison could make a speech from America, commanding one turbine to start, followed by a speech from Berlin by Karl von Siemens commanding the second, and finally a speech from Cosgrave in Dublin signaling the final turbine. All of this, according to McLaughlin, could be broadcast over “wireless loud speakers...set up in halls all over the country, and the Irish throughout the World would

¹²⁸ Robert N. Tweedy, Memorandum, “Sketch of a Proposal for Ceremonies and Activities Accompanying the State Opening of the National Electric Power Supply of the Irish Free State,” Shannon Scheme Collection, NA SS/821, 13 September 1929.

be invited to listen in.”¹²⁹ This grand affair was to be accompanied by “a ‘Light’ Festival throughout the country and general national rejoicing.” In the margins of this memo, McGilligan wrote that responsibility for organizing such an event rested with departments in the government because “it’s a state matter, not an ESB one.”¹³⁰ Government memos suggest that the Cabinet considered these proposals, but no other ceremony commemorated the Scheme, likely due to the expense that, in true Cumann na nGaedheal fashion, the party would not have been eager to approve, even for its most audacious undertaking.¹³¹

In fact, as an event the opening ceremony encapsulated many of the important issues that were involved not only with the construction of the dam but also with the building of the state in the 1920s. As recently as the summer of 2012, the current Taoiseach, Enda Kenny—leader of the successor party to Cumann na nGaedheal—said of the Shannon Scheme, “Ardnacrusha remains a powerful symbol of the bold thinking of these men and women, of their passion for their country, their determination not just to effect radical change in Ireland but to be that radical change.”¹³² In honoring past achievements of the state, he momentarily put the spotlight back on the hydroelectric project, which has largely been ignored or treated historically as an anomaly in Cumann na nGaedheal policies, and completely overlooked in terms of its cultural impact as a

¹²⁹ Thomas McLaughlin, Letter from Thomas McLaughlin to Patrick McGilligan, Shannon Scheme Collection, NA SS/821, 11 October 1929.

¹³⁰ Patrick McGilligan, Marginal notes on a letter from Thomas McLaughlin, Shannon Scheme Collection, NA SS/821, 11 October 1929.

¹³¹ Gordon Campbell, Letter from Gordon Campbell to the Director of the Electricity Supply Board, Shannon Scheme Collection, NA SS/821, 15 October 1929.

¹³² “Looking back on 85 Years at Ardnacrusha,” *Clare Champion*, 2 August 2012.

marker of Irish identity. Kenny went on to say that the dam “links our past and future,” as a “legacy—one that makes us justifiably proud, both as a nation and as a people.” The Taoiseach’s comments echoed uncannily rhetoric used by promoters nearly decades ago to situate the project as both representative of Irish traditions and an indication of how modernity might transform the future. Although the praise heaped on Cumann na nGaedheal leaders was short-lived and expressions of national pride in the hydroelectric project faded over the years, Kenny’s participation in the commemoration of the Scheme served as a reminder of its significance in the process of nation building.

Conclusion

The question that begs to be asked of the political rhetoric associated with the Shannon Scheme is whether or not the promotional campaign was successful. How can one assess if Cumann na nGaedheal was able to achieve its objectives to fashion itself as a national party, committed to the revolution and vindicated by the realization of national electrification? Perhaps a more imperative line of inquiry would be the degree to which these goals were actually pursued by Cumann na nGaedheal apart from deploying the language of nation for electioneering purposes. Some contemporaries were easily persuaded by the propaganda and saw the Scheme as a great benefit to the national community. According to Shan O’Cuiv, an Irish observer reporting to the *New York Herald* on November 16, 1930,

Electric light in towns and villages has led to a remarkable increase in reading by the public of these places. It has also led to greater cleanliness and has brightened both the homes and the streets. The resident and visitor can now see where he is going at night instead of having to grope his way in the dark. What this means can only be appreciated by one who has had to walk through an Irish village on a winter’s night after a fair had been held during the day and the streets and

footpaths were covered with mud. For this alone the Shannon Scheme has proved a boon to the people.¹³³

However, the actual figures of rural electrification indicate that the perception of supporters exaggerated the reality. While current from the Shannon Scheme undoubtedly influenced the lives of many Irishmen and women, as Michael Shiel found, “by 1946 the number of consumers had reached 240,000 . . . [but] the great majority were ‘urban’ consumers. The 400,000 rural dwellings had been virtually untouched.”¹³⁴ Cumann na nGaedheal’s propaganda which claimed the Shannon Scheme would bring electricity to all Irishmen was not realized for several decades, and in the minds of many citizens, this was just another reason to be disappointed with the government. They expressed this in elections by voting in favor of the party’s opposition, Fianna Fáil, which dominated Irish politics from the 1932 general election to that of 2010. While this election and those after were certainly not referendums on the Shannon Scheme specifically, Cumann na nGaedheal’s continued political failure must be seen in light of its inability to follow through with promises to bring about an increased standard of living. Meehan has pointed to the fact that “Cumann na nGaedheal’s campaign was far more problematic for what it had failed to say than what it actually said.”¹³⁵ In addition to the absence of a clearly defined policy for dealing with economic problems by the end of the 1920s coupled with a willingness to pursue unpopular measures, like cutting old-age pensions, Meehan has demonstrated that Cumann na nGaedheal never achieved the success that Fianna Fáil did

¹³³Shan O’Cuiv, “Irish Free State’s initial Hydroelectric Plant in Successful Operation for One Year,” *New York Herald*, 16 November 1930, quoted in “Shannon Scheme Contract,” NA S4/380.

¹³⁴ Michael Shiel, *The Quiet Revolution: The Electrification of Rural Ireland, 1946-1976* (Dublin: O’Brien Press, 2003), 22.

¹³⁵ Meehan, *The Cosgrave Part*, 167.

when it came to grass-roots organization.¹³⁶ Therefore, a clearly defined policy for hydroelectric development and promotional campaigns designed to encourage national participation, while perhaps envisioned by the party as the first step towards articulating an economic policy that would appeal to the masses, it proved insufficient.

The promotion of the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme illuminated, and in some important ways shaped, the political, economic, and cultural contexts in which it was undertaken by the Cumann na nGaedheal government. In the post-Civil War period, the government made unity a national priority and party leaders viewed the Shannon Scheme as a tool to make that a reality. Cumann na nGaedheal justified its two-fold promotional campaign in terms of a desperate need for support. The party needed people not only to financially support the Scheme by purchasing electricity, it also needed political support to establish its legitimacy in a new nation. Explaining that electricity would benefit all homes, farms, and factories served the former purpose, while celebrating the project as an achievement of the party served the latter. However, the promotion and the reception of that promotion cannot be equated. The Shannon Scheme represents an example of the ways in which an undertaking can be politicized, yet this does not imply corruption or that electioneering triumphed over the social benefits expected in Irish communities. Rather, it highlights the multifaceted aims of the project and the significance Cumann na nGaedheal attached to modernization and industrialization. In light of the party's commitment to politicizing the Shannon Scheme, Cumann na nGaedheal's legacy is in need of a reassessment—not because the dam was an exception to its policies, but

¹³⁶ Ibid, 206.

because it was representative of the party's attempts to realize objectives of the revolution.

CHAPTER III

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND IRISH EDUCATION

So far, indeed, is science from being an obstacle to holiness that it would be truer to say it is an aid to it. How many studies are better fitted than the scientific study of Nature, for creating in the scientist a sense of moral responsibility? He learns from Nature that every act has a consequence, and every sin a penalty. If he need[s] a sense of the dignity of work and the duty of self-sacrifice he will obtain it from scientific study which calls for devoted labour for the benefit of others.¹

—“Science and Holiness,” *Irish Electrician*, 1929

Science and religion no more contradict each other than light and electricity.²

—William Hiram Foulkes

Ever since religious predominance was challenged by the rise of secularism in the transition to the modern period, the Catholic Church has played an active role in the shaping of modernity. From Galileo’s dispute with religious authorities to Newton’s conviction that his research only strengthened his faith, societies have questioned the compatibility of the sciences with spirituality. Fearful that new theories would weaken the resolve of the faithful by contradicting the teachings of the Church, which vociferously guarded its monopoly on knowledge, some religious leaders also gained a reputation for opposing modernity, criticizing the utility of scientific studies, and, in effect, emerged as bulwarks against progress and hopes for change in many localities. While the message of the epigraph indicates that the engineering community in Ireland may have interpreted science and religion as mutually supportive, it does not prescribe a definitive answer on a matter which remained deeply controversial throughout the twentieth century. The conservative reputation of the Irish Catholic Church in the 1920s,

¹ “Science and Holiness,” *Irish Electrician* 5, no. 10 (April 1929): 597.

² William Hiram Foulkes, quoted in Leelavati Ramanand Kanchan *Education and Religion: A Critical Study* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2002), 50.

known for its crackdowns on “evil” literature, films, and fashion, and other ominous markers of modernity, meant that promoters of the Scheme expected the Church to be predisposed against the hydroelectric grid. Unlike the “scientific study of nature” described by the *Irish Engineer*, technology associated with the Scheme more accurately involved a dramatic manipulation of nature and a herculean forging of the environment along new lines: tasks traditionally reserved for the Creator and Almighty God. But despite these expectations, the Irish Catholic establishment largely stood behind national electrification because of its benevolent potential to benefit others.

In an atmosphere characterized by strict morality and a deep devotion to the Irish flock, the decision of Catholic leaders to support the project was not peculiar. However, it differed from all other Free State projects because electrification symbolized swift and rapid change, potentially threatening religious authority and its grasp on moral control. This indicates that the decision to back the Scheme was a calculated one, and one that fundamentally propelled Irish Catholicism to fashion an agreeable version of modernity. To understand how this new outlook became manifest, this chapter will explore the Church’s dual responsibilities in the promotion of the Shannon Scheme: teaching the basic principles of electricity to the community and administratively renegotiating pedagogical approaches to Irish technical education. By unveiling the ways in which the Church configured the modern elements of the project to make them palatable *and* transformed the educational system accordingly, the distinctly Catholic elements of Irishness will come to the fore.

Further, a reconsideration of Irish identity in the light of the Shannon Scheme not only reaffirms the centrality of religious beliefs to perceptions of national belonging, but

also challenges simplistic generalizations regarding the relationship between faith and modernity. Whereas the previous chapters discussed the political significance of the project to Cumann na nGaedheal and the Free State, the purpose here will be to build on that argument by positing the Scheme as a nexus where influence oscillated between the two sources of power in Ireland: the government and the Catholic Church. Each institution depended on the support of the other, and the success of national electrification hinged on their collaboration and commitment to promoting the project through a massive educational campaign. Cumann na nGaedheal profited from clerical support, often equating endorsement of the Scheme by prominent members of the Church hierarchy with much needed legitimacy, as the Free State was still getting on its feet in the mid- to late-1920s. However as J. H. Whyte has argued, “if the government proved on the whole willing to listen to the Church, there is no need to explain this as simply due to political necessity. Ministers were the products of the same culture as the bishops, and shared the same values.”³ Members of the clergy were not merely pawns of the government, and they acted independently, motivated by a number of factors, including raising the standard of living and stemming the tide of emigration, in order to promote the Shannon Scheme without compromising a Catholic outlook on the future.

In his book, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism and the Postcolonial*, Rubenstein has argued that “as a cultural event, the Shannon Scheme embodied a postcolonial struggle to define the stakes of modernization and to navigate the ideological contradictions between a secular and a religious worldview.”⁴ Clarifying the

³ J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923-1979*, 2d ed. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 36.

⁴ Rubenstein, *Public Works*, 152.

ramifications of the Scheme as a cultural event, he concluded further that “modernization meant not only electrification but also the end of Irish romantic nationalism and its sudden replacement with a modern, networked sensibility of the common good.”⁵ While he accurately identified fundamental differences between secular and religious outlooks on modernization, and correctly pointed to the undeniable links between the Shannon Scheme, nationalism, and identity in a postcolonial context, Rubenstein glossed over the nuances of these relationships. First, in claiming a singular religious worldview, the author whitewashed the numerous, and often contradictory, religious opinions regarding the Shannon Scheme in particular and modernization more generally. The presence of diverse stances on modernity, coupled with the fact that many religious leaders endorsed the electrification project, make classifying a united religious worldview unrepresentative of the reality. Further, in positing modernization as the end of Irish romantic nationalism, Rubenstein overlooked efforts by many of the project’s promoters to make modernization acceptable to romantic nationalists, including priests who helped elevate Catholicism as a distinct cornerstone of Irishness. Instead of the “sudden replacement” of romantic nationalism suggested by Rubenstein, priests played a critical role in fostering “a modern, networked sensibility of the common good,” in terms of a continuation, rather than a transformation, of their religious commitment to the betterment of their communities through education.

Of course, the archetype of extreme romantic nationalists portrayed by Rubenstein certainly existed within pockets of the Catholic Church and characteristically displayed an intense hatred of modernity. Despite the fact that many Catholics embraced

⁵ Ibid.

the Shannon Scheme, some called for a return to traditional ways of life that appeared pure in comparison to British industrialization and the moral corruption it produced. For example, the Archbishop of Tuam, Dr. Thomas Gilmartin, voiced his own anti-modern sentiments at the opening of the Mayo Feis in 1927. He lamented:

One of the great evils of the day was the tendency to break up home life. Even in Ireland there are all kinds of attractions that draw young people away from the old industries and the old domestic pleasures that made the Irish home a little paradise. The making of butter, the baking of cakes, the carding of wool, the spinning of yarn, and the knitting of stockings have well nigh disappeared, and how much domestic happiness has gone with them!⁶

Gilmartin feared that this move away from the traditional was detrimental to the community, but he viewed the feis—a linguistic and musical festival inspired by pre-independence Gaelic League events—as a means to “counteract this degeneracy.”⁷ While he did not deal with the Scheme specifically, Gilmartin’s stance on small home industries would in all likelihood have made him less inclined to appreciate the application of electricity to tasks like carding wool and knitting stockings. Promoters often highlighted electricity’s application to household chores, and some romantic nationalists were instrumental in constructing a conservative interpretation of Irish industrialization that was based on small rural development and not large factories or bustling cities.⁸ Even though the evidence suggests that few priests shared Gilmartin’s unyielding penchant for the traditional in every aspect of Irish life, he does represent a highly vocal minority of religious leaders who feared what modernity and new industries might bring to Ireland.⁹

⁶ “Home Life—Archbishop of Tuam on Modern Perils,” *Clare Champion*, 6 August 1927.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See McMahan, *Grand Opportunity*, 127-154.

⁹ See Patrick Maume’s “A Pastoral Vision: The Novels of Canon Joseph Guinan,” *New Hibernia Review* 9, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 79-98. Even Guinan is a problematic advocate of “tradition,” in that some

Perhaps one reason that this view lacked widespread appeal was that the Pope himself was supportive of hydroelectric development. Ecclesiastics who read the *Irish Catholic* or kept up on the Pius XI's activities would have been aware that His Holiness took a second tour of an Italian electric power station in 1929 "and took deep interest in the motors which have just been installed, ordering four more of 500 horse-power."¹⁰ With the Pope setting an example for hydroelectric advocacy, priests in the Free State felt justified in supporting the Shannon Scheme, while rejecting other modern developments that they perceived would have a more direct impact on the moral character of the Irish people.

The scope of this chapter neglects two obvious groups: Catholic leaders who denounced the Scheme and all Protestants. While historian Mary Daly has acknowledged that "some priests expressed hostility because they believed that electricity would be the first step towards an undesirable modern lifestyle," these dissenting voices were not dominant in national literature or regional press coverage of the project.¹¹ Attempts to categorize Catholics according to political persuasion, regional affiliation, or other demographic calculations would be fruitless considering that supporters and opponents came from all types of backgrounds. The same would be true of many Protestants who certainly appreciated the potential benefits of the Scheme, but who were not as active in terms of managing the segregated educational institutions dominated by Catholics in the Free State. However, Protestants also made up the majority of critics who subscribed to the British and Anglo-Irish presses that offered many of the most specific denunciations

of his novels featured youthful priests who showed disdain for the urban world represented by Britain but who embraced cooperative activities designed to make small farms and businesses competitive in modern markets. See McMahon, *Grand Opportunity*, p. 268, fn. 112.

¹⁰ "Notes and Comments," *Irish Catholic*, 6 April 1929.

¹¹ Daly, "'Turn on the Tap,'" 212.

of the project. So, like their Catholic counterparts, it would be contrived and misleading to assume that support or condemnation of the Scheme followed a strict religious divide; it simply did not. Since promotion is at the heart of this study, the discussion will be limited here to those Irish Catholics and educators who envisioned a positive program for national electrification and acted as advocates in its name through their scholastic affiliations and community connections.

Part I: Educating the Public

For promoters of the Shannon Scheme, having the support of Catholic priests was a major victory because they could assume the role of grassroots promoters by interacting with the community in ways the government and Electricity Supply Board initially could not. In rural areas in particular, the Irish people had little experience with electricity, which reinforced the need for an educational campaign to dispel myths, overcome superstitions, and encourage parishioners to get their homes wired. This point was reiterated by Deputy Michael Heffernan of the Farmer's Party when told the Dáil,

With regard to the possibilities of a demand for electricity, the people of this country are unfortunately very conservative with regard to new ideas. They do not take to them as the people in other countries do. . . . It appears to me that it will take a considerable amount of education, and I should say of propaganda, to prove to the people of this country that a saving is likely to come to them from the use of electricity as well as an improvement in their present living conditions.¹²

Parish priests were a vital part of this educational effort, because, as Lawrence McCaffrey has noted, they “were the only educated leaders in rural peasant communities. Laymen accepted them as advisors and authorities on a wide range of topics. Because of

¹² Michael Heffernan, “Shannon Electricity Supply Bill, 5th Stage,” Dáil Éireann Debates, vol. 11, 26 May 1925.

their influence, nationalist politicians recruited priests as agitators and organizers.”¹³

They were certainly used in this capacity on behalf of the Shannon Scheme by teaching their communities the ins and outs of the project with nontechnical and accessible language. For example, lecturing on the “Future of Limerick,” Rev. Father Philip, O.F.M., told his audience, “I would like in the beginning to outline roughly, in popular language and without any technicalities, what is meant by the Shannon Scheme.”¹⁴

Language used by engineers and electricians was inaccessible to most people, so priests who were able to simplify scientific figures and highlight information that was necessary for practical purposes were extremely valuable to the educational campaign.

Seen as experts on spiritual and temporal matters in many places, religious leaders had to address many misconceptions about electrification. As the ESB’s current archivist, Brendan Delany, explained, it was quite common for people unfamiliar with electricity to turn to their priests in order to ease their genuine fears about it.¹⁵ Superstitious anxiety about electricity was understood to exist mainly in rural areas, and the press supplemented the Catholic educational effort in many ways, often relying on humor to lighten the mood or as a satirical device. For example, in the article “Laying the ‘Ghosts,’” one writer recollected, “in the old days when furniture was heavy and gloomy, rooms dark and depressing, and when passages and corridors had to be traversed with the aid of a flaring candle, was it any wonder that there were rumours of an occasional ghost?” The article proposed to explain “how electric light dispels ethereal spirits” and

¹³ McCaffrey, “Irish Nationalism and Irish Catholicism,” 532.

¹⁴ “Future of Limerick—Prospects Under the Shannon Scheme—A ‘Bright and Cheery’ Outlook,” Lecture by Rev. Father Philip, O.F.M., *Limerick Leader*, 21 March 1925.

¹⁵ Brendan Delany, conversation with author, Dublin, Ireland, July 2008.

noted that “passages, cellars and all dark and dismal corners are illuminated at the touch of a switch. No ghost dare face electric light.”¹⁶ Here, superstition was turned on its head, so that electricity became the remedy, and not the cause, for distress.

The joint efforts of priests and the press to employ knowledge as a weapon against ignorance proved massive in scope. Some supporters expressed frustration and chastised critics for their stupidity, but the effort to educate the public and convert skeptics proved to be a cumbersome process. In 1930, Hinkondelle, a women’s columnist for the *Star*, reported meeting a woman who still relied on an old-fashioned range for all of her household chores. Though this was not terribly unusual given that rural electrification was not fully achieved for many decades, the columnist expressed frustration when she “asked her if she had ever heard of the Shannon Scheme.” The woman replied that “she had previously received circulars informing her of the advantages of electricity, but that she told me that she had no head for figures, that an iron would run away with a lot of money, and that she was afraid of it.” Hinkondelle concluded this anecdote on an uplifting note by informing readers that the woman was amenable to her proposal that she would try an electric iron “on the sporting chance that electricity does not emanate from the devil!”¹⁷ While superstition was employed here for comedic purposes, the anecdote highlights the real challenge faced by advocates of electricity, that is, helping individuals overcome serious apprehensions about electricity in general and the Shannon Scheme in particular.

¹⁶ *Star*, 25 January 1930.

¹⁷ *Star*, 3 May 1930.

Though the majority of Irish people did not publically express these superstitious beliefs about electricity (perhaps more dealt with their fears privately), most rural residents had little experience with electricity, and priests were often the first point of contact for questions on the matter. Indicating a common sense of confusion arising from the use of technical language and a general lack of knowledge about electricity, the poem “The Great Shannon Scheme,” identified the type of person a priest would likely confront:

Oh, Paddy, me jewel, I’m an ignorant man,
 And don’t understand this electrical plan.
 There’s very queer questions put forward each day
 To hinder this Scheme, now advanced on its way;
 The eyesight of many sees big rocks ahead,
 And obstacles great, in the wide Shannon bed,
 But, between me and you, just wait and you’ll see
 The Shannon victorious, flowing down to the sea.¹⁸

In order to address the ignorance they encountered, priests in their roles as neighborhood leaders spread the word about the hydroelectric project and electrical development by employing three broad methods. First, they and like-minded lay Catholics wrote about the Scheme in periodicals that were directed at devout readers. This meant that clerics and lay persons who read these publications acquired knowledge not only about what was happening during the construction phase, but they also gained an understanding of what would be needed once the project was completed. Second, Catholic priests regularly offered lectures open to the public that, like the aforementioned talk by Father Philip, used simple and non-technical language to spread the educational campaign to a wider audience. Finally, Church representatives acted as models for their own advice by having churches and convents wired for electricity. This last action set a powerful precedent for

¹⁸ Maolmora, “The Great Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 18 April 1925.

the rest of the community because religious institutions in Ireland were popular places for social events, and for many, entering an electrified Church or parish hall would have been their first encounter with electrification apart from perhaps visiting a few public buildings in town.

Catholic Periodicals

Catholic periodicals like the *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, the *Capuchin Annual*, and the *Catholic Bulletin* contributed to the educational campaign designed to promote the Shannon Scheme and electricity more generally. Although these were not official organs of the Church, they were read by devout laypersons and religious leaders who were presented with Catholic interpretations on major issues of the day. Thus, they would have been considered reliable sources of information by skeptical Catholics. The *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, a popular and socially conservative devotional magazine, highlighted the hydroelectric undertaking in a piece entitled “Practical Patriotism.” The author, ironically named M. Shannon, noted the importance of buying Irish-made goods and hoped that “the supply of electricity, soon available, will remove Ireland’s greatest industrial handicap—the lack of coal.” Echoing other religious publications and leaders committed to spreading the word about the project’s potentials, Shannon argued that “it will enable industries to spring up all over the land, so that instead of great cities, with their attendant evils and crowded slums and unwholesome atmosphere, we may hope to see a large number of thriving small towns, each with the industries best suited to it, where the young people now faced with emigration can obtain remunerative employment in healthful surroundings.”¹⁹

¹⁹ M. Shannon, “Practical Patriotism: Our Industries,” *Irish Messenger* 43, no. 7 (July 1930): 302-303.

Another Catholic periodical that lent itself to the educational campaign developing around the Shannon Scheme was the *Capuchin Annual*, first published in the year after the dam was completed. As Susan Schreibman, an expert on the journal, explains, “although its ethos always remained the promotion of and education in Christian values and a Catholic way of life, it found many unique ways of exploring these subjects.”²⁰ Given that the need for education about the project extended beyond the period of construction, the ESB viewed the journal as an unconventional outlet to share its message with a largely Irish Catholic audience. W.S. Lawlor, from the Public Relations Department of the ESB, authored a piece in the December 1930 issue of the *Capuchin Annual* entitled “Electricity in Industry.” Complete with photos of the Scheme and a picture of the 1930 commemorative Shannon Scheme postage stamp, the article celebrated the publicity campaign that had occurred to date: “There are few people who are not well informed on the constructional details of the Shannon Scheme. It is doubtful if any project of modern time captured to the same extent the fancy of the world.” He also outlined the Free State’s distinctly Irish vision for modernization when he stated that “electric power will mean the decentralization of industry, the revival of agriculture and country life, the up-building of small communities and a strengthening of the family.” Contrasting this utopian existence with the ills ascribed to British industrialization, Lawlor called upon the journal’s readers to undertake a noble project: “we can build a civilization that will be spacious where the other was congested, clean where the other

²⁰ Susan Schreibman, “Introduction to *The Capuchin Annual*,” accessed 16 August 2012, <http://www.macgreevy.org/style?style=text&source=com.cpa.xml&action=show>.

was dirty, healthy where the other was unhealthy.”²¹ This focus on enhancing the more traditional elements of Irish life, such as the family and agriculture, aimed to persuade Catholics that modernization in the Free State could be regulated by improving the standard of living without introducing the perceived evils that existed in other modern societies.

While many clerics voiced their support for the Shannon Scheme as community leaders and advocates for education, ecclesiastics were far from a monolithic group. Some Catholics had to strike a delicate balance between criticizing the government and championing its most important project. For example, the *Catholic Bulletin: A Monthly Review of Catholic Literature*, published in Dublin, presented a curious interpretation of the Scheme while denouncing the government that backed it.²² Although the magazine was not an official mouthpiece for the Church, priests and bishops regularly contributed pieces to it or openly applauded its efforts, and the Pope was presented with a white bound copy of the publication each month. Expressing a general disappointment in the Free State government and its ministers, the *Catholic Bulletin* conceptualized the Shannon Scheme within the context of what it perceived as a political record marred by failure. As “Kevin,” the columnist for the magazine’s regular column “Far and Near” posited, “the collective and individual record of the members of the Free State government is such that we are compelled to view with the greatest reserve any measure

²¹ W.S. Lawlor, “Electricity in Industry,” *Capuchin Annual*, December 1931.

²² According to the entry for John J. O’Kelly (a.k.a. “Sceilg”) in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, the former president of the Gaelic League also served as the editor for the *Catholic Bulletin*, which sought “to promote wholesome literature for the family and to support vigilance committees in their opposition to undesirable publications.” By 1914, the *Catholic Bulletin* achieved a circulation of 10,000 to 15,000. Though O’Kelly left his position as editor in 1922, before the Shannon Scheme was initiated, the magazine continued his legacy of political opposition to the Treatyite government throughout the 1920s.

having as its alleged objective the welfare of the country.” In this piece for the May 1927 issue, Kevin focused solely on the hydroelectric project and suggested “with this unparalleled record of treachery and failure, it is not unnatural to entertain the gravest misgivings with regard to the success of the Shannon Scheme and the proposals in connection therewith.”²³ But after laying out the case of those who criticized the project, the periodical put aside its political leanings and offered that “irrespective of party, we wish the Shannon Scheme every success.”²⁴

Perhaps the *Bulletin*'s general nationalist persuasion, as opposed to its specific anti-Treaty leaning, was responsible for this sign of solidarity in supporting the project. In fact, the columnist admonished groups who had traditionally resisted Catholic and nationalist causes: “From its inception, the Scheme encountered the most hostile opposition from Protestant and British interests in Dublin.”²⁵ Kevin chastised Protestant businessmen in Ireland for refusing to take Catholic apprentices and the Dublin press for sympathizing with criticism from British firms that condemned the project for threatening the balance of trade. Conspicuously absent from the analysis of what the paper described as “an impartial indication of the views of all parties who have figured into this dispute,” was the project's most frequent critic: Fianna Fáil. Nevertheless, after providing several examples of how the British and Irish Protestants had supposedly sabotaged Catholics in the past, the periodical concluded, “Frankly, we have little hope of the success of the Shannon Scheme. Our stupidity is too colossal and our disunity too widespread.”²⁶ But

²³ “Kevin,” “The Shannon Scheme,” *Catholic Bulletin* 17, no. 5 (May 1927): 468.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 476.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

here, it was stupidity resulting from joining with the British to prevent the success of the Scheme and religious—not political—disunity that was at the heart of a pessimistic outlook. However, the lack of optimism displayed was more likely a ploy designed to encourage other Catholics to support the Scheme by uniting against common enemies that stood in the way of national development. Even though this Catholic publication openly objected to policies of the Cumann na nGaedheal government, it objectively weighed evidence against the Shannon Scheme and found that its political apprehensions did not necessitate a rejection of a national project that was promoted according to nationalist principles and rhetoric.

Lectures and the Dissemination of Information

Parish priests and educators also took the initiative to contact the government for materials they could use to spread the word about the Shannon Scheme to their parishioners. For example, on 7 July 1927, Fr. John O’Doherty, the parish priest of Rathmullan, Co. Donegal, wrote a letter to McGilligan. He informed the minister that he was “having a parochial bazaar on the 20th and 21st of July,” and was “anxious to know 1) whether there is such a thing in existence yet, as a popular illustrated lecture on the Shannon Scheme; and 2) is there in your Department any such machinery as . . . popular lectures or lecturers on the industries of the Free State present and contingent.” O’Doherty admitted that he would “regard such lectures as highly educative, and while, my immediate object is money, I should be pleased to have such informative matters for slide shows.”²⁷ H. S. Murray, McGilligan’s private secretary summarized O’Doherty’s

²⁷ Letter from John O’Doherty to Patrick McGilligan, 7 July 1927: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS625.

inquiry in a note, stating that one of Professor Rishworth's recent lectures might be of use to the parish priest. But Murray ultimately concluded that the professor would be inclined to "think that it might not appeal to the type of audience one would expect at a parochial bazaar."²⁸ The government was clearly caught on its heels by this type of entrepreneurial initiative because it repeatedly answered such requests by denying that such material was available.

Unfortunately for the unprepared Free State government, requests for lectures, photographs, lantern slides, and booklets poured in not only from Irish educators, but also from the international community. In November 1927, H.S. Collins from a school in Oakfield, Rugby, wrote to the Department of Education asking if it would "lend sets of magic lantern slides, with accompanying lectures, suitable for schools?" The British educator was interested in "any subject illustrative of Irish life and industry, and scenery, or, if possible, of the works on the Shannon Hydro. Electric Scheme."²⁹ This prompted a series of correspondence between the departments of Education and Industry and Commerce since nobody seemed to know if such slides were available. Rishworth informed Gordon Campbell, secretary of the Department of Industry and Commerce, that "this Department has not got any lantern slides available for loan in connection with the Shannon works." He acknowledged that "the contractors lent me some for lecture

²⁸ Minute Sheet, Note by H.S. Murray to Gordon Campbell, 11 July 1927: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS625.

²⁹ Letter from H.S. Collins to Department of Education, 13 October 1927: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS622.

purposes but as their slides do not fit standard slide holders, they can only be shown with difficulty and are not suitable for lending purposes.”³⁰

Meanwhile the messages of many priests in lectures given near Limerick focused on the benefits the community could expect in the wake of the Shannon Scheme. Although the specific content of those messages is more pertinent to a discussion of the regional issues I will address in Chapter 5, the fact that priests made public appearances to speak exclusively on the Shannon Scheme is relevant to the present discussion. Priests often acted as ambassadors for their communities, and near Limerick, they usually emphasized the economic benefits electricity could bring to the area if residents actively fostered industries. Targeting apathy as a barrier to success, another priest took up the cause of promotion when he told the *Limerick Leader*, “I imagine Limerick people are not half enough alive to this huge opportunity that has appeared in their midst. Picture 3,000 men working and millions to be spent—what would it mean to every establishment and every individual in Limerick.”³¹ Seven months later, when three Irish-American priests visited the district, they “expressed the opinion that the scheme would make Limerick a great city in a comparatively few years. ‘The people of Ireland,’ said one of the clergymen, ‘do not seem to realise what a benefit the electrification of the Shannon would be to them’”³² Thus, clerics often championed the project by calling attention to others who they believed were not demonstrating the appropriate level of enthusiasm for this great national undertaking.

³⁰ Letter from Rishworth to Gordon Campbell, 5 November 1927: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS622.

³¹ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 3 January 1925.

³² “Our White Coal,” *Limerick Leader*, 27 July 1925.

Other priests used public speaking as a means to address criticism of the Scheme and to encourage the community to adopt a sense of public spirit that would ensure the project's success. The Bishop of Killaloe, the Most Rev. Dr. Michael Fogarty, who would later be responsible for the decidedly Catholic tone at the opening ceremony of the dam, was outspoken about the project from its inception. In fact, the bishop was also honored with the task to "cut the first sod at Ardnacrusha, Co. Clare, for the construction of the Shannon River Power Development Scheme" in August 1925.³³ In a speech delivered in 1925 at St. Flannan's College, Ennis, the Bishop "commented in very severe terms on the waste of public money by the Ennis Urban Council and the neglect by them to provide efficient water and lighting services." As a religious leader who acted as an advocate for the best interests of the community, the bishop called on the people of Ennis to stand up to their elected officials by demanding access to public utilities, which he viewed as necessities and not as threatening manifestations of modernization. Fogarty also addressed educational institutions that were charged with "the teaching of honesty and sincerity of heart" that would prepare future generations "to deal with public and national affairs honestly and straightforwardly." He expressed contempt for "efforts made by anyone to set the country on its legs . . . in the name of patriotism," because he believed this was contrary to the purpose of education, which he saw as a means to shape the ideal citizen. Fogarty provided an example of this type of false patriotism: "When the Shannon scheme was started, the cry was raised 'Down with it.' There were people who did not care how they injured the country—their own aim seemed to be to smash up every effort

³³ "A Mighty Undertaking: The Harnessing of the River Shannon," *Banner*, (1963): 86.

to improve the country. What was that but insincerity and dishonesty?”³⁴ Given that the bishop’s audience was students and instructors at the college, his message about using education to impart patriotic values would have been particularly resounding. Fogarty used his position as a religious leader to counter criticism of the Shannon Scheme from a moral pedestal, arguing that proper instruction in the nation’s schools would correct flawed thinking about the project.

Even when priests were not the featured speakers, they often hosted public events as a go-between for members of their communities and the experts who were willing to share their knowledge. For example, when a district engineer working for the ESB offered to deliver a lecture “on the reasons which prompted the harnessing of electric power throughout the Saorstát, the aims and possibilities of the scheme and its practical application,” Rev. J. Houlihan presided over the meeting and introduced the expert speaker.³⁵ And when distinguished priests or bishops could not attend lectures or discussions on the Shannon Scheme, they commonly sent letters of apology for their absences—a fact not only noted at the presentations, but also duly reported in local papers. This suggests that their very presence at these events or their endorsements of the events carried weight within the community.

Church Hookup

Representatives of the Catholic Church did not merely ease their parishioners’ anxieties about installing electricity in homes and businesses; they acted on their own

³⁴ “Public Spirit—Need in Ireland—Bishop Fogarty’s Views,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 December 1925.

³⁵ “Electricity’s Part in Modern Progress—Lecture at Abbeyfeale,” *Limerick Leader*, 28 August 1929.

advice by electrifying churches and schools. The fitting of religious buildings for electricity predated the Shannon Scheme, indicating that at least some elements within the Catholic establishment were sympathetic to electrical development in Ireland. For example, in 1924 Roche & Maguire, a mechanical and electrical engineering company operating out of Dublin, ran an advertisement in the *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac* claiming, “If it’s an Electrical Job Consult Us. High-Class Work Only. Send for list of churches, convents, colleges, and institutions where we have carried out work.”³⁶ Given that the target audience for the *Irish Catholic Directory* was a host of Catholic associations, this advertisement was banking on the hope that those churches, convents, or schools that were undecided about electricity would find comfort in knowing that its company’s services had been sought out by others within the religious community. Clearly relying on its reputation as a company that could be trusted by the Church, the fact that Roche & Maguire noted that its business did “high-class work only” presupposed that members of religious orders and status-conscious parish priests would have been impressed by this exclusivity and would have considered the installation of electricity in churches to be different, and perhaps requiring more care, than the installation of electricity elsewhere.

Referring to the Church as a potential or current consumer of electricity was also a marketing strategy the ESB considered in its advertising campaign. In the event, the ESB rarely mentioned the Church directly in its advertisements, perhaps because it perceived that many clerics already supported the Shannon Scheme and needed less convincing than did the masses; nevertheless, it was open to the idea of promoting

³⁶ Roche & Maguire Advertisement, *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1924* (Dublin: James Duffy & Co., Ltd, 1924), 111.

electricity to the Church as was evident in an ad proof from the early 1930s. Entitled “The Lighting, Heating and Flood Lighting of Churches by Electricity,” the draft included pictures of three brightly lit cathedrals. Assuming that these places of worship required different considerations, the advertisement suggested that church lighting must deal with “such factors as Architecture, Colourings, Surface reflections, type of fittings to be used, etc. in order to produce adequate and harmonious illumination without glare or shadows.” The ad proof also stated that flood lighting on the exterior of the buildings “by a modern Electrical installation is the *only* method by which full justice can be done to the architectural beauty of the building.” Alluding to a special relationship with the Church, the ESB also emphasized in this advertisement that “We shall be glad to cooperate, without any charge or obligation, in solving any problems of Church lighting or heating.”³⁷

It is unclear if the ESB published this ad in secular newspapers or Catholic periodicals, but it was apparent that the Board viewed the electrification of religious institutions as a positive example to be shared with others, because it highlighted electricity’s ability to enhance the majesty and splendor on display in the physical structures associated with worship space. For instance, Mr. T. Catten of the ESB put religious institutions literally on display when he delivered a lecture on electric lighting to a group gathered in Ennis and supplemented his speech with a series of slides depicting “school and church lighting systems.”³⁸ Though a list of all of the religious institutions the ESB worked with would be redundant here, records indicate that many

³⁷ “The Lighting, Heating, and Flood-Lighting of Churches by Electricity,” circa 1930s: ESB advertising scrapbook, ESBA, (emphasis in the original).

³⁸ “Electric Lighting—Interesting Lecture in Ennis,” *Clare Champion*, 15 March 1930.

churches and convents were wired for electricity after current from the Shannon Scheme was in full production. Newspapers, like the *Limerick Leader*, took an interest in reporting on these cases. For instance, when Adare was being hooked up to the Shannon current, the paper mentioned that staff members from the ESB were working to connect the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy.³⁹ To promoters who understood the correlation between educating the public about electricity and encouraging its widespread use, it was a useful strategy to highlight religious institutions that were wired for electricity since many skeptics in the community likely would have looked to the clergy for guidance and leadership in unfamiliar matters. Churches and schools were popular areas for the Irish to congregate, and besides public buildings such as city halls, they would have been the places where those unfamiliar with electricity would have encountered it for the first time. As will be examined in Chapter 7, the promise of electricity to improve cleanliness and convenience within the home proved an effective marketing campaign towards Irish women. However, promoters did not make these comparisons when speaking about religious institutions, but rather they posited the electrification of churches as a decision that parishioners could come to appreciate. By extension, they could in turn be encouraged by the Church's example to have their own homes and businesses hooked up to electricity.

Apart from wiring churches and other religious buildings, the Catholic establishment also engaged the Shannon Scheme directly when associations and organizations for Catholics demonstrated an interest in seeing the project to learn more about electrification in the Free State. In 1926, for example, 400 members of the

³⁹ "Shannon Current—'Dead' Wires Become Alive," *Limerick Leader*, 23 September 1929.

Kilkenny Sacred Heart Confraternity ventured by train to Killaloe as tourists intent on seeing the Shannon Scheme under construction.⁴⁰ In the aftermath of the Scheme's completion, a large audience of the Cork Catholic Young Men's Society gathered to hear Hugo Flinn, a member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers, who gave a lecture on "The Electrification of the Free State."⁴¹ Any time distinguished Church leaders toured the site, local newspapers were also sure to note the occasion as a sign of support from the higher echelons of the Catholic hierarchy. For example, the *Limerick Leader* reported in 1926, "Recent visitors to the works and camps at Ardnacrusha were the Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty, Bishop of Killaloe, and the Bishop of Derry. Their Lordships were much impressed by the great progress of the Shannon Scheme."⁴² A similar report from 1928 noted that the bishops of Limerick, Kerry, and Cork had toured the works with the manager of the ESB's Guide Bureau, a body set up to facilitate tours around Ardnacrusha. According to the article, "Their Lordships expressed pleasure in the progress of the works, and asked many questions regarding the various aspects of the scheme."⁴³ It mattered that Church leaders took an interest in the Shannon Scheme because their parishioners often valued their judgment, and promoters were encouraged that these representatives of the community would lead by example.

⁴⁰ "Killaloe Notes—Sunday Visitors," *Limerick Leader*, 10 July 1926.

⁴¹ "Free State Electrification—Lecture by Mr. Hugo Flinn," *Clare Champion*, 4 December 1930.

⁴² "Bishops at Ardnacrusha," *Limerick Leader*, 21 July 1926.

⁴³ "A Big Draw—Shannon Scheme Visitors—Southern Bishops' Tour," *Limerick Leader*, 25 July 1928.

Advocates for the Community: Defenders of Heritage and Dispute Negotiators

Equally important, religious leaders built upon a long tradition of serving as activists on behalf of their communities. In this case, they defended heritage in the face of modernity and negotiated conflicts between individuals and the government that arose both during the construction and transmission phases of the project. In purposeful and imaginative ways, leaders of the Catholic Church in Ireland managed to articulate an identity that balanced expectations for modernity with an appreciation of the past as the foundation for traditions. Speaking to a packed audience at the City Hall in Waterford, Rev. Philip of De la Salle Training College reflected on the importance of not allowing the Shannon's future to eclipse the significance of its history. Philip recited a few lines that students were taught in school about the geography of the Shannon, but found them deficient since "they give little or no idea of the outstanding industrial importance of our noble river, nor do they contain a word by way of reminder of the notable events in our national history, and the spots made sacred by our ancient culture, which by their association with the Shannon cannot fail even now to give that river an additional claim to the notice of every educated Irishman."⁴⁴ Not only did the priest identify how the current curriculum failed to address the new function of the hydroelectric dam, but he also advocated for a history of the river's holy legacies to be taught concurrently. Perhaps not surprising given his clerical position, Philip also invoked Ireland's strong religious tradition to lessen the very serious tensions arising from the presence of Germans on the Shannon Scheme, which is discussed in the next chapter. He prefaced this argument with

⁴⁴ "The Shannon Scheme: Interesting Lecture in Waterford," *Munster Express*, 4 February 1927.

the sensitive issue of foreign expertise exposing perceived inadequacies in the education of Irish engineers:

If men learned in science and engineering are now coming from foreign lands to help us to “harness the Shannon,” it is well to remember that they are but paying a debt that has long been due, because time was when from these same banks of [the] Shannon, and not very far from the present scene of action, our learned and saintly men went forth from the great University of Clonmacnoise to evangelise and to teach the men of Gaul and Germany, Belgium and Lombardy.⁴⁵

He concluded with a subtle appeal to priests as educators claiming that it was imperative for them to convey a sense of religious heritage to the Irish: “Although our present purpose has to do solely with the industrial development of the river, let us hope that no amount of even the most successful industrialism will ever make us forget these historic and sacred associations.”⁴⁶

Despite the great appeal linking the Shannon’s past with its future in the minds of the clergy, others were more skeptical of emphasizing Ireland’s ancient monastic legacy as the isle of saints and scholars. For example, the Earl of Longford, an Anglican, Irish nationalist, and founder of the Gate Theater, was leery of national legends that might obstruct the development of the Free State. He warned,

We should not then be too ready to believe that the whole of our people are saints and scholars, with the qualities of the Red Branch and the Fianna thrown in. Such beliefs prevent efforts from being made to improve our national position. Likewise there is nothing to be said for the curious idea, which ap[p]eal to some of us, that Ireland is a land of Yahoos, low comedians and incarnate fiends. Let us then cut out the legends and get on with the work of building up the Nation.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Earl of Longford, “What the Nations Believe,” *The Freeman* 1, no. 22 (7 January 1928): 1.

This line of thinking was an obstacle to priests like Philip, who viewed upholding Irish traditions as part of their duties as religious leaders. In this way, priests acted both as preservers of the Shannon River valley's legendary history, but, like the educational readers designed for children to be discussed below, they also wove stories featuring Gaelic traditions alongside ones featuring modern hydroelectric development.

The Shannon Scheme did, in fact, threaten an ancient heritage site, the small Catholic Church called St. Lua's Oratory, named for Saint Molua, the sixth century priest who brought Christianity to Killaloe. Explaining the religious and cultural significance of the structure, a Killaloe correspondent for the *Limerick Leader* described,

This ancient landmark, situated on the Tipperary side, about half a mile from the town of Killaloe, containing the ruins of an old abbey, wherein St. Lua taught and prayed in the sixth century, and from whom the town of Killaloe derives its name, is worthy of antiquarian notice. As the greatest anxiety prevails lest the island should be submerged on the Shannon Electric Scheme becoming operative, we hope to see this island preserved from inundation, with its sacred relic, marking the earliest introduction of the Christian Faith into Ireland. Some time ago the Rev. Father O'Dea, C.C., Killaloe, preached an eloquent and instructive sermon on Friars' Island, on its founder, St. Lua, and on the latter Saint's worthy disciple, St. Flannan, the patron saint of the diocese. The preservation of this holy island is occupying the attention of the best informed amongst us, and its safety is the earnest wish of everyone in the community.⁴⁸

The future of the oratory was not just a local issue. In 1928, "Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty, accompanied by President Cosgrave, Canon O'Kennedy, St. Flannan's, and some German engineers, visited the island, and as a result of their visit, it is stated the oratory will be preserved, either in its present site or if that is rendered impossible, in some convenient spot to which it will be transferred in safety."⁴⁹ When it was decided that the oratory could not be preserved in its current position on the river, Bishop Fogarty

⁴⁸ "Friars' Island—A Holy Spot—Plea for Preservation," *Limerick Leader*, 1 March 1926.

⁴⁹ "A Shannon Shrine—Friar's Island Oratory," *Limerick Leader*, 11 February 1928.

acted on behalf of the community to save the structure: “Apprehension has been now allayed, as, owing to the direct intervention of the Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty, Lord Bishop of Killaloe, this venerable relic of primitive Christian ecclesiastical architecture is to be removed to the high cliff on the Clare side of the Shannon.”⁵⁰ The last mass held on Friar’s Island took place on 21 July 1929, the day before the dam’s official opening ceremony. The *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac* identified this Mass as a notable entry in the “Ecclesiastical Events for the Year 1929,” since the island was to be “submer[ged] by the raising of the level of the Shannon in connection with the electrification scheme. People from all parts of Killaloe attended. The Holy Sacrifice was celebrated by the Very Rev. Canon Clancy, P.P. The nuns from Killaloe Mercy Convent and the local church choir rendered the music of the Mass.”⁵¹ The preservation of this ancient landmark was achieved when it was moved stone by stone to the grounds of the Killaloe Catholic Church, and those priests who fought to prevent its being submerged beneath the waves of the river invested this action with a great deal of religious and cultural importance. The legacy of the oratory, from that moment on, was intertwined with the history of the Shannon Scheme.

While the case of St. Lua’s took on national importance, as evidenced by Cosgrave’s having visited the site, the Shannon Scheme also impacted other, less well-known, ecclesiastical sites. For example, the school and church at Parteen found a fierce advocate in the community’s parish priest, Father John Moloney. The priest wrote regularly to the government on behalf of his parishioners living on the opposite side of

⁵⁰ “Clare Searchlights,” *Limerick Leader*, 5 January 1929.

⁵¹ “Record of the Irish Ecclesiastical Year 1929,” *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1930* (Dublin: James Duffy & Co., Ltd, 1930), 597.

the Shannon canal, whose direct road to Parteen village had been blocked by the tailrace. Patrick McGilligan wrote to the diocesan secretary of Limerick that Moloney had “been agitating for some years past the question of providing some better access to his Church across the tail race of the power house,” and that the priest had “produced long calculations for me to show that I am imposing a journey of about eight thousand miles extra on each child of the present school-going population.”⁵² As McGilligan noted, Moloney had long been a thorn in the side of the government, with one official referring to the priest in a minute sheet as “a difficult man,” adding disparagingly, “I understand [he] has been in ‘a home’ on two occasions.”⁵³ McGilligan sought the intervention of the Bishop of Limerick in order to verify a claim made by Moloney to the minister that “25 to 30 families in his parish have this extra journey of between two and three miles put upon them.”⁵⁴ The secretary responded that the bishop did “not think that the number of persons concerned is so large nor that the resulting inconvenience would be so great as to justify him in supporting a demand for [the erection of a footbridge].”⁵⁵ This matter reached the Department of the President, which was advised that Moloney “is a most difficult man, it would be best that you should say nothing other than the President will consult to the Minister for Industry and Commerce on the matter at an early

⁵² Letter to the Diocesan Secretary of Limerick, Rev. M. Moloney from Patrick McGilligan, 16 March 1931: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS545.

⁵³ Minute Sheet, V.M. MacMahon to Captain Murray, 6 July 1929: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS545.

⁵⁴ Unaddressed letter from H.S. Murray, 10 July 1930: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS545.

⁵⁵ Letter from Rev. M. Moloney to Patrick McGilligan, 11 June 1931: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS545.

opportunity.”⁵⁶ Eventually, local residents were allowed to use a service footpath near the power house in order to commute to and from church on Sundays. For Moloney, making sure that his parishioners could have easy access to the church was of paramount importance, and he was more than willing to badger the government.

In fact, Moloney did not limit his community advocacy to the footbridge; he also petitioned the government about building a new school in Parteen. Several engineers and officials were sent out on separate occasions to interview the priest and discover the nature and merits of his complaints. According to one observer, Moloney worried that if a new school was not “speedily erected, children who used to go to Parteen will have acquired the habit of journeying to Limerick. In consequence he fears or says that he fears the almost entire disappearance of the Parteen School population.”⁵⁷ The priest further hoped to use the old German schoolhouse as a temporary structure and expected the government to offer him compensation for this. When a government official met with him on the matter, “the reverend gentleman launched out into an attack upon the minister and said that the government did not know who were their friends.”⁵⁸ This exchange impacted the interviewer so severely that he stated, “I do not care to criticize any clergyman, but I should prefer not to be instructed to interview Father Moloney on this matter again. I suggest any negotiations should be conducted with the Bishop of

⁵⁶ Letter to M. O’Cathain, Department of the President from H.S. Murray, 26 March 1931: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS545.

⁵⁷ Memo to the Minister for Education from Patrick McGilligan, 23 February 1928: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS545.

⁵⁸ Memo from Arthur Taylor to the Secretary of the Department of Industry and Commerce, 4 March 1931: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA, SS545.

Limerick.”⁵⁹ Despite Moloney’s cantankerous personality and perceived uncooperativeness with the government, his motivation seems to have been pure: to ensure that his school children and parishioners had easy access to religious and educational facilities.

Catholic leaders also advocated on behalf of their communities as intermediaries between those in power and those members of their community who felt powerless. For example, priests did not hesitate to get involved in the labor dispute that hit the Shannon Scheme in 1925. They acted as negotiators between laborers, who demanded higher wages and better living conditions, and the contractors who were, in turn, answerable to the government. While many priests were interested in obtaining a standard of living for the workers that would allow them to support their families, others acknowledged the concerns of the state to keep costs low and get work underway as soon as possible. For example, Fr. Philips, O.F.M., Cork, who was an oft-cited figure on electrification, was sympathetic to the demands of Shannon Scheme workers, but he cautioned, ““Get as many eggs as you can but for heaven’s sake don’t kill the goose.””⁶⁰ Other priests were disturbed by the violence that broke out during the strike and spoke out publicly against it. Fr. Cleary, C.S.S.R., addressed a meeting of the Arch-Confraternity about recent attacks on Germans related to the labor dispute. The priest “strongly deprecated” those acts of violence and warned that if such attacks continued, they “would besmirch the fair name of the city.” The meeting concluded when “the rosary was recited for a speedy and happy termination to the dispute.” Cleary was not only acting in the role of a negotiator,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ “Future of Limerick,” *Limerick Leader*, 21 March 1925.

hoping to reestablish peaceful interactions at the site, but he was also serving as a representative of the city when he claimed that the reputation of Limerick lay in the balance.⁶¹ Priests like Cleary ensured a speedy end to the labor dispute because they offered to mediate conferences between both sides. This was greatly appreciated by the contractors, who wrote a letter to the priest as “an expression of thanks . . . for his efforts to bring about a settlement of the dispute.”⁶² During the construction phase, it was quite common for parish priests to act on behalf of locals who had to deal with complicated legal procedures when their lands were confiscated for the Scheme and compensation was not always delivered in a timely fashion. When the Shannon Scheme was nearing completion, priests also championed the causes of their parishes when they petitioned the government and the ESB for lines to be extended to their communities at fair rates. What all of these examples suggest is that priests were indispensable representatives who stood up for the rights of others because their positions prepared them to square off with the government when necessary. This was not a new role for priests, but rather a continuation of their pre-independence status into the post-revolutionary period. From educating members of their communities about electricity to defending traditions, Catholic priests revealed that they were proactive about the Shannon Scheme and acted in the best interest of their parishioners. But this was only one facet of the priestly commitment to education; many religious leaders played an active role in shaping school curriculums to meet the changing needs of the day.

⁶¹ “Shannon Scheme—Today’s Developments,” *Limerick Leader*, 10 October 1925.

⁶² “The Shannon Scheme Dispute—Question of Conference,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 October 1925.

Part II: Pedagogical Transformations in Irish Education

Since the 1830s, when the United Kingdom set up a system for primary education throughout Ireland, religious denominations took responsibility for schooling. When the Free State government came to power, it maintained oversight of elementary and secondary education, which had previously been the prerogative of boards dominated by members of the clergy. In addition, the Department of Education put some limits on the Church's influence, including imposing financial regulations and stipulations requiring religious orders to hire lay staff members, but for the most part, the Cosgrave government did not interfere much with the existing system. As one contemporary surmised regarding the relationship between the state and religious institutions, "Ireland has a system of education offering many points of interest, the result of a long series of attempts to bring educational policy and administration into harmony with the social and religious conditions of the country."⁶³ However, such an attempt to achieve harmony was not terribly difficult. For example, Whyte has argued that in other nations, "one can say that education has caused more trouble between Church and State than any other single topic. In self-governing Ireland, it has only rarely been an issue."⁶⁴ For the most part, Ministers for Education did not challenge the Church's control over education in the new state, but rather upheld "the merits of the *status quo*."⁶⁵ In fact, E. Brian Titley has argued that in the 1920s, "it became clear that there would be no attempt to reduce the church's role in education. If anything, the power of the clergy in schools was augmented. It was certainly

⁶³George Fletcher, "Education," in *Ireland*, ed. George Fletcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 199.

⁶⁴ Whyte, 21.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

legitimized.”⁶⁶ This type of cooperation between the Church and the Free State government ensured the continued influence of priests in matters related to education. Thus, when the Shannon Scheme revealed weaknesses in the way science was taught to schoolchildren, both religious and political leaders worked together to implement changes that would address the problem, but not revolutionize an educational system steeped in conservative values.

Several scholars, including John Coolahan, Sean Farren, and Susan Parkes have made substantial contributions to the expanding historiography on Irish education, but they have not looked specifically at the ways in which the Shannon Scheme influenced the education system or sparked conversations about pedagogical approaches to the teaching of science.⁶⁷ Titley’s work, which provides a thorough outline of the evolution of technical instruction in the Free State, does not couch this process in terms of how hydroelectric development served as an impetus for change.⁶⁸ The national electrification project underscored the exigency for equipping future generations not only with a basic understanding of electricity, but also with the training necessary to produce Irish engineers and electricians capable of keeping the whole enterprise running. From primers aimed at children to the curriculums designed for technical colleges, the dissemination of the Shannon Scheme reached every level of the education system in the Free State. For educators already petitioning to expand the role of the sciences, the project came at a

⁶⁶ E. Brian Titley, *Church, State, and the Control of Schooling in Ireland 1900-1944* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1983), 124-125.

⁶⁷ For example, see John Coolahan *Irish Education: Its History and Structure* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1981); Sean Farren *The Politics of Irish Education, 1920-1965* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University of Belfast, 1995); and Susan Parkes *Education and National Identity: The Irish Diaspora* (Hull, England: University of Hull, 1997).

⁶⁸ See Titley *Church, State, and the Control of Schooling in Ireland 1900-1944*.

felicitous time and was promoted as the quintessential example for why the Irish system needed to make dramatic changes if it hoped to keep up in the technologically advanced age of modernity. The implementation of these calls for change were often slow and unevenly dispersed, but for the present purposes, the crux of the matter was that the Shannon Scheme provided the necessary circumstances to launch significant modifications in the curricula and methods of teaching science, and it gave legitimacy to earlier efforts to change the system, which could no longer be ignored.

Primary and Secondary Education

Advocates of the sciences touted the advantages of exposing children in primary and secondary school to electricity and the basic principles of electrical engineering. Since few students would be exposed to the more intense study of these subjects in the universities or technical schools, educational reformers argued that all students needed a foundation in the sciences that would prepare them for the modern world. For younger pupils, this meant introducing them to the idea that the Free State harnessed the Shannon in the service of the nation—a lesson in civics. However, more advanced pupils could be expected to learn about the basic applications of electricity, since they would encounter it in their homes and businesses as adults—a lesson in science and economics. Efforts to encourage the study of electricity in schools predated the Shannon Scheme, but they would in turn shape the conversation of reformers throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. For example, in 1924, Edward Connor, writing for the *Irish Electrician*, suggested that “though we cannot all be electricians, there is no reason why the science of electricity should not be more fully developed in colleges and schools.”⁶⁹ Connor stressed the need

⁶⁹Edward Connor, “Electricity as an Educational Factor,” *Irish Electrician* 1, no. 5 (November 1924): 146.

for schools to prepare students for “the practical needs of life,” and proposed that “if schools are to fulfil their mission—to prepare the children for life, there must be more flexibility, more power of adaptation, that they may change with the changing life of the people.” He argued that modern times had transformed electricity from a luxury to a necessity, and no longer was it to be a curiosity presented to college students, but “because electricity has become so potent a factor in the everyday life of us all, we say some knowledge of it should be gained in the schools.” Connor hoped that electricians could work with educators to change science teaching to supplement theory with actual experimentation designed specifically for students.

Like Connor, John J. Nolan believed that educating students about electricity was most effective at an early age. However, Nolan—a professor of experimental physics at University College, Dublin (UCD)—differed from Connor in that he based his opinion on changes he foresaw as a result of the Shannon Scheme.⁷⁰ In a response to an article calling for changes in technical education, the professor argued that

When the maturing of the Shannon brings electricity into the daily life and experience of a multitude of people and leads to its application to a variety of industrial processes, the demand for instruction that will arise should produce reactions not only in the secondary and technical schools, but in all scientific teaching in this country. We need not discuss the higher technical side; it is more to the point at the moment to consider the elementary aspect of the teaching of electricity.⁷¹

For Nolan, it was important to teach every schoolchild about electricity because “the Irish citizen of the future will be taking advantage of the ease of transformation and

⁷⁰ Nolan was responding to William J. Williams’s 1926 article “The Shannon Scheme and the Teaching of Science: A Plea for Realism in Education,” published in *Studies*, which is discussed below.

⁷¹ John J. Nolan, “Comments on the Foregoing article,” in response to W. J. Williams, “The Shannon Scheme and the Teaching of Science: A Plea for Realism in Education,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 15, no. 58 (June 1926): 189.

distribution of alternating current, and it is but right that he should know something of what it is and what it can do.”⁷² Rejecting the heuristic method of instruction in the sciences, which another educator had described as “the fiddling with scientific instruments, the legerdemain with beakers and crucibles that masquerade as science teaching,” Nolan agreed with most other reformers who thought teachers needed to provide lessons that imparted knowledge instead of wasting time by allowing students to make discoveries on their own through experimentation.⁷³ This was the most consistent and extensive call for reform in the teaching of science across the board in response to the construction of the Shannon Scheme.

While reforms were slow to be implemented and often originated in the university system, where those who specialized in pedagogical approaches pondered such issues, this is not to say that the hydroelectric project did not have an immediate impact on what children learned in school. No doubt the Scheme would have been a buzzword in many households, particularly near the construction site, and teachers saw value in introducing hydroelectricity as part of the national story to future citizens. Given the available evidence, it would not be feasible to trace precisely how teachers talked about the hydroelectric project with their students, or whether they emphasized science over civic responsibilities, but a few primers do exist that shed light on how book publishers, at least, envisioned the project as part of the new curriculum. As early as 1930, the Shannon Scheme appeared in the *St. Brendan's Readers Preparatory Book* for young schoolchildren. According to the publishers, St. Brendan was:

⁷² Ibid, 190.

⁷³ W. J. Williams, “The Shannon Scheme and the Teaching of Science: A Plea for Realism in Education,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 15, no. 58 (June 1926): 180.

Beloved of Irish boys and girls: the great example of the many-sided genius of Erin: a world-figure of surpassing note. Saint and scholar, traveler and preacher, patriot and founder of the schools, he is the very pattern of godliness, united with the spirit of enterprise and activity that fires the imagination of the young.⁷⁴

This description paralleled the efforts described above made by priests in the 1920s to fuse spiritual and scholastic duties in the cultivation of the national electrification project. The *Preparatory Book's* chapter on "The Lordly Shannon," was also representative of clerical efforts to blend lessons on the Shannon's industrial future with its historic and sacred past. It informed young pupils that

Battles have been fought on its banks; churches and schools have overlooked the gleaming waters; it has been crossed by armies in the hour of victory and in the hour of defeat; pilgrims have sailed up its waters to visit the shrines on its many lake-islands; poets have been inspired by the beauty of its scenery; fishermen and fowlers have lived on the wild life which finds refuge there.⁷⁵

To further emphasize the River Shannon's spiritual importance, the primer retold the story of the river's origins from Gaelic folklore. The legend depicted a well in Ossory, where salmon lived and feasted on falling berries from a rowan tree. According to the tale, fishermen who were lucky enough to catch one of these "salmon of knowledge," were "gifted with the knowledge of all things." However, a local woman, Sionan, refused to believe the warning that all women who ate these fish died, and desirous of knowledge herself, ate one of the salmon. After experiencing "the joy she felt from the light of new knowledge that filled her mind," the well immediately burst and she was swept away by the water and drowned. The legend explained that the mighty river that formed when the

⁷⁴ See the inside cover of *The St. Brendan Readers: Preparatory Book* (Dublin: Brown and Nolan, Ltd, 1930).

⁷⁵ "The Lordly Shannon," in *The St. Brendan Readers: Preparatory Book* (Dublin: Brown and Nolan, Ltd, 1930), 56.

well burst was named after Sionan.⁷⁶ This origin myth put an interesting twist on the story of Adam and Eve, whereby it was acceptable for men to seek knowledge, but the pursuit of it would mean certain death for women. The inclusion of this story as a part of river's history is indicative of the conservative climate of the 1920s regarding women's education in Ireland.⁷⁷

Juxtaposing the mythic past with the technological present, the next chapter of the primer was titled "The New Irish Giant of the Electric Age," and likened the magic of Lady Sionan's story to the science of the Shannon Scheme. It explained in simple terms how "the giant strength of the Shannon waters has been curbed by man and made to render services of priceless value."⁷⁸ Complete with a drawing of a mother serving a meal cooked on an electric stove to her children in a dining room lit by an electric lamp, the chapter depicted the many practical uses of electricity in the home and in factories. The tone of this piece for young children was that there was much to be hopeful about since, "the lordly Shannon, having given his mind to industry, so to speak, is about to shower wealth on Ireland."⁷⁹ But assuming that these young readers might not be amused by or prepared to grasp the scientific principles of electricity, the chapter resorted to the rhetoric of "marvels and magic which every Irish child can see and use to-day; for indeed the baby can turn on the switch that bids the electric giant set about his work."⁸⁰ Utilizing

⁷⁶ Ibid, 58-59.

⁷⁷ As the chapter on women will discuss, education for women in light of the Shannon Scheme was largely directed towards domestic science courses, though the business skills of some women were sought out by the ESB in the 1930s to promote electricity.

⁷⁸ "The New Irish Giant of the Electric Age," in *The St. Brendan Readers*, 61.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 63.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

the magic, giants, and great riches found in fairytales, those producing the primers sought age-appropriate themes in school texts to promote electricity to the next generation.

However, by 1933, the *Irish World Readers: Middle Book*, which was also published by Browne and Nolan, had dropped the chapter on the Shannon Scheme, featuring only the origin myth in its history of the river.⁸¹ It is unclear whether this decision was politically motivated (Fianna Fáil formed its first government in 1932), or if the publishers assumed specifics about the dam would be covered in other texts dedicated to the sciences.

In addition to texts that were available to children in national schools, evidence also exists that indicates the Shannon Scheme became the focus of other lessons and projects designed for young people. In 1929, when Cosgrave and his wife toured the Artane Industrial School, a Christian Brother's School established in 1870, the interconnectedness of politics, religion, and education was particularly evident. According to the *Irish Catholic*, "on their arrival the school band played the 'National Anthem,' and the distinguished visitors were received by Very Rev. Bro. Hennessy, Superior-General; Rev. Bro. Ryan, manager of the institution; Rev. Bro. Mullen, an old friend of Mr. Cosgrave; and Rev. Bro. Strahan." The Cosgraves "were shown over the workrooms and workshops [and] evinced great interest in the boys' work and in the electric power station and a very perfect model of the Shannon power scheme constructed in the school."⁸² This description implied that the boys at the industrial school participated in a thorough study of the project and would have been familiar with a variety of topics related to the dam, including its construction, as well as the more

⁸¹ *The Irish World Readers: Middle Book* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, Ltd., 1933), 75-77.

⁸² "President Cosgrave at Artane," *Irish Catholic*, 12 January 1929.

complex functions involved with the transmission of electricity. Their pride in displaying the project to the president and first lady of the Free State was indicative of the project's significance in the school and suggests that school officials assumed their distinguished guests would be impressed by a model of one of the most important undertakings in Cosgrave's tenure.

Irish schoolchildren also participated in official school trips to the construction site. For example, in the fall of 1928, the *Limerick Leader* mentioned,

The Shannon Power Works were visited yesterday by students from three secondary schools. In the morning, boys from Belvedere College, Dublin, and Presentation College, Bray, were shown over the works by Messrs. J. Creagh and P. McNamara, Official Guide Bureau, and in the evening, Mr. L. J. Joye conducted the students of St. Mary's College, Dundalk over the project.⁸³

Not only was the dam a popular destination for school field trips during the construction phase, but it has continued to be an important site to visit for Irish school children.

Although the massive canals have since been filled with water, school tours make up the majority of visitors to the power station at Ardnacrusha today. Just as students in the 1920s were impressed by the magnitude of the work and were encouraged to view the project as a national accomplishment, the point of school field trips today remains the same, but with an added emphasis on the largely forgotten glory days of the dam, which now supplies only 2% of Ireland's electrical needs.⁸⁴

While Irish students were undoubtedly exposed to information about the Shannon Scheme, it is a different question entirely as to what they actually learned about the project. Despite some contemporary commentators describing Ardnacrusha as "one of the

⁸³ "Students Visit the Scheme," *Limerick Leader*, 3 November 1928.

⁸⁴ "Ardnacrusha," ESB website, accessed 12 June 2013, <http://www.esb.ie/main/about-esb/ardnacrusha.jsp>.

most important spots in Ireland to-day,” it would appear that this message was not internalized by Irish youth.⁸⁵ In 1929, the *Limerick Leader* poked fun at a group of students taking an examination in Dublin for a library position. According to the paper, “One of the questions on the general information paper was: ‘Where is Ardnacrusha? One youth said it was in Russia, and others placed it anywhere and everywhere, except Ireland! One lad said it was ‘at the centre of power’—but whether on this or some other planet he did not even attempt to guess.”⁸⁶ Quoting another regrettable examination experience reported in the *Irish Times*, the *Leader* featured the story of a young man whose civil service examination gave rise to “a series of howlers that showed the candidate was not lacking in effort, if rather vague in his knowledge of the geography of the country.” The paper explained: “With a calm offhandedness, designed, no doubt to impress the examiners, he described Limerick as ‘bounded by a new scheme called the Shannon Scheme, which aims to spread the Shannon throughout Ireland.’”⁸⁷ These unfortunate errors made by students indicated that being wrong was what made their answers newsworthy and humorous to both the Dublin and Limerick presses. The expectation here was that the boys would answer the questions correctly based on what they had been taught in school—the chances of them being praised by a newspaper for getting the answers right were slim. While the student mentioned in the second example may have simply mistaken “Shannon” for “electricity,” the geographical confusion displayed in the first example is indicative of a more serious gap in the students’

⁸⁵ “Lighter Side of Ardnacrusha,” *Clare Champion*, 28 January 1928.

⁸⁶ “Where is Ardnacrusha?” *Limerick Leader* 17 April 1929.

⁸⁷ “A ‘Howler’ on the Shannon,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 October 1929.

knowledge base, though the pervasiveness of this ignorance would be difficult to ascertain.

Irish education was similarly the butt of the joke in a fictional story created by a special contributor to the *Limerick Leader*. According to the tale, “A certain farmer living near the excavations vaguely termed the Shannon Scheme is the possessor of a son age ten, who by a strange dispensation of providence suffers from the uncommon malady known to the vulgar as ‘slingeing’ from school.” Employing satire to criticize the failures of compulsory education in Ireland that intended “to make us a more enlightened people,” the writer set the scene in which two local constables (known in the Free State as the Civic Guards or Garda Siochána) ventured out to find the farmer’s son and correct his bad behavior. Upon spotting a small figure in white clothing, which the boy was said to wear, the Guards enlisted the help of “a fat German foreman,” to round up the child as they “pounce on their unsuspecting victim like a pair of Garryowen forwards in a Munster Senior League final.” After a scuffle, the Guards realized that they had in their custody “a small figure swearing voluble in Irish and attired in a bawneen, and ye Gods, whiskers! Anticlimax! Hurrah! For the Gaeltacht and Irish homespun.” The writer summed up the moral of the story: “Thus fittingly, and in a manner keeping with the warlike qualities of the race, did compulsory education come to the Shannon Scheme, and here endeth the tale of the farmer’s son, who liketh not the village dominie.”⁸⁸ Employing the Scheme as a backdrop to mock the police force, Irish education, and Gaelic culture, the writer also incorporated the church into his tale as the “village dominie,” meaning cleric or schoolmaster, which represented the boy’s aversion to school. This writer may

⁸⁸ “Electric Sparks—Flashes from the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 29 January 1927.

well have been responding to the barrage of stories advocating for reforms in the educational system which used the Shannon Scheme as justification for an urgent restructuring of the curriculum.

Demands to Reform Technical Education

Technical education in Ireland had been established in 1899 under the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, which was responsible for setting up technical schools that were administered by local committees. When the Free State's Department of Education took over technical instruction, it followed its general policy towards educational reform and did not seek to alter the system in significant ways. Unlike the rest of the educational system in Ireland, technical schools were the only ones controlled by lay authorities and not religious denominations. Although this reality had the potential to pit the Church against the government in its efforts to maintain its undeniable authority on educational issues, this was not the case for two main reasons. First, on a philosophical level, the Church did not view technical education as a threat to its efforts to educate the higher echelons of Catholic society: many students who attended technical schools sought agricultural instruction, which religious leaders did not interpret as a challenge to the secondary system it controlled. The *Limerick Leader* defined technical education as “pertaining to trades, manufactures, commerce and other industrial pursuits (including the occupations of girls and women carried on in the workshops or connected with the household),” but also addressed “education in the principles of science and art applicable to such pursuits and in subjects being thereon or related thereto and also includes physical training.”⁸⁹ Second, while jurisdiction over technical education was

⁸⁹ A New Phase—In Irish Education,” *Limerick Leader*, 26 July 1930.

formally transferred to the Department of Education and local technical instruction committees through legislation in 1924 and 1930, in practice, priests exercised influence over the schools through their involvement with the local committees. For example, Whyte has argued that the “experience of technical education had shown that, whatever the letter of the law might say, clerical leadership was in practice accepted here as in other educational fields.”⁹⁰ Echoing this point, Titley has shown that “the vocational system was not to be as secular and neutral as the legislation establishing it seemed to suggest,” and that clerical influence in these schools was obvious on many fronts, including the fact that members of the clergy dominated local technical instruction committees.⁹¹

Indeed, Catholic priests, in their capacities as educators, worked with laypersons as administrators to dictate the curriculum for technical institutes. Calls for reforms came from both groups. Technical education committees dealt with the merits of these requests to restructure the curriculum so that Irish students would be prepared for the types of employment that were expected to result from the Shannon Scheme. Newspapers and other periodicals also facilitated this culture of activism by publishing these calls for reform and echoing their messages in editorials and articles on the status of technical education in the Free State. Religious leaders not only participated in these conversations, but they also served on boards that were responsible for implementing the changes requested. For example, in 1926, Bishop Keane nominated Rev. Michael Hannan of St.

⁹⁰ Whyte, 38.

⁹¹ Titley, 121.

Michael's Parish to replace Rev. James Carroll, parish priest of Kilfinane, on the Municipal Technical Education Committee.⁹²

Efforts to incorporate science and the study of electricity into Irish education predated the Shannon Scheme, but they took on greater prominence when the project commenced and were particularly focused on technical schools. These types of institutions offered specialized training after students completed the necessary prerequisites at the primary and secondary levels. In 1923, a Jesuit and Professor of Education at University College, Dublin, Timothy Corcoran, reviewed science education in the Free State prior to the commencement of the Shannon Scheme. He explained that the Commission on the Curriculum of Secondary Education in Ireland had submitted its proposals to the Ministry of Education and that the Minister, Eoin MacNeill, planned to put them into place for the 1924-1925 school year. According to Corcoran, "the most important secular issue in the whole curriculum of secondary studies in Ireland, next to the Irish Language itself, is the position to be granted to the sciences as a part of general education."⁹³ Corcoran was an oft-cited writer on educational issues, even though, as in the case of the Irish language, the scope of the subject matter could be beyond his particular expertise. Titley has argued that "Corcoran championed an extremely conservative Catholic view of education" and "was openly hostile to the 'modern' in education."⁹⁴ Nevertheless, his opinion was valued and respected by the Irish community

⁹² "Technical Institute," *Limerick Leader*, 1 January 1927.

⁹³ T. Corcoran, "The Place of the Sciences in General Education," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 12, no. 47 (Sept. 1923): 406.

⁹⁴ Titley, 94, 96.

despite the fact that his understandings of the role of science in education were based on tradition and past teachings.

McGilligan also commented on the lack of technical education in Ireland when he recalled a conversation with the European experts asked to evaluate Siemens' proposals. He told the Dáil that after a lengthy conversation with one of them about the report that formed the initial draft of the White Paper, he was shocked by how short and simple the report was; in fact, he felt "that they were writing for a set of children electrically."⁹⁵ He described that "during that five hours' [sic] controversy that I had with them, there was nothing more marked than their good humour and their patience with me. I think I must have appeared as typifying to them the childishness of the Irish race with regard to electricity." McGilligan, who many considered a leading expert on the topic since he was able to discuss details of the proposal at length without notes, told the experts that there were things he did not understand in their assessment, and "it would be necessary that the explanations should be put in the report." To this, McGilligan claimed that "once or twice the remark was made to me: 'That is in the electrical primers in any country.' I said: 'Yes, but there are no electrical primers here.' I added that this report would be the foundation, the beginning, for the people of an electrical education." McGilligan took responsibility for the inclusion of so much technical detail in the final report and claimed that this "has confused some people" and contributed to unwarranted criticism of the entire project.⁹⁶ McGilligan's admission to the Dáil about the state of technical education, particularly the Irish people's understanding of electrical matters indicated that, at least in

⁹⁵Patrick McGilligan, "Dáil in Committee, Shannon Electricity Bill, 1925, Second Stage," Dáil Éireann Debates, vol. 11, 8 May 1925.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

his mind, the Shannon Scheme marked a significant moment of change because ignorance about this topic was all too apparent as Irishmen, including himself, attempted to come to grips with Siemens's plan and the experts' evaluation of that proposal.

The state of technical education in Ireland was also the focus of F. McNamara's article published in the *Irish Statesman* and reprinted by the *Limerick Leader* in 1925. McNamara, who had worked at the Technical Institute of Limerick before transferring to a position as vice principal of the County Wicklow Technical Committee, was acquainted with the educational system in Ireland and qualified to write on the topic. He stressed,

Those who believe that a suitable system of technical education is vital to the development of the Free State have reason to be disappointed at certain symptoms that have developed in some of the technical instruction committees and in the central educational authorities. Most of those who have for many years been engaged in the work of technical education were hopeful that, under a home government, keen on promoting the industrial development of the state, technical education would receive an impetus that would bring it into its proper position in the educational scheme. This hope, unfortunately, remains deferred.⁹⁷

McNamara attributed this laxity to a sense of apathy among the technical instruction committees and a convoluted central organization. For example, he was disappointed by the vague governing system: "where exactly the authority rests at present, whether with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education, the Technical Instruction Branch or the Committee of the Civil Service Commission on appointments, or how authority is apportioned between those, nobody seems to know." The remedy for this disorganization, according to McNamara, was that "local authorities must be educated as to the true import of technical education." Additionally, he suggested that "the government ought to place definitely the responsibility for technical education on some central unit that would

⁹⁷ "Public Education—Impressive Article by Limerickman," *Limerick Leader*, 26 September 1925.

have real power and could act with reasonable independence.” If these steps were not taken, McNamara forewarned that “the people of the Free State will not fit themselves for their share in the world’s work—well, some other people will do it instead, and our state—glorious ideals notwithstanding, will become a ‘one-horse show.’” To McNamara, Ireland would remain an agricultural country, and it did not matter if the Cumann na nGaedheal government showed an interest in industrial development if it failed to equip young people with the skills necessary for industrial jobs. Finally, he brushed aside critics who maintained that technical education was too materialistic and took away from cultural education: “Technical education looked at thus is no soul-destroying thing, but rather helps to divert it from the evil of concentrating entirely on abstractions, with disastrous results.”⁹⁸

The assistant secretary of the Technical Instruction Department, George Fletcher, delivered a paper on “Technical Education—Some Avenues of Progress” in 1926 and pointed to the hydroelectric project as the driving force behind educational reforms. Fletcher stated, “The Shannon Scheme, which was destined to have a profound influence on their industrial life, threw an immense responsibility and conferred a great opportunity on all engaged in the work of technical education.”⁹⁹ Like other educators in the field, he emphasized the importance of organizing apprenticeship programs, but he was more realistic than most when he claimed, “It must not be supposed that an army of electrical engineers would be required when the Shannon Scheme came to fruition. But the success of the scheme would involve a great demand for electrical power and the growth of

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ “Roads to Progress—Mr. Fletcher’s Paper,” *Irish Independent*, 23 June 1926.

existing and the introduction of new industries requiring cheap power.” He essentially explained that the time had passed for Irish engineers in the construction of the Shannon Scheme—it was too late to train them for the work already being done by the Germans—but that there was still time to plan for the types of industries demanding electricity that would be developed after the project’s completion. Therefore, Fletcher argued, “the larger urban schools had a new aim, and should immediately seek to develop courses of study in those branches of science which bore especially on such industries.” He stressed that “where they had successful industries they also found a highly developed system of technical education,” but the failure of technical education to prepare its students for new challenges would have devastating effects. For example, Fletcher warned, “To withhold instruction in the scientific principles underlying their trade would be to deprive them of the opportunity of qualifying themselves for such higher posts, and would constitute a shameful disregard of their interests and retard industrial progress.”¹⁰⁰

The most thorough and well-developed reconsideration of the study of science and technology came not from a priest, but a lecturer in education at the University College, Dublin. William J. Williams was active in educational reform throughout his career, serving on numerous commissions and boards to reorganize Irish education, including the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland. In 1926, he published an article entitled “The Shannon Scheme and the Teaching of Science: A Plea for Realism in Education” in *Studies*, a journal dedicated to exploring the intersections of culture and politics. He argued that the goals of the project could not “be realised unless the people as a whole have a clear understanding of the value of science in modern industrial progress,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

and, above all, unless the generation that is growing up in our schools is equipped with the technical skill and knowledge necessary to fit it to do the work that will be open to it when the Shannon Scheme has reached its development.”¹⁰¹ According to Williams, “these conditions can be fulfilled only by a wide extension of instruction in science, especially as related to electricity in its industrial applications.”¹⁰² He was aware of the importance of propaganda in promoting the project and proposed the “best mode of propaganda is by way of instruction,” and claimed that the people of Ireland, “who appreciate the importance of science in modern life, and possess the technical knowledge and skill enabling them to utilise it, will readily welcome the instrument that the Shannon Scheme proposes to put in their hands.”¹⁰³

Along with experts in the field, the press commented on the state of technical education in the Free State. In the fall of 1926, the *Catholic Bulletin* called attention to “The Reconstruction of Our Technical Schools,” noting a specific connection between Catholic education and industrial education. Speaking of the latter, the religious journal acknowledged that “Ireland does want that skill. She has brains in plenty, Papist brains. Even now there is an abundance of well-developed skill among the Catholic young men and young women of Ireland. It needs the technical combination of scientific skill and of industrial organization. It needs no more than that.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ W. J. Williams, “The Shannon Scheme and the Teaching of Science: A Pleas for Realism in Education,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 15, no. 58 (June 1926): 177.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ “The Reconstruction of Our Technical Schools, *Catholic Bulletin* 16, no. 10 (October 1926): 995.

The *Kildare Observer* also recognized the dual nature of the educational campaign designed to promote the Shannon Scheme. In the spring of 1928, the paper stated “that a good deal of propaganda work will be undertaken in the coming months with a view to instructing the public in the use of electricity for lighting, heating and power.” But like the *Clare Champion*, the *Observer* pointed out the practical need that the public be informed about electricity, while also suggesting that “it would be a good idea if the technical education classes gave instruction in electrical engineering to fit young men for the many positions that will have to be filled for the carrying on of this great scheme.”¹⁰⁵

Petitioning for change in technical education did not always manifest itself in optimistic language and some resorted to chastising the system when it fell short of expectations. For example, another journalist for the *Clare Champion* brooded over an ESB advertisement asking, “Are you prepared for Shannon Electricity?” The newspaper expressed frustration with the slow progress being made to alter the curriculum in local schools when it offered, “May we suggest that this question might usefully be addressed to the Department of Technical Education? It seems curious that the technical education programme in the Co. Clare takes no cognisance of the fact that Ardnacrusha, from which the cheap power, light and heat will radiate, is in this county.”¹⁰⁶ While it might be humorous when students did not know the precise location of the dam, it was no laughing matter that the local committee ignored this technological resource when the training of adults for jobs was on the line. The *Clare Champion* may have been less optimistic about

¹⁰⁵ “Electricity Scheme Nearing Completion,” *Kildare Observer*, 10 March 1928.

¹⁰⁶ “Notes and Comments,” *Clare Champion*, 25 August 1928.

the state of technical education and was anxious that the Free State might miss its opportunity to use the Shannon Scheme as impetus for change in the field of technical education. In a 1929 piece, the paper argued that

With one of the greatest electrical development schemes in the world approaching completion in our midst, it is nothing short of a scandal that there is not a single course in elementary electricity for our youth. If the Shannon Scheme were in full blast to-morrow, how many young men could fix up the simplest electrical appliance? Tradesmen, skilled workers of all sorts, and intelligent agriculturists, are the real want of this community, and their interests should have first call on the public purse where technical education is concerned.¹⁰⁷

Many supporters of the hydroelectric project expressed optimism about the ways in which educational reform could be improved for future generations. One writer for the *Limerick Leader* eagerly looked to the possibilities of “the great scheme for the development of water-power from the Shannon and its applications to the electrification of the industries of the entire Saorstát.”¹⁰⁸ Anticipating a remarkable transformation that would, he claimed, restore Limerick to its former greatness, the writer took an additional leap by suggesting that “many other developments must take place as a result of this awakening, and in the revival of our trade and prosperity we will have urgent need of citizens whose minds are trained to apply the fruits of economic study to the problems that the coming developments foreshadow.” Praising the work being done by the “Municipal School of Commerce, where the mental scaffolding may be erected for the building up of a structure of economic thought in our midst,” the journalist also pointed to the City Technical Institute as an educational institution that could be revamped in the light of the Shannon Scheme. Acknowledging that the course on economics offered by

¹⁰⁷ “Notes & Comments,” *Clare Champion*, 27 July 1929.

¹⁰⁸ “A New Spirit,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 March 1925.

the CTI “has already done a great deal of good,” the writer stated that “it is to be hoped that it will be developed still further and be much better attended henceforth than it has been up to this.” In order to make the most of the advantages offered to Limerick by the project, the journalist concluded that a grounding in economics would be “indispensable to any person who wishes to be in a position to offer constructive and useful suggestions for the industrial and commercial advancement of the nation.”¹⁰⁹ Another journalist at the paper echoed these themes about the dam’s impact on local education by touting,

A splendid opportunity exists in Limerick at present for getting the sound training we refer to, and in view of the great industrial prospects the Shannon Scheme is certain to open up for this centre it is to be hoped it will be very largely availed of. The City Technical Institute affords facilities that have been by no means as fully appreciated so far as they should be. Enrollment for the coming session will be on Wednesday next, 8th inst., and we sincerely trust that the number of students who will join will not only constitute a record but will double as it should, the highest roll for any past session.¹¹⁰

The emphasis on a “sound” education implied that the current system needed to be updated to meet current demands. This was also the theme stressed by yet another *Limerick Leader* reporter who predicted that the Shannon Scheme “should lead to a big industrial revival, and that will provide employment for thousands of young men and women with technical training and sound practical education.”¹¹¹ Women’s education will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, but it is important to note here that this writer’s casual reference to the technical education of women, which was generally reserved for the domestic sciences, as a means to obtain employment was unusual in the context of this period.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “Things that Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 4 September 1926.

¹¹¹ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 9 March 1929.

The *Connacht Tribune* also called for reforms that were outlined by priests and educators who demanded a more organized educational system at the national level. One writer for the paper sympathized with others who believed that “if the state is to secure the much-needed national development in which the Shannon electricity scheme and other enterprises will form a prominent part, it is of paramount importance that there should be persons of the highest scientific and technological qualifications to fill ‘key positions.’”¹¹² Echoing many priests and other journalists, the focus here on preparing the Irish for future jobs seemed to be at the heart of calls for reform. It would have been futile to focus on preparing the present generation for something like the Shannon Scheme, since it was already underway. The lesson these advocates took from being unprepared initially for the hydroelectric undertaking was that the Free State needed to make drastic changes in its educational policies if it was to ride the momentum of the project into the future and encourage industrial development. For the writer with the *Connacht Tribune*, this meant offering “courses designed to produce persons to fill ‘key’ positions,” in the universities, but if this was not feasible, then the writer proposed that it would “be necessary to have in the Saorstát a higher technological institute.”¹¹³ The financial cost of maintaining such programs, which would have been a particularly salient issue in the conservative fiscal environment of the 1920s, was also justified by this journalist who argued “that such expenditure is necessary for the raising of the level of education of the people and for the development of trade and industry in the country.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² “Shannon Scheme Potentialities,” *Connacht Tribune*, 3 March 1928.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Advising that these reforms needed to take place slowly and on a limited scale in order to assess progress before applying new techniques nationally, the *Connacht Tribune* imitated Cumann na nGaedheal's stereotypical strategy of relying on bureaucratic structures, which just as frequently delayed well-intentioned reforms.

The government responded to these calls for change from educators and journalists by establishing the Technical Education Commission in 1926 and the recommendations made by this committee informed the Vocational Education Act of 1930. According to the *Limerick Leader*, this commission was “to enquire into and advise upon the system of technical education in Saorstát Eireann in relation to the requirements of trade and industry.”¹¹⁵ It held 75 meetings and heard evidence at 47 of those meetings on a variety of issues affecting technical education in Ireland, including apprenticeships and prior training.¹¹⁶ For example, J. A. Jones, an automobile engineer, testified to the committee that “if the old methods are adhered to, the Shannon scheme will be a pure waste of good money.”¹¹⁷ In sharp contrast to this perspective, Fr. Corcoran, whose views on pedagogy have been described as “strictly traditional,” also addressed the committee.¹¹⁸ As someone who praised thinkers “who acknowledged the essential unity of science and religion,” Corcoran recommended a more conservative curriculum that would prepare students for formal technical education after age 16.¹¹⁹ Despite his tendency to favor tradition over modernity, Corcoran “felt that there was a

¹¹⁵ “Technical Congress,” *Limerick Leader*, 6 June 1928.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ “Apprenticeships—Relation to Technical Education,” *Irish Independent*, 30 November 1926.

¹¹⁸ Titley, 99.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

great need for technical training, especially in electricity and agriculture.”¹²⁰ Keeping with the tradition in Ireland to separate Catholic and Protestant education, he also suggested that “general and technical education in Ireland should not be ‘mixed’ at the primary stage.”¹²¹ In his own way, Corcoran justified the study of modern subjects, like electricity, by grounding the ways in which they would be taught in tradition. Another priest, Rev. Richard McCarthy of Aughadown, Skibbereen, echoed Corcoran’s message about the lack of preparation students received and the urgent need for continuation schools. McCarthy argued, “If this country was ever going to develop from an industrial point of view, technical education must be taken in hand far more seriously than it had been.”¹²² Repeating the point made by so many others—that if education did not prepare the future generation for jobs in new industries, then the project would ultimately be a failure—McCarthy pointed to the many industries that were expected to spring up and “it was on that assumption that he pleaded for the extension of continuity in education. If they had not hands ready to work the various industries that they were hoping would arise, then they must fall back on the industrially-trained from other countries.” McCarthy also addressed emigration, when he speculated, “if they were going to stop emigration they must have, in addition to agriculture, industrial work in the towns and cities.” As discussed above in Chapter 1, emigration was an important political and social theme in Ireland, and it was common for priests to concern themselves with the

¹²⁰ Ibid, 120.

¹²¹ Ibid, 99.

¹²² “Technical Congress,” *Limerick Leader*, 6 June 1928.

Diaspora because they were only too aware that the Free State was losing its most able and educated to other nations for want of work.

There was a sense of hope that these calls for reform from priests, educators, and concerned members of the community would result in an improved educational experience for students, meaning that they would be qualified for jobs in electrical and industrial development. According to J. J. O’Byrne of the Wexford County Committee of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, “with proper rural electrification, through the Shannon Scheme, engineering courses will give greatly enhanced value, and will be capable of considerable development.”¹²³ On a similar note, when P. V. Twomey, principal of the City Technical Institute in Limerick, was asked by a representative “if he had primarily the Shannon Electrification Scheme in view when he launched his scheme for extra classes in electric training,” the educator responded “that of course he had that in view, as he considered that a large number of men would be required in the Limerick district.”¹²⁴ While these instructors certainly saw the value in altering their courses to meet current and future demands, widespread change of the system required much more sweeping organization and standardization of policies. This meant that the effects of the Shannon Scheme on technical education as a whole, both in universities and at technical institutes, were not felt as immediately as some reformers would have liked, but the momentum towards change was evident as a result of the movement.

¹²³ “Mechanical Farming—What Wexford is Doing,” *Clare Champion*, 12 February 1927.

¹²⁴ “Chance for Boys—Electrical Engineering as a Career—Changed System Under Shannon Power,” *Limerick Leader*, 1 August 1928.

Irish Engineers and the Shannon Scheme

In hiring German engineers for most of the positions on the Shannon Scheme, the government and Siemens indirectly questioned the qualifications of Irish engineers and the standards of their profession. This was a particularly sensitive issue and one that received a good deal of attention in the Dáil and Seanad. For example, Senator O’Farrell stated that

Arguments in favour of giving a task of that magnitude to a firm of experts like Siemens-Schuckert rather than to engineers who had no experience, who are mere babies in a matter of this kind, were obvious and need no recital in an average assembly. As Senator Gogarty stated, our engineers have had no experience in such matters, and it would be the height of absurdity, and unfair to them and to the State, to give them the task that has been entrusted to the great German firm.¹²⁵

Even though members of the engineering community believed it was their duty to question the German proposal, project supporters took their stance to be a sign that Irish engineers were critics of the project because they “feel or seem to feel that they have been slighted as they have not been consulted in connection with or given charge of it.”¹²⁶ In response to such sentiments, the *Limerick Leader* frankly admitted that “an enterprise of such magnitude and such moment must obviously be entrusted for plan and execution to the most skilled and expert hands obtainable, and it is really no slur on Irish engineers to point out that they have no experience of such matters to justify any pique on their part at being passed over for engineers who have specialised in that particular sort of work.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ John Thomas O’Farrell, “County Boards of Health Accounts Order, 1924. The Shannon Scheme—Motion by Sir John Griffith,” Seanad Éireann Debates, 31 March 1925.

¹²⁶ “In Full Cry,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 March 1925.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

Despite this attempt to avoid offending Irish engineers, the journalist lost all ground on that front when referring to these professionals as “yappers . . . in full cry against it.” Claiming that any criticism from engineers within Ireland was not justified since the project had been approved by international experts whose opinions “one would naturally think, ought [to] carry much greater weight than the criticism of men who have neither the training nor experience to fit them for undertaking work of the kind and on which they talk and write so cocksuredly.”¹²⁸ The *Catholic Bulletin* lumped criticism by Irish engineers with those from Britain when it noted that

the proposals of a German firm for the hydro-electric exploitation of the River Shannon have caused much anxiety in England and Ireland. The engineers of both countries are deeply grieved because the contract has not been placed with them. Our ideas on the subject amount to this: Anglo-Irish history has demonstrated over and over again that in industrial and political affairs neither the people of England or Ireland can be trusted. England’s enactments against Irish trade rule her people out of contracts for all time, while Irishmen’s duplicity, trickery, and dishonesty have engendered a state of suspicion that is positively tragic.¹²⁹

Irish engineers were also reproached in the poem, “The Great Shannon Scheme,” by Maolmora, which was published in 1925 by the *Limerick Leader*. According to the poem:

Mechanics are strange to the plain, working man,
And keep all trades secrets close hid while he can.
I don’t like the ways of our home engineers,
Throwing mud at the heads of their clever compeers,
There’s a hullabaloo [sic] in some parts of the land
Fanned into a blaze as we ‘quite understand,’
‘Tis an ill wind that doesn’t blow good, as they say,
The tide may yet flow to success down our way.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Kevin, “Shannon Scheme,” *Catholic Bulletin* 15, no. 5 (May 1925): 419.

¹³⁰ Maolmora, “The Great Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 18 April 1925.

It was widely assumed by promoters that any Irish engineer who spoke out against the Scheme was simply jealous that he had not thought of it first. Though some were careful to make a distinction between a lack of work available in Ireland, which would have prepared engineers for a project of such magnitude, others attacked the education and qualifications of natives in the profession more freely. Senator O'Farrell supposed that Irish engineers did not have anything positive to say about the scheme due to professional jealousies, but

As a layman, I prefer to follow the considered advice given after prolonged scientific investigation by the representatives of the engineering profession in Germany, whose ability and brilliance has made Germany one of the greatest economic forces in the modern world. I do not think we can be so very far wrong in taking their advice as against the advice of Irish engineers who have not explored the position at all in the same way, and who have never had the experience of their continental colleagues.¹³¹

In some circles, engineers who quibbled with certain aspects of the proposal were castigated as unpatriotic and unwilling to learn from their more advanced German counterparts.

However, the Irish engineering community also contributed much needed support for the project, and many valued it for the future emphasis it would place on their profession. For example, professors responsible for educating the next generation of Irish engineers participated in tours with their students, in much the same way that national school teachers led school children to the dam site. While the content of these tours would have been decidedly different for these groups, their purpose as educational opportunities to be introduced to the dam and admire its magnitude was a shared

¹³¹ John Thomas O'Farrell, "County Boards of Health Accounts Order, 1924. The Shannon Scheme—Motion by Sir John Griffith," Seanad Éireann Debates, 31 March 1925.

experience. In 1926, several professors from University College, Dublin toured the works at Ardnacrusha. The *Limerick Leader*, which kept a tally of notable visitors to the site reported,

These distinguished visitors included Professor Purcell, Professor of Engineering; Professor Seymour, Professor of Geology; and Mr. Lewis, Lecturer in Engineering at the College. On the previous day the widespread interest in the scheme was evidenced by a visit from professors and students of Galway University. These latter included Professor Griffith, Professor of Electrical Engineering; Professor Michel, Professor of Geology; Messrs. Glynn and O'Connor, Lecturers in Civil Engineering, and Mr. Hassard, President of the Institute of Civil Engineering (Ireland).¹³²

In another visit planned for delegates of the Technical Congress, the *Limerick Leader* noted the ways in which the content of the tour varied depending on the audience.

According to the schedule for this event, “Engineers will bring the delegates over all the ramifications of that gigantic undertaking, pointing out to them the points of particular interest, especially to technical students.”¹³³ Professor Rishworth planned to deliver a lecture “so that the maximum knowledge may be gained by the leaders of technical education in the country, who in turn will exchange that valuable knowledge to their pupils.”¹³⁴ Engineering students also partook of organized tours along with their professors, including a large contingent from West Cork, many of whom attended the Technical School at Skibbereen and Clonakilty. They were received by the City Technical Institute in Limerick and the Resident Engineer made arrangements for the

¹³² “Shannon Scheme—Surprising Progress,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 May 1926.

¹³³ “Limerick Prepares—For Coming Technical Congress,” *Limerick Leader*, 5 May 1928.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

engineering staff to show the students over the works and explain everything to them in detail.¹³⁵

While the long-term effects of the Shannon Scheme on the profession of Irish engineering is beyond the scope of this study, some evidence suggests that there was a direct and positive impact. For example, Dr. McLaughlin, the Irish engineer employed by Siemens who presented the Free State government with the company's proposal, addressed the annual dinner of the Association of Electrical Engineers in 1930. According to McLaughlin, "were it not for the Shannon Scheme the Association of Electrical Engineers would not exist. Before 1926 eighty percent of their electrical engineers emigrated. That percentage had now been reduced to 15. Of the 84 members of the Association, 74 were employed on the Shannon Scheme."¹³⁶

Part III: Scheme, Priests, and Politics

Though much work has been done on the politicization of Irish priests, it is important to note that when they accompanied Cumann na nGaedheal politicians on the stump and praised the work of the Cosgrave administration, they also invoked the Scheme for political purposes. The *Catholic Bulletin* warned about the dangers of this close relationship when it wrote that "the identification of priests with politics has led even to a stupid distrust of the Catholic Church itself. We maintain, therefore, that any scheme of the development of Ireland, on a large scale, could not be entrusted to agents whose sensitiveness and proximity to British influence would assuredly endanger its

¹³⁵ "Engineering Students—Visit Shannon Scheme," *Limerick Leader*, 8 June 1927.

¹³⁶ "Work at Home—For Electrical Engineers," *Limerick Leader*, 8 December 1930.

success.”¹³⁷ The Very Rev. Canon Kennedy presided over a meeting of the Cumann na nGaedheal executive in Ennis and criticized political opponents and the press for “sneer[ing] at those magnificent measures which are so calculated to uplift the badly hit farmers,” put in place by Cosgrave’s government. To them, he argued, “the Shannon Scheme is of no moment. Even the immediate benefits that it confers on the people of Parteen, Meelick, Clonlara, the Bridge, Killaloe, and other neighboaring [sic] parishes, are quietly ignored,”¹³⁸ At a meeting in Ennis where the president also spoke in September 1927, Rev. Michael Breen, parish priest of Kilkee, remembered the recently murdered Kevin O’Higgins and celebrated the former minister for he “showed how the ‘Giant Shannon Scheme’ was launched to diminish unemployment and to give cheap power to the existing industries, thus enabling them to meet foreign competition, and to industries that will certainly spring up, and which have a reaction to the advantage of the farmer and labourer.”¹³⁹ O’Higgins was not particularly outspoken on the Shannon Scheme, especially compared to other ministers like McGilligan or Hogan, but possibly because of the heightened emotion in the aftermath of his death, the parish priest believed it was necessary to link his memory to the Shannon Scheme. Even priests of Irish heritage, who had emigrated elsewhere, occasionally spoke on Irish politics and threw their support behind the Shannon Scheme. For example, when Archbishop Michael J. Curley of Baltimore returned to Athlone to visit his mother, he gave an interview “in which he paid a high tribute to the Saorstát Government, [and] his Grace expressed the

¹³⁷ Kevin, “Shannon Scheme,” *Catholic Bulletin* 15, no. 5 (May 1925): 419-420.

¹³⁸ “The Government Policy—Vigorous Defence of Schemes & Measures,” *Clare Champion*, 21 May 1927.

¹³⁹ “The Election Campaign,” *Clare Champion*, 10 September 1927.

view that the Shannon Scheme would prove of tremendous benefit to the nation by infusing new life into industry and making for enterprise and progress.”¹⁴⁰ While the project was inherently political, this condition was enhanced by members of the clergy who lent religious authority to bolster Cumann na nGaedheal’s legitimacy by referencing the hydroelectric project as a significant accomplishment of the government.

The Opening Ceremony: Catholic Pageantry vs. Political Spectacle

As discussed in the previous chapter, the opening ceremony for the Shannon Scheme in July 1929 was a profoundly important opportunity for Cumann na nGaedheal government to put the state and party on display. However, the ceremony was arguably just as much a religious event as it was a political one. Some contemporaries, assessing the relative balance of these components, may have been swayed to favor the former. For example, the headline announcing the “Historic Ceremony” in the *Clare Champion* was immediately followed by a subhead in bold typeface stating, “Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty Blesses Shannon Scheme.” Only after another sub-heading announcing that the “Sluice Gates Opened,” did the paper mention, in smaller print, “President Cosgrave’s Address.” The president also appeared in a small cropped picture, pressing the switch to open the sluice gates, but it was the dam that dominated the photo collage. On the other hand, a photograph of Bishop Fogarty and the Very Rev. Canon Clancy, processing to the site of the blessing, showed the religious men in full clerical dress, while another photograph captured the moment the bishop blessed the intake. Granted, Fogarty would have been a familiar figure to the paper’s local readers as the Bishop of Killaloe, but the fact that his blessing overshadowed the presence of the Free State’s president, whose government was

¹⁴⁰ “Shannon Scheme—An Archbishop’s View,” *Limerick Leader*, 10 August 1925.

responsible for initiating the hydroelectric project, indicated that the newspaper preferred to highlight the event's religious elements over its political ones. The *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac*, also covering the eventful day, reported, "The religious note was dominant in the ceremony of the opening of the sluice-gates of the Shannon scheme at Parteen Villa, nine miles from Limerick. The Bishop of Killaloe was present by special invitation of President Cosgrave, and was the central figure in a striking ceremonial prior to the actual opening."¹⁴¹ Other papers, including the *Limerick Leader*, said very little about the spiritual presence that day, noting simply that the Bishop "blessed the whole undertaking."¹⁴²

In the National Library of Ireland's collection of photographs on the Shannon Scheme, one picture in particular symbolized the close relationship between the Church and state at the opening ceremony (See Figure 3.1).¹⁴³ As Cosgrave delivered his speech to the crowd, Bishop Fogarty can be seen standing immediately to the president's right and closer than any other figure invited to stand on the stage. Significantly, the National Library of Ireland has titled this symbolic photograph, which captured this noteworthy event celebrating one of the most expansive projects in the Free State's history, "Man talking into microphone priest (?)" Not only is this oversight unfortunate in that it refers to the first president of the Executive Council of the Free State simply as "man," but it also fails to accurately depict the Shannon Scheme as a momentous event in the nation's

¹⁴¹ "Record of the Irish Ecclesiastical Year 1929," *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1930* (Dublin: James Duffy & Co., Ltd, 1930), 597.

¹⁴² "A Great Event—Diverting the Shannon," *Limerick Leader*, 22 July 1929.

¹⁴³ "Man talking into microphone priest (?)," Independent Newspapers Collection, National Library of Ireland, accessed 1 August 2012, http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/IND_H_1171.

history and one that represented the strategic collaboration between the Church and government in this period.



Figure 3.1: “Man talking into microphone priest (?)” National Library of Ireland

The Bishop’s ceremonial and blessing of the Shannon Scheme was precisely orchestrated and planned to the last detail. According to the handwritten schedule for the ceremony, found in Fogarty’s papers at the Diocese of Killaloe, everything he planned to say was accounted for, along with every gesture he was to make and the activities to be performed by others. For example, one draft of the ceremonial stated that the service was to begin with the “Procession of Priests and Acolytes with Processional Cross chanting Psalms 23, 103 and the Benedictus which being said the Bishop standing near the Gates says ‘Adesto Deus unus omnipotens Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus.’”¹⁴⁴ Following a brief prayer, the schedule noted that “The bishop kneels and chants, the choir responding a litany as follows . . .” This detailed agenda also dictated when the bishop was to sprinkle the canal and gates with holy water, and included the full text of the three

¹⁴⁴ Fogarty Collection, Killaloe Diocesan Archives, box 35. A translation of the Benedictus would be “Here the one God, the Almighty, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

blessings, written in Latin, that he composed especially for the ceremony. The *Clare Champion* also offered a thorough account of the religious pageantry witnessed at the site, commenting that the bishop arrived early and

His Lordship, wearing the full episcopate robes, and preceded by cross-bearers immediately on the president's arrival proceeded from the little structure which had been erected for him, and ascended the embankment, and followed by the President, the members of the Executive Council, Mr. De Valera and other deputies, went towards the weir, the choir, which accompanied, singing Psalms specially arranged for the occasion.¹⁴⁵

Offering an even more exhaustive description, the newspaper illustrated the “procession, which partook of a religious aspect, and which provided the Ritual of the Church in its association with such an important ceremonial.” For those not present or unable to hear every part of the ceremony from their vantage points, the paper explained “during its progress to the weir Psalms were chanted by the clergy accompanying the Bishop, and, on arrival at the gates of the weir, the blessing was begun with the chanting of the ‘Benedictus.’ The blessing of the gates, waters, and canal then followed. The ‘Te Deum’ was sung on the return to the dais.” Not only did the *Clare Champion* mention the clergy who participated in the ceremony alongside Bishop Fogarty, it listed each person by name in the article.¹⁴⁶ This suggests that the religious presence at the opening ceremony

¹⁴⁵ “Historic Ceremony—Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty Blesses the Shannon Scheme,” *Clare Champion*, 27 July 1929.

¹⁴⁶ According to the article in the *Clare Champion* dated 27 July 1929: “At the blessing, his Lordship the Bishop was assisted by Very Rev. Canon Clancy, P.P., Killaloe; Very Rev. Canon Slattery, P.P., Quin; Very Rev. Canon O’Kennedy, President, St. Flannan’s College’ and Rev. M. Crowe, Ennis master of ceremonies. Rev. P. Cahill, C.C., Ennis, had charge of the choir of priests who were assisted by the Ennis Cathedral Choir. Amongst the clergy also present were-- Very Rev. Canon J. Moloney, P.P., Parteen; Very Rev. Canon Farrell, P.P., Ardagh; Rev. Father Barrett, P.P., Clonlara’ Rev. Father Murray, C.C., do.; Rev. J. O’Gorman, P.P., Bodyke; Rev. Father McMahan, C.C., do.; Rev. Father Devanney, P.P., Castleconnell; Rev. Father O’Reilly, C.C., do.; Rev. Father Flannery, C.C., Kilkishen; Rev. Father Hayes, C.C., Broadford; Rev. Father Hamilton, St. Flannan’s College’ Rev. Father Vaughan, do.; Rev. Father Enda, O.F.M., Ennis; Rev. Father O’Rahilly, C.C., Miltown Malbay; Rev. Father McKenna, C.C., Monsea; Rev. J. Barry, C.C., Doora; Very Rev. Father Solomon, C.S.Sp., Rockwell College; Rev. Monsignor

was not only significant in size, but that the paper believed its readers would be curious to know if their parish priest or local religious leaders were in attendance.

Along with the pageantry of the ceremony, the messages of the blessings delivered by Fogarty ensured that the event marking the completion of the Free State's most modern undertaking would also be ascribed with profoundly holy and traditional features.¹⁴⁷ This blending of the modern and the traditional, employed by the dam's promoters to fashion a uniquely Irish modernity, also provided the Church in Ireland with a position on the Scheme that jibed with religious doctrines. In the bishop's "Prayer for the Blessing of the Gate at the Intake," he prayed:

O Almighty and everlasting God, by Whose high Providence all things are governed, deign, we beseech Thee, to bless from on High these newly erected gates to control the inflow of the Shannon's waves, so that, protected by Thy arm they may rightly fulfil their purpose, for Thy greater glory and the good of the people of Ireland; and grant that we, Thy servants, illumined by the light of Grace, may regulate our lives according to Thy Holy Will in all things, and after the darkness of this world, be admitted, through Thy mercy, within the gates of eternal light. Through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

His blessing contained parallel religious language whereby the intake gates designed to control the flow of water were likened to the ways in which grace regulated the lives of believers on their personal approaches to the gates of heaven. References to God's power, pleas for his protection over the dam, and statements recounting electricity's potential benefits for the Irish people were common themes in two subsequent prayers delivered by the Bishop. For instance, in his "Prayer for the blessing of the canal," Fogarty described

Langan, Moate; Rev. Father Sweeny, do.' Rev. T. Meehan, C.C., Nenagh; Very Rev. T. A. Crehan, President, Rockwell College; Rev. Father Donohue."

¹⁴⁷ It is clear from the Bishop's papers that he revised several drafts of the blessings, so the text of what he said at the ceremony as published in the *Clare Champion* will be used here since the sequence of the drafts in his papers is unknown. Cf. Fogarty Collection, Killaloe Diocesan Archives, box 35; and "Historic Ceremony—Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty Blesses the Shannon Scheme," *Clare Champion*, 27 July 1929.

God as the “sole source of light and power,” and beseeched him to protect the dam so that “it might successfully bring the waters of the Shannon to turn the turbines, and generate the mysterious power of electricity, for Thy glory and the benefit of the people of Ireland.” Fogarty appropriated language about light in a way that not only invoked religious imagery, but also alluded to the purpose of the dam as the provider of light, through electricity, for the Irish nation. He favored religious symbolism of light over the illuminating function of the project, but like the incomprehensible power of God, Fogarty drew a parallel with the “mysterious power of electricity.” The bishop purposefully chose his words so that those present would be unable to deny the link between religion, i.e., God as the “sole source of light and power,” and the subject of his prayer, the Shannon Scheme—a worldly provider of light and power. Thus, the modernity of the project was made palatable through religious rhetoric that reaffirmed the power of God as the provider and protector of all the benefits expected to come in the wake of national electrification.

For the sixty or so young boys of the Ennis Cathedral Choir and Altar Boys, the opening ceremony of the Shannon Scheme was also a memorable experience. Led by Rev. Father Michael Crowe, the boys “assisted the priests’ choir at the solemn ceremony of blessing Ireland’s gigantic undertaking.”¹⁴⁸ Following this deeply religious occasion, the boys had more time to relax, and enjoyed a tour of the site “by an official guide, who explained in simple, non-technical terms the plan and working of the entire scheme.” According to the *Clare Champion*, “the explanation was much appreciated by the boys, who appeared to be delighted at their visit and the arrangements made for their

¹⁴⁸ “Historic Ceremony—Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty Blesses the Shannon Scheme,” *Clare Champion*, 27 July 1929.

comfort.”¹⁴⁹ Their participation in the religious facets of the opening ceremony was no doubt unique, and echoed tours taken by bishops and engineers, but as Chapter 6 on tourism will demonstrate, their experience as visitors to the site was quite common and showcased another aspect of the educational campaign designed to teach sightseers about the Shannon Scheme and electricity in a more direct way than was available to priests interested in promoting the same message.

The opening ceremony not only conceived of the dam as a nexus where political and religious forces within the Free State sought a balance between power and influence, but it also underscored the leading role played by members of the Catholic Church in promoting the Shannon Scheme. As community advocates who bore heavy responsibilities as educators and administrators in national schools and technical colleges, priests worked with other supporters to develop an educational campaign. They were vital resources in terms of explaining the benefits and basic applications of electricity in non-technical terms, while also collaborating with other educators to demand reforms in educational institutions that were largely run by the Church and charged with preparing the next generation of Irish engineers and electricians. In many ways, the Shannon Scheme acted as an impetus for change in Irish education. Moreover, in a broader consideration of the Church in 1920s Ireland, characterized by its conservatism, backwardness, and abhorrence of all things modern—essentially the standard-bearer of tradition—support for national electrification seems to render such a generalization insufficient. By applying methods used by other promoters to define Irish modernity as an amalgamation of both traditional and modern elements, representatives of the Catholic

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

establishment chose to embrace certain aspects of modernization, especially when it strengthened or supported their *raison d'être*. Though Catholicism and educational curriculums are not commonly associated with hydroelectricity, the Shannon Scheme—partly because of its timing and its centrality to the Free State's plans for national development—was a key component in these discourses precisely because it represented the future and challenged the Irish to reconsider every aspect of their national identity.

CHAPTER IV

RACE AND NATIONALITY: OTHERING ON THE SHANNON SCHEME

While the two previous chapters explored the pageantry of the opening ceremony, designed to put Free State politics and Catholicism on display, the special occasion also made a profound statement about Irish national identity within an international context. The *Clare Champion* provided a thorough account of activities over the course of the day, noting specific details such as “the flag of the Saorstát and also that of the German Republic were flown at the weir, and when the ceremony had concluded a body of German workmen sang the German National Anthem.”¹ To anyone picking up the newspaper to see photographs of the opening ceremony taken by the *Irish Independent*, the oversized Irish flag blowing in the breeze was unmistakable, but the German flag was nowhere in sight (See Figure 4.1). Either the latter was too small to be seen from a distance or the photographer or editor carefully positioned the frame to reveal only the Irish national symbol. Regardless, both of these premises support the same conclusion: the Free State’s ties to the project were magnified at the expense of Germany’s. However, the written text indicated that the flag and national anthem, profoundly nationalistic symbols of the Weimar Republic, were exhibited at what was lauded as an “epoch-making event” for the Free State.² This incongruity exposed a critical dilemma at the heart of promoting the Shannon Scheme as a national project: was it a German or an Irish accomplishment—or could it be both?

¹ Ibid.

² “A Great Event—Diverting the Shannon—Opening of Sluice Gates,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 July 1929.



Figure 4.1 Photograph of the Saorstát flag flying over the weir at the opening ceremony, Digital Photographs Collection: *Irish Independent*, National Archives.

To understand the significance of this question, it is necessary to look at the ways in which Irish-German relations had evolved over the course of the previous four years. When the Irish Free State initiated the Shannon Scheme in 1925 by granting the contract to Siemens-Schuckert, the government sparked a national debate about race and Irishness. For the Irish living near Limerick, it also meant daily interactions with several hundred Germans hired to oversee the works and manage Irish laborers, who did much of the manual labor. The Germans built homes, shops, and a school, fashioning what some referred to as a little German village for their families who joined them on the site. All of this was quite unusual for the local population, which had more experience with emigration than immigration. But contact with Germans on the Shannon Scheme provided opportunities for the people of the Free State to explore what it meant to be Irish and to negotiate the contours of otherness as a means of defining national difference.

The realities of colonialism for the Irish people within the British Empire took shape during the long nineteenth century—at a time when ideas about race solidified and were used as justifications for imperialism—and this colonial relationship has dominated historical interpretations about race in Ireland. As Michael de Nie has illustrated in *The*

Eternal Paddy, “chauvinistic notions of Ireland’s racial, class, and religious identity were fundamental to . . . the hierarchal relationship of Ireland and Britain, and instrumental in how Britons interpreted the Irish question and Irish policy.”³ As de Nie argued, however, racial identity in Ireland was more multifaceted than the objectified Irish stereotype associated with anti-Irish prejudice, and he demonstrated this point by positing race as “a vehicle for expressing multiple anxieties and preconceptions, among them class concerns and sectarian prejudices.”⁴ However, relying on race as a marker of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon differences was problematic for advocates of self-government, and as Steve Garner has described, “the ‘race’ card for Irish nationalists was . . . a double-edged sword.”⁵ According to Garner, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, “political leaders ended up praising the Irish contribution to Empire as a way to endorse their place in the imperial sun yet the cultural nationalist case was based on the non-material, communitarian and rural essence of the Irish ‘race’ that set them apart from their acquisitive, material, urban-powered colonial masters.”⁶ Understanding race in an Irish context, according to these historians, necessarily involves its intrinsic ties to the colonial experience; thus, the process of defining what it meant to be Irish was inextricably tied to notions of Britishness.

Others have recently approached issues of race and racism with a broader lens than anti-Irish sentiment within the Empire provides. As John Brannigan argued in *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture*, “one reason racism in modern Irish culture has

³ Michael de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 5.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Steve Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 152.

⁶ Ibid.

largely been ignored by contemporary cultural critics is because of the tendency to explain racism as the product of colonialism.”⁷ He suggested that “the political nationalisms of the early twentieth-century Ireland, which found institutional form in the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, frequently expressed themselves in relation to an imagined Irish race, and through the form of racial and racist distinctions from other peoples.”⁸ While these distinctions obviously included comparisons with the British, Brannigan contended that racism is not only an external construction—a product of colonialism or emigration, but it is also shaped by an internal “process of ‘self-racialisation’, whereby Irish political and cultural actors have generated their own lexicon of racial understanding, and their own stigmata of otherness.”⁹ Like Brannigan, Bruce Nelson emphasized the importance of the particular Irish, imperial, and international contexts in which racial identity emerged. However, Nelson stated that other historians have circumscribed their interpretations of Irish nationalism in their acceptance of Cathal Brugha’s representative proclamation: “We, of the Republic . . . should have . . . but one objective . . . to get the English out of Ireland.”¹⁰ Instead, Nelson maintained that the construction of the Irish race and nation is best understood in terms of a “merging of nationalism and internationalism,” rather than an inward tendency to be “preoccupied overwhelmingly with ‘Ourselves,’” as many historians of Irish nationalism portray the

⁷ John Brannigan, *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 12.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 13.

¹⁰ Bruce Nelson, *Irish Nationalism and the Making of the Irish Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 16.

emergence of Irishness.¹¹ It is in this vein that the Shannon Scheme should be analyzed—as a site for negotiating otherness as simultaneously an Irish, imperial, and international endeavor. The hydroelectric project provided a unique context for the Irish people to interpret their own racial identity in terms of both the absence of the British and the presence of the Germans, while also attempting to situate the dam as an *Irish* achievement to the rest of the world. While contemporaries often used race, ethnicity, and nationality interchangeably, I will use the latter as it most clearly stands as an indicator of difference based on national belonging. Race will only appear when it was used to specifically refer to the now problematic classification of humans based on perceived differences in physical or behavioral traits, such as the ‘Irish race’ or the ‘German race.’

Like manifestations of nationalism elsewhere, the construction of a unique national identity was critical and it was often the product of a muddled amalgamation of racial, cultural, and linguistic characteristics believed to be shared by most of the community. It was the process of imagining a sense of “otherness” vis-à-vis the Germans that demonstrated one of the most significant, if unintended, ramifications of building the dam in the 1920s. It expanded the “us” and “them” dialectic to include a broader international perspective and overthrew an overly simplistic classification of the nationalistic Irish as solely anti-British. The differences between the Irish and Germans on the site were much deeper and far more complex than supposing that the Germans embodied modernity and the Irish embraced tradition. In pointing out what made Germans “German” in order to signify what the Irish were not, the latter sought to establish symbolic connections as a national community. This chapter highlights the ways

¹¹ Ibid, 16, 11.

in which critics employed anti-German sentiments in pursuit of a pro-British agenda. Efforts by promoters to counteract these negative stereotypes by emphasizing positive attributes of the German contractors provide perspective on the broad spectrum of attitudes regarding issues of nationality. As a result of these racial tensions, I argue that Irishness, in part, was defined in relation to perceived differences and similarities with others through interactions with foreigners on the Shannon Scheme. However, these ideological examples of race and nationality conflicted with actual examples of Irish-German relations, demonstrating that mixed feelings towards Germans resulted in equally complex relationships that failed to conform to generalized classifications. The historian's desire to identify a schema to describe cross-cultural encounters as largely positive or negative, beneficial or detrimental, and innocuous or revolutionary does not seem to apply in this case. Race relations on the Shannon Scheme were multifaceted, continuously evolving, and heavily dependent on overarching forces like politics and economics.

Perception and Criticism: Scheming Germans and Envious Brits

One of the most complicated aspects of situating the project as an Irish feat was the contradictory situation created by the fact that significant responsibility lay with a German firm. Siemens represented a potential threat to Cumann na nGaedheal's efforts to promote the Shannon Scheme as a national undertaking. Since the ESB was a semi-state body and electricity was nationalized by the Free State government after it bought out smaller electricity suppliers, Siemens was the only corporation that could make a claim on the project in Ireland. For example, in November 1927, Herr Ernsweiller from Siemens wrote to McGilligan, "I can assure you that I am following the progress of the

work with the fullest attention, I am perfectly aware of the fact that our name is bound up with the success of the Shannon Scheme. It is far more for us than just a business problem, even national interests are at stake.”¹² Statements such as this allowed Germans to appropriate this Irish symbol as an integral part of their identity as leaders in electrical development and hydroelectricity. In the minds of Siemens’s engineers, it was no stretch of the imagination to see the Scheme as a *German*, not an Irish, accomplishment. This was particularly important for the firm in the interwar period. Siemens, a company that specialized in electrical engineering, had a tainted relationship with the previous German government as a major aircraft supplier during World War I. As Gerald O’Beirne and Michael O’Connor have argued, “For the House of Siemens, the execution of the Shannon Scheme was the one single event that marked the reappearance of the firm on the world electrical scene following the gloom of the Great War and its aftermath.”¹³ The company hoped to promote the project and what it could achieve in order to attract new business internationally. This not only contradicted Cumann na nGaedheal’s efforts to talk about the Scheme as an Irish endeavor, but it also led to a lack of consensus among others who vacillated between calling it an Irish or a German project.

The timing of the project was particularly relevant for both Germany and the Free State coming as it did in the wake of the Great War, and the difficult legacy it left for both nations. In *Ireland, Germany, and the Nazis: Politics and Diplomacy 1919-1939*, Mervyn O’Driscoll has looked at the diplomatic relationship between the two nations in the interwar period. He noted that attempts by radical nationalists to establish a link with

¹² Letter from Herr Ernsweiller to Patrick McGilligan, 2 November 1927: NA ESB 6/11.

¹³ O’Beirne and O’Connor, “Siemens-Schuckert and the Electrification of the Irish Free State,” 99.

Germany largely failed during the revolutionary period. O'Driscoll acknowledged the influx of German imports in Ireland as a result of projects like the Shannon Scheme, but he discounted the significance of German-Irish diplomacy in the interwar period. He attributed this to two factors: first, that the Germans did not want to alienate the British, a major European power after the war, and second, that the Free State lacked a clear policy towards Germany. However, the Shannon Scheme served as a critical example of interwar diplomacy and served as a symbol of recovery and rebuilding for both nations. While some nationalists may have sympathized with Germans during the war by viewing the British as a common enemy, many Irish soldiers fought for the British army and propaganda within the Empire focused on the common German threat. For example, Colonel George O'Callaghan-Westropp, a prominent landowner from Clare and former colonel in the British army wrote to H.H. Hardy, Esq., the headmaster of the college where his son attended expressing his lingering internal struggle with Germany. Writing about his son's future profession as an engineer, O'Callaghan-Westropp acknowledged that German "would probably be more use to him than any other modern language except perhaps Spanish or Arabic."¹⁴ He admitted, "much as I dislike the idea, I cannot disguise from myself that magnificent technical training is to be had in Germany, therefore I have to keep that door open in the boy's interest, little as I like it." This mixed perception of Germans after the war required promoters of the Scheme to strike a delicate balance by justifying the need for German expertise and easing fears about foreign domination.

Furthermore, the Great War was an extremely sensitive topic in the 1920s, and occasionally, its memory was invoked in connection with the Shannon Scheme. Though

¹⁴ Colonel George O'Callaghan-Westropp, Letter to H.H. Hardy, Esq., 23 January 1928: George O'Callaghan-Westropp Papers, UCDA P38/16(12).

the war was anything but humorous, a journalist for the *Limerick Leader* relied on it for comedic purposes when describing the ubiquity of mud in the area. He likened the construction site to the muddied trenches, which would have been familiar to “soldiers serving in Flanders during the Great War, [who] were wont to describe the particular brand found there.” The writer credited the contractors for the mud surrounding Ardnacrusha, and joked, “these Germans have succeeded in discovering in this old country of ours . . . the quintessence of mud” leading him to label the mire a uniquely “German-Irish mud.”¹⁵ Comparing the construction site to the not-so-distant memories of the battlefield was particularly insulting to Irish veterans of the Great War, many of whom had found employment as laborers on the Shannon Scheme. But this writer went a step further in his analogy by invoking the memory of Flanders, where in May 1915, only 21 of the original 666 men of the 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers survived a poison gas attack by the Germans. To continue the correlation of the Shannon Scheme to the Great War, the writer also attributed the Germans with agency for the unheroic task of “discovering mud.” Admittedly, this parallel of German agency could be seen as a demoralizing shift in the status of Germany after the war: from masterminds of military maneuvering to the excavators of mud in the Irish countryside. Though mud and not race was the intended punch line of this piece, its reception depended on the audience’s stance on the war and on Germans in particular.

Perhaps unexpectedly, some Germans working on the Shannon Scheme were honored for their service in the Imperial Army by the Irish press. The *Limerick Leader* reprinted a story from the *Irish Times* discussing the life of Herr K. Bach, Chief Engineer

¹⁵ “How a Big Project Progresses,” *Limerick Leader*, 18 December 1926.

of Siemens and one of the first Germans to arrive in Limerick. The paper described Bach “as a remarkable young man” and indicated that “he fought at Verdun, on the Somme, and in the Champagne, and was at Sedan when the Armistice came,” resulting in three notable wounds. Like many German engineers, his wife and young son accompanied him to Ireland, “where he made himself very popular by his cheery manner and sympathetic personality.” Concluding that he was “an exceptionally charming man,” the *Limerick Leader* presented a controversial depiction of a German soldier, considering that the majority of those opposed to the Shannon Scheme went out of their way to emphasize that the War had showed the world what the Germans were capable of and the potential dangers brought about by their quest for supremacy.¹⁶

Representatives of the government, along with the general public, voiced concerns about the possibility that the Shannon Scheme would open the door for German domination of the Free State’s economy. Major James Sproule Myles, a retired British army officer who was elected as an Independent in the Dáil, forewarned, “the plant that would be employed, presuming that Messrs. Siemens take this job in hands, will be entirely of German manufacture. That places this country lock, stock and barrel in the hands of German engineers.”¹⁷ Similarly, in 1925, J. Holland delivered a paper on the future of the Shannon Scheme at a meeting of the economics class at the Municipal School of Commerce in Limerick. The group discussed his findings and, while they approved of the project, they were also of “the opinion that care should be taken to safeguard the country from the possibility of a foreign domination of its principal

¹⁶ “Shannon Engineer’s Record—A Distinguished Career,” *Limerick Leader*, 8 June 1929.

¹⁷ Major James Sproule Miles, “The Shannon Scheme. Motion by the Minister of Industry and Commerce—Resumed Debate,” *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 10, 3 April 1925.

enterprises and the consequent dependence of the State upon German or other interests.”¹⁸ I. Poole, writing for *Honesty*, saw something more sinister in this possibility. Believing there was more afoot in granting the contract to Siemens, the writer surmised that “in view of the apparent fact that the Germanic spirit is permeating those responsible for the state’s welfare, the average citizen who is not behind the political curtain would like some information as to why Germany is receiving so much encouragement and help from our government in industrial and commercial affairs.”¹⁹ Given their past experience with colonialism, it is understandable that the idea of a foreign power playing such an important role in Irish development would have been met with skepticism and a thorough inquiry of German motives.

But occasionally these concerns over German influence in the Free State were exaggerated to the point of unfounded hysteria, fanatically envisioning the complete Teutonization of Ireland. For instance, a notebook containing manuscript notes by James B. Murray addressed to the vice president of the executive council and minister for justice, Kevin O’Higgins, depicted pervasive fears of German domination on the Shannon Scheme.²⁰ Entitled “Shannon Schemes and Other Matters,” the author made it clear from the beginning that he believed “the . . . scheme of the Siemens-Schuckert people is not only not the best possible, but about the very worst imaginable—the most

¹⁸ “Would Help Limerick Industries—Possibilities of the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 11 April 1925.

¹⁹ I. Poole, “Who will own Ireland,” *Honesty*, 20 June 1925.

²⁰ Notebook entitled “Shannon Schemes and Other Matters,” containing manuscript notes by James N. Murray for Kevin O’Higgins concerning the electrification of the Irish Free State and the Siemens-Shuckert Proposal, circa 1923-1925: Kevin O’Higgins Papers, UCDA P197/164,.

expensive, the most impracticable and the most dangerous.”²¹ It was the last two points that compelled this critic to wonder, “can it be that the Germans have dis-erected some occult quality in the waters of the Shannon and that they can extract butter from them? Only that the Germans are so damnably cunning one would think the whole scheme the imaginings of a maniac.” But unlike other skeptics, who worried about a German takeover of the Irish economy, this author foresaw doom when he supposed that the real reason the contractors imported so much machinery and piping was that these material “would afford means of smuggling in arms and ammunition to any desired extent. The dam itself would be an unanswerable argument in favour of German domination and our ex-army dupes would be fooled like our legislators, into giving their help.”²² Though it was common to typecast the Germans as warmongers, few went so far as to claim that Siemens was complicit in some secret conspiracy to inundate the Free State with weapons. Distrustful of the Germans’ intentions since the Great War, the notebook warned that “it is mischievous folly to expose our too easily misled youths to the corrupting and disorganizing influence of designing German agents whose chief aim seems to be to bedevil the social systems of every other civilized land so that Germany may profitably fish in troubled waters.” Deducing that Siemens took the Irish for fools, the author surmised that “there is some other project on hand besides electrification.”²³ Hyperbole abounded in this notebook, but it demonstrated that anti-German sentiments were aggravated by the Scheme.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

It was essential for the Free State government, ESB, and promoters of the Scheme to address the extensive German involvement on a project of great national importance for the Free State. In order to do this, they suggested that even though foreigners participated in constructing the dam, its success ultimately lay with the Irish people. At the time of the dam's opening, the *Irish Independent* ran an article entitled "Germans' Task Ending—People's Work About to Begin," in which a correspondent for the newspaper discussed the Shannon Scheme with McLaughlin. The latter praised "Siemens for the manner in which they had carried out the work," but he noted that there was to be an important transition in the near future as "the work of the German firm was coming to an end, and the real work for the Irish people would then begin." McLaughlin mentioned the tendency within the Free State to overlook German participation in favor of the initiative taken by the Irish. According to the article, "they in Ireland had taken great credit for the harnessing of the Shannon and were, naturally, very proud of it." But McLaughlin acknowledged that pride was not enough, and that "the test for the Irish people remained, in the extent to which they would utilize the opportunities in the way of electrical developments which the Shannon scheme placed at their disposal."²⁴

The role of McLaughlin, the young Irish engineer who had worked for Siemens prior to the launch of the endeavor, in strengthening Irish claims to the project cannot be exaggerated. He was praised by all concerned for his early involvement in selling the Scheme to Free State leaders and credited as the mastermind of the entire undertaking. While this was undoubtedly an overstatement, it was one employed by a variety of Irish supporters seeking to deemphasize German initiative in favor of the project's perceived

²⁴ "Germans' Task Ending—People's Work About to Begin," *Irish Independent*, 24 July 1929.

Irish genesis. For example, the *Limerick Leader* gushed, “if that young student of the National University, Dr. McLoughlin [sic], had never dreamed seemingly fantastic dreams and had never explored seemingly impossible possibilities, the Shannon Scheme, as it is to-day, might never have been born.”²⁵ A few days later, the paper claimed that “the Irish representative of Messrs. Siemens-Schuckert, and may be described as the inventor of the present Shannon Scheme, is only twenty-nine years of age. . . . The result of his further activities was the White Paper, and he is now virtually in charge of the whole scheme.”²⁶ In the Dáil, Professor William Magennis explained that Irish engineers were too focused on Liffey Schemes, but Siemens, “prompted by an Irish engineer's brain and patriotism, was able to show to the satisfaction of four of the greatest experts in the world in those particular matters that the Shannon power could be exploited advantageously.”²⁷ Similarly, at a meeting of the Limerick Rotary Club, Mr. S. M. O'Mara claimed, “The big idea of generating electricity for the whole country was born in the mind of Dr. McLaughlin, who, single handed, approached one of the largest firms in the world to whom he disclosed his plans. . . . The young and fertile brain of Dr. McLaughlin had realised for them a dream.”²⁸ The *Limerick Leader* acknowledged that “Messrs. Siemens-Schuckert have prepared the scheme, but it has been elaborated under the direction of an Irish engineer.” This statement identified the second clause as a key qualification of the first: the Germans' role was far less significant than McLaughlin's

²⁵ “Future of Limerick,” *Limerick Leader*, 21 March 1925.

²⁶ “The Man behind the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 March 1925.

²⁷ William Magennis, “The Shannon Scheme. Motion by the Minister for Industry and Commerce—Resumed Debate,” Dáil Éireann Debates, 3 April 1925.

²⁸ “Industries to Come—Advantage for Limerick,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 July 1928.

whose involvement with the project was often discussed as a means to excuse or ignore the participation of foreigners.

Others downplayed the German connection by claiming that any nationality could have found success with the hydroelectric work. J.C. Goff, chairman and managing director of Messrs. Crosse and Blackwell, Ltd., visited the Shannon Scheme and remarked, “I am told that the engineers are Germans, but this only goes to show that when you get men embarked on great enterprises, whether they be Americans, Germans, French, Irish, or English, it is of no consequence—it is men of the great mind that are needed to-day to carry our country forward.”²⁹ It was because of men such as McLaughlin, Robert N. Tweedy told the Dublin Rotary Club, that “the Shannon Scheme was a thing of which Irishmen could be proud without any qualification; for there was nothing in connection with it from the construction to the distribution that was not absolutely first-class, and nothing of which the country need be ashamed (applause).”³⁰ With criticism of the project in mind, Tweedy’s praise of McLaughlin was designed to address negative attitudes about the scheme related to cost, size, technical aspects, and the Germans. While promoters touted the Irish connection to Siemens, the official plaque at the power station reads “Shannon Hydro Electric Development, Designed and Constructed by Siemens-Schuckertwerke A.G., Berlin, 1925-1929” (See Figure 4.2).³¹ This marker gave far more agency to the German firm than contemporaries typically were comfortable with during the period of construction.

²⁹ “Courage and Vision—Shannon Scheme Enterprise—A Visitor’s Impressions,” *Limerick Leader*, 12 June 1929.

³⁰ “Shannon Scheme—Some Erroneous Ideas,” *Limerick Leader*, 21 December 1929.

³¹ Shannon Hydro Electric Development, Plaque, photographed by author.



Figure 4.2 Shannon Scheme Plaque

To men and women of the Free State, Germans on the site represented one case among many in which foreigners were brought in to manage an important undertaking, and potentially threatened to impede Irish sovereignty. In a letter to the editor of the *Southern Star*, a concerned citizen writing under the name “Disillusioned” interpreted the German presence on the Shannon Scheme as just another example of foreign commercial intervention in the Free State. “Disillusioned” regretted that “the Germans have captured the Shannon scheme, the Belgians have secured a sugar beet concession, the Danes have got the contract for building the dressed meat factory in Waterford, the French, it is said, are to be entrusted with the cleansing of the streets of Dublin.” What troubled the writer the most about foreigners being granted contracts for major projects were the negative

implications for Irish workers, as the letter tauntingly concluded, “Up emigration and unemployment!!”³²

Ostensibly, the problem with foreigners overseeing projects in Ireland was that the Irish were subject to exploitation in the interests of other nations. A special commissioner for *Honesty* also mentioned projects of national importance that were given to Belgian, German, English, and French firms, including the Shannon Scheme. The article was entitled “Ireland for the Irish—or for Foreigners, Hanging the Country with a Golden Rope,” and argued that “Ireland is becoming a miniature cosmopolis. Ireland was never so overrun with foreign agents of all classes of work, big or little.” This article was accompanied by a cartoon featuring men from China, France, Britain, and Germany gleefully celebrating in the face of an angry Pat, who retreated carrying nothing but a bundle and a walking stick, and lamented, “Ireland for the Irish—I don’t think.” The special commissioner characterized the role of foreigners in the Irish economy as “denationalizing” and called on patriots to save Ireland.³³ The threat outsiders posed to the Irish nation was taken up by another writer for *Honesty*, who hopefully declared that “it is the indestructible spirit of Irish nationality that has kept Ireland’s name before the world for centuries and Ireland is not going to destroy that spirit in a swamp of materialist cosmopolitanism no-more than she is going to submerge it in the slough of British imperialism.”³⁴

³² “Disillusioned,” Letter to the Editor, “Ireland for the Irish,” *Southern Star*, 3 October 1925.

³³ “Ireland for the Irish—or for Foreigners, Hanging the Country with a Golden Rope,” *Honesty* 2, no. 35, 24 October 1925.

³⁴ “Ireland First,” *Honesty* 3, no. 64, 15 May 1926.

Others were less confident in the “spirit of Irish nationality,” and instead faulted the Cumann na nGaedheal government for negotiating these arrangements with foreigners. Those who opposed the efforts at Ardnacrusha often posited foreign projects as unwise political maneuvering designed to court the approval of other Europeans. In a letter to the editor of *Honesty* entitled “God Save Ireland,” J. Concannon voiced his doubt about the Shannon Scheme and Cumann na nGaedheal’s commitments to foreign business interests within the Free State. According to Concannon, “we are importing French cleaners, German diggers and fiddlers, English fliers and instructors.” However, he believed that the presence of foreigners was far more ominous and believed that “there is only one remedy to save the Irish race from extinction and that is to wipe the present government out of existence at the next general election, for if they are not hunted bag and baggage, the scent of their work will hang around us and eventually choke us.”³⁵ A similar sentiment was expressed when McGilligan, the minister most associated with the Scheme, was up for reelection in 1927. One newspaper quipped that he could not possibly stand for Limerick since “there is not yet, by any means, a sufficient number of Germans on the voters’ list, though in the future he may be member for Ardnacrusha.”³⁶

The standard inventory of foreigners was also the focus of another article by *Honesty* called “The Free State Slave Market.” The article compared the Irish people to overworked asses, “being ridden furiously at present by politicians, paid commissioners, and ex-ministers.”³⁷ Claiming that this assembly was “not satisfied with getting up on our

³⁵ J. Concannon, Letter to the Editor, “God Save Ireland,” *Honesty*, 23 October 1926.

³⁶ “Mr. McGilligan’s Seat,” *Honesty* 5, no. 113, 23 April 1927.

³⁷ “The Free State Slave Market,” *Honesty* 2, no. 32, 10 October 1925.

backs,” the columnist admonished them for “telling us that we must also carry a choice collection of Germans, French, Belgians and Danes, who are united for the purpose of breaking our backs and depriving us of the little fodder we formerly regarded as our own.” Revealing its support for Cumann na nGaedheal’s political opponents, the article continued, “‘Ireland,’ said De Valera, ‘is yours for the taking.’ The Free State ministry, fearing apparently that we might take it, has put it up for auction, and all . . . is being sold to foreigners.”³⁸ This was especially true with regards to the Shannon Scheme, where “the green banks of the Shannon are to be raised and reinforced with the flesh and blood of Irish workers and their families.” Depicting managers of Siemens as greedy capitalists, the writer accused them of colluding with the Irish government to recruit only those hungry enough to work for meager wages. As he forewarned, “we are to starve quickly in our hovels, or somewhat slower but none the less surely with German picks and shovels in our hands.” The article stated that “nobody but the politicians—who are at best a collection of nobodies—invited the Germans to undertake the work,” resulting in a resentment of “German adventurers who are coming here to participate in the share out of the swag.” Fearful that “‘Hoch der Huns!’ is to be our new national anthem,” the xenophobic article urged, “let us get back to the cry of ‘Ireland for the Irish!’ Not for a section of the pseudo-Irish, nor for the remnants of the old Ascendancy gang, nor for the French, Germans, Dutch or Danes, but for the plain people of Ireland.” Summarizing the message of the article, the columnist proclaimed, “Ireland is not for sale, its people are not slaves to be sold to foreign capitalists.”³⁹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

The conspicuous exclusion from this list of foreigners was the British. The fact that the government commissioned Germans for the Shannon Scheme —and not Britons—sparked a firestorm of racial attacks and charges of anti-British plots on the part of the Free State. British periodicals offered the most xenophobic perspectives on the Germans in Ireland, going so far as to speculate about an invasion of the North if the Shannon Scheme were completed. For example, the *Daily Mail* ran an article entitled “German Intrigue in Ireland,” in which the paper hypothesized that “if they come to success the entire industry of the Free State will be conducted at the will of German masters, and the Free State prosperity, when it comes, will be used to strengthen the industrial sinews of Germany in her new bid for supremacy.”⁴⁰ But this article’s significance is amplified by the fact that Eugenie Torrigiani—an English national of Italian and German parentage and with no ties to Ireland with the exception of a few close friends—decided to include a clipping of this article along with a hand-written letter addressed to an unspecified government minister. In Torrigiani’s letter, held in an unprocessed and restricted collection at the National Archives of Ireland, she warned that the Germans “are [as] subtle and unscrupulous as they are clever, and you will find yourself in their clutches before you are aware of the fact.” She advised the government to keep the Germans at “arms’ length,” because they would “find them...worse than the English, who are at least... honourable, whilst the Germans are dishonourable as well as dishonest.”⁴¹ Clearly, the process of negotiating what constituted “us” and “them” was

⁴⁰ “German Intrigue in Ireland-Bid for Economic Control,” *Daily Mail*, July 1924, NA SS Collection.

⁴¹ Letter from Eugenie Torrigiani, 5 July 1924, NA SS Collection.

not done in isolation and those outside Ireland were not shy about voicing their fears and prejudices towards the Germans.

The most damning criticism of the Germans and their character came from British or pro-British sympathizers in Ireland, who interpreted the contract with Siemens as a slight to the Motherland. It was widely speculated in the British press that Germany intended to lay the groundwork for world domination at the Shannon Scheme. As Michael McCarthy argued, “the contract with the Germans may have helped to put some emotional distance between Ireland and Britain and to swing the compass away from London towards Berlin, even for a while.” Some people speculated that the British were ignored in order “to create an occasion to ostentatiously offer an affront to Englishmen.”⁴² One commentator argued that if this was why they were not approached for the Shannon Scheme, “it would be wiser statesmanship to improve the friendliness of our relations with England. Englishmen are the best customers for our farm produce.” Denouncing the anti-British ethos of Irish nationalism and republicanism, the social critic went on to say that “some of our unthinking young men confuse patriotism with hatred of England. Patriotism of the right kind should be based on prudence, love of justice and love of our fellow men.” The author also provided evidence for why the British would have been a superior option to undertake the Shannon Scheme. His experience in England demonstrated to him that the English “are on the whole big-hearted and fair-minded. We should learn to appreciate them at their true worth. The Englishman’s heart is like his

⁴² McCarthy, *High Tension*, 24.

money, sterling.” Finally, he contended that the British did not have the “stomachs” to destroy Ireland, but the Germans did.⁴³

It was also widely speculated that had the Shannon Scheme been given to a British firm, criticism of the project would have been largely silenced. For example, the *Limerick Leader* stated that “if English engineers were given work of examining into and giving effect to the scheme we would hear very little of the croaking now going on in the anti-Irish press of Great Britain.”⁴⁴ Criticism of the project from across the Irish Sea also influenced those denounced as “West Britons” in the Free State. The paper suggested, “opposition in this country to the Shannon Scheme would be less vehement and persistent than it has been were the project in the hands of a private capitalistic firm and preferably an English one.”⁴⁵ So the issue of nationality added another complex layer because the project was German, and, therefore, not British. The objective for domestic supporters of the Scheme was to navigate these national divides and find ways to posit the project as an Irish one in the face of a complicated triangular relationship between the Free State, Britain, and Germany.

One way in which promoters of the Scheme attempted to do this was to embrace British criticism as a positive sign for the Irish. In a lecture on the “Future of Limerick—Prospects Under the Shannon Scheme,” Rev. Father Philip of Cork addressed the ways in which Irish citizens could interpret British criticism as good fortune for the Free State. He noted that “adverse criticism from England is one of the Scheme’s best recommendations

⁴³ Notebook entitled “Shannon Schemes and Other Matters,” containing manuscript notes by James N. Murray for Kevin O’Higgins concerning the electrification of the Irish Free State and the Siemens-Shuckert Proposal, circa 1923-1925: Kevin O’Higgins Papers, UCDA P197/164,.

⁴⁴ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 5 January 1925.

⁴⁵ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 15 June, 1925.

(applause).” The priest revealed his nationalist leanings when he mentioned “England had possession of this country for 700 years. She did nothing to develop its minerals, its industries, or other resources; on the contrary, she legislated against it and exterminated some of our industries.”⁴⁶ Philip also mentioned two previous schemes suggested by Irishmen to harness the Shannon, which, according to him, the British insincerely rejected out of concern for water levels and fishing. The real reason the British did not want to utilize the Shannon for electricity, claimed the priest, was because “it did not suit them to provide a cheap power in this country. . . . They wanted to keep one of their coal markets secure and dependent.” He called this policy “the ‘Dog in the Manger,’” since Britain “would not develop the country herself, nor let Irishmen develop it.”⁴⁷

Attacking the other side of the issue, Philip also dismissed accusations in the British press that the German connection to the Shannon Scheme posed a threat to the nation. He sardonically observed that such publications were “now full of virtuous indignation when they see Irishmen introducing this big scheme.” The priest claimed that British papers “are now crying out about the scheme being of German origin and the danger to poor Ireland of Germany getting an economic strangle-hold on Ireland.”⁴⁸ To this, he responded that “no one desires to see Ireland an economic fief of Germany; any more than we desired to be political fiefs of Great Britain.” Philip indicated that the idea “that we should reject the Shannon Scheme because it is the product of German initiative is as ridiculous and bigoted as would be a proposal to reject Shakespeare and Dante

⁴⁶ “Future of Limerick—Prospects Under the Shannon Scheme—A ‘Bright and Cheery’ Outlook,” Lecture by Rev. Father Philips, O.F.M., *Limerick Leader*, 21 March 1925.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

because they are not Irish.”⁴⁹ He echoed a similar sentiment expressed by Colonel Maurice George Moore in the Seanad just three months before when he stated that “the real issue is not between the Liffey and the Shannon as rival sources of power, but between the German firm of Siemens Schuckert and certain important financial interests in London and Dublin.”⁵⁰ Instead, he believed that “several other British financiers are determined to combat the acquisition by Germany of an economic stranglehold on the Free State.” Demonstrating that the original threat to Ireland was the British, the colonel supposed that “if Germany is to get a stranglehold on the Free State in that way, England will also have a stranglehold if she succeeds now. England is much nearer and more capable of holding on to that stranglehold. . . . They had it, they lost it, and they want to regain it.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, this was not ideal speculation, and as Tim Pat Coogan has shown, “the Shannon hydro-electric scheme project resulted in an imbalance in the Irish-German trading relationship which illustrates both the disparity and the scale of the volume of trade.” He noted that “between 1924 and 1930 Irish exports to Germany rose by 500%, amounting to a total of 237,981 in 1930. Irish imports from Germany, however, rose from 744,580 in the same period to 1,329,931.”⁵²

Gauging how the Irish responded to these warnings from abroad can be difficult to determine, but there is evidence to suggest that such opinions could be interpreted as unwarranted meddling in national affairs. For instance, the *Irish Independent* admitted

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Colonel Maurice George Moore, “Railways (Directorate) Bill, 1924 (Second Stage), Seanad Éireann Debates, vol. 3, 17 December 1924.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (London: Arrow Books, 2004), 280.

that it had “adversely criticised” the Shannon Scheme, but condemned papers like the *Morning Post* who regarded the project “as an unfriendly action towards British industry” and “visualize[d] with fearful forebodings the establishment of a colony of skilled German mechanics in this country.” Rather than uniting with fellow critics of the scheme, the *Independent* provided evidence of English contracts with Germany and emphasized Ireland’s dependence on trade with Britain to affirm that “the line followed by the anti-Irish journal is as contemptible as it is absurd.”⁵³

While Irish papers may not have expressed as overtly as English papers a fear of German invasion or colonization, there was a sense that their presence should not be ignored and ought to be monitored closely. In an article cited earlier, I. Poole wondered in the pages of *Honesty*, “is it that having chased the British lion into his den, we are now to be the prey of the German eagle, who, by plausible and statute methods of propaganda and trade, will get us in its talons?” He jokingly speculated that “the German invasion of the Free State will be a menace to England in the first place and will ultimately become a danger to our own land.” While admitting that “it would be the acme of absurdity to even hint that a century hence Germany may have an aerodrome and fort at Howth or elsewhere and our children’s children be practicing the Goose-step in Phoenix Park,” he nevertheless advocated caution and placed responsibility with the government. Poole suggested that the men in government “would be well-advised to pinch themselves and see if they are as wide-awake as the ordinary man-in-the-street, who sees something more than mere industrial development in the present campaign of peaceful penetration by

⁵³ “German Gold,” *Irish Independent*, 10 April 1925.

German capitalists.”⁵⁴ The writer used humor as a means of advocating for genuine skepticism and caution by criticizing unfounded accusations based on racial stereotypes of German aggression.

Other supporters of the project eagerly asserted that British criticism was evidence for why the Scheme was in the best interest of the Free State. For example, the *Limerick Leader* recalled that “Daniel O’Connell once remarked that if the London ‘Times’ had anything good to say of him he should examine his conscience.” Using like reasoning, the paper supposed that “the people of Ireland might well regard as commendable any Irish movement or proposal denounced by the ‘Morning Post.’”⁵⁵ According to the article, “this doughty champion of reaction appears to be very troubled in its mind about the project for electrically harnessing the Shannon,” which the *Leader* claimed “is in itself strong evidence that the scheme has the germs of great progress and prosperity for this country.” Elaborating on this theme, the paper claimed,

The Shannon Scheme is evidently causing a good deal of annoyance in that reactionary and bigoted section of Britishers who hate to see Ireland prospering and progressing and would stoop to anything to see our country kept forever backward. The project, however, will very likely materialise and it is highly significant of its importance, practicability and utility to find anti-Irish journals like the ‘Morning Post’ and ‘Daily Mail’ up in arms against it.⁵⁶

Critical that the *Morning Post* also condemned the Scheme by using the language of nationality, the *Leader* charged that the British paper “favours the Liffey Scheme as against the Shannon one, but it rather gives itself away when it mentions that ‘Irishmen happen to be interested in the one and the Germans in the other.’” The *Leader* deduced

⁵⁴ I. Poole, “Who will own Ireland,” *Honesty*, 20 June 1925.

⁵⁵ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 5 January 1925.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

that this “statement gives the clue to the uneasiness being displayed in certain British quarters over the prospect of a German firm of experts being given the contract.” But the Irish paper was not sympathetic to the *Post*’s contention “that it is unfair to bring in German experts over the heads of Irish engineers to harness the water-power of the Shannon.” In fact, the *Leader* found this line of reasoning, though “decidedly amusing,” to be “di[s]gusting,” in much the same way that Philip had found it to be “ridiculous and bigoted.” It also did not appreciate the British paper’s reasoning that the Liffey could meet Ireland’s needs at a more modest price. As it sarcastically remarked, “How considerate of our contemporary, assuredly, to be anxious to keep down the expenditure of Irish money on Irish schemes!” As if this was not an egregious enough effrontery, the *Leader* concluded “that the ‘Morning Post’ depreciated our looking for future developments in our country” in its support of the Liffey Scheme.⁵⁷

The *Morning Post* was similarly targeted by a writer for the *Limerick Leader* going by the nom de plume “Noiram.” According to the Irish reporter, an article published in the English paper headed “The Germans in Ireland” was reminiscent of “a Sherlock Holmes’ story.” Sticking to its customary disapproval of the project, the journalist stated, “when the British public are asked to make some new surrender to that Government (An Saorstát), it will, we hope keep this Shannon business in mind.” “Noiram” dismissed this comment as unfounded, claiming that “every sane Irishman knows that the love bestowed by the ‘Morning Post’ [sic] on Ireland is of such a fractional capacity as to leave the denominator a proud possessor of at least a dozen

⁵⁷ Ibid.

figures with a noteworthy ‘dot’ over the last two.”⁵⁸ Like the others, this Irish writer put a spin on the language used by the British to critique the Scheme when he commented that the *Post*’s journalist “gives good and solid advice to his English people when he tells them ‘to keep the Shannon Scheme in view,’ because, as even a child can foresee, the advance of economic science has left no other alternative than the use of ‘white coal’ for black.”⁵⁹

However, some British commentators came to the defense of the Free State’s decision to grant the contract to the Germans. The *Limerick Leader* reprinted an article from the *London Observer* in which the writer declared, “government undertakings as a rule are not popular, for there is a history of some that is not encouraging for new enterprises. NO charge of feebleness, however, can be laid at the door of the Irish Free State government in tentatively accepting the proposals laid before them by the German firm of Siemens-Schukert [sic], nor can any charge of want of care or of political bias be advanced in respect of the manner in which these proposals were examined and tested.”⁶⁰ In a publication entitled *The Shannon Hydro-Electric Power Scheme: Construction Work carried out under the direction of the Department of Industry and Commerce*, a series of articles that had originally been published in the British journal *The Engineer* reached a similar conclusion about the government’s unbiased and justified decision to go with the German firm. Praising the proposal put forward by Siemens, the author supposed that “if any English firm had tackled the matter in the same way, there seems to be no doubt that

⁵⁸ “Noiram,” “The Shannon Scheme—‘White Coal’ to Replace Black,” *Limerick Leader*, 16 September 1925.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ “An English View—Of the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 7 October 1929.

it would have been given equal opportunities, and the money that is being spent on the undertaking might have come to this country.”⁶¹

McLaughlin also dismissed publically the notion that Siemens had been chosen as a means to slight the British. As the managing director of the ESB, he consistently spoke of the project as purely a business venture, and not as a means of political maneuvering. McLaughlin told a meeting of the Limerick Rotary Club that British firms had secured the contract for the high tension network and “the construction of the transformer stations in face of very keen Continental competition.” When British manufactures came to him hoping they would get preferences, he maintained his strict adherence to business principles. Indeed, he emphasized that he had “replied that the Irish got no preference for their agricultural produce in the English markets—that the Irish exporters had to meet with the keen competition of Continental trade rivals.”⁶² This practice of fashioning the Free State as an independent agent in trade agreements with other nations, including Britain, provided legitimacy to the government’s decision to work with Siemens. The *Sunday Graphic* also addressed the limited participation of British firms and acknowledged that:

The Free State government has been criticised, not only in England but also in Ireland, for not placing this huge contract with its neighbour and best customer. It would seem that if British firms did not tender it was because they were not given the opportunity. But though the Germans are the principals, large orders have already been placed in Great Britain in connection with the work, including some £90,000 worth of electrical material for the distribution alone.⁶³

⁶¹ *The Shannon Hydro-Electric Power Scheme: Construction Work carried out under the direction of the Department of Industry and Commerce*, originally published as a series of articles in *The Engineer*, December 1927-March 1928: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/122.

⁶² “Industries to Come—Advantage for Limerick,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 July 1928.

⁶³ Valentine Williams, “Begone, Celtic Twilight: A Young Irishman’s Dream Lights the Face of a New and Hopeful Ireland,” *Sunday Graphic*, 16 September 1928.

The journalist concluded that an “association of Great Britain and Ireland in this enterprise would have had political results transcending in importance all pecuniary considerations.”⁶⁴ However, he was hopeful that, even though the British did not take the lead on the Shannon Scheme, they might be able to benefit from it and strengthen future economic connections with the Free State. The journalist claimed that British and Irish prosperity were interdependent, and “British business men will watch with interest the development of the Shannon Scheme, with its, as yet, almost unexplored possibilities of industrial expansion. It may be that the stream of energy flowing from the river whose banks have been the scene of so many tragic passages in history of the two peoples will bring with the light and the power it radiates a new spirit of reconciliation.”⁶⁵

Cumann na nGaedheal likely would not have embraced this sentiment expressed in the English press since the party was constantly battling the opposition’s claims that it had pro-British tendencies. Efforts to downplay politics in favor of prudent business decisions by McLaughlin and others, especially in their attempts to highlight British participation in the construction of the grid, in many ways contradicted nationalist’s promotion of the project as a means to demonstrate independence. While the purpose of rhetoric that deemphasized the dam as a political statement may have been to shield Cumann na nGaedheal leaders from accusations of playing politics with the nation’s greatest undertaking, the legacy of national ethos in Irish political thinking provided little support for such an approach. Using the dam as a means to demonstrate independence

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

from Britain, rather than highlighting its commercial contributions to the project, remained the most popular maneuver for Cumann na nGaedheal politicians.

The pressure to decrease Ireland's dependence on British coal clearly had nationalist influences. It echoed the hopes of Arthur Griffith, the revered Irish nationalist and founder of Sinn Fein, to obtain economic independence. Nationalists, following the call of those like the founder of Sinn Fein, Arthur Griffith, believed that one of the most important ways for the Irish to separate themselves from the British Empire was to develop natural resources and lessen their dependence on foreign goods. The Shannon Scheme was seen by many nationalists, including government officials, as a means to replace British coal in Ireland. While protectionism was considered an economic disaster by farmers who depended on exports of produce and cattle, Griffith's call for economic independence through the utilization of domestic natural resources resounded with greater appeal to a generation steeped in revolutionary propaganda that focused on economic, political, and psychological self-sufficiency. In a newspaper article titled "Ireland's White Coal," the author explained Griffith's perception of national resources:

Modern nations are made or broken not so much by bayonets as by economic forces. Arthur Griffith realised that this truth lay at the root of Ireland's discontent. . . . To Griffith, nationality without good economies was like faith without good works—dead. To him the shrill voice of hatred of the British Empire without active work for Irish industry was no more nourishing to Ireland than a blast of east wind blowing through an apple garden in April. Therefore, his policy was directed towards the development of Irish farms, mines, water ways, water power, harbours, and cities. He believed with the deep sincerity of a prophet that only when the Irish people themselves developed these sources of wealth could the materials be gathered and the gracious commonwealth be woven from the ideals of Irish nationalism.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *Star*, 5 January 1929.

In a government publication called *The Shannon Scheme*, its authors noted that “when considering a scheme as the Shannon Development our thoughts naturally turn to Arthur Griffith who so long preached the doctrine that political oppression has usually its origin in economic rivalry, that political freedom is only attained when economic freedom has been attained.”⁶⁷ Cumann na nGaedheal leaders touted that the project would do as much, and the press kept this patriotic and nationalistic objective at the forefront. Desmond Fitzgerald, Minister for Defense, spoke on the government’s aim to nationalize electricity from the Shannon Scheme under the Electricity Supply Bill in 1927. He described the government’s goal to consider the entire nation since “every part of the country would get electric light and power cheaper than they had got it before, and to have it produced by Irish water power instead of by English coal.”⁶⁸

It was widely speculated that British criticism of the project partly arose from the economic concern that hydroelectricity would alter the balance of trade, with negative results for British coal suppliers. For example, the *Limerick Leader* reported that “the chief reason, of course, why England looks with disfavour on the proposed Shannon enterprise, is that the undertaking . . . would at once wipe out to a great extent a very valuable and convenient market for British coal.” As the paper succinctly put it, “Britain would not be so concerned with our utilization of our ‘white coal’ if that did not mean a loss of market for her own ‘black diamonds.’”⁶⁹ However, when asked whether coal needed to run the equipment needed to run machinery during the construction of the dam

⁶⁷ “The Shannon Scheme,” government publication, [n.d.]: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/10.

⁶⁸ “Government’s Aim,” *Irish Independent*, 30 April 1927.

⁶⁹ “Random Gossip—‘White Coal’ v. Black,” *Limerick Leader*, 21 February 1925.

would be purchased from Germany, or if opportunities would be made available to English firms, McLaughlin continued to present a strictly business attitude, devoid of politics, when he claimed that the origin of the coal was of little relevance. According to the *Limerick Leader*, he stated that the Free State would “buy the coal in the cheapest market—it is immaterial to us whether it is English or German.” To explain his reasoning, McLaughlin chuckled “we . . . are not sentimentalists in the matter of business, and we buy in the cheapest markets.”⁷⁰

As the head of a semi-state body, McLaughlin was in the unique position to speak on behalf of the Free State, though he was not an elected official, and was therefore granted more leeway to position the ESB as a business rather than as an extension of the government. However, President Cosgrave echoed these sentiments several years later when he told a reporter for the *New York Times*, “when approving the scheme our prime intention was to save on our coal imports and to provide electricity in a country where its use is as yet hardly known. . . . We gave the orders to the Germans because their plans were superior to the suggestions put forward by other people.”⁷¹ Cosgrave added that “there is no animosity against British products. Our only aim is to buy in the cheapest markets irrespective of nationality, although there remains, of course, imperial preference.”⁷² Cumann na nGaedheal politicians, including Cosgrave, also benefited from positing the decision to hire the Germans as a purely business proposition by appearing to be diplomatic and rational rather than spiteful and emotional. While this could be

⁷⁰ “Coal for the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 21 October 1925.

⁷¹ Ewing Galloway, “Cosgrave Sees Ireland Now in Reconstruction,” *New York Times*, 9 June 1929.

⁷² *Ibid.*

effective political rhetoric, it is important to remember that this language existed alongside explicitly anti-British propaganda associated with the scheme.

Interestingly enough, the public message espoused by McLaughlin directly contradicted his private correspondence with the government's principal liaison to the project, the soon-to-be Minister for Industry and Commerce himself, Patrick McGilligan. In a private letter to McGilligan, a friend from college days, McLaughlin revealed, "In Siemens I am very happy. I have been treated very well and the Germans are friendly and kind like the people at home."⁷³ Not only this, but he confided that he "prefer[red] them to the English." McLaughlin also had an unmistakable fascination with German women, recounting to McGilligan a "walk down Leinziger Strasse immersed in thought—suddenly I feel a gentle hand and I startled look up—a beautiful blonde faces me and with a sweet smile says 'Kommen sie mit mir' and all my German vanishes." Shocked by what he considered immoral, McLaughlin told his friend how he reacted, "I doff my hat, bow low, and say mademoiselle, I thank you but pray excuse me and it is my turn to smile and walk on!"⁷⁴ However, even these encounters did not sway the young Irish engineer living abroad in Germany because he admitted that he desired "a little girl to talk broken German to but my friends tell me there is no 'respectable' little girls so I have called a Baroness to my aid and she is to find me a very pretty one. I await the adventure." The significance of McLaughlin's boyish tales of chasing women in a foreign country and his admiration for the German people is that it underlined his close personal relationship with McGilligan and other Cumann na nGaedheal leaders at a particularly

⁷³ Letter to Patrick McGilligan from Thomas McLaughlin, circa 1923-1924: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA, P35d/133.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

opportune moment. For it is in the same letter to McGilligan, that he also introduced the idea of a working relationship between Siemens and the Free State when he noted, “we look forward to a great future in Ireland, but please *do not speak* of this at home as the firm is very anxious not to noise it about.” Contrary to statements he would make later about the unbiased business agreement negotiated between Siemens and the Free State, McLaughlin predicted, before a proposal was even presented, that he “believe[d] we can undercut English firms.”⁷⁵

A few politicians, conscious of future economic repercussions, also tried to smooth over the anti-British rumors circulating about by justifying why the project was awarded to the Germans. For example, Senator John McLoughlin delivered a message that simultaneously praised the British as important trading partners, while also making a case for German initiative and skills in hydroelectric development. Unlike Thomas McLaughlin, he believed preference should have been given to the British, but he made a case for why the Germans deserved the opportunity. In the fifth stage of the discussion of the Shannon Electricity Bill in the Seanad, Senator McLoughlin charged that critics lodged two primary objections to the project: the “secret fear . . . that the Free State will succeed too well, and that we will become too independent of our neighbours across the water”; and “the bogey that the work is being done by the Germans, are the cardinal objections to the scheme in the eyes of most of its critics.”⁷⁶ McLoughlin claimed to “have no preference for the Germans,” and he acknowledged the “importance of

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Senator John McLoughlin, “Shannon Electricity Bill, 1925—Fifth Stage,” Seanad Éireann Debates, 25 June 1925.

cultivating and maintaining good trade relations with the people across the channel.” But he announced to his fellow senators,

All things being equal, a British firm as belonging to our best customer, should have the preference, but all things are not equal. The people who object to the Germans getting this work to do should remember the fact that, for years, the Shannon lay there to be electrified by either British or Irish engineers, but not one of them could do it. Then, when the Germans come along and produce their scheme . . . the cry is raised that the Germans are getting the work, and that the contract should be let out to the very people who, for years, have been saying that the electrification of the Shannon was impossible and impractical. I say that the government were quite right in giving the contract as they did. No man can make a hat like a hatter, and there is no one who could carry out this highly technical scheme like the men whose brains conceived it.⁷⁷

Several months later, Thomas Farren, a senator from the Labour party, reintroduced the question of race as it related to the Shannon Scheme in a committee debate about limiting the number of coroners in each county. He stated, “it is ridiculous to think that Limerick should have five coroners. They do not need that number, unless they are going to kill all the Germans connected with the Shannon Scheme.”⁷⁸ While the Labour party had its objections to German workers in Ireland, Farren’s comment must be read as more than just a comment on the number of coroners in Limerick; it is significant because it used the rhetoric of race—and specifically race as it related to Germans on the Shannon Scheme—to demonstrate that this discussion was such an ingrained part of the political culture that it could be utilized for other purposes of debate. As the chapters on politics demonstrated, supporters of the Shannon Scheme faced criticism from within the government about the project and felt pressure to address issues of race.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Senator Thomas Farren, “Select Committee Coroners Bill, 1925, Section 15,” *Seanad Éireann Debates*, 29 April 1926.

There was great speculation, both in Ireland and abroad, that the Free State government gave the contract to Siemens to spite the British by courting the former colonizer's enemy in World War I. Even skeptics of the project, such as the *Irish Independent*, took the defensive on this position and candidly admitted, "We have very grave doubts as to the wisdom of proceeding with the Shannon Scheme; but we do not think the average Englishman will believe us foolish enough to throw away five or six million pounds merely to display pro-German tendencies!"⁷⁹ When the *Irish Times* cautioned the government about the Shannon Scheme such "that they should do nothing in the matter that might offend England," the *Limerick Leader* quipped, "surely the slave mind and cheek could go no further in the way of what we might call a combination of impudence and absurdity."⁸⁰ Pro-British opposition to the Shannon Scheme was met with equally dogmatic opinions, ranging from outright denial of pro-German feelings (even if this was true for some like McLaughlin) to carefully phrased explanations engineered to maintain favorable conditions with the Free State's most important trading partner.

Response to Criticism: Positive German Attributes

To combat negative stereotypes of Germans as aggressive and calculating, supporters of the Shannon Scheme emphasized their positive qualities, especially their leadership in the modern sciences. In praising the Germans, some contemporaries expressed the hope that appealing characteristics of that nationality would be imparted to the Irish as a result of their interactions on the hydroelectric works. For example, the *Limerick Leader* eagerly speculated that "if we be wise in our generation, it will be of

⁷⁹ "German Gold," *Irish Independent*, 10 April 1925.

⁸⁰ "The Shannon Scheme," *Limerick Leader*, 15 June, 1925.

value to Irishmen to see how the sons of the most progressive nation on earth do their work.” Anxious to exploit the relationship to the advantage of the Irish, one writer for the paper encouraged citizens of the Free State to “let us learn all we can from them.” German superiority in the sciences was widely acknowledged, and the commentator “admitted that in technical training, in applied science and in the adoption of the most modern progressive methods, the Germans are amongst the first people in the world.”⁸¹ In a letter to the editor, another contributor discussed the Shannon Scheme and recognized, “the Germans in science are the world’s benefactors.”⁸² And yet another expressed that it was “well-known that the Germans are a highly skilled people in the fields of science and mechanics.”⁸³ For residents of Limerick, the contractors’ specialized knowledge was especially valued as they worried that blasting at the site threatened to shatter their windows. They were hopeful that “our German friends may have a way of avoiding any such damage, as they seem to have some more scientific knowledge than is dreamt of in our philosophy.”⁸⁴ Even visitors to the site described the Germans as the leaders in modern developments. One tourist looked upon the construction site and exclaimed, “it was all wonderful and orderly and German. . . . It was massive, solemn and terribly modern.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ “Clare Jottings,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 January 1926.

⁸² “Amazing Apathy,” Letter to the Editor, by “Progress,” *Limerick Leader*, 4 April 1925.

⁸³ “How a Big Project Progresses,” *Limerick Leader*, 18 December 1926.

⁸⁴ “Random Gossip—‘Good for Glaziers.’” *Limerick Leader*, 23 January 1926.

⁸⁵ “The Shannon Harnessed,” by W. M. Letts in the *Irish Times*, reprinted by the *Clare Champion*, 26 October 1929.

But calling attention to areas in which the Germans were believed to be exceptional also had the potential to highlight glaring deficiencies in Irish skill sets. Though this was sometimes the goal of nationalists who relied on shame and disapproval in their efforts to motivate their fellow countrymen to better their situations, belittling the Irish by uplifting other nationalities was not a standard practice. Speaking at a dinner held by the ESB, McGilligan justified the decision to bring in the Germans by commenting, “we were not going to be debarred from bringing in foreign brains and skill at the beginning when we knew that we had not them at home.”⁸⁶ This position was attacked by Cumann na nGaedheal’s opposition, including de Valera, who (as seen in Chapter 2) argued that the Liffey Scheme would have allowed the Irish to “have their own engineers trained to do it instead of having to bring over the Germans.”⁸⁷ Politically, having to rely on foreigners was not an ideal situation, but Cumann na nGaedheal attempted to present it as both a necessity and an opportunity for the Irish to learn German techniques. While Irish engineers and their training were the focus of the previous chapter, it is important to note here that they were constantly compared to other nationalities that often had more experience and exposure to programs of great magnitude. The task then for promoters of the Shannon Scheme was to commend German experience as an ideal that the Irish could aspire to in the future.

Another tactic used by promoters of the project was to balance an appreciation for German accomplishments with admirable traits believed to be common amongst the Irish,

⁸⁶ “The Shannon Scheme—Industrial Development to Follow,” *Clare Champion*, 15 September 1928.

⁸⁷ Compilation of de Valera’s Comments to the *Independent*, “De Valera at Nenagh,” 16 May 1927: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/11(3).

including courage and strength. For example, one writer simultaneously applauded German skills, while also asserting that “in brawn and sinew they are not superior to the sons of the Emerald Isle, but their brain power is more fully developed by an up-to-date educational system.”⁸⁸ At a time when theories of racial hierarchies favored such characteristics, emphasizing that the Irish compared favorably with the physicality of Germans meant that any perceived deficiencies in mental capacity were not the result of racial inferiority and could be corrected with a proper education. However, according to a *Limerick Leader* journalist, the Irish were not merely equal to the Germans, they had qualities to be envied since, “in other lands Irishmen outstrip all other nationalities in commercial and industrial enterprise, in feats of engineering, and in every field of human competition requiring courage, intelligence or endurance.”⁸⁹ Meanwhile, Minister for Defense Desmond Fitzgerald focused his analysis on the role of collaboration between the two nations, outlining the separate contributions made by the Germans and the Irish to the project in stereotypical terms. He claimed that “the Germans had administered to them what they had brains to do and could do,” while the Irish had displayed “what their gallantry, courage, and the facing of endurance could do, and they appreciated their services in a scheme that he believed would prove of great advantage and benefit.” Fitzgerald received applause from the audience when he concluded that “both countries had great prospects before them.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ “Clare Jottings,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 January 1926.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ “Wonderful Reception—Airmen’s Visit to Limerick,” *Limerick Leader*, 7 July 1928.

By highlighting carefully chosen positive attributes of Germany, the Free State hoped to justify its decision to allow Siemens extensive control over a project that had unprecedented importance for the state and its citizens. The newspaper *Honesty* proclaimed, “It is mainly because of Germany’s greatness that the Free State recognises her and maintains cordial diplomatic relations, which may ultimately, we hope be to mutual advantage.”⁹¹ The article further indicated that “Germany is admittedly a great nation—she is preeminent in science, art, industry, invention, research—and, even in her present hour of adversity she is brave and persevering in her efforts to regain her place in commerce and world power.”⁹² Ironically, although playing up Germany’s reputation as an international leader in modernization and hydroelectric development certainly matched the Free State’s practice of relying on experts for approval, it had the adverse effect of belittling the qualifications of Irish engineers as incapable of carrying out such an undertaking of great national importance.

Many who lived near the construction zone also complimented the Germans on their politeness and general demeanor. For example, a local paper noted that “Limerick is at present being afforded lessons in continental courtesy. The Germans here in connection with the Shannon Scheme doff their hats not only to ladies, but to members of the sterner sex. It is quite common to see two German males lifting their hats to each other as they pass in the street. This custom is quite common in France and Germany.”⁹³

⁹¹ I. Poole, “Who will own Ireland,” *Honesty*, 20 June 1925.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ “Random Gossip—‘Continental Courtesy,’” *Limerick Leader*, 23 January 1926.

Others described the Germans as “thorough-going, keen business people, amiable and very agreeable to work for.”⁹⁴

Despite the best efforts by the German contractors to act with professionalism and courtesy, the coverage and interpretation of their deeds was at the mercy of each media outlet. Not everyone was impressed by German sensibilities, and in a few cases, some even took offense at them. For example, *Honesty* resented other press reports claiming “German appreciation of Irish Workers.” Shocked that “a Dublin newspaper, quite unconscious of absurdity and, apparently, of the insolence of such a remark, makes known that the German is appreciative of the effort of his Irish minions,” *Honesty* declared that the situation “added insult to [the] injury that huge sums of money are to be handed to the Germans, who, in return, employ a minimum number of Irishmen.” Clarifying its stance on this issue, the weekly noted, “if this remark had appeared in a German newspaper, it might have been permissible, if rather bad taste, but in an Irish newspaper it creates a new record even for our notorious press.”⁹⁵ The sensitivity expressed by *Honesty* in this matter reveals that the German contractors were under immense scrutiny, demonstrated by the fact that even their well-intentioned efforts to praise Irish participation in the project could be met with disapproval.

Establishing Differences and Similarities

Establishing what made the Germans “German”—and thus not Irish—was an important consequence of the Shannon Scheme and was typically expressed through observable cultural characteristics including language, food, religion, and other attributes

⁹⁴ “Killaloe and Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 January 1926.

⁹⁵ “Much Ado,” *Honesty* 3, no. 59, 10 April 1926.

that were perceived to be unique to the German race. As was often the case, racist humor in the press assumed an audience that was at the very least familiar enough with racial stereotypes to understand the jokes and more likely one that had internalized them to such a degree that it found them funny. In 1929, for instance, the *Kildare Observer* reprinted a racist caricature of Germans from the *Irish Times* in which the writer focused on language and food, two of the most common cultural signifiers of difference. The fictional account read:

The Germans and the Irishmen working on the Shannon Scheme do not fraternise to any great extent, but a story is told of two who did. The German always had rabbit pie for lunch, and every day he shared this dainty with an Irish workman. "By the way," said the Irishman, "where do you get your rabbits? I never see any around here." "Ach!" replied the German, "I shoot dem. Every night dey make noise outside house and I shoot." "But rabbits do not make a noise," said the Irishman. "Doch, doch" was the reply, "Dey go 'meow, meow.'"⁹⁶

Eating cats certainly made a fool of the German, but it also implied that the Irishman, who unknowingly shared in the delicacy, was duped by the foreigner and was victim to his ineptitude at negotiating the cultural divide. While the university educated German engineers in all likelihood did not struggle to tell a cat from a rabbit, the point of the joke was to emphasize their strangeness as a means of deflating the perception of German superiority.

Curiosity over German cuisine was not always expressed in a derogatory way, but it was frequently used as a means to distinguish cultural differences. The *Clare Champion* published an article that similarly relied on food and language as particular identifiers of Germanness. "The German canteen bore testimony to the great national weakness for sausage. There seemed to be innumerable varieties of the 'dainty,' every

⁹⁶ *Kildare Observer*, 25 May 1929.

shape and size and colour imaginable, some of them with names, which, judging by their length, embodied a detailed list of the ingredients.”⁹⁷ By classifying Germans in terms of what they ate and how they spoke, social commentators were in effect identifying what the Irish were not and fostering an “imagined community.”⁹⁸ In 1999, at the age of 94, Michael Flannery recalled his experiences as a worker at the site, including his encounters with German cuisine.⁹⁹ He told the archivists from the ESB, who were interviewing him for an oral history project that he used to have lunch with an older German during the workday. According to Flannery, the foreigner “really explained to me all about the bacon. They eat it raw, you know. He was from the Black Forest, he told me. They shoved it up a chimney, and let it cook away there, and go up and take a bit off of it and eat it. It was smoked and cooked.” However, this cooking method did not bother the Irishman, who claimed, the brain was absolutely delightful. Their own women baked it. They were always very clean and tidy looking.”¹⁰⁰ While differences in cuisine may have disturbed others, Flannery’s recollection revealed that new types of food could also be exiting and pleasurable.

Richard Hayward published an account of his travels in Ireland in August 1939 called *Where the River Shannon Flows*, and his prejudice towards the Germans was pronounced as he looked on food preferences with more contempt than curiosity. He quipped that “at Ardnacusha they were artificially sustained in what was virtually a

⁹⁷ “Lighter Side of Ardnacusha,” *Clare Champion*, 28 January 1928.

⁹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

⁹⁹ *Ardnacusha Veterans*, “Interview with Michael Flannery,” ESB Oral History Collection, DVD, 1999.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

transplanted German town. German food was imported, German beer was brought over, and very little of the Irish money paid in wages to these unpleasant, inhumanly efficient, humorless, bombastic automatons, almost every one of them a potential Hitler, was spent in Ireland.”¹⁰¹ Though an Englishman, the travel writer assumed himself qualified to speak for the Irish when he observed, “The Germans were not popular around Limerick. Their national characteristics are poles apart from those of the Irish people—much farther apart even than Irish and English ways of life.”¹⁰² Lamenting that a British firm was not hired for the project, Hayward recalled that a local publican had once told him, “Be dammit, if we’d had the British at Ardnacrusha, they’d have drunk the town dry every Saturday, for they’re the lads know how to spend their money. The Germans! Damn’ all they’re good for but bombastin’ an’ bloody wars. It’s not men they are at all, but machines.”¹⁰³ By dehumanizing the Germans and emphasizing their propensity for violence, it became possible for the Irish to obscure their own recent hostilities and subhuman status perpetuated by the former colonizers.

The resentment expressed over Germans sending money home and importing their own food was often coupled with a fear that there were too many of them sneaking into Ireland for work, and that they may never leave. In a newspaper article entitled, “The Shannon Scheme for Native Deportation—Ireland for the Foreigner,” the anonymous writer speculated that “It is clear to anyone with eyes to see that those Germans are not going to clear out of the country when this contract is finished—if it ever is. And, again,

¹⁰¹ Richard Hayward, *Where the River Shannon Flows* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1940), 273.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

rumour has it that they are allowed to import their motor cars free of duty, and some would also say some of their foodstuffs, and cigars, and tobacco.”¹⁰⁴ The writer described visiting Limerick where “he could imagine himself in Berlin, considering the way he was jostled by hordes of German men, women and children.” Placing the blame for this perceived injustice squarely on the shoulders of government leaders, the writer accused them of opening a money order office at Ardnacrusha “for the sole benefit of Germans, so they could send away the money wrung from the sweat and blood of the Irish taxpayer.” Despite the fact that others observed “most of the Germans were said to be sending nearly all their earnings across to their own country but that, on the face of it, must be very largely an exaggeration,” he remained steadfast in his convictions about the Germans.¹⁰⁵ Instead of acknowledging exaggerations, the writer embraced hyperbole by proclaiming, “We have heard of the Plantations under Elizabeth and Cromwell, but it is nothing compared to the German Plantations under President Cosgrave’s beneficent rule.” Echoing the xenophobic British press, this writer for *Honesty* argued that the only solution to this awful state of affairs was to “stand firm and insist that the foreigner must go.”¹⁰⁶

In addition to newspaper and political commentary on the Germans, foreigners at Ardnacrusha were also featured in local folksongs about the project as a means of demarcating Irishness. As one might expect, the Germans were by no means the focus of these cultural interpretations and they were certainly not celebrated like the Irish

¹⁰⁴ Exile, “The Shannon Scheme for Native Deportation -Ireland for the Foreigner,” *Honesty*, 11 June 1927.

¹⁰⁵ “Things That Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 7 September 1929.

¹⁰⁶ Exile, “The Shannon Scheme for Native Deportation -Ireland for the Foreigner,” *Honesty*, 11 June 1927.

statesmen or workers. For example, in *The History and Folklore of Parteen and Meelick*, editor Eilís Uí Shúilleabháin described, “a popular song of the time, attributed to the well-known balladeer Phonsie Hanrahan, contain[ed] the following lines: Hoist up the red flag and pull down the green/For the Germans are blowing up the road to Parteen.”¹⁰⁷ This song emphasized German socialism and militarism (red flag) as a threat to the Irish state, and further alluded to this violent and warmongering stereotype by depicting the building of the dam in destructive (blowing up) rather than constructive terms. James Lynch’s song “When the Shannon starts flowing down through Donegal,” is representative of songs about the Shannon Scheme because it shared a sense of optimism about the future and pride in Irish initiative. However, one verse of his song was particularly relevant to the discourse on Irish-German relations. Preceded by the hopeful prediction that current from the Shannon would mean profits, the song continued,

At least so they told me and Germans don’t lie,
 Except in their beds till Sunday goes by,
 And old Ardnacrusha is like Berlin,
 Where the lingo they speak starts a pain in your chin.¹⁰⁸

The first two lines of this verse express a slight to Lutherans who were often perceived as less devout churchgoers in contrast to Irish Catholics, whose religion was central to national belonging. Like others who pointed to language as a central way of establishing difference, Lynch’s last two lines conveyed a dislike for the spoken German heard around Ardnacrusha, and in doing so, they reflected that the Shannon Scheme inadvertently created a space for discussion about race and national identity at a time when these issues

¹⁰⁷ “The Shannon Scheme,” in *The History and Folklore of Parteen and Meelick*, ed. Eilís Uí Shúilleabháin (Limerick: Intype Ltd., 1991): 152.

¹⁰⁸ James Lynch, “When the Shannon starts flowing down through Donegal,” Songs of Ardnacrusha, ESB Archives.

were of paramount importance and revealed the project's underexplored political and cultural significance in Irish history.

While some commentators singled out language, food, and religion as markers of cultural difference, others sought out similarities between the Germans and the Irish to demonstrate a sense of camaraderie and to emphasize positive cross-cultural interactions. The *Irish Times* indicated that “nearly all the principal officials speak English fluently.”¹⁰⁹ Unlike those who jested about Germans’ poor linguistic abilities, a journalist for the *Limerick Leader* commended Germans for their command of the English language, though admitting that their translations were by no means perfect. The writer mentioned that “to those acquainted more or less, and in touch with the scheme since the beginning, not one of the least striking things is the rapidity with which the German workmen have acquired a good working knowledge of English.” This was attributed to the fact that people on the continent were more adept to learning new languages. Given the example of “when a German wants to know what particular work you’re engaged on he says ‘what makes you,’” the journalist explained that the speaker “replaces English for German words without generally troubling to ascertain their correct sequence in an English sentence.” However, this did not make conversing an impossible endeavor, as the writer concluded that “in the majority of cases the meaning implied is almost universally recognised and understood, especially after a little first-hand experience in trying to hold a conversation.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ “Shannon Water-Power Scheme—Rapid Progress by the German Engineers,” *Irish Times*, 19 August 1926.

¹¹⁰ “Electric Sparks—Flashes from the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 April 1927.

While most were wont to point out the differences between English and German, some were pleased to note shared features of the languages. For example, the journalist noted above was surprised to discover that “to those acquainted with our native tongue the similarity of phrasing is in some cases striking.”¹¹¹ The fact that the writer assumed the Irish native tongue to be English and not Gaelic was itself telling, suggesting an unsupportive stance on this particular aspect of cultural nationalism. Nevertheless, the article went on to compare, “the name beer in German is, of course, pronounced the same as in English; and that other very commodity in the cost of living, to wit, stout, is universally pronounced by all Germans as sthout, as good as an Irishman with the broadest brogue.”¹¹²

Establishing differences between languages was a far more common practice in the othering of Germans than tracing similarities, but there was also a contingent in Ireland that was interested in linking the two cultures through the historical record. For instance, the *Freeman* reminded its readers,

The German employees of Messrs. Siemens-Schuckert are not the first of their countrymen to labour on the banks of the Shannon. The colonies of German ‘Palatines,’ planted in various parts of the County Limerick two hundred years ago are now all but forgotten. The ranks of these sturdy settlers from Rhineland have long since been thinned almost to nothing by emigration, and the remnants that have survived have become absorbed by inter-marriage with the native Irish. Electricity was as yet undreamt of when the first of the Palatines set foot in Ireland.¹¹³

M. G. Palmer, writing for the *New York Times*, also reflected on the historic relationship between the Irish and the German Palatines. Claiming that the latter “came and saw, but

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “German Colonies in Limerick—Story of the Palatines,” *The Freeman* 1, no. 16, 26 November 1927.

instead of conquering they were conquered,” Palmer traced the process of assimilation whereby “they had begun to drop their native ‘saurkraut’ for a potato diet, and though in the neighborhood of Limerick one finds names like Bovinzer, Rappe and Ruttle, and German ancestry peeps out in flaxen hair and blue eyes, the Palatine, as he is still called, is indistinguishable from the ordinary Irish countryman.”¹¹⁴ However, according to Palmer, the process of assimilation was not a smooth one, and the Irish had experienced a cultural shock in their encounters with the Palatines, much as they did two hundred years later on the Shannon Scheme. He described that the German of the 1700s “no longer horrifies his neighbors by his passion for hard work, as in the early days of his settlement, when tales were spread that the Palatines yoked their wives to the plow against horses.” Apparently, this stereotype of industrious Germans was enduring considering that the dynamic between hardworking German foremen and lazy Irish workers became a recurrent problem for the chief engineer. But as for the Palatines of yesteryear, who embraced the Irish way of being “slow-moving and easygoing, these Irishized Germans contemplate wonderingly Germans of another brand who play tricks with a mighty river as if it were no more than a trickle of water in a back garden, chain the lightning and hustle and drive at a pace Ireland has never known in her history.”¹¹⁵

While German emigrants and the Irish mixed in the 1700s, the *Limerick Leader* also proposed that the Shannon Scheme provided another opportunity for assimilation and cultural blending. Going back several more hundred years, the paper referred to the

¹¹⁴ M. G. Palmer, “The Shannon Stirs New Hope in Ireland: Popular Imagination Has Been Fired by the Harnessing of Its Historic Waters to Make Industries Grow,” *New York Times Magazine*, 12 January 1930; Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35d/15 (15).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Geraldines or FitzGerald dynasty, a powerful family in Ireland since the fourteenth century, and recalled the familiar trope that these foreigners “became more Irish than the Irish themselves.” According to the article, some “may think there are signs of a similar phenomenon on the Shannon Scheme,” but the journalist concluded “that the metamorphosis of that description in as far as the Germans are concerned is to say the least of it extremely remote.”¹¹⁶ Unlike those settlers of the Palatines, who had become one with the Irish race, the *Leader* projected that “the most we may ever expect is to send back to Germany large numbers of men speaking English with a strong Irish brogue.” Lightheartedly speculating the repercussions of this type of cross-cultural experience, the article stated, “in another hundred thousand years someone will try to prove to the Gaeltacht Commission that we are descended from a people living somewhere between the Rhine and the Masurian Marches. Stranger things have happened.”¹¹⁷

Irish-German Interactions

Although an analysis of criticism and counter-examples of racial stereotypes reveals a great deal about how concepts of race and nationality developed over time, they do not elucidate how Irish-German relations existed in reality. While speaking hypothetically about warmongering modern Germans, British conspiracies, or shared cultural legacies provides a glimpse into the shaping of ideologies, this information must be coupled with the complex interactions shared by the national groups in order to get at a better understanding of the ways in which the Shannon Scheme influenced perceptions of Irishness. Topics that offer evidence to characterize these encounters include: the

¹¹⁶ “Electric Sparks—Flashes from the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 April 1927.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

comings and goings of Germans; negotiations with Siemens; episodes of violence, racial prejudice, and harmony; and an understanding of the ways in which all of these instances were shaped by the political leanings of the newspapers that reported on them.

An issue that received special attention in the press was the number of Germans employed on the Shannon Scheme in comparison to the number of Irish workers. This had practical repercussions for citizens of the Free State who assumed that every German on site had taken the position from an Irishman. McGilligan was repeatedly pressed by the Dáil to provide figures, and Labour representatives took a specific interest in this type of information given the high rates of unemployment in Ireland at that time. The Irish public was privy to this data in many formats. For example, in December 1925, the *Limerick Leader* reported that “there are now 805 men employed on the scheme, 114 being Germans and the balance Irishmen.”¹¹⁸ Mr. T. St. John Gaffney, a native of Limerick who served as the American Consul General at Munich stated that by the end of 1929, when the project was completed, “there has been considerable intercourse between Germany and Ireland. During the progress of the work some sixty German engineers and five hundred German mechanics were employed, who worked shoulder to shoulder with a similar number of Irish engineers and three thousand Irish workers.”¹¹⁹ The arrival of Germans with their families was also particularly noteworthy. In 1926, a school building was erected for German children near the construction site. According to the *Limerick Leader*, at the time, “the population of German speaking children is between 30 and

¹¹⁸ “Shannon Scheme—Much Progress Already Made,” *Limerick Leader*, 14 December 1925.

¹¹⁹ “Ireland and Germany—Relations during the War and Since,” *Limerick Leader*, 28 December 1929.

40.”¹²⁰ It was important for people to know how many foreigners were in their country, and accurate figures were vital for combating wild speculations, which were found in the pages of such unsympathetic news outlets as *Honesty*, which reported that the government was scheming to conceal the presence of 5,000 to 10,000 Germans at one time.¹²¹

Just as accounting for how many Germans were arriving received attention, their departures were also publicized. This was in part due to the fact that a number of people were worried that the Germans planned to settle in the Free State. In 1926, the *Limerick Leader* claimed that “twenty-one Germans employed on the Shannon have gone back home within the past few weeks. Their return to their own country was due to the fact that the particular work they were engaged upon in connection with the project has been completed.”¹²² This explanation was typical in the sense that the Germans were discussed in terms of a temporary status that was directly tied to the Shannon Scheme. The Irish were not interested in encouraging them to stay and their presence in the Free State was depicted as strictly a matter of business. For instance, the *Limerick Leader* stated that the contractors had a clearly defined objective to complete the hydroelectric dam, and concluded satirically that “Siemens did not come to visit the Shannon for the purpose of viewing the scenic beauty of the Falls of Doonass.”¹²³ McGilligan also reassured dinner party guests of the ESB that the Germans ““realised from the beginning that they could

¹²⁰ “Shannon Scheme—More Developments,” *Limerick Leader*, 31 May 1926.

¹²¹ Exile, “The Shannon Scheme for Native Deportation—Ireland for the Foreigner,” *Honesty*, 11 June 1927.

¹²² “Random Gossip—Back Home,” *Limerick Leader*, 27 March 1926.

¹²³ “Amazing Apathy,” Letter to the Editor, by “Progress,” *Limerick Leader*, 4 April 1925.

not remain in Ireland permanently, that the country was bringing them in for the country's use and advantage, and that when that had been attained we would bid them a most graceful farewell.”¹²⁴

When it came time for the majority of Germans to leave in 1929, the *Leitrim Observer* published an article entitled “Return to the Fatherland,” in which it referenced a popular German song when it foretold “the watch on the Irish ‘Rhine’ is ending.” In light of previously expressed fears that the Germans might never leave, the paper explicitly stated that “week by week German workers on the banks of the Shannon are packing up and returning to the Fatherland, because the Shannon Scheme is now almost completed, and their presence is no longer necessary.”¹²⁵ Unlike Irish emigration to places like the United States, where expatriates settled and obtained a variety of jobs, Germans coming to Ireland to work on the Shannon Scheme had clearly defined objectives that determined how long the Free State would extend its welcome. By October 1929, only 50 of the original 500 Germans remained, and the *Observer* expected that “by Christmas not a solitary German will be left.” A German executive for Siemens expressed to the paper, “We are all sorry that the time has come for us to leave, and most of us will be very anxious to visit the country again.”¹²⁶ Though the article ended with this positive assessment of German-Irish relations, it also emphasized that German immigration as a result of the Shannon Scheme was not to be expected, and that the Germans' status within the Free State had always been, and would remain, that of visitors.

¹²⁴ “The Shannon Scheme—Industrial Development to Follow,” *Clare Champion*, 15 September 1928.

¹²⁵ “Return to the Fatherland—Watch on the Irish ‘Rhine’ Ending,” *Leitrim Observer*, 26 October 1929.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Issues of labor and unemployment also helped to shape the relationship between Irish workers and German employers on the Shannon Scheme. Michael McCarthy provided an excellent and detailed account of the wage dispute that erupted in the autumn of 1925, resulting in a strike on the project.¹²⁷ Suffice it to say here that the issue did not emerge as a confrontation between the contractors and Irish laborers—many interpreted it as neglect on the part of the Irish government. Nevertheless, violence did occur between the Irish and the Germans as a result of this wage dispute. Indeed, some observers applied interpretations of these events that were designed to create further division between the nationalities. For example, James Carr, secretary of the Limerick Trades and Labour Council, spoke at a meeting held at the O’Connell monument in the city. Referring to attacks on Germans by Irish laborers, he admitted that “he could not see any more sacredness in the skull of a German scab than in the skull of an Irish one. The instrument alleged to have been used in the reported attack on the Germans in Barrington Street seemed to have been a very cute German invention—a rubber tube loaded with lead. (A Voice—A German sausage). (Laughter).”¹²⁸ Carr also stated that “he did not believe that any of the Germans employed on the docks in the erection of a little crane were engineers at all.” Claiming that the Irish were held to a higher standard than the Germans, he elaborated that “if they were Irish engineers and had not the work completed by now they would have got the sack.”¹²⁹ However, the general secretary of the I.T.G.W.U., William O’Brien, deemphasized racial issues at the meeting, arguing that it was not an issue of

¹²⁷ See McCarthy, *High Tension: Life on the Shannon Scheme*.

¹²⁸ “Shannon Scheme—Dispute Drags On,” *Limerick Leader*, 12 October 1925.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

them being German, and that “if the contractors of the scheme came from England, Wales, Scotland, or any other country, they would take the same stand on the question of principle.” In fact, O’Brien acknowledged that “he had great respect and admiration for the German nation. . . . But if, [sic] the Germans were to come over here and work under conditions calculated to degrade the standard existing in this country, they were entitled to be criticized.”¹³⁰

To be sure, a few held out that “so long as the ‘Fatherland’ is served what matters the health of Shannon scheme workers or the destiny of the ci-devant Kaiser’s ‘cabbage-patch,’” but many refused to blame the Germans for ongoing labor tensions.¹³¹ For example, speaking at a meeting of the unemployed in Nenagh, D. Morrissey, Labour T.D. “said that he was convinced that the German firm was not so much to blame for the wages offered on the Shannon Scheme as the government.”¹³² Not only were they blameless in matters of wages, but when it came to hiring, some also supposed that the Germans, “being strangers . . . have no opportunity of discriminating between the very poor and their more fortunate brothers in Ireland, who look to them for employment. They are guided chiefly by the information they receive from Irishmen in their employment and others whom they have become acquainted and familiar with.”¹³³ Therefore, according to this source, anyone who complained about who the contractors chose to hire was neglecting the Irish influence on those decisions. This negated claims that the contractors, out of some malicious plan to squeeze as much as possible out of the

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ “Much Ado,” *Honesty* 3, no. 59, 10 April 1926.

¹³² “Shannon Scheme—Conference in Limerick,” *Limerick Leader*, 26 October 1925.

¹³³ “Killaloe and the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 January 1926.

Irish laborer for the sake of the Weimar Republic, were a threat to the Irish labour movement. Thus, McCarthy's extensive research on labor issues on the Shannon Scheme has demonstrated that the fear of rising expenses for the government were at the heart of wage disputes and that "the Germans, in fact, cannot really be faulted because, as is now known, they were quite prepared to pay more and to raise the standard of accommodation."¹³⁴

Apart from the initial wage dispute, McCarthy and others have mentioned some incidents of violence between Irish workers and German foremen on the Shannon Scheme. These were titillating stories in the press and often inflated by critics of the project, including those in Britain. At a meeting of the Irish Labor Party and the Trades Union Congress, E. P. Harte, representing an English organization, utilized anti-Prussian tropes that were prevalent in the postwar era. He stated "that on the Shannon Scheme at Ardnacrusha they had a colony of Germans 'who used the most vile epithets in the German and English languages to the workers employed there, and that they do not stop at that—they use the fist and the boot on Irish workers.'" ¹³⁵ Joseph McGrath, in his role as Labour director, replied that such an accusation was "incorrect, exaggerated, and highly coloured." Nevertheless, McGrath relied on racial stereotypes of the Irish as keen fighters when he claimed to "have no doubt . . . that the Irish workers on the scheme are quite capable of dealing with any attempt by the Germans to use their fists or their boots on them."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Michael McCarthy, "How the Shannon Scheme Workers Lived," in Bielenberg's *The Shannon Scheme*, 67.

¹³⁵ "The Shannon Scheme Workers," *Clare Champion*, 13 August 1927.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

While German aggression was alluded to elsewhere as a definitive racial characteristic, specific cases of violence very often pointed to Irishmen as the instigators. For example, when in 1929, Thomas Hinchy and Michael Callan were charged with assaulting George Wiedmaier and Frank Wunsch, the court hoped to situate the case as an exception in otherwise “very good and cordial relations which have existed between the German and Irish workmen, and the German and Irish overseers.”¹³⁷ However, this statement of goodwill was overshadowed by the trial of John Joseph Cox, accused of murdering Jacob Kunz, which was brought to court just a few days later. The evidence against Cox suggested that he had followed Kunz on 21 December 1928 and hit him over the head in order to steal his money, but killed him in the process. While the papers never claimed that Cox targeted Kunz because he was German, some did rely on stereotypes of Germans to explain Cox’s motive. The *Limerick Leader* noted that “there could be no doubt that the deceased was murdered for his money. Being typical of his nation, Kunz was a thrifty man and had saved a considerable sum of money.”¹³⁸ But what was more striking was the plea for mercy issued by the jury, who found Cox guilty, when they expressed that they “were of the opinion that the death may not have ensued if the skull of the deceased had been stronger.”¹³⁹ At a time when measurements of the thickness of one’s skull carried determinative weight in racial theories, this statement explicitly faulted the German’s bone structure for failing to withstand the blow by the Irishman, and implicitly relieved Cox of responsibility. It would be interesting to know whether the

¹³⁷ “Not Vindictive—German and Irish Workers,” *Limerick Leader*, 4 March 1929.

¹³⁸ “The Parteen Murder—Opening of Trial in Dublin To-day,” *Limerick Leader*, 11 March 1929.

¹³⁹ “Death Sentence—Final Stages of Cox Trial,” *Limerick Leader*, 16 March 1929.

jury would have drawn the same conclusion if the deceased had been an educated Irishman, beaten over the head with a pipe and robbed of his earnings. Though violence between German and Irish workers at the site received considerable attention in the press, casting a cloud over race relations that was not necessarily justified, it is clear that the role of race and racial stereotypes in these few instances was significant. However, these infrequent, but devastating, acts of violence should not be employed to paint the relationship with a broad brush of negativity; like all cultural contacts, those between the Germans and the Irish on the Shannon Scheme were varied and complex interactions were defined by more than a few examples of hostility.

If not explicitly violent, the relationship between the Germans and the Irish was also described with indifference. The *Irish Times* claimed that the strict discipline expected by Siemens and the “importation of German methods is not popular locally. The Limerick people have been accustomed to easier modes of life and have not yet become acclimated to German ideas.” Not only did this inability to see eye to eye on work ethic serve as a barrier between the two communities, according to the newspaper, but “there is virtually no ‘fraternization’ between the Germans and the inhabitants of the city. The former keep strictly to themselves and have a social life of their own. As time progresses this aloofness may be modified, but at present it is as strong on the side of the Germans as it is on that of the local population.”¹⁴⁰ Apparently, progress was not made in the following two months when the *Irish Times* repeated that the Germans “have brought with them new ideas of work and citizenship which have set an example to the inhabitants. In former days nobody in Limerick would have dreamed of starting work at 7

¹⁴⁰ “Shannon Water-Power Scheme—Rapid Progress by the German Engineers,” *Irish Times*, 19 August 1926.

o'clock in the morning, now they think nothing of it." The newspaper also reiterated its contention that "it would be idle to pretend that the Germans are popular, in fact there is virtually no 'fraternization;' but the importation of modern methods of industry into the city which for generations has been living in the atmosphere of the violated treaty has produced astonishing results."¹⁴¹

The perception of German methods, as described by the *Irish Times*, varied considerably and depended on the political leanings of the news outlets. For instance, in the summer of 1927 the *Anglo-Celt*, a unionist paper from County Cavan, ran an article on "Prussian Methods with Irish Farmers." The paper claimed that the public had not been informed about how the standards for cable were to be erected and that its sources could "supply the missing particulars." According to the *Anglo-Celt's* account, "without a word of warning, without a farmer's permission being asked, a number of Germans appeared with lorries, in the districts selected, and entered the fields in which oats, barley, and wheat were growing. Gates were smashed in the work of carrying in the standards, and in the process the farmers' crops of grain were ruined." Alluding to a lack of political support for the Cumann na nGaedheal government, the paper noted that "in one particular instance it was decided to erect three standards in one field of oats, and after the entrance gate had been destroyed and the grain trampled into the ground, this representative of Mr. McGilligan offered the man as compensation a shilling for each post that had been erected." Using this incident as a means to attack both the German involvement with the project and the government, the paper reported,

Indignant at the Prussian method of doing the work, some of the farmers who had been treated in the matter we indicate, attended a meeting at which a prominent

¹⁴¹ "The Shannon Power Scheme—German Engineers in Limerick," *Irish Times*, 1 October 1926.

member of the government party was speaking, and were about to make a protest against the treatment they had received, when they were hustled out of the meeting by ready hands in waiting, although the farmers' only intention in being there was the perfectly legitimate one of calling attention to a man possessing power to the manner in which their crops had been destroyed.

That this kind of destruction was unique to the Germans harkened back to racial stereotypes during the Great War, which emphasized German aggression and propensity for violence. The *Anglo-Celt* depicted this event as a travesty, concluding, "We have never before heard of the government of a civilised country permitting the rights of an owner being ignored and his crops destroyed—as effectively as when conquering soldiers march in war time through their rival's territory."¹⁴² The newspaper made it clear that blame lay with the Prussians and the Cumann na nGaedheal government, and thus, race and politics were employed to criticize the Shannon Scheme.

However, the *Limerick Leader* covered a similar story less than a year later and drew a very different picture of events. This article similarly mentioned destruction when it noted that "during the progress of the work in the district, it was sometimes found necessary to level fences and cut down trees here and there." But unlike the *Anglo-Celt*, which blamed the Germans for wanton demolition, the *Limerick Leader* reported that "the officials—both Irish and German—have acted with courtesy and consideration, and any damage caused made good as far as possible, while cases meriting compensation were dealt with in a prompt and generous fashion." The *Limerick Leader* concluded its article, not with condemnation but with gratitude, for "the engineers in charge of the work have often to carry out duties which are the reverse of pleasant, but it is only just to say that they always manage to do so in a kindly and considerate spirit and in a manner

¹⁴² "Prussian Methods with Irish Farmers," *Anglo-Celt*, 18 June 1927.

calculated to inflict only a minimum of inconvenience on others.”¹⁴³ The two papers could not have provided more conflicting accounts of what happened when the poles were erected.

But as this example demonstrates, Germans working for Siemens were exposed to attacks in the press that were infused with racial prejudices. A few additional cases will illuminate the ways in which xenophobia manifested itself as a barricade to fostering positive relationships across cultural divides. As mentioned previously, for those opposed to the project and harboring anti-German sentiments, it was usually sufficient to highlight the German connection, without necessarily offering much in the way of an explanation for why this merited a rejection of the entire Scheme. In the summer of 1926, the *Anglo-Celt* advertised a social gathering for people in the area of Drumbess. The paper did not identify the sponsors of a dance was arranged for the community to attend on Sunday, 18 July, but the headline read “No Germans Wanted.” Moreover, the unnamed organizers of the dance planned to charge admission “in aid of a good cause,” which the byline identified as opposing the Shannon Scheme. This event was open to everyone, with perhaps the exception of Germans, and promised to have “good music and splendid catering.” It is unclear what became of the funds raised at this dance or what motivated the organizers to oppose the Scheme and the Germans, who had already been in Ireland for the better part of a year. The labor dispute over workers’ wages between the contractors, government, and labor leaders had been settled months before, but this did not appear to stifle criticism of the project among some in County Cavan.

¹⁴³ “Athea Notes,” *Limerick Leader*, 7 April 1928.

Another representative example of racial discrimination occurred in 1927, when the district judge of Limerick received an objection from Superintendent Mooney of Killaloe regarding “the renewal of the excise license for the German club at Ardnacrusha on the ground of improper management.”¹⁴⁴ Gaffney, the solicitor for the club, argued that his clients had misunderstood a few regulations, but had fixed the problems. In his clients’ defense, Gaffney “charged the superintendent with prejudice against the Germans, who had been harried and their houses searched at midnight by the Civic Guards.” Ironically, the solicitor relied on racial stereotypes himself when he asserted that “the club had been obstructed from the beginning by the superintendent, but was now ruled with a rod of iron, such as would have been used by Hindenberg.”¹⁴⁵ Mooney was offended by Gaffney’s accusation of prejudice and “said if the Germans thought they had been persecuted they could make representation to the proper quarter.” The district judge “acquitted the superintendent of any personal bias against the Germans,” but he also pointed out that discrepancies existed, and “if the records of other clubs in the country were subjected to the same severe scrutiny as this club, they would not come through with flying colours.”¹⁴⁶

But as numerous examples in this chapter suggest, the Irish and the Germans did socialize in cordial ways with one another, whether that meant conversing, sharing meals, or acknowledging each other’s accomplishments on the project when both flags and national anthems were incorporated into the project’s opening ceremony. Newspapers,

¹⁴⁴ “Conduct of German Club at Ardnacrusha,” *Irish Independent*, 18 June 1927.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

especially local ones, printed stories of congenial relationships between the Germans and the Irish they lived amongst near Limerick. For example, when three Germans were taking measurements on the Shannon in 1926, their boat capsized, “and after a rather exciting experience the engineers were rescued by Abbey and Sand fishermen and taken ashore, none the worse for their immersion.”¹⁴⁷ In addition, they also played sporting events with one another. When a cinema fire killed 46 people in Dromcollogher, it was noted that the event “evoked the deepest sympathy and regret amongst workers of all classes on the Shannon Scheme.” In an effort to help those affected by the disaster, a movement was started “both in the Irish and German camps to organise hurling tournaments and concerts, the proceeds to go to the national fund initiated by the president.”¹⁴⁸ Finally, the ultimate example of cultural assimilation occurred when, according to an executive of Siemens-Schuckert, Herr Weckler, “a number of German workers had married Irish girls and had taken them back to Germany.”¹⁴⁹

Germans and Irish alike preferred to lend credence to the spirit of cooperation and collaboration that existed between the two nationalities working on the Scheme. Not surprisingly, the *Limerick Leader* drummed up much excitement about a visit from the “Bremen Crew,” a group of German airmen who successfully piloted the first transatlantic flight from the east. At the reception held for this group in Limerick, both national anthems were played to a crowd of 15,000 to 20,000 people who gathered to hear the airmen speak. One member of the crew, Major James Fitzmaurice, an Irish pilot

¹⁴⁷ “Shannon Incident—German Engineers’ Exciting Experience,” *Limerick Leader*, 6 January 1926.

¹⁴⁸ “City and District Notes—Practical Sympathy,” *Limerick Leader*, 18 September 1926.

¹⁴⁹ “Return to the Fatherland—Watch on the Irish ‘Rhine’ Ending,” *Leitrim Observer*, 26 October 1929.

and veteran of the Great War, told the crowd that “the recent flight of his colleagues and himself was a German-Irish combination, and they succeeded. In Limerick they had a similar combination.”¹⁵⁰ Fitzmaurice applauded the scheme and told the crowd that it would mean future prosperity for Ireland if the people were willing to “work cheerfully and energetically towards that end.” Baron von Huenefeld shared a similar message when he claimed to be “happy to know that so many countrymen of his own had combined with the Irish people to build up a scheme that would be productive of Ireland’s future prosperity.” He added that “in Germany they had a bond of sympathy and co-operation with Ireland, and they knew and realized their cry for liberty and development and prosperity.”¹⁵¹ Desmond Fitzgerald also spoke at the gathering, recounting the relationship between the Germans and the Irish government. He said that “when their German friends, with their great abilities in engineering matters, offered their services to the government of their country, they were readily accepted, and they were delighted that was so because by their combination they had produced a project that would make all the difference between decay and certain prosperity.”¹⁵²

Once it became clear that the Germans would be leaving Ireland at the project’s completion, the *Limerick Leader* offered them a generous farewell in 1930. It gushed:

Limerick people will bear testimony to the high character, probity and integrity of the German men and women who lived and worked amongst them for the past four of five years. They were a hardworking, industrious people, who minded their own business. They gave offence to no one, but by their industry and enterprise gave us a lesson that we could profit by if taken to heart. In their

¹⁵⁰ “Wonderful Reception—Airmen’s Visit to Limerick,” *Limerick Leader*, 7 July 1928.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

dealings, too, they were always straightforward, and free from any pettiness. They were a splendid type of manhood and womanhood.¹⁵³

Granted, this paper was more sympathetic to the Germans from the beginning than were the national papers in Ireland, but such praise of “splendid manhood and womanhood” was the result of extended interactions with the foreigners and had certainly not been the expressed greeting upon the Germans’ arrival in Limerick.

The German Legacy

Long after the project was completed, racial and cultural prejudices continued to surface over the dam’s associations with Germany and attempted to skew public perceptions about the Shannon Scheme. Four years after German engineers left Limerick and returned home, the memory of the foreigners was revived in a Cork courtroom. When Michael, Maurice, and Robert Fitzgerald, along with Richard Barrett faced 19 charges of coining in 1933, they made an unusual accusation in their statement to the Gardaí. Michael Fitzgerald stated that their illegal activity began five years previously, when the men worked on the Shannon Scheme. The *Irish Press* quoted the accused as admitting, “I got the idea of making coins from a German on the Shannon Scheme,” and the criminal enterprise had been making sixpences ever since then “when they were out of work or wanted cigarettes.” The article’s headline, printed in bold, read, “German showed them how to do it,” reinforcing the idea that blame lay with a mysterious German on the Shannon Scheme, and not with the Irishmen. While an educated German engineer may have had specialized knowledge of coin-making and discussed this with workers, the paper clearly traced criminal responsibility to the foreigner for corrupting the Irishmen, who apparently had no previous experience with coining. The fact that the article quoted

¹⁵³ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 12 February 1930.

the accused as saying “he got the idea” from and was “told...how to make coins” by the German differed significantly in the rhetoric from the subheadline which attributed far more agency to the foreigner, who had “showed them how to do it.”¹⁵⁴ The *Irish Press*, a mouthpiece of Fianna Fáil, had political motivation to emphasize the German’s agency in criminal culpability. Discussing hypothetically how to make coins was not nearly as egregious as physically participating in the process of forging Irish currency. Regardless of whether or not a German had shared or demonstrated coining techniques, this case demonstrated that, in some circles, xenophobic tendencies to cast off Irish wrongdoings onto foreigners remained alive and well long after the project was completed. The pre-construction fears of German conspiracies to bring down the Free State government by using the Scheme as a launching pad for an economic takeover never materialized, but they were replaced here by a captivating accusation that at least one German involved with the project was complicit in an attempt to devalue the state’s currency.

One of the most disturbing manifestations of the trend to perpetuate falsehoods in the historical record was when some attempted to link the Shannon Scheme with Hitler. While Hayward’s previously mentioned characterization of Germans as “all potential Hitlers,” may be understood in light of the fact that he was writing just a few years after the Second World War, this does not explain examples of the phenomenon in the 1980s or as recently as 2010. In 1987, 78 year-old David Flynn recalled his experiences among the Germans to the *Irish Post*. Speaking of the accommodations for workers provided by the contractors, the paper reported Flynn laughingly stating, “To tell the truth, the huts

¹⁵⁴ “4 Corkmen on Coining Charges,” *Irish Press*, 31 July 1933.

did look a bit like the concentration camps which the Germans built during the war.”¹⁵⁵ While the huts resembled other workers’ quarters and barracks of that period, Flynn’s recollection reflected a ubiquitous trend to remember the Germans in Ireland in light of World War II, and thus to replace the constructive efforts by Siemens with the destructive reputation of the Nazis in popular memory. As McCarthy has argued, “it would be unfair and unreasonable to expect the Germans to carry out any more responsibility than they were already doing,” and that they could not be blamed for the Irish living conditions “when they were quite prepared to pay more and to raise the standard of accommodation.”¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Flynn’s comment about concentration camps was provocative and carried with it the potential to shape a negative stereotype of Germans to an Irish audience who had no personal ties to the project.

The tendency to associate the German past with Hitler has also contributed to a misunderstanding of the Shannon Scheme and race that has extended into the twenty-first century. Tom Landers’s inclusion of Hitler and the Shannon Scheme in the same sentence confused some readers of the November/December 2009 issue of *History Ireland* even though he was only intending to show that the dam significantly contributed to pro-German sentiments in Ireland. In a letter to the editor, Landers responded to an earlier article on parliamentary democracy. He stated, “I agree with what you say about many Irish being pro-German and even pro-Hitler at the beginning of the war. The Shannon hydroelectric scheme was carried out by the Germans, and Hitler had ended

¹⁵⁵ “Power to the People,” *Irish Post*, 7 February 1987.

¹⁵⁶ McCarthy, *High Tension: Life on the Shannon Scheme*, 93.

unemployment in Germany.”¹⁵⁷ However, this reference was misinterpreted by one *History Ireland* reader who felt Landers had suggested Hitler was somehow involved with the Shannon Scheme. D.M. Kennedy’s response, published in the next issue, criticized Landers’s letter as “silly and puzzling.” Missing Landers’ point, Kennedy questioned the connection between Hitler and the Shannon Scheme by noting that it “Was started before he was even heard of and completed nearly four years before he came to power.” In addition to injecting Hitler into conversations about the Shannon Scheme—even as a misguided attempt to dispel that very myth, Kennedy also revealed his own bias as the son of a Shannon Scheme employee. He recalled his father telling him that the Germans resented the Irish workers, many of whom had fought with the British, and reportedly bragged, “We bet yez on the Somme, we bet yez on the Rhine, and, by Jaysus, we’ll bate yez on the Shannon.”¹⁵⁸ It is impossible to say with what frequency the Irish would have stirred up the memory of the Great War in order to snub the German engineers, but the inclination of former soldiers to keep silent about their experiences and the public’s apprehension about acknowledging the war suggests that such digs were more likely the result of fanciful imagination than real animosity.

In conclusion, it is important to note that a related discourse on tourism to the Shannon Scheme allowed the Irish to define themselves in an affirmative way by negotiating how the modernity of the project would fit in with existing notions of Irishness. In this sense—they were able to project as an aspirational image, whereas the

¹⁵⁷ Tom Landers, “Democracy?” Letter to the editor, *History Ireland* 17, no. 6 (November/December 2009): 14.

¹⁵⁸ D.M. Kennedy, “Hitler and the Shannon Scheme,” Letter to the editor, *History Ireland* 18, no. 1 (January/February 2010): 13.

involvement of Germans forced the national community to consider what it, as a unified body, was not. Establishing difference between what was Irish and what was German was key to imagining the project as an Irish accomplishment, and whether that difference was based on race, language, cuisine, or other cultural attributes, the Shannon Scheme certainly facilitated discussions about these elements of national identity at a critical time in Irish history. The intersection of German, British, and Irish nationalities that converged on the project illustrates that defining the contours of race and Irishness must be viewed not only in terms of a national effort, but also as a product of imperial and international circumstances. And as the next chapter will demonstrate, regional identity provided for the expression of additional alternative interpretations of Irishness that paralleled and challenged national rhetoric about electrification.

CHAPTER V

LOCALISM, REGIONAL IDENTITY, AND DEFINING IRISHNESS FROM WITHIN

Even if half the county of Limerick were submerged, they would be the last people to complain of it [the Shannon Scheme], if it were for the general interests of the Saorstát.¹

—Senator Oliver St. John Gogarty, 31 March 1925

It was no wonder that people in the neighbourhood of Limerick should be in favour of this scheme. If any part of Ireland is to benefit by this wonderful scheme it is the City of the Violated Treaty.²

—Seantor Benjamin Haughton, 25 June 1925

On a pleasant Sunday morning in March 1925, two old men from Limerick contemplated how the Shannon Scheme would alter their current vantage point from Thomond Bridge. According to the story, Michael and Tom “puffed their pipes contentedly as they gazed reflectively into the depths of the Shannon. The loungers seemed to share with the great river a certain serenity of spirit.” But this local sense of peace and familiarity was abruptly disturbed by the sudden presence of foreigners, as “strange words trip from strange tongues” of German engineers who arrived at the site to discuss “blasting, damming, and excavating.” Michael asked Tom, “What does it all mean?” referring to the intruders he grudgingly called “The Shannon Schemers.” Tom considered this question as the sun began to rise and imagined how these men before him were “going to make water into light.” As more engineers joined the others, brandishing maps and bustling about, the tranquil mood on the banks of the river shifted and “the harmony of the scene ha[d] been broken.” Troubled by what they had witnessed, the old

¹ Oliver St. John Gogarty, “County Boards of Heath Accounts Order, 1924. Shannon Scheme—Motion by Sir John Griffith,” *Seanad Éireann Debates*, vol. 4, 31 March 1925.

² Benjamin Haughton, “Shannon Electricity Bill, 1925—Fifth Stage,” *Seanad Éireann Debates*, vol. 5, 25 June 1925.

men's anxiety manifested as a pessimistic take on the whole project. "Shannon Scheme my eye," says Tom discontentedly, "they'll soon be tryin' to turn night into day, the poor old Shannon will be runnin' in the air before these young fellows are finished with it." Michael shared his neighbor's disgust. "Aye," he returned moodily, "but they're the devil's own schemes that won't have the country in peace instead of tryin' to make nature fly in the face of Providence." As they pondered these uncertainties, "each buried himself gloomily in his thoughts, while the Shannon, undisturbed and untroubled, continued its somnolent way."³

According to the storyteller, this was just one way to imagine the Shannon Scheme. Unconvinced that the project was to be feared, the narrator "wondered if the pessimism of the cynics or simply of those who lament that old times are changed, would be swept away by the enthusiasm of the 'schemers.'" Turning attention back to the river and "watching its ribbon-like windings through the cool green of the valley and fields that stretched away into the misty blue haze, one found time to wonder—to dream." From the dreamer's perspective, the unknowns of the Shannon Scheme could also be exciting, transforming the quiet hamlet so beloved by Michael and Tom into a hive of busy activity and industry. Thus envisioned, the project was not a "devil's scheme," but rather inspired "the dream . . . of a smiling countryside, full of strange oaths and monstrous-looking contrivances." Glimpsing into the future, the story predicted that changes in the countryside would turn Limerick into a chief port city, allowing for more efficient transport of local farm produce by train and by barge once the river was made navigable. Indeed, the author hoped that, as a result of the hydroelectric project, "man will take

³ "A Shannon Fantasy—Visions and Realities," *Limerick Leader*, 28 March 1925.

away from the Shannon all the vitality which is to strengthen and enrich the industrial life of the new Ireland.”⁴

By suggesting a more optimistic stance on progress compared to the old men’s desire to maintain the traditional ways of life, the tale highlighted a potential polemic of the Shannon Scheme. Juxtaposing tradition with modernity, the story continued,

It is no longer, however, the ‘shamrock watering river,’ so beloved by our itinerant songsters. The growth of the ‘three-leaved shamrock’ in the district has scarcely been obstructed by the scheme of Siemens-Schuckert, Ltd.; but, at all events, the vagrant warblers of the streets must in all honesty dissociate the memory of St. Patrick from any immediate connection with the new embankments of the Shannon between O’Brien’s Bridge and Killaloe.⁵

But the impulse to disassociate traditional memories of the surrounding geography in response to the modern hydroelectric project was neither simple nor completely justified. This chapter will analyze the ways in which the Shannon Scheme shaped both the local mentality and the physical environment in ways that challenged residents near Limerick to reassess their own regional identity at a time when Irishness was being contested on a national stage. Initially, the project inspired a sense of optimism that Limerick in particular was to benefit greatly from national electrification, as expressed in the vignette above. There was a sense in some circles that the project was going to mean the rise of Limerick above other regional centers like Dublin and Cork. However, the resulting speculations about regional competition also had the adverse effect of dividing a united sense of Irishness along strict regional lines, wherein Limerick residents deemed Cork accents or Connemara culture to be deviations from their interpretations of Irish identity. However, as time progressed and the realities of industrialization set in, observers noticed

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

a coexisting and conflicting sentiment that threatened the success of the entire project: apathy. While there was great hype surrounding the many benefits the Shannon Scheme might bestow on Limerick in particular, the apathetic response to the project among locals was strikingly incongruous with the goals of its promoters. Favoring optimism for obvious reasons, advocates addressed apathy as an ill—the cause of which was debated among various local bodies—that needed to be cured. Accusations of indifference towards the project often originated with those sympathetic to the Scheme as a means of acquiring additional support, but these affronts to Limerick's character exposed regional tensions that developed outside of the campaign to promote the project as a national venture in electrification.

Localism and nationalism intersected at the construction site, a process which was drawn into sharp relief by the fact that people from around the country and abroad flocked to see the project and witnessed moments when these identities clashed rather than harmonized. As the next chapter on tourism will demonstrate, promoters suggested that building up the tourism industry would reinvigorate the local communities and allow them to reclaim a sense of hope. Before turning to those tourists, whose unprecedented numbers made Limerick an unexpected center of cultural development in the founding years of the Free State, it is necessary to conceptualize the locale. First, massive excavation and a desire to cater for an influx of visitors meant that Limerick and its surrounding areas underwent profound changes, both in the mental outlook of residents and the physical landscape. The locus of national electrification was precisely situated, determined by geography, and resulted in a manipulation of the landscape in places like Ardnacrusha, O'Brien's Bridge, and Parteen. For locals, the Shannon Scheme was not

perceived abstractly as a project in the Free State; they encountered it constantly because it was right in their backyards. With hundreds of thousands of tourists flocking to the environs to see the works, Limerick was immersed in discourses on tourism development and what it meant to be Irish. The district had to consider the ways in which visitors were going to alter its identity and how it wished to address its reputation as a destination for others. The Shannon Scheme altered Limerick's physical landscape, attitudes towards tourism, and local policies in ways that were distinctive in the Free State. An examination of the localization of the national project sheds light, therefore, on what the Scheme meant to the community and how this compared to the more generalized rhetoric of Irish identity and tourism promotion.

Transformation of Limerick: Mental Outlook

While the Shannon Scheme generated a sense of hope in the future of the new state and shaped identity at a national level, the transformative power of the project was felt most directly by those living in its vicinity. The press often repeated the notion that “while the whole Saorstát in general stands to gain immensely by this scheme for harnessing our ‘white coal’ Limerick in particular is certain to benefit to an enormous extent.”⁶ Similarly elevating local benefits over national ones, another article stated that the Shannon Scheme “should certainly mean the remaking of the Saorstát industrially and commercially and if there is any part of the country that ought be in raptures of delight at the prospects it opens up that portion should be Limerick city and the surrounding localities.”⁷ Three months earlier, the ex-mayor of Limerick had followed a similar line

⁶ “Our White Coal,” *Limerick Leader*, 27 July 1925.

⁷ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 5 July 1925.

of thinking when he boasted that “from the developments certain to follow the scheme Limerick stands to gain in a very big and special sense.”⁸ Therefore, localized feelings of hopefulness paralleled a sanguine national outlook. However, physical changes in the landscape and increased tourism to the area shaped the Scheme into a local institution, even though the power it generated would be national in scope. The Shannon Scheme altered Limerick’s geography, business sensibilities, tourism industry, and sense of identity in many ways that were analogous to national changes, but the impact on the environs had a deeply personal meaning for those living in close proximity to the dam.

The anticipation characterizing what the future held for Limerick was profoundly optimistic. Turning away from revolutionary changes brought about by violence, the project was described as a positive reawakening, playing on electricity as a source of light and brightness. From the outset, supporters of the project expressed “sufficient faith in the future to visualize a time—and that in a comparatively few years hence—when Limerick will throb with the hum of busy life and industry and when progress and prosperity will replace the backward and regrettably decadent conditions existing amongst us for so many years back.”⁹ Some perceived that Limerick was turning a new leaf and was on the cusp of a transformation that would wipe away the past, transitioning the city to a new era of prosperity. For example, one article beamed,

A couple of years ago the little hamlet of Ardnacrusha, ‘the height of the cross,’ did not shelter a single inhabitant who could tell that it bid fair to be the hub of Ireland’s reawaking in the course of a few years hence. Suddenly it has found a prominent place in the sun. It hums with life and hope. . . . And symptoms point to the greater Limerick now likely to arise, extending in its direction.¹⁰

⁸ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 6 April 1925.

⁹ “The First Sod,” *Limerick Leader*, 13 May 1925.

¹⁰ “Clare Jottings—Notes and News—Ardnacrusha,” *Limerick Leader*, 27 March 1926.

The idea that Limerick would expand, absorbing all of the nearby villages associated with the Shannon Scheme, was a common way of describing the potential for growth. For instance, one journalist wondered if “it would not be entirely too rash to venture the prophecy that in time to come—and that before very many years—Ardnacrusha, Clonlara and O’Brien’s Bridge will virtually form part of a hugely extended Limerick City.”¹¹ A contingent in Limerick was convinced that the city was on the brink of remarkable change, and that the Shannon Scheme was the millennial harbinger of progress.

From the moment construction commenced, the project brought much needed tourism dollars to the area. Exposing the contours of the relationship between the Scheme and tourism, one journalist spoke of visitors who had “Limerick in their itinerary and, in all probability, will go see the Shannon Scheme” but admitted the primacy of the project for being “the means of attracting to this district vast numbers of visitors who would not otherwise come amongst us.”¹² John C. Foley, President of the Irish Tourist Development Association, delivered an address on “tourist development in particular relation to Limerick and the Shannon Works.” He explained the correlation between the project, tourism, and other industries when he told his audience,

While for administrative purposes they should consider separately their economic and social activities, at the same time they should understand that all these activities were closely interlocked, and mutually affected each other. Their advancement depended not only on their agricultural industry, nor on their manufacturing, wholesale and retail industries, neither did it depend on the perfection of their transport system, their educational standard, their industrial power, the stability of their political position, their standard in sport, the natural

¹¹ “Shannon Scheme—Surprising Progress—Operation on Three ‘Fronts.’” *Limerick Leader*, 22 May 1926.

¹² “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 4 July 1928.

scenic beauties of their country, to mention a few, but it depended on all these, and more taken together.¹³

In addition to the direct benefits of tourism for local hotels, restaurants, and transport companies, the anticipated surplus of cash circulating in the city from visitors to the Shannon Scheme led some to imagine that Limerick and its surrounding areas were on the brink of a new epoch: one that exceeded the narrow parameters of tourism by leaving no part of the community untouched. Foley explained the interconnectedness of various factors influencing the local economy, not only to establish tourism as a legitimate business, but also to emphasize that those lying outside the bounds of the industry would still benefit from visitors coming to see the works.

One of the most important ways that the Scheme was predicted to bless Limerick in particular was through its potential to encourage industrial development. As McLaughlin explained in 1928, “Limerick certainly had a big advantage by its proximity to Ardnacrusha. It was only reasonable to expect that any big power consumer would come near the base of production. It was obvious that if a big load had to be transferred from Limerick to Dublin the cost would be materially higher.”¹⁴ In an interview with the *Limerick Leader*, the secretary of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association described his organization’s recent visit to the Scheme and supported McLaughlin’s view that location was essential:

‘It is a wonderful piece of engineering,’ he said, ‘and will very considerably affect the future of the Shannon basin. Limerick in particular will feel its effect. New industries will grow in the city, as the nearest place to the tail race, and it is

¹³ “A Mecca for Tourists—Limerick and its Future—Shannon Scheme As A Permanent Attraction,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

¹⁴ “Industries to Come—Advantage for Limerick,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 July 1928.

important for the city and the country that the siteing [sic] of industry should be on sound lines.¹⁵

Such notions had predated construction. In January 1925, for example, Fr. Philip had given a lecture to the Limerick Press Club in which he referenced the Shannon Scheme and its effects on industrial development, stating that “many inquires had been made by firms who were anxious to start factories in Limerick if the scheme materialised. It showed that industry followed cheap power.”¹⁶ The proximity of the power station to the city was assumed to mean that industries near Limerick would have an advantage over more distant centers. Listing specific industries that would prosper in the area, one commentator advised, “Limerick is ideally situated for the manufacture of cement, cyanide of potassium, and for several other new industries. . . . We will have the unequalled advantage of having an abundance of cheap power at our very doors.”¹⁷ At the annual meeting of Limerick Ratepayers’ Protective Association in 1928, one speaker referenced the twelve month period before the Shannon Scheme was projected to be finished and advocated converting expiation into reality: “Could not the interval be used for the advertising of Limerick as a suitable centre for the starting of new industries. Could not Limerick get someone as Cork got Ford?” The speaker highlighted the specific qualities that made the area ideal for industrial development in connection with the Shannon Scheme. Mentioning that “in the city they had waste ground by the acre adaptable for factory sites; old mills by the score, where the city itself could not be more suitably situated as an industrial site,” the speaker posed the question, “could not these

¹⁵ “Visitors’ Views—On Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1925.

¹⁶ “Reminiscences—Interesting Lecture—In Limerick Press Club,” *Limerick Leader*, 31 January 1925.

¹⁷ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 May 1928.

facts and many others be brought to the notice of foreign manufacturers by a publicity campaign, if they had any initiative.”¹⁸

Indeed, tourism advocates sought to take up this cause, fashioning their industry as a means of attracting businessmen to Limerick for the purpose of making the city the home to new factories and industrial manufacturing. Describing the presence of a “new spirit” in industrial development, the *Limerick Leader* crowed, “The great scheme for the development of water-power from the Shannon and its applications to the electrification of the industries of the entire Saorstát foreshadows also the rise of Limerick to a position of a most important industrial centre.”¹⁹ While not discounting that a boon from the Shannon would be experienced by other commercial centers, this statement articulated the perception that Limerick was special. For example, the ESB was not only involved in the business of tourism, but it was also a commercial venture that literally brought electricity from the Shannon Scheme into every home by selling electric appliances out of showrooms in the community. When the ESB opened a new showroom at 41 O’Connell Street in Limerick, the focus remained on the city as the center of national electrification. Admiration grew for “this very artistic building which adds so much to the appearance of the street, [and] is a fitting tribute to the importance of Limerick as the hub of the Shannon Scheme. The ultra-modern design of its architecture is in keeping with the part it must play as the headquarters in Limerick of the most modern public utility—electric service.”²⁰

¹⁸ “Limerick’s Future—Outspoken Declarations,” *Limerick Leader*, 9 May 1928.

¹⁹ “A New Spirit,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 March 1925.

²⁰ “New Showrooms—Of Electricity Supply Board,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 November 1930.

The hope that the Shannon Scheme would facilitate the growth of new industries and much needed employment in the future was preceded by the immediate employment of workers during the construction phase. One journalist made this connection explicitly: “the work of carrying out the project should in itself be the making of Limerick, while the opportunities that will be created by the actual operation of the scheme may well be expected to create a future of almost unlimited possibilities and potentialities for this city and district.”²¹ A prominent priest in the community urged his parishioners to “picture 3,000 men working and millions to be spent—what would it mean to every establishment and every individual in Limerick.”²² Before the first sod was turned in the fall of 1925, local advocates assumed that “the project, in the first place, should absorb most if not all of the unemployed in the city and district, and it would be well that some practical steps be taken in time to secure that object. Then an enormous amount of additional money—several thousand pounds—will be sent in circulation in Limerick week by week, thus tending to improve and develop all classes of trade and business in the city.”²³ Repeating these sentiments, another journalist supposed that the Shannon Scheme “will, naturally, give an enormous amount of employment and will in the ordinary course send a lot of money in circulation in Limerick and district.”²⁴ This journalist also connected Limerick employment on the project to wider benefits for the entire community by predicting that construction jobs “should give a big and badly-needed impetus to local trade, business and industry of all kinds, and in that way be a huge benefit to all classes of the

²¹ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 August 1925.

²² “Random Gossip—‘Not Half Enough Alive,’” *Limerick Leader*, 3 January 1925.

²³ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 5 July 1925.

²⁴ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 August 1925.

community.”²⁵ Therefore, money from the employment of Shannon Scheme workers coupled with revenue from tourism were expected to lift up the city and encourage industrial growth.

While much was expected to happen from employment opportunities offered by the Shannon Scheme, citizens of Limerick also understood that these changes required local leaders to act. For instance, at a meeting of the Limerick Borough Council to elect the next mayor, “it was contemplated that the Shannon Scheme would come into actual operation next month, and in that connection it would be the business of the mayor to have many interviews with the contractors to endeavour to ensure that the workers of Limerick would get employment on the job.”²⁶ But politicians were not the only ones expected to do something about the job situation. Three months earlier, in a letter to the editor, “A Worker” called his fellow men to action when he exclaimed,

A great opportunity is now opened to them in the gigantic scheme by our Irish government. The workers of Limerick should wake up and use all their endeavours to see that our unemployed get employment when the work is to be carried out. Men of Limerick, organise at once, and put your shoulders to the wheel of this great undertaking; stir some life into your societies and officials, and send deputations to the men in charge of the scheme to put forward your claims for work.²⁷

“A Worker” believed that such an appeal for action was necessary because the workers of Limerick had dropped the ball. Disgusted by the apathy of workers of the city, the writer called upon the Transport Union, Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, the Unemployed Workers’ Union, and others to publicly acknowledge the project. He further admonished

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Limerick Civic Chair—Election of Mayor,” *Limerick Leader*, 1 July 1925.

²⁷ “A Worker,” “Limerick Workers—And the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 4 April 1925.

the unemployed who “have organised processions through the city, but they have not called a public meeting to show their appreciation for the great scheme which is to be put in working order very shortly.”²⁸ The tendency to view the Shannon Scheme as a local issue convinced those near Limerick that the jobs on site were meant for them, and though unemployed workers from across Ireland flocked to the site, local employment figures improved the most. It was a matter of local pride for men and women in the community to be hired on as laborers, shopkeepers, or members of the secretarial staff. For example, the following year, the *Limerick Leader* reported that “most of the young men of Killaloe and many of the middle aged have found employment under the Shannon Scheme.”²⁹ The local press even touted that the contract to paint and decorate the powerhouse had gone to a Limerick firm.³⁰

Taken together, the overwhelming feeling that the Shannon Scheme was going to spark unprecedented tourism, industrial development, and employment in Limerick provides a glimpse of local perceptions of the project. The corollary effects of tourism, however, were often presented as a mishmash of positive expectations to come from the Scheme. It was common to view the impacts of tourism on the local community as the first among many of these benefits. A former chairman of the Irish Canal Commission once remarked in 1926 that with the passage of ten years, people of Limerick would see “the streets were well paved, the people were well-dressed, the whole atmosphere of the place was different, and that was simply and solely because the Shannon Scheme had

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Shannon Scheme—Activity in O’Brien’s Bridge Area,” *Limerick Leader*, 7 April 1926.

³⁰ “Turbines in Motion—Second Now Ready—Power At Any Moment,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 September 1929.

begun its beneficial work.”³¹ Others were more nostalgic, looking to the project as a means of restoring Limerick’s former glory and optimistically predicting that “the fruition of this scheme will, it is confidently hoped, give the city once more its lively streets and animated docks.”³² As an article in the *Limerick Leader* demonstrated, the Shannon Scheme revolutionized the community in a variety of ways, but the most important message to take away was that positive change was happening in Limerick.

The article stated that

The Shannon Scheme—even though it is still only in its constructive stage—has proved a great boon to Limerick. Despite the grumblings and the croakings sometimes heard, it has given a big fillip to business locally for there can be no doubt, of course, that at least a very substantial amount of the money earned at it is spent in the city. Then, again, it is the means of attracting huge numbers of visitors to our midst, and surely the big crowds who come here cannot do without leaving some sort of custom to the shops, hotels and restaurants before they leave. But whatever advantage Limerick is deriving at present from the Shannon Scheme the benefit is as nothing compared to what should accrue once the great electrification project is completed and in full working operation.³³

Touching on employment, the tourism industry, and opportunities for the future, this article encapsulated the ways in which these features were interwoven in the mindset of locals whose perspective on the Scheme was grounded in a complicated sense of place. This made Limerick unique in comparison to the rest of the Free State, which could conceive of the Scheme abstractly as the provider of electric current, but which did not incorporate the physical presence of the project in its conception of space.

It is not unusual for people to let their imaginations run wild when a project of great magnitude promises to transform life so completely. However, it was one thing to

³¹ “Optimistic Views—Regarding the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 September 1926.

³² “A New Spirit,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 March 1925.

³³ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 May 1928.

suppose that Limerick would receive the lion's share of benefits, and something else entirely to claim that only Limerick deserved to reap profits from the Scheme. In fact, similar claims to local benefit came from neighboring County Clare. James D. Kenny wrote a letter to the editor of the *Clare Champion* in which he argued, "primarily the water right and power is a local, not a national asset. It belongs where it can be developed, not somewhere else, and this fundamental rule ought not be lost sight of." He explained that "the motor power of the Shannon, when developed, ought to be put to work in Clare, where it belongs." In support of his claims, Kenny naively assumed that "the whole system is at the mercy of the elements, thunderstorms, snowstorms, hurricanes, and the like, and what may be even more serious, it may be totally destroyed by armed forces, or by general strikes." Though apparently ignorant of engineering feats that protected transmission systems from a majority of weather-related disasters, he maintained that expanding a national grid was a waste of money because "by the time it is installed it may be out of date by reason of new inventions." Kenny hoped that the power from the Shannon Scheme foreshadowed the establishment of an "electric city" in County Clare, which would entice Henry Ford to build up factories in the area.³⁴ In a lecture on the "Future of Limerick," Fr. Philip of Cork responded to the argument expressed by people like Kenny "that the Shannon power should stay in Co. Clare, the principle of which, as described by the priest, was met with laughter from the audience." According to Philip, "this criticism is scarcely more amusing than the statement of the

³⁴ James D. Kenny, "Shannon Water Power," *Clare Champion*, 3 January 1925.

English electrical journal, 'Electrician.' To the effect that the best source of power in Ireland would be, not the Shannon water, but imported coal."³⁵

Kenny's ideas never gained a substantial public following, but they were reminiscent of misunderstandings expressed by the first generation that encountered the industrial revolution, and, thus, should not be dismissed as merely the musings of a silly man. Undeterred by critics like Philip, who advocated for greater dissemination of facts about electrification, Kenny remained steadfast in his beliefs. In 1927, two years after he first published his thoughts on the Scheme, Kenny remained the sole public voice espousing the idea that County Clare had legal claim to the undertaking. Writing in response to a previous article in *Honesty*, Kenny reiterated that "the river, in the main, is a Clare river, and the power generated from it is, in the main, a Clare asset." Kenny provided a lengthy evaluation of the trade balance with Britain, arguing that the cost of transmitting electricity across the Free State was prohibitive. Instead, he declared that "when sources of power have been developed anywhere in the past history of the world, manufacturers have gone to where the power is in order to put it to work. They have not gone away from it and asked it to be hauled to them in order to start their machinery." Pondering what should alternatively be done, he admitted that the Irish were unlikely to build up new industrial organizations, but he believed the Shannon could be put to use in making Ardnacrusha the "woolen centre of the Irish world." The ESB and Cumann na nGaedheal Ministers tirelessly promoted the Scheme as a national project, completely at odds with Kenny's basic premise, but they surely would have been mortified to think that the highest honor for this great achievement in engineering would be to turn the tiny

³⁵ "Future of Limerick—Prospects Under the Shannon Scheme—A 'Bright and Cheery' Outlook—Magnificent Lecture by Rev. Father Philip, O. F. M.," *Limerick Leader*, 21 March 1925.

hamlet of Ardnacrusha into some kind of woolen paradise. At any rate, his letter sparked another response, this time from a writer, who signed him/herself “F.A.B.,” who had an ongoing public debate with Kenny in the press. According to “F.A.B.,” Kenny was nonsensical and “tried to evade the queries I put to him.” The writer characterized Kenny’s arguments as “weird theories,” and exposed his ignorance of Irish industries that would benefit from national electrification.³⁶ Though not the voice of reason in the community, Kenny revealed the extremes of overstating what the Scheme represented to Limerick and surrounding areas.

Exaggerations aside, geography not only dictated that Limerick would become the new national hub of electrification, but it also tapped into the sense of regional competition within the new state, alluded to above. The anticipated draw of tourists to see the Shannon Scheme, coupled with the conviction that industries would flourish in proximity to the dam, led many in Limerick to hope that their city would one day surpass Cork and Dublin as a bustling and vibrant metropolis. In 1925, a writer for the *Limerick Leader* calling himself Pro Bono Publico wondered if “it is perhaps not premature to predict the future of Limerick if the Shannon Scheme succeeds. In ten years hence Limerick may outstrip Cork and become the second city in the Free State.”³⁷ Limerick was the driving force behind the cultivation of new regional competition centered on the Shannon Scheme, and city promoters relied on familiar tropes that pitted major centers within Ireland against each other for national superiority. For example, “there used to be

³⁶ “F.A.B.,” “Drainage and Electric Power in the Saorstát—‘F.A.B. Replies to Mr. Kenny,’” *Honesty*, 17 March 1928.

³⁷ “Pro Bono Publico,” “Limerick’s Future—The Shannon Scheme and its Immense Possibilities,” *Limerick Leader*, 2 February 1925.

an old saying to the effect that Cork was, Dublin is, and Limerick will be.”³⁸ This saying was not lost on promoters of the Shannon Scheme, who held out “hope that Limerick ‘will be’—but that end would be attained all the more speedily if the people of the city and district became fully alive in time to the tremendous opportunities now virtually knocking at their doors,” referring explicitly to the hydroelectric works that were just underway.³⁹ Similarly, a song published in the *Limerick Leader*, entitled “The Great Shannon Scheme,” echoed this motto when it concluded that criticism of the project was unfounded and was tied up with private interests. Instead of paying credence to the naysayers, the song advised, “But we needn’t mind, for the Shannon you’ll see/Will flow yet triumphant and Limerick will be.”⁴⁰ Many believed the Shannon Scheme signaled Limerick’s awakening, sparking great anticipation for the future of the city.

Unless present indications are altogether deceptive, we are within measureable distance, so to speak, of the fulfillment of the old prophecy that ‘Limerick will be.’ The Shannon Scheme and the developments that will accompany and follow it should make this city in the ordinary course a centre of throbbing industry and almost boundless prosperity in a comparatively few years. That, at all events, is the hope that should animate us all and it is the aim and object towards which every local nerve and sinew should be assiduously strained.⁴¹

However, regional competition was perhaps more of a motivating factor for people in Limerick than in other parts of the island. Thus, as Senator Benjamin Haughton from Cork admitted in the epigraph, Limerick would benefit directly from the Scheme, but acknowledged that “We in other parts of Ireland are not jealous of our friends in

³⁸ “Our White Coal,” *Limerick Leader*, 27 July 1925.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ “Maolmora,” “The Great Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 18 April 1925.

⁴¹ “Random Gossip: Limerick Will Be,” *Limerick Leader*, 29 August 1925.

Limerick, because if Limerick prospers, that prosperity will spread itself throughout the length and breadth of the Saorstát.”⁴²

While regional tensions could foster a mutually advantageous rivalry based on prosperity, they also threatened to uncover that the city was not doing enough to take advantage of the Shannon Scheme—transforming its great potential into a sore spot for Limerick. It was widely suspected that the Irish in Cork or Dublin would have welcomed a project like the Shannon Scheme with open arms, and that there was something strangely amiss in Limerick. Alluding to regional differences, a local priest speculated that “we can well imagine how Cork, for instance, would gloat, and grow enthusiastic if it were made the central point in the undertaking.”⁴³ As one adept journalist put it, “The great drawback of the Scheme in some eyes is that the Shannon does not flow through Cork or Dublin! If it did we would have the project hailed with huge paeans of joy and approval from these quarters.”⁴⁴ Another reporter quipped, “Cork, as a matter of fact, is far more wide awake in this connection, and we can quite readily understand how it would exert itself and blow its own trumpet—and rightly so—if the Lee were the river being harnessed for the production of ‘white coal.’”⁴⁵

As these journalists demonstrated, the press could be a great champion against negative attitudes towards the Scheme, but newspapermen, especially in Dublin, were also responsible for publicizing criticism about the project. Writing to the editor of the

⁴² Benjamin Haughton, “Shannon Electricity Bill, 1925—Fifth Stage,” *Seanad Éireann Debates*, vol. 5, 25 June 1925.

⁴³ “Reminiscences—Interesting Lecture—In Limerick press Club,” *Limerick Leader*, 31 January 1925.

⁴⁴ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 6 April 1925.

⁴⁵ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 May 1928.

Limerick Leader on the subject of the Shannon Scheme, “One of the Unemployed” posited that the ascendancy of Limerick was an uncertainty since the city was vulnerable to threats posed by a combination of indifference and negative opinions in the press. The writer opined that these issues “must be tackled seriously if Limerick is to hold its own in the fight for supremacy now waging. Are we going to remain ‘a city of silent men,’ where big issues are involved; and are we going to submit patiently to the jibes of such people who care to use the Press and platform for their own selfish interests, to the detriment of our city in general?”⁴⁶In another letter to the editor, a local calling himself “Progress,” chided the *Irish Times* for its regional sympathies towards Dublin, noting,

The probable value of the Scheme may suggest itself to anybody by the veiled effort on the part of a leading journal in the metropolis to throw cold water on any such possibility. If this scheme had been projected in connection with the Liffey or the Lee, the newsboys in the street would have the topic for breakfast, dinner and tea.⁴⁷

Though promoters exhaustively spoke of the Shannon Scheme as a national undertaking that would lift up the entire Free State, geography dictated that regional issues, including Limerick’s efforts, or as some identified—a lack thereof, to support a blossoming tourist industry, would test national cohesion and place the city under increased scrutiny.

Intersections of Region and Race: Defining Irishness from Within

Regional competition and a desire to make major centers in Ireland distinct from one another certainly did not originate with the launch of the Shannon Scheme, but the hydroelectric project cultivated the tendency to perceive regional differences as more important than “national” traits. On the surface, this was evident in those hypothetical

⁴⁶ “One of the Unemployed,” “Shannon Scheme—Campaign of Obstruction—Limerick’s Amazing Apathy—Need For Active Local Interest,” letter to the editor, *Limerick Leader*, 4 April 1925.

⁴⁷ “Progress,” “Amazing Apathy,” letter to the editor, *Limerick Leader*, 4 April 1925.

discussions about how Dublin or Cork may have been better equipped than Limerick to handle such a large undertaking; however, the reverberations of this process of internal othering were perhaps felt most intensely when culture was depicted as a divisive, rather than a unifying force among the Irish at the site. While locals singled out the men from Cork or Connemara for their unfamiliar cultural and linguistic practices, much in the same way the Germans had been, there was other evidence that the project served as a theoretical battlefield where regional tensions erupted and efforts to speak of a homogenous Irish national community were tested. The German presence on the Shannon Scheme, therefore, was not the only factor that encouraged the Free State to consider the linked issues of race and nationality; defining Irishness was as much an internal process among the Irish as it was an external process vis-à-vis the British and the Germans. The impact of these regional rivalries on Limerick is crucial to understanding the project as simultaneously a local event and a national undertaking. A brief look at how the Shannon Scheme was a divisive rather than a uniting factor that potentially strained the superficial bonds of national identity is important here in a discussion of how the project shaped definitions of what it meant to be Irish.

Cork was considered to be especially manipulative and shady in the minds of some Limerick residents. For example, when McGilligan and McLaughlin were invited to Cork on the pretext that they would provide the people there with useful information about the Scheme, the *Limerick Leader* implied that “these Corkmen wanted to get this very important ‘Big Two’ of the scheme in some hidden sanctum within the sacred precincts of that city.” Likening Cork to a baby snatcher, the correspondent went on to warn,

Now, knowing the predatory and pioneer instincts of our esteemed neighbours from within the area defined above, I here and now give solemn warning to all local patriots to have a care for that puling infant in its midst, to wit, the Shannon Scheme works, and make it their business to see that on some dark and wild night it not be spirited away to eventually come into its prime amongst foster parents whose lullaby bears strong traces of that medium of speech used by all government officials—the Cork accent.⁴⁸

Fearful that Cork was scheming against the people of Limerick, the writer acknowledged that he was “perhaps . . . a bit of an alarmist,” but contended that “there is no good locking the stables when all those horses, or at least, the horse power the Shannon Scheme is going to provide us with, are as colts lassoed and taken away to find stabling in a hotter clime. I believe southern climates are usually warmer.” Speaking of their southern neighbors, as though they were enemies, the journalist called for vigilance because they “never descend to the vulgarity of threatening you openly, and that is how unsuspecting innocent people like us get it in the neck.”⁴⁹ Such characterizations of Cork were hardly flattering, but more importantly, they suggest that the project’s importance was not always based on national growth or prosperity; jockeying for the benefits to come from national electrification could also be portrayed as cutthroat regional competition. As this journalist made clear, the enemy of Limerick could be easily identified by the way he spoke. Although some locals would have interpreted this as rubbish, for many others, Corkmen were a real threat to the community in the sense that they were filling jobs on the site that, as we have seen, men from Limerick believed should have belonged to them.

⁴⁸ “Electric Sparks—Flashes from the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 7 May 1927.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Connemara: Too Irish for the Irish?

A similar flood of Connemara men came from the West of Ireland to Limerick to find work at the site, and this phenomenon exacerbated the debate about what it meant to be Irish. Regional differences were most pronounced as the people of Limerick considered the unfamiliar language, culinary habits, and cultural practices expressed by men from the West. While these tactics paralleled discussions of race in relation to the Germans at the site, they also exposed the forces that threatened to undermine a shared sense of Irishness. The rhetoric may have been the same, but the implication of the ways in which differences were presented had opposite effects on the process of identity formation. For example, as Chapter 4 demonstrated, othering the Germans allowed the Irish to define their own national characteristics in opposition to those perceived traits. However, by emphasizing that the men from Connemara were utterly dissimilar to the people in Limerick, the very idea that they had *any* sense of a shared national identity became less credible.

Although cultural nationalists lauded those who hailed from the Gaeltacht, including Connemara, as purveyors of the pure Irish culture that was largely untouched by British influences, the treatment of workers from this region revealed that the people of Limerick viewed these idealized figures more as exotic peculiarities than as exemplars of a shared heritage. It appeared that Irishness was itself contested, not only in contrast to outsiders like the Germans, but also from within the heterogeneous community of the new Irish state. Regional rivalry between those living in Dublin, Cork, or Limerick never quite approached the othering of the inhabitants of the Gaeltacht who worked at the site. Despite the push by cultural nationalists and representatives of the state to laud the people

of the West as the “true” Irish by promoting the Gaelic language and other cultural practices that had died out elsewhere, the Shannon Scheme became a site where Irishness was revealed as more complicated and less homogenous than nationalist doctrine would prefer.

In fact, Limerick natives considered the Connemara men who sought employment on the Shannon Scheme to be foreigners in much the same way as they did the German contractors and engineers. Whereas Michael and Tom, the two old men mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, heard “strange words trip from [the] strange tongues” of the Germans, the same could be said of Irish workers who were unfamiliar with the Gaelic spoken in Connemara—to them Gaelic was as indecipherable as German. These perceived differences led one writer for the *Limerick Leader* to state that “the Shannon Scheme, or at least the varied and polyglot collection of individuals it embraces within its all-embracing toils, is cynically designated by quite a number of people ‘The League of Nations.’” While the journalist admitted that “one would, as a result, expect to find (and not be disappointed) a rather interesting and varied collection of widely different types of humanity,” the focus of the piece was on the Connemara men, who the writer “personally consider[ed] one of the most interesting from the psychological point of view.”⁵⁰

The religious practices, clothing, and other cultural markers of the Connemara men were indicative of perceived fissures within Irish identity that had decidedly regional tones. Some journalists attempted to elevate these cultural traits of the Connemara men as ideals—practices and lifestyles that were *truly* Irish, and thus worthy of praise. The same writer for the *Limerick Leader* who addressed the location of the Gaeltacht also

⁵⁰ “Electric Sparks—Flashes from the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 26 February 1927.

described the Connemara man in detail. Sketching their physical appearance, he explained:

What first strikes one most forcibly is what may be vaguely termed his general colour scheme, which is pronounced by grey from his neck to his ankles—grey is the predominant note. His upper portion is protected from the four winds of Eirinn [sic] by that humble yet very serviceable garment, the ‘bawneen,’ a sort of abbreviated dressing gown made of Irish homespun wool. His trousers is made of the same material, with the exception that it has generally a lot of little black spots thrown in indiscriminately, to sort of break up the general drabness of the landscape, I presume. The whole ensemble is typical of the general outlook in the particular portion of the country he hails from, and, again, synchronism of various descriptions play[s] an important role in the scheme. He is mild of gaze and looks out on the world with eyes that are wholly innocent and guileless and withal possessing that soft melancholy so peculiar to the Celtic temperament of which he may be said to be the most unspoilt and perfect specimen.⁵¹

The specificity with which the writer depicted a typical Connemara man suggested that his dress and demeanor in some way made him stand out from the rest of the Irish people—he may have symbolized the “perfect specimen” of the Irish race, but in many ways, he lay outside the bounds of what the writer classified as normal.

This classification of the Connemara men as the “unspoilt” Irish also tended to place them in a category defined by what the Irish used to be, rather than what the Irish were becoming—this meant a clear division between groups of Irishmen, with little opportunity for cultural blending. For example, the writer previously mentioned also provided an account of the typical day for a Connemara man working on the Shannon Scheme. He stated that most rose at “about 6 a.m., and immediately foregather with his kind—they are immensely clannish.” The author was clearly indicating what the rest of the Irish were not—they were not clannish (traditional) or related to the kinds of people

⁵¹ Ibid.

from that region. Although the writer indicated that the work was similar for everyone, he stated that evening rituals differed considerably. At the grocer's shop, for instance,

An animated conversation in Gaelic is taking place; money is handed by all to one individual. After a few more preliminaries, this plenipotentiary, accompanied by one other, disappears within the hospitable portals—to drink? No, sir. I no longer entertain the idea that the people of Connemara are inveterate drinkers, as some would like us to believe. They seldom, if ever, in my experience, drink at all. I've only seen one, and two pints finished his desires and any working man may have that amount, I think. No, instead he buys groceries, tea, bread, bacon, jam, etc., and by the way, strikes as canny a bargain as any housewife.⁵²

The image painted by the author was significant for two reasons. First, the Connemara men appeared again as clannish in their experiences at the grocery store. Presumably, all of the other (English-speaking) workers handled their own affairs independently, and did not rely on a representative to bargain on behalf of a group. Second, the author referred to the common stereotype that the men from that region were known to imbibe. As noted by the author himself, on a previous occasion, he had quipped “that the knowledge of siphons gleaned on the scheme has been turned to use, as siphons and whiskey are synonymous terms, hence the necessity of this knowledge in Connemara.”⁵³ In describing the workers from Connemara as responsible, the writer was contributing to an effort that glorified the ways of the west and echoed the defenders of the Connemara men in western papers, such as the *Connacht Tribune*. However, in doing so, the article also implicitly expressed the usually elided deep cultural divides within the new Irish nation state

The presence of Connemara men on the site drew frequent comments from reporters, who noted differences that appeared to make these workers stand out from

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “Electric Sparks—Flashes from the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 8 January 1927.

others around Ardnacrusha. Speaking of the Gaelteacht Commission, established by the government in 1925 to study the social, economic, and linguistic issues affecting Gaelic-speaking districts, one writer for the *Limerick Leader* explained,

The principal occupation of these super-patriots is bewailing the lack of interest shown by us in the Irish language, and periodically disappearing into that mystic region known to them and through them to us, as The Home of the Gaelteacht [sic], or the last stronghold of the Irish race. Now, the majority of us believe that the aforementioned home can also be spelled Connemara—at least that is where the majority of us believe that the remnants of the Irish race lie coyly hidden and where, according to the Gaelteacht [sic] Commission, we are periodically exhorted to repair to hear at first hand the beautiful sonorous and musical inflexions associated with the Irish language as it is spoken by the unspoilt, un-Anglecised [sic] remnant of all that is Irish of the race—in fact that there and only there can it be heard.⁵⁴

The writer's interpretation of the central place of the Gaelic language, as a mark of Irishness, reflected official opinions on the language issue. However, the writer connected the Irish language to the Shannon project site specifically when he opined that the heart of Irishness had been transposed to Ardnacrusha, where many men from Connemara had come to find work. He stated,

I beg to differ from the Commission, as to the present precise location of the home of the Gaelteacht [sic]. It is no longer in Connemara; it has shifted, taken wing, and 'sought fresh fields and pastures new.' I hereby declare that the present home of the last of the race may be said to exist in that particular portion of Ireland that is embraced within the ambit of the sphere of operations of the Shannon Power Works. Proof you require? I can produce it, and on phonograph records, if necessary, where you can from noon till dewy eve listen to the perfect cadences of the pure soft Erse. This Shannon Scheme area is full of it; it is overrun with it; it permeates the whole atmosphere of the place—the beautiful language of our fathers, with its age-long and inevitable accompaniment, the ring of the pick. Truly has it been said 'hewers of wood and drawers of water,' and it will take something more tangible than fluent speech in Irish to raise our people from the rut into which they are sunk—in this case without the aid of pick or shovel on their part.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ "Electric Sparks—Flashes from the Shannon Scheme," *Limerick Leader*, 25 December 1926.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

In a later article, the same writer revised his opinion and admitted, ““my prophesies have all gone astray, and so have the coats of Galway Grey”” since “the ‘wild geese’ have returned home—‘twas merely a temporary migration. The Gael has abandoned the Shannon Scheme en bloc.”⁵⁶ Whether he meant his comments about the Gaeltacht in jest or as an exaggeration, the writer made it clear that the presence of Connemara men was significant and noticeable precisely because of differences in language. Though the plight of the Connemara men on the Shannon Scheme provided a rare occasion in which language and national economic considerations overlapped for Gaelic speakers, researchers like Nuala C. Johnson have demonstrated that these two issues were typically disconnected by the state which viewed the success of cultural and economic policies as entirely separate matters.⁵⁷

Seventy years after the project was completed, Michael Flannery, a former worker at the site, recalled the Connemara men in much the same way as his contemporaries did during the Scheme’s construction. While Flannery’s comments on the Germans during an interview for the ESB’s oral history collection were mentioned in the previous chapter, his recollections of the men from Connemara deserve mention here. A lifelong native of Clonlara, Flannery grew up near the site and embraced a sense of regional identity that also included the Shannon Scheme. When asked by the interviewer if there was much in the way of rivalry between men from different parts of Ireland and if any of them were clannish, he replied, “the Connemara men were. You see, but I think they were made to

⁵⁶ “Electric Sparks—Flashes from the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 8 January 1927.

⁵⁷ Nuala C. Johnson, “Building a nation: an examination of the Irish Gaeltacht Commission Report of 1926,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 19, no. 2 (April 1993): 157-168. While the Commission did make considerable recommendations about how to go about developing the Gaeltacht economically, most of these were put aside by the government due to cost.

be . . . because . . . fellows were sneering at them and this and that, you know what I mean. They had to be more religious to be clannish and then of course, they were talking their own language.”⁵⁸ Pressed to explain why the men were sneered at, Flannery replied that this was largely the result of typical animosity between young men, but that other men at the site saw disparities in the types of pants worn by the Connemara and the fact that many of them were usually not married. He characterized the ridiculers as “shoneens,” a derogatory term used to describe those who preferred English customs to Irish ones, indicating that he was perhaps more accepting of their Irish customs. Flannery admitted that he “worked around and liked them, too,” but similar to the Germans, few Connemara tended to stay in the area, viewing employment at the site as “sort of a stop by . . . from going to England.” Though he noted that linguistic differences created difficulties between the Germans and the English-speaking Irish, he acknowledged that this divide was far greater where the Connemara men were concerned. According to Flannery, “the Germans always distinguished, you see, between the Irishmen and the Connemara men. You know, they thought the Connemara men was [sic] a different breed altogether.”⁵⁹

Not only were the men from the West perceived as culturally different, but as Flannery indicated, they were also accused of belonging to a separate race entirely. This was evident on the evening of 4 September 1927, when a fight broke out between approximately forty Connemara men and other laborers on the Shannon Scheme. According to the *Connacht Tribune*, reprinting a report from the *Limerick Leader*, the fracas was the result of “a feud that existed amongst Connemara workers and others, that

⁵⁸ *Ardnacrusha Veterans*, “Interview with Michael Flannery,” ESB Oral History Collection, DVD, 1999.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

the former were the object of jibes and other forms of insult because of their meagre knowledge of English.”⁶⁰ Fourteen Connemara men were arrested and put on trial for “attack[ing] fellow workers with sticks, stones and bottles,” and the prisoners were formally “charged with conspiring to commit a felony, causing grievous bodily injury, and with damage to property.” The article also stated that there was “great public interest” in the hearing at which one witness gave evidence damning the Connemara men involved for apparently “want[ing] to wipe out the civilized race.”⁶¹

The testimony given by two of the victims of the attack further shed light on the perceived differences between the Connemara men and other Irishmen at the site. Daniel Harley testified that he was sitting on Bernard McAleese’s bed when the Connemara men tossed a bottle through the window before attacking him with their fists and a stick—knocking him unconscious and sending him to the hospital for fourteen days to recover. Harley focused on language as a means to demonize his attackers—further condemning their physical violence as a transgression against societal norms by highlighting the foreignness of their words and the fear this aroused in him for not being able to understand the motivation behind the attack. He stated that when he asked one of his attackers “why he carried a stick, he muttered something in Irish.” During cross examination, Harley denied that he had ever “call[ed] them dirty Connemara men,” and accused his attackers of planning the ambush for days. Further, the defense attorney tried to implicate Harley in provoking the men when he asked “Do suggest that these hard-working boys acted as you say they did without any cause?” This line of questioning

⁶⁰ “Object of Jibes—Connemara Speakers on the Shannon Scheme—Handcuffed in Pairs,” *Connacht Tribune*, 24 September 1927.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

continued when the lawyer asked Harley, “Are you constantly irritating them?,” which Harley also denied. However the lawyer got to the heart of the matter when he asked Harley, “Are you from the North of Ireland, and you consider yourself a superior being?” to which Harley answered “I do not.”⁶² The lawyer for the Connemara men repeatedly insinuated that his clients “got on well” with other workers and that they were driven to violence by Harley’s constant slurs regarding their language and culture. This testimony is insightful because it explicitly touched on a sense of regional competition whereby Connemara men were perceived to rank lower in a hierarchy of Irishness, despite the fact that this was denied by the victim for obvious legal reasons.

However, some members of the public defended the Connemara men in question by attacking the way one writer had depicted details of the fight in a column that appeared in the *Limerick Leader*. In a letter to the editor of the *Connacht Tribune*, M. V. Trayers of Gort, Co. Galway, railed against an earlier writer who “supposes that the men with the ‘bawneens,’ whose ignorance compels them to converse in the ‘vernacular,’ resented the distinctions which are necessary adjuncts to the ‘distinctive badge’ of Ardnacrusha culture, and in their ‘rustic disposition’ brooded over what they considered insults.”⁶³ The idea that the men from Connemara belonged to a different race was also perpetuated by the writer who reported “Interested spectators regarded these hardy sons of toil as of something of a different race.” Trayers was appalled by this insult and remarked, “Perhaps! The race Pearse lived amongst and died for. The race Casement helped and struggled for. The race MacNeill worked for and studied amongst.” Instead of

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ M. V. Trayers, “Connemara Workers on the Shannon,” *Connacht Tribune*, 17 September 1927.

viewing the Connemara men's ties to Gaelic culture as a mark of inferiority, Trayers emphasized their celebrated status among cultural and political nationalists, whose legacies were above reproach. For example, Trayers claimed the people of

Ireland and England were [k]illed in the fight to uphold the vernacular and heritage, these 'bawneens' from Connemara were to be found on equal terms of civilization with Griffith, with Collins, and with de Valera. The 'objects of curiosity' were in evidence along the trail from Frongoch in 1916 to Ballykinlar in 1922, and in the battlefields of Ireland from Cork to Monaghan. Their presence was not resented then, or their language or apparel referred to in insult or opprobrium, but when the spoil of war was being divided, the higher culture of Ardnacrusha could not tolerate them.⁶⁴

Trayers countered a further stereotype—that the men from Connemara were heavy drinkers who were prone to violent outbursts. He stated that “since the inception of the operations on the Shannon Scheme the boys from Connemara have congregated in their huts at night and recited the rosary in Irish prior to retiring.” This religious devotion, according to Trayers, was the real issue behind the attack on workers in Clonlara. He wrote that “this devotional practice was ma[d]e a joke of by some of the less religiously inclined workers, who adopted various practices to disturb the prayers,” including throwing boots and garbage through the windows of the huts in which the Connemara men prayed. Trayers defended the accused by arguing that “the family rosary is no matter of joking or horse-play in Connemara or County Galway. Retaliation became inevitable, with the result that the ‘higher culturalists’ were taught a lesson they are not likely to forget.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid. Interestingly, the list of revolutionary-era heroes included patriots associated with the Easter Rising, including Patrick Pearse and Roger Casement, as well as both the pro-Treaty (Griffith, Collins, and MacNeill) and anti-Treaty (de Valera) sides of the Civil War.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Another citizen calling himself “Nager” from Galway also wrote a letter to the editor of the *Connacht Tribune* defending the Connemara men. Language and culture were the central foci of the letter, in which he explained “the jeers ‘at their meagre knowledge of English’ which are stated to have provoked Connemara labourers on the Shannon Scheme to take law into their own hands, are a striking commentary on the value attached to the Irish language and our native speakers in certain quarters.”⁶⁶ “Nager” was grateful that the paper published the court proceedings and noted that “the words slung at some of them [defendants] that they should behave themselves ‘as a civilised race’ may be treated with contempt.” Like Trayers, “Nager” also countered arguments that the Connemara men were uncivilized and prone to violence by highlighting cultural characteristics that painted the laborers from the west as the ideal Irish. For example, the writer stated, “there are preserved in Connemara among its native speakers characteristics of tender human feeling, charity, religious fervor, and an outlook untainted by modern habits tending to degeneracy that would perhaps put many of their revilers to shame.” And again, in an effort to give the men from Connemara legitimacy within the Irish nationalist tradition, “Nager” commented, “the greatest Irishmen of our day lived among them, and understood their lives, loved their simplicity, and touched their hearts. Pearse was one of those, and Pearse’s writings will for all time remain a monument to the beauty of Connemara peasant life.”⁶⁷ “Nager” also contrasted the Germans discussed in the previous chapter and the men from Connemara when he stated, “I wonder have the German workers been jeered at for their meagre knowledge of

⁶⁶ “Nager,” “Jeers at Irish Speakers,” *Connacht Tribune*, 21 September 1927.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

English.” Although the writer appeared ignorant of the fact that the Germans’ English language skills *were* the butt of many jokes among the Irish laborers, he was touching on language as a contentious subject on the Shannon Scheme.

In the January 2009 issue of *Hedgemaster*, James P. Walsh wrote an article recalling his father’s experiences on the Shannon Scheme for the Irish Cultural Society of the Garden City Area, a group that “endeavors to bring together people with the common goal of learning about our roots and supporting Irish culture and study.”⁶⁸ According to Walsh, before his father found work on the Shannon Scheme in his twenties, he lived in Galway with his parents “in a dirt-floor cottage, without electricity and without indoor plumbing. For heat the family had to dig up and cart peat from a nearby bog.”⁶⁹ For his father, the experience of the barracks, which had heat and indoor plumbing, was a shocking improvement in terms of his standard of living and he was grateful for the work. According to Walsh, his father, “vividly remembered a riot between Irish workers based on language,” a reference to the ordeal described above. Walsh’s father recalled that “those workers who spoke only English, who were the majority, resented those, like my father, who came from the Gaeltach [sic], who spoke only Irish, or who, like my father, could speak English but felt more at home speaking Irish.” He imparted to his son that “The Irish-speakers tended to congregate together in part because the English-speakers looked down on the Irish speakers as hopelessly backward and let those feelings be known.” Walsh’s father participated in the riot and

⁶⁸ Irish Cultural Society of the Garden City Area, “Our Mission,” accessed 8 October 2013, <http://www.irish-society.org/home/our-mission>.

⁶⁹ James P. Walsh, “The Shannon Scheme for the Electrification of the Irish Free State,” *Hedgemaster*, Irish Cultural Society of the Garden City Area, January 2009, accessed 8 October 2013, <http://www.irish-society.org/home/hedgemaster-archives-2/history-events/the-shannon-scheme-for-the-electrification-of-the-irish-free-state>.

Was proud to remember that he knocked down a larger opponent and that one of the German supervisors who witnessed the fight said in effect ‘Good work, Paddy.’ The foreman may have known that my father[‘s] name, in Irish was Pádraig (or Patrick in English) but it was more likely that for the Germans working on the Scheme, all of the Irish workers were Paddies.⁷⁰

In recounting this story that his father passed down to him, Walsh shared with the readers of *Hedgemaster* the strength of the memory about this riot, which was fundamentally about defining Irishness and difference among the Irish people. His comments about the German’s reaction to the fight also placed the incident in a broader discussion about race and identity, as the latter man, in using the generic “Paddy,” apparently saw in the combatants as all of a piece.

Local Apathy vs. National Pride

Arguably one of the most peculiar aspects of promoting the Shannon Scheme in Limerick was the overwhelming sense that many in the city did not care about the project in spite of its promise. As one resident commented ruefully after the government endorsed the project, “the coming Shannon Power Scheme, which is not alone attracting great attention in some parts of Ireland but across the seas, but seems like a hidden spectre in Limerick.”⁷¹ It was peculiar that a project which was expected to attract so many visitors failed to capture the attention of its host city. In striking contrast to the great optimism and hyperbolic assertions that the Shannon Scheme carried the power to transform the locality and the wider Free State, the most common characterization of Limerick’s attitude to the project initially was apathetic. Three years later, one commentator expressed both the optimistic outlook of many observers and surprise at the

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ “A Worker,” “Limerick Workers—And the Shannon Scheme,” letter to the editor, *Limerick Leader*, 4 April 1925.

apparent lack of local attention because he believed “there are no people in Ireland who should be as interested in the success of the Shannon Power Scheme as those of Limerick and Clare.” He further explained,

The regrettable and disappointing fact is, however, that no more real interest is being taken locally in the undertaking than if it were West Africa . . . to benefit by it instead of the Irish Free State! Why, if the proper spirit of enterprise and initiative existed here this city would long before now be humming and throbbing with excitement and activity as to how to derive the greatest and the most speedy advantage from the cheap power to be available when the turbines are to be set going at Ardnacrusha next year. Instead of that, lethargy and indifference seem to still reign supreme amongst us.”⁷²

Despite the best efforts of promoters to drum up support for the project by suggesting the tangible benefits that were at hand especially for the local community, indifference appeared to put a damper on hopeful predictions for the future.

Observers explained that the city was either “slow” or “did not realize” the prospects that the Shannon Scheme made available. This was unfortunate for the city precisely because such portrayals threatened to reveal that action did not accompany the positive rhetoric spouted off in newspapers, speeches, and public gatherings. Regarding tourism specifically, one commentator posited that “Limerick is very slow to make the most of any opportunities that offer. It is not doing anything like as much as it might to improve its business or to attract visitors to the city.”⁷³ Similar language was used to describe the city’s attitude towards the Scheme more generally, as another local writer lamented,

Limerick city was rather slow in taking interest in the project at the start and still remains lackadaisical in so far as taking steps for its prompt and full utilisation is concerned. This centre, of all others, stands to gain most from the Shannon

⁷² “Things That Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 7 July 1928.

⁷³ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 May 1928.

Scheme and up to the present there is an entire absence of anything like a ‘hustle’ towards getting ready for the great industrial and commercial revival that the huge undertaking will bring within reach.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, others speculated that Limerick’s apathy could be explained in terms of simply not understanding what the Scheme meant for their community. This incomprehension was not symptomatic of Limerick alone, however. As one Irish-American clergyman acknowledged in 1925, “the people of Ireland . . . do not seem to realise what a benefit the electrification of the Shannon would be to them. It is an axiom that the material prosperity of a country is in direct proportion to the amount of horse-power generated in the country according to population.”⁷⁵ The *Limerick Leader* noted that, “the comment has frequently been made—and not without some justification—that Limerick does not fully realise how it stands to gain from the Shannon Scheme when that big enterprise is completed. The experience everywhere is that industry follows cheap power and it is only natural to expect that this city should gain in particular from having in its vicinity a supply of electric current at a very low rate.”⁷⁶ Supposing that Limerick residents did not realize the Scheme’s potential was a striking indictment considering that the local press bombarded the public on a weekly basis with articles that described the prospective benefits in exhaustive detail.

Concerned onlookers took it upon themselves to find the source of this perceived apathy. Local advocates wondered about its cause, especially since the Shannon Scheme had infiltrated all aspects of public life. As the *Limerick Leader* noted in 1928, “meetings

⁷⁴ “Things that Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 5 September 1927.

⁷⁵ “Our White Coal,” *Limerick Leader*, 27 July 1925.

⁷⁶ “Importance of Cheap Power,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 March 1926.

have been held, speeches made, but again . . . no material progress has been made. The question, ‘What is the matter with Limerick?’ suggests itself.”⁷⁷ Echoing similar rhetoric, the newspaper also indicated that it was not only local residents who considered their predicament:

The role of grumbler is not a pleasant one in any sense, but we find ourselves driven to it from time to time by the almost criminal lack of initiative and enterprise in this now highly-favourable centre. Before we know where we are, as Dr. Burke, of the Department of Education, stated in Cork recently, ‘the waters of the lordly Shannon will be generating cheap electricity at our doors,’ and so far one foot has not been put before the other in any local effort to prepare for the wonderful opportunities and possibilities that will then be placed in our way. No wonder so many outsiders would ask, as they frequently do, what is wrong with Limerick?⁷⁸

While recognizing that there was indeed a problem with Limerick, speculation abounded as to what was responsible for the “criminal lack of initiative.”

Culpability for Limerick’s apathy was usually placed with the local political leaders, the business community, the collective population of Limerick, or even the former colonizers for perpetuating a slave mentality that was difficult to overcome. Often, these groups heaped blame on each other in an effort to identify a scapegoat for Limerick’s perceived failure. Apathy, it seemed, had seeped into every aspect of the public mentality, such that the people of Limerick did not believe progress was being made in any avenue. For instance, the local press surmised,

The blame for this lamentable absence of a spirit of push and active citizenship is to be spread over many shoulders. Those who are to be naturally looked to as leaders in matters of this kind merit no small share of censure, but there are others, too, who deserve adverse criticism for their lackadaisical attitude. The policy of ‘leaving it all to the other fellow’ is a great clog in the wheels of

⁷⁷ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 June 1928.

⁷⁸ “Things That Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 15 September 1928.

progress and nowhere is it more religiously and disastrously followed than here in Limerick.⁷⁹

Local leaders were likely targets to admonish for not doing enough to take advantage of the benefits offered by the Shannon Scheme. Nearly a year later, the *Limerick Leader* noted that nothing had changed:

Limerick, we regret to have once more to comment, has by no means risen to the height of the great opportunities literally thrown on its way. Instead, it has in effect been virtually throwing cold water on the Shannon Scheme to the extent of treating it to little ‘jabs’ and ‘thrusts’ that can do no good but are calculated to do an immense amount of harm.”⁸⁰

Again, the paper openly concluded that “blame falls on local government and leaders, and Ministers were not made to listen by a spirit of earnestness.”⁸¹

Politicians were accountable to those they represented, and citizens in the district expressed concern about how the sluggishness of their leaders would impact them. For example, a member of the community declared, “it strikes me as amazing the apathy and indifference of the representative bodies of the city in the matter of their responsibility for the industrial progress and social and economic life of the city, which of all areas affected is certainly the one to gain the most.”⁸² Not only did apathy reflect poorly on local politicians, it also threatened to harm Limerick’s relationship to the Free State government, as one commentator speculated about the consequences of the city’s attitude

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ “Things That Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 7 September 1929.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “Progress,” “Amazing Apathy,” letter to the editor, *Limerick Leader*, 4 April 1925.

towards the Shannon Scheme, claiming to not be “surprised that the Government or controlling body should keep us as much in the background as they possibly can.”⁸³

Of course, local politicians were not the only ones to blame for Limerick’s apathy, as business leaders often found themselves accused of not doing enough to show their sympathies for the project and the tourism it fostered. As early as 1925, when criticism was at its apex, supporters charged that, “if Limerick city and county, through their local public bodies and commercial and business men, were more active and articulate in showing their approval of the scheme the opponents of the enterprise would be less assertive and persistent in their attitudes than they are.”⁸⁴ Many in the region believed the Limerick Chamber of Commerce, made up of influential businessmen responsible for acting as advocates on behalf of the community, fell short in terms of doing enough to back the Shannon Scheme. The ubiquitous theme of idleness on the part of local businessmen reared its head year after year, and in 1927, the *Limerick Leader* reported that the

Limerick Chamber of Commerce has not distinguished itself for push or initiative. It has done little or nothing to advance the general business of the city or to bring the industrial potentialities of this centre to the notice of outsiders. The Shannon Scheme has left it virtually cold, although one might naturally expect a body of this kind to actively interest itself in the local possibilities the project is bound to open up.⁸⁵

Censure also suggested a solution to this problem as the article continued, “Surely our Chamber of Commerce ought be able to blow Limerick’s trumpet much more loudly than

⁸³ “Limerick’s Future—Outspoken Declarations,” *Limerick Leader*, 9 May 1928.

⁸⁴ “Random Gossip—Wake Up, Limerick!” *Limerick Leader*, 4 April 1925.

⁸⁵ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 24 September 1927.

it has ever yet attempted,” since the Shannon Scheme brought with it unprecedented opportunities for the city.⁸⁶

To be sure, a consensus about what was to be done required cooperation within the community, but some openly accused business owners of dodging responsibility and refusing to take the initiative to bring about real change. For example, the *Limerick Leader* condemned the average shopkeeper in its blanket dissatisfaction with the business community’s lack of enterprising spirit. Speaking of the Shannon Scheme, the paper regretfully told its readers,

On all sides in this city comment is heard daily as to how Limerick is neglecting to avail of its great opportunities. But the very people who indulge in such language do nothing whatever to stimulate practical action in accordance with their views. The shopkeeper behind his counter will wax eloquently indignant at the thought that nothing is being done to build up a great commercial and industrial future for the city, but wild horses could not drag him to a meeting convened to consider any project with that end in view.⁸⁷

Utilizing the popular taunt that local apathy was akin to believing the Shannon Scheme existed in a far-off place, a journalist scoffed, “Opportunities of tremendous value and importance are now opening up for industrial enterprise in Limerick and yet our business and commercial people appear as indifferent to them as if the Shannon Scheme were as far away as Greenly Island.”⁸⁸ Taking this taunt to the extreme, one of the project’s supporters confidently equated hope and fact in order to chastise businessmen, not for simply treating the Shannon Scheme as if it were someplace else, but for acting like it would never exist at all. As one concerned citizen declared, “It is a well known fact that

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “Things That Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 15 September 1928.

⁸⁸ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 May 1928.

Limerick will derive most benefit from the carrying out of such a project, but, so far, our business men seem to view the whole thing like the thirsty traveller viewed the mirage in the desert—a glorious uncertainty.”⁸⁹

Sometimes, blame was placed equally on the shoulders of politicians and businessmen. Referring to the promise of a bright industrial future, one observer exclaimed,

Limerick, it must be said, does not appear to be fully alive to its interests in this connection at all. So far as we know no concerted move has been made or is being made to secure for the city any new industries that are bound to make their appearance as the natural corollary of cheap industrial power. That lethargy on the part of our public men, industrial magnates and labour leaders is to be regretted. The time has now come when that lethargy should be shaken off, for if we are to content ourselves as mere idle lookers-on some other city or centre will reap the harvest that should be ours.⁹⁰

Even the former mayor of Limerick, P. O’Donovan, was frustrated by the lack of response from all representatives in the community. As early as 1925, he stated that “in regard to the Shannon Development Scheme . . . the apathy was appalling.” The former mayor blamed local public bodies who had not “passed a resolution, or taken the slightest interest in it.”⁹¹

While politicians and businessmen were the most common scapegoats, the general populace also occasionally found itself in the crosshairs of Shannon Scheme supporters. As one journalist argued in 1926, a negative self-perception was a deeply engrained mind-set that affected the entire community because

⁸⁹ “One of the Unemployed,” “Shannon Scheme—Campaign of Obstruction—Limerick’s Amazing Apathy—Need For Active Local Interest,” letter to the editor, *Limerick Leader*, 4 April 1925.

⁹⁰ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 June 1928.

⁹¹ “Tourist Traffic—Limerick Meeting—References to the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 6 April 1925.

The people of Limerick have been too given to depreciating their own city, instead of being proud of it and doing all they can to build it up commercially and industrially. This centre—especially now in view of the Shannon Scheme—has all the potentialities for a prosperous and progressive future, and if things don't hum henceforth as they should the fault will lie with the inhabitants themselves.⁹²

Uncovering why the city seemed to be unwilling to pull itself up by the bootstraps was puzzling, especially because “while Limerick is having progress and improvement thus thrust upon it, as it were, the people themselves are doing nothing whatever of a practical or tangible nature to take the tide of opportunity at the flood.”⁹³ Indeed, the *Limerick Leader* used bold type to highlight a statement made by Mr. Richard Quin at the annual meeting of Limerick's Ratepayers' Protective Association in 1928 when he declared “There is one thing certain . . . and that is that no city or people in Ireland threw more cold water on the Scheme than Limerick did.”⁹⁴ But, as with politicians, negative attention heaped on the residents of the area did not produce the critics' desired results.

The local paper disappointedly recalled,

Again and again we have animadverted on the rather lackadaisical attitude of Limerick as a whole regarding the harnessing of the Shannon. When the project was at first mooted the people of this city appeared to take as little interest in it as if were proposed to harness the Lagan [in Northern Ireland] instead of the Shannon. Even up to this—when the carrying out of the undertaking has been over a year and a half in progress—nothing in the way of an organised effort has been made to ensure that the fullest and earliest advantage be taken of the wonderful facilities the completion of the Scheme will undoubtedly make available.⁹⁵

In nationalist circles, meanwhile, the British were guilty as charged for many of Ireland's woes, and this ethos infiltrated discourses on the Shannon Scheme at a local

⁹² “Things that Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 17 April 1926.

⁹³ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 May 1928.

⁹⁴ “Limerick's Future—Outspoken Declarations,” *Limerick Leader*, 9 May 1928.

⁹⁵ “Things that Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 28 March 1927.

level. As seen in Chapter 4 on race, Britain's role in cultivating a slave mentality in Ireland was a common trope, and a brief mention of its application to the situation in Limerick will contextualize the city's enervated stance on the hydroelectric project. During a speech given at Mullingar in 1925, Cosgrave linked the ultimate quadriad of the Shannon Scheme, tourism, apathy, and the slave mind when he noted that "nothing, for instance, surprises visitors to Limerick more than to find such little public interest manifested in the project. The slave mind has not yet fully ceased to exist in Ireland and there is still a latent idea, begotten of long years of subjection, that we cannot do big things for ourselves as they do in other countries."⁹⁶ It was common to speak of the slave mind hindering industrial development or technical education, but the fact that it was also used to excuse local apathy as an uncontrollable postcolonial legacy was less obvious. In a newspaper article entitled, "The Shannon Scheme," a journalist hypothesized that "For a long time there was a surprising amount of local apathy regarding the matter. This was probably due to the slave-mind idea that we could do nothing big for ourselves and also to the idea that 'the thing was too good to be true.'"⁹⁷ The use of the past tense to describe a former state of apathy in Limerick was clearly overly optimistic, if not fanciful, in 1925. Nevertheless, blaming the ever-present slave mind for Limerick's ineptitude in dealing with the Shannon Scheme had the dual advantage of snubbing the British while shifting the blame from the people of Limerick themselves.

Whatever the cause of this lethargy, overcoming it was what Limerick needed to do in order to properly embrace the Shannon Scheme. The number and variety of

⁹⁶ "Our White Coal," *Limerick Leader*, 27 July 1925.

⁹⁷ "The Shannon Scheme," *Limerick Leader*, 19 August 1925.

solutions offered in leading articles and public speeches rivaled the number of those held responsible for the city's shortcomings. Sometimes the remedy was vague with a touch of optimism, as in, "it is to be hoped that the Borough Council will do something to let the outside public know that Limerick is in some way alive to the tremendous potentialities being opened up for it by the Shannon Scheme."⁹⁸ Doing something was thought to be a step in the right direction, though what that something included was not always clearly outlined. It was plain though that many envisioned a solution in which community cooperation was paramount such that "the citizens must—through the local public bodies and representatives and in every other way possible—show that they are anxious and willing to make the most, from the very beginning, of the unparalleled opportunities about to arise for them."⁹⁹ Echoing this rhetoric as the panacea for Limerick's disinterest in the project, others reasoned that in this regard, "no progress will be made without a generous and general blend of hope, enterprise and energy."¹⁰⁰ Harboring hope was, however, not a pragmatic solution for a community that was doing little to take advantage of tourism to the Shannon Scheme or to promote other business opportunities that would benefit from electrification.

Numerous other well-meaning proposals remained vague. For instance, several commentators expressed a desire for greater "civic spirit." As defined by the *Limerick Leader* in 1926, this spirit would combat the tendency to pass responsibility onto one's neighbor:

⁹⁸ "Things that Matter," *Limerick Leader*, 28 March 1927.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ "Things that Matter," *Limerick Leader*, 17 April 1926.

Another thing Limerick needs very badly is a sound a vigorous civic spirit. The policy of 'leaving it all to the other fellow,' and then indulging in futile whines is a fatal one. The masses should be imbued with a full sense of their individual and collective responsibilities as citizens and should assert themselves accordingly.¹⁰¹

Councilor Casey of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce, who was a vigorous supporter of tourism and the Shannon Scheme, warned that "if a real civic spirit is not shown then, Limerick, instead of being the chief beneficiary from the Shannon Scheme will lose the greatest opportunity in its history."¹⁰² According to this article, the people of Limerick were believed to be responsible for bringing about a revolution in their civic values. This was also the view taken by another journalist who acknowledged, "There is much, indeed, to be done before Limerick's apathy is wiped out and replaced by a better sense of civic pride and citizenship. The field of progress and development is wide, and what is principally needed is initiative and enterprise on the part of the people themselves."¹⁰³

To engender this sense of civic spirit, activists argued that it was necessary to launch a campaign with the purpose of stirring the sleepy city into action, as indicated by their popular slogan, "Wake Up Limerick." For example, one reporter advocated that "Limerick should wake up, even now, and demonstrate to all parties that it is enthusiastically in favour of the Scheme, the carrying out of which should make this district in a comparatively few years the centre of almost boundless prosperity and unexampled progress."¹⁰⁴ Stating that tourism "is one way at least in which the Shannon Scheme is something of an immediate asset to Limerick," another journalist pleaded that

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² "Limerick's Future—Shannon Scheme Possibilities," *Limerick Leader*, 30 July 1927.

¹⁰³ "Things That Matter," *Limerick Leader*, 9 July 1928.

¹⁰⁴ "Random Gossip—Wake Up, Limerick!" *Limerick Leader*, 4 April 1925.

“Limerick should wake up and do better than it has been doing in the way of catering more generally and more satisfactorily for excursion parties.”¹⁰⁵ Columnists’ calls for Limerick to “wake up” were so frequent that they would utilize the phrase in the elaborate puns to report on the dam. Thus in January 1926, the *Limerick Leader* quipped that

The Germans are waking up Limerick these days in a really literal sense. For the past couple of mornings they have been carrying on extensive blasting in the Ardnasrusha district in connection with the Shannon Scheme. The explosions, which resembled the thundering of heavy cannon, began this morning and yesterday morning between six and seven and aroused the heaviest slumberers in all parts of the city. Except for those who have to get up at an unearthly hour altogether, there is no need for alarm clocks in Limerick of late.¹⁰⁶

Though in jest, this article played on the serious plea for Limerick to awaken from its slumber, shake off its apathy, and make the most of the Shannon Scheme. Calling for the city to “wake up” was the logical parallel to the prophetic belief that the hydroelectric project signaled the reawakening of Limerick.

However, not all advice for the city’s recovery relied on abstractions regarding civic spirit or community reawakening. Councilor Casey, for instance, made some practical recommendations to the Chamber of Commerce when he “suggested that an industrial survey map should be prepared showing the railway, waterways and the Shannon Scheme. His idea was that a booklet should be got out and supplied to the hotel keepers, etc., from a bureau in the city, and showing the industrial possibilities of Limerick, as well as the tourist spots.” He also stated that the money should come from the corporation to support tourism and commercial development equally, and efforts

¹⁰⁵ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 June 1926.

¹⁰⁶ “Random Gossip—Waking Up Limerick,” *Limerick Leader*, 16 January 1926.

should be made towards “advertising Limerick’s possibilities in English, French and American newspapers.”¹⁰⁷ Even those who lived outside of the Limerick area felt compelled to share their views on what the city should do to make the most of the Shannon Scheme. At a Limerick Rotary Club dinner, attended by approximately 100 Rotarians from Dublin, Belfast, Derry, and Cork,

Mr. Fred Summerfield, Dublin . . . said that had he been a Limerick man he would bombard the Electricity Supply Board to make the city the shop window for advertising the Shannon Scheme. In all seriousness we would suggest to the mayor that he should take up the question of making Limerick the shop window of the Shannon Scheme, for if the Supply Board spent money on advertising their ‘wares’ in Limerick, it occurred to him that it would be very good business (applause).¹⁰⁸

Advertising was also advocated by another contemporary who believed that getting the word out about the Shannon Scheme would go a long way towards improving the city’s economic prospects. Claiming that talking about the Scheme was more important than taking any specific action, the opinionated observer stated, “to merely speak about Limerick’s suitability as a centre for new industrial enterprises when the Shannon Scheme is in operation would be a useful advertisement and would in time probably have the effect of inducing people with capital to start factories here in this centre.”¹⁰⁹

To be sure, reports appeared about specific instances where businesses in Limerick and the surrounding areas positively exploited the project’s potential.. For example, in Clonlara, the *Limerick Leader* noted that “since the Shannon Scheme operations were undertaken shops of divers kinds have sprung up all over the district. A

¹⁰⁷ “Limerick’s Future—Shannon Scheme Possibilities,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 July 1927.

¹⁰⁸ “As a Shop Window—Limerick and Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 15 November 1930.

¹⁰⁹ “Things that Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 28 March 1927.

very enterprising young man, Mr. James Ryan, has opened a victualler's [sic] supply store at Clonlara, where he is commanding an excellent business."¹¹⁰ Even an expatriate from Limerick living in Germany showed an entrepreneurial spirit when he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Limerick Leader* explaining that he had read an article on the Shannon Scheme and his friend happened to have invented electrical devices and needed a market for them in Ireland. He explained that his acquaintance could supply electric lamp holders, fittings and protectors for electric lamp holders, along with junction boxes.¹¹¹

The most important way that Limerick attempted to shake off its apathetic reputation was to actively pursue opportunities for increasing tourism to the area. The early stages of cultivating a relationship between Limerick and the Irish Tourist Development Association coincided with the commencement of the Shannon Scheme. Zuelow and Furlong have provided excellent histories on the establishment of various organizations dedicated to tourism, but the ways in which these bodies affected Limerick in particular deserve attention. The local press kept abreast of tourism development, and by 1925, the local press anxiously notified its readers, "both Great Britain and America are, it appears, to be flooded with posters and literature describing the beauties and charms of Ireland and nothing will be left undone in the way of advertising abroad the many attractions this country offers to tourists."¹¹² In early April 1925, citizens of Limerick met under the auspices of forming a local branch of the ITDA in the city. According to the local newspaper, the former mayor, Philip O'Donovan, "was of the

¹¹⁰ "Clonlara and District—Changed Aspect," *Limerick Leader*, 26 March 1927.

¹¹¹ M. Hollywood, "New Inventions—In Electrical World—Letter from Limerickman Abroad," *Limerick Leader*, 6 August 1927.

¹¹² "A Forward Move," *Limerick Leader*, 4 March 1925.

opinion that the Shannon Scheme and the Tourist Development Scheme should go hand in hand.” J. P. O’Brien, secretary of the ITDA, emphasized the importance of local involvement, with the key for success being organization. At the conclusion of the meeting, city residents who attended passed a resolution to form a branch of the association.¹¹³

Given the community apathy, it is not surprising that little was done to follow up this initial resolution. But by 1928, the ITDA believed that the local branches needed to link with the national organization in order to achieve the best results. In January of that year, the ITDA wrote to the Limerick Corporation about “striking a rate under Section 67 of the Local Government Act to be expended in a publicity campaign” because the Act provided that “public bodies are empowered to levy a nominal rate to be used for the purpose of advertising the attractions of their respective areas.” The local newspaper noted that the Corporation “did not avail of their powers in this respect” the previous year.¹¹⁴ By August of 1928, the President of the ITDA was still hopeful “that Limerick would join the Tourist Development Association, as it was one of the few centres in the country that was outside the movement.”¹¹⁵ The Limerick Chamber of Commerce agreed, noting “in view of the growing importance of Limerick as a tourist centre, it is considered that, in the interests of the city and county, it is most important that an active body to deal

¹¹³ “Tourist Traffic—Limerick Meeting—References to the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 6 April 1925.

¹¹⁴ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 January 1928.

¹¹⁵ “A Mecca for Tourists—Limerick and its Future—Shannon Scheme As A Permanent Attraction,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

with tourist problems be formed.”¹¹⁶ Finally, in December, the Chamber of Commerce agreed to form a Limerick Advisory Committee to the ITDA.¹¹⁷

There was a sense that working with the ITDA to promote tourism to the Shannon Scheme and Limerick in general would benefit the city. According to the secretary of the ITDA, “the Shannon Scheme had been boosted during the present year, both by the Irish Tourist Development Association and to a greater extent by the organisation responsible for the undertaking.” As a result of this publicity, he claimed that tourism to the Scheme provided Limerick “a big revenue as a result . . . and although individually they may not have spent very much, the cumulative return must have meant a big revenue for the city taken as a whole.”¹¹⁸ Mr. F. J. Cleeve, president of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce, asserted that, “the only way to attract visitors to the country was by showing its scenic and industrial attractions through the medium of the Tourist Association.”¹¹⁹ Promoters of tourism not only emphasized the combination of “scenic and industrial attractions,” but they reasoned that this contribution made Limerick more desirable to tourists. For example, the people of the city were informed that “Limerick enjoys many advantages over other tourist centres by reason of its geographical position, and its wealth of scenic sporting, historical and antiquarian features. These, with the additional attraction afforded

¹¹⁶ “Tourist Traffic—Proposed Association for Limerick,” *Limerick Leader*, 21 November 1928.

¹¹⁷ “To Attract Tourists—Advisory Committee for Limerick—Meeting of Chamber of Commerce,” *Limerick Leader*, 3 December 1928.

¹¹⁸ “Things That Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 14 August 1929.

¹¹⁹ “To Attract Tourists—Advisory Committee for Limerick—Meeting of Chamber of Commerce,” *Limerick Leader*, 3 December 1928.

by the Shannon Scheme, provide a ready means of increasing the prosperity of our city through the advent of visitors.”¹²⁰

Despite the ITDA’s assertion that its publicity of the project meant a boost in tourism for the city, not everybody was sold on the utility of the association. Michael J. Keyes, mayor of Limerick and former Labour TD, referred to this opinion at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in 1929 when he jokingly mentioned,

At a meeting of the Tourist Development Association a gentleman from Bray had said that in his town they had no necessity for such an organisation, as their difficulty was to keep the overflow of tourists away from Bray, and he (Mayor) had replied in jest that they had experienced a similar difficulty as regards the Shannon Scheme, but at the same time he should admit that that was not a healthy line of thought to pursue.¹²¹

Even though the mayor implied that the area had a healthy supply of tourists, Keyes did not agree with the man from Bray that tourism development was unnecessary. However, it seemed that some of the city’s residents remained indifferent to the idea because the Limerick Advisory Committee to the ITDA struggled to gain community support. In the summer of 1929, the committee “issued an appeal to the citizens for financial support, so that they may be in a position to fully advertise the attractions of the city. It would be a misfortune, indeed, if the Advisory Committee had to curtail its activities because of lack of funds.”¹²² Nevertheless, the Mayor was convinced that the tide was changing in the city. He admitted that “for a long time he had regretted that Limerick was not taking the interest in tourist development which they should take, and it seemed that they had become a kind of dead thing, or a dead end. The Shannon Scheme had galvanized them,

¹²⁰ “Things That Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 14 August 1929.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

or should he say electrified them? (laughter) into action in several ways.”¹²³ In fact, the connection between the ITDA and the Shannon Scheme forged a formal link between the project and visitors on both a local and national level.

Tourism to the Shannon Scheme was the subject of an address in 1928 given to the weekly luncheon of the Limerick Rotary Club by John C. Foley, president of the Irish Tourist Association and an ESB official. While some believed that tourism to the Shannon Scheme would only coincide with the construction phase, Foley argued “that the Shannon Scheme will remain a permanent attraction for visitors from outside.” Foley predicted “that Limerick would continue to be a mecca for tourists when the Scheme is completed, as the route from the city on through O’Brien’s Bridge to Killaloe would always have great attraction for visitors.”¹²⁴ Perhaps more than any other official working for the ITA or the ESB, Foley consistently combined tourism to the Shannon Scheme with the natural attractions in the area. He appeared to make no distinction between industrial tourism and sightseeing in natural surroundings when he announced,

Tourist traffic along the Shannon in the future would be of a permanent nature, because when the plant was completed people would come to see it in even greater numbers, than at present. The route from Limerick through O’Brien’s Bridge to Killaloe and down the head race to Ardnacrusha would be a permanent tourist trip. Nature had endowed this country with scenic and natural characteristics which were priceless, and it was up to them to advertise such unique possessions, and be proud of them and to let other people know of their existence.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ “A Mecca for Tourists—Limerick and its Future—Shannon Scheme As A Permanent Attraction,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Although Foley provided no evidence for this opinion, his comment is illustrative in that it articulated the belief that coming to witness the modernity of the Shannon Scheme could complement a visit to the areas of traditional importance in the countryside.

Transformation of Limerick: Physical Environment

Tourism associated with the Shannon Scheme had broad appeal, in part because it allowed the government and citizens of the Free State an opportunity to reassess what it meant to be Irish. As one historian stated, “tourism, at least national tourism, requires consideration of precisely what it means to be part of the nation being promoted, its defining characteristics, history and geographic space.”¹²⁶ At the heart of this debate was the same issue faced by the ESB in its promotion of electricity to the wider population: the reconciliation of the agrarian and conservative ethos of Irish nationalism with modernity. The Shannon Scheme raised the question of whether Irish tourism, both domestic and foreign, should focus on the Gaelic and rural nature of Ireland or on the progressive and modern aspects of national electrification. Promoters addressed this potentially contradictory situation by arguing that the Shannon Scheme was representative of *Irish* modernity. Tourists could enjoy the beauty of the Irish countryside in County Limerick, while simultaneously appreciating modern luxury hotels, complete with electricity.

Many believed that Irish tourism was based primarily on an interest in the island’s natural beauty and a fascination with Gaelic culture. Industrial tourism did not seem compatible with this interest. Thus, the Irish Tourist Association ran ads in the *Irish Independent* for pamphlets on “what to see” and “how to get there,” that included a visual

¹²⁶ Zuelow, “National Identity and Tourism,” 159.

depiction of Ireland in its most natural sense, complete with streams, trees, and hills.¹²⁷

Similarly, Sir Felix Pole, the general manager of an English railway company, toured Ireland and wrote an article for the *Irish Independent*, in which he stated that “the country is indeed a paradise for tourists, providing facilities for mountaineering, fishing, golf, and boating, with enchanting scenery at every turn.”¹²⁸ Books such as *The Angler’s Guide to the Irish Free State*, published in 1924, focused on the Irish landscape, the friendliness of its inhabitants, and the rustic adventures visitors experienced in the countryside.¹²⁹

Zuelow has argued that there “was a protracted discussion about whether Ireland should be forward-looking or nostalgic,” and that “Ireland represented a positive ‘other’ to the harried people of industrial Europe and America.”¹³⁰ The Shannon Scheme could be presented as the antithesis of the rustic appeal of the Irish countryside, steeped heavily in traditions that were of particular interest to foreign visitors seeking an exotic experience. However, the ESB encouraged tourists to turn their attention to the modernizing efforts of the nation, with which visitors from Britain, America, or the continent were already familiar.

Tourists could still take in the beauty of the countryside, but they could also observe the modern engineering feat of the Shannon Scheme. For example, the *Sunday Graphic* reported the striking differences between the bucolic countryside and the industrial construction site:

¹²⁷ *Irish Independent*, 14 June 1927.

¹²⁸ *Irish Independent*, 29 July 1927.

¹²⁹ Irish Free State, Department of Lands and Fisheries, *The Angler’s Guide to the Irish Free State*, (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1924).

¹³⁰ Eric Zuelow, *Making Ireland Irish: Tourism and National Identity since the Irish Civil War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009), xxxii.

The wild and picturesque stretch of the country between the towns of Limerick and Killaloe, where, but a few years since, the snipe drummed and only a rare cabin broke the solitude prevailing on the banks of the rushing brown river, has since been transformed into a hive of activity. Great camps of frame houses with canteens and shops and offices; new roads and railways; tremendous machines; grotesque to view and bewilderingly complicated, representing the last word in modern engineering devices, shovel and bucket excavators, stone crushers and concrete mixers. Filling the erstwhile silent Shannon valley the round of the clock with noise; lofty cable cranes soaring over all; a huge temporary power station, where nine diesel engines pulsate thunderously; seething repair shops; fussing trains; the spasmodic thud of blasting, shaking the widows of dingy Limerick away at the river mouth—all this mass of machinery, this confusion of sounds, this extraordinary, and in this desolate setting of the Clare hills, altogether unprecedented, bustle, attests the unremitting labours, by day as by night, of the thousands of thousands of men during the past three years.¹³¹

A similar sentiment was expressed in D. L. Kelleher's entry on "The Shannon Scheme," in *The Limerick Anthology*. Taken from *Ireland of the Welcomes*, the entry employed "an absurd metaphor," but nevertheless included the description of Ardnacrusha:

Hitherto for all the years of recorded time a green, clanking, fertile place, where cattle lowing and birds smiling over it with a song. A house here and there, white and tidy, hardly bigger-looking than a milestone, a herd following his cattle, a milkmaid in the tradition of the ballads, as poetical and, perhaps, as unreal—that was all the hitherto. The now Ardnacrusha is different: Diesel engines are the deities, kilowatts the acolytes, the servers are volts. . . . But, even so, at Ardnacrusha, where once King Brian Boru was a neighbor, the natives can talk in terms of modern magic today.¹³²

As the electricity promotional campaign made clear, Irishness incorporated elements of both tradition and modernity. This was possible because the Shannon Scheme represented not British industrialism, but the first step towards an Irish modernity.

The Shannon Scheme differed as a site for tourism in Ireland precisely because it represented change and newness. Touring beauty spots often carried with it the

¹³¹ Valentine Williams, "Begone, Celtic Twilight: A Young Irishman's Dream Lights the Face of a New and Hopeful Ireland," *Sunday Graphic*, 16 September 1928.

¹³² D. L. Kelleher, "The Shannon Scheme," in *The Limerick Anthology*, ed. Jim Kemmy (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996), 254.

expectation that visitors would gaze upon timeless scenery, which was special because it had the reputation of being untouched by the modern world. But as one newspaper phrased it, “the whole district of Ardnacrusha [had] undergone a complete transformation.”¹³³ In fact, the Shannon Scheme was not only “unnatural,” its construction depended on the destruction of nature. Describing the ways in which the familiar aspects of the natural environment had been obliterated by the Shannon Scheme, a correspondent compared how the sound of construction had drowned out the sounds of nature in the area. Recalling a temporary suspension of work during the Christmas holiday, the writer alleged, “to anyone acquainted with the fierce amount of noise associated with the everyday workings of the Scheme, the effect produced during the cessation of all active operations was purely uncanny. If it were not for the amount of machinery, banks and canals, etc., one would hear no sound foreign to the usual countryside.”¹³⁴ In a special recurring column for the *Limerick Leader* called “Electric Spark—Flashes from Shannon Scheme,” the reporter underscored the intense tension between the hydroelectric undertaking and nature. Instead of focusing on the power of machinery to reshape nature, the article sought to give credence to the forces of nature. Alluding to the Shannon Scheme, the columnist supposed,

One had only to turn one’s back on it all and nature was again back in her own, the sweet song of the blackbirds and others ring, through the trees, and brakes and the gurgle of the small streams fall pleasantly on the ear. After all, even the most monstrous and terrible machinery invented by man for the tearing and grinding up of the earth has but an infinitesimal effect on the whole. In one or two seasons nature in her never ceasing activities gently covers the gaping wounds of the fields with a soft garment of green, gone is the hideous raw earth appearance, the grass grows again, the trees and saplings begin to bud and bloom, the inexorable

¹³³ “Things that Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 21 April 1926.

¹³⁴ “Electric Sparks—Flashes from Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 1 January 1927.

laws of nature cannot be stopped, and the seasons come and go clothing the countryside in their varying mantles from year to year, and man puny man, and his mightiest efforts crumble and fade and in time are no more.¹³⁵

The Shannon Scheme not only went against the laws of nature, it also threatened to deface one of nature's most charming features: beauty. The *Limerick Leader*, which was generally supportive of the project, ran a few articles that surely irritated those interested in increasing tourist traffic to the area. These advocates were responsible for blending natural sightseeing with industrial tourism by encouraging visitors to the site to partake in tours of the countryside as well. But construction sites are not known for enhancing the beauty of nature, and are principally striking because of the ways in which they disfigure it or make it appear unnatural. For example, in a weekly column, the journalist noted that "even the tip-and-run visitor . . . is struck immediately with the huge amount of work carried out up to the present (certain farmers in the vicinity have another more forcible word to describe their activities!) But I beg to state what strikes the aforesaid visitor more forcibly is the amount of mud that is everywhere painfully evident."¹³⁶ In a letter to Patrick Hogan, Colonel George O'Callaghan-Westropp, who was a prominent community advocate with ties in the Limerick and Clare areas, complained that the press had taken his comments in a speech about the Shannon Scheme out of context. He lamented the misrepresentation when he stated that "my expression of hope that the Scheme might be a success was not published, all that appeared was 'the God-forsaken wilderness of mud' which is exactly what the thing appeared when I went to see it in January, and the words were a warning to people not to go near it until it was fit to

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ "How a Big Project Progresses," *Limerick Leader*, 18 December 1926.

be seen.”¹³⁷ However, reports like these were not meant for tourists, but rather for those who lived near the site and understood the farmers’ frustrations and who were familiar with the ubiquity of mud. In fact, O’Callaghan-Westropp’s letter explicitly stated that those wishing to come see the works should delay until construction had reached a less muddy phase, presumably because he did not think their impressions of the project should be shaped by the unattractive necessity of moving soil around the site.

Conscious that their city’s appearance left an impression on visitors, at least some Limerick residents turned their attention to beautifying the city in order to make the tourists’ experience more enjoyable. Since it was understood that the Shannon Scheme was a spectacle in all its chaos during construction, it was up to the city of Limerick to offer an alternative and well-ordered venue for guests. According to an aspirational piece in the local paper, “Limerick, for instance, should be the Mecca for an exceptionally large number of tourists this year. The Shannon Scheme will naturally make it a centre of attraction for most of the visitors who will come from the States. It is of vital importance, therefore, that everything feasible is done to brighten up the city and make it look its best.”¹³⁸ A similar theme informed the report that 250 members of the Knights of Columbus from San Francisco were to visit in 1928. The reporter highlighted the importance of the city’s first impression, noting “that the party are [sic] to visit the Shannon Scheme with a view to seeing its dimensions and progress will in itself be a big advertisement for the Free State in general and for Limerick in particular. This city, therefore, should make a special effort to ensure that the visitors’ stay amongst us will be

¹³⁷ Colonel George O’Callaghan-Westropp, Letter to Patrick Hogan, 18 April 1926: George O’Callaghan-Westropp Papers, UCDA P38/4(662).

¹³⁸ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 11 February 1928.

as pleasant and satisfactory as possible.”¹³⁹ If the people of Limerick were already aware of the importance of keeping up the city’s appearance for the sake of all visitors—an apparently debatable point in itself, then the prominence of the Shannon Scheme as a tourist attraction increased the importance of carrying forward such actions.

While the Shannon Scheme taught Limerick the need to beautify, the project proved to be initially a source of frustration for Galway. Galwegians were accustomed to showing off their city’s pleasing features, but when poles arrived for connecting the area to transmission lines, the citizens were outraged. The Galway Urban Councilors described the tar-covered wooden poles meant to link the city to the Shannon Scheme as “ugly, ignorant, awful, terrible, dangerous, unsightly, horrible, [and] nasty.” According to other members at the meeting, “if the poles were erected they would negate all the work done by the council to beautify the city.” In order to preserve its attractiveness, a few members went so far as to propose “that the council pay the difference between sightly poles and the tar-covered ones rather than that the latter should be erected in the city.”¹⁴⁰

The *Connacht Tribune* highlighted the seriousness of the issue when it reported that

Considerable indignation has been caused in Galway because of the crude, unsightly wooden standards which the Electricity Supply Board is about to erect to carry its new scheme of overhead wires. No doubt, utilitarianism is a first consideration of the Board. Wooden standards impregnated with creosote outlast two or even three generations, and are proof against the mists that come in from the Atlantic. Nevertheless, a national institution like the Electricity Supply Board should have regard from the amenities of a progressive city like Galway. It is in the interest of the country as a whole that its towns should prosper and that civic pride in them should be developed. The Electricity Supply Board will reap a

¹³⁹ “Blazing a Trail—San Francisco to Limerick—Important Visitors Coming,” *Limerick Leader*, 16 June 1928.

¹⁴⁰ “Those Lovely Poles! Unsightly Sticks for the Shannon Scheme,” *Connacht Tribune*, 5 July 1930.

considerable revenue out of Galway in the future, and the least that might be expected of it is that it would improve the appearance of our streets.¹⁴¹

Just as nature excursions were understood to coexist with industrial tourism, cities like Galway fought to have local aesthetics respected by the ESB, demonstrating an alternative example of how the Shannon Scheme could ruffle local sensibilities.

Construction meant not only a technological manipulation of the environment, but also a potentially shocking transformation in the sense of space and location for those who grew up with personal memories of particular trees, paths, and streams. This sense of dislocation and a loss of the familiar had to be dealt with by local communities if they were to reassert a sense of pride in place and adjust their self-image in light of the ways in which the Shannon Scheme had altered the physical landscape. The struggle to come to terms with such changes often went unnoticed by the outside observer, who did not share the experiences of those who knew the families whose ancestral homes were razed to the ground or who could no longer rely on trees as markers of distance because they had been uprooted to make way for the canal.¹⁴² This struggle became apparent to visitors in stories from locals or tour guides describing the state of change. Indicating the differences between local perception and what tourists noticed about the landscape, a columnist suggested that “the immense amount of digging and dredging being done daily does not strike the eye of the person looking at it constantly. To the visitor, of course, the changed contour of the country along the canal course must be truly amazing, and particularly the first view of the immense bankers and dredgers and kindred machinery

¹⁴¹ “Shannon Scheme Ugliness,” *Connacht Tribune*, 5 July 1930.

¹⁴² “Shannon Scheme—More Developments,” *Limerick Leader*, 31 May 1926.

spread all over the fields for miles.”¹⁴³ It was knowledge of the countryside that allowed nearby residents to share mysterious happenings with others, including the belief that “this Shannon Scheme is, by the way, providing us with a few novelties that a lot of people are unaware of—that is the very unusual spectacle of disappearing rivers.”¹⁴⁴ Although such changes in the physical landscape may have been primarily traumatic for locals, these unprecedented transformations generated the excitement that motivated so many people to witness the destructive and constructive forces inherent in such a project.

The most famous example of change in the physical landscape was the dismantling and reconstruction of the ancient St. Lua’s oratory on Friars’ Island, which we have seen in connection with priests in Chapter 3. The oratory embodied a deep sense of tradition and a physical link between the past and the present. If tourism, as Zuelow suggested, involves the process of discovering a shared sense of identity and relying on the past to share a community’s unique story with others, then the renovations that were occurring around the Shannon Scheme became entangled with local folklore and traditions. For example, one journalist surmised that,

Modern progress is no respecter of things ancient. Limerick, for instance, is to lose some of its familiar old landmarks through the development of the Shannon Scheme. Thomond Bridge will shortly cease to be as we know it to-day. Some of the present buttresses, it appears, are to be removed and a portion of the bridge converted into a swivel structure to allow ships to pass up and down to and from Ardnacrusha. ‘The Bishop’s Lady,’ of whom the ‘Bard of Thomond’ wrote, must have ceased her nightly revels at this bridge, else no one would dare to modernise it.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ “Electric Sparks—Flashes from Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 December 1926.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ “Random Gossip—Thomond Bridge,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 January 1926.

Apart from the personal disconcertion arising from the demolition of homes and the disappearance of familiar place markers in the local community, the alterations to the physical landscape necessitate by the Scheme directly impacted visitors to and residents of the area alike. An increase in tourism to an area often provides the funding required for making improvements to local infrastructure, but this is usually preceded by a contentious transitional period when heavy traffic makes upgrades, such as road construction, which are absolutely essential to ensure safety and permit a smooth flow of bustling travelers. For example, the massive amounts of material brought from the docks in Limerick to the construction site coupled with increased tourist traffic resulted in severe damage to the roads and unprecedented dangers to those who had relied on them for their daily commutes. J.P. Gwynn wrote a letter to the editor of the *Limerick Leader* expressing anxiety about the state of the roads and the safety of the public in connection with the works. He alleged,

The roads to Clonlara and Killaloe and towards Broadford, with the auxiliary roads giving cross connections and access to the Clare hills, were adequate enough for normal traffic. Now they are incessantly used by enormously heavy motor traffic of every size and description, making it very dangerous for horse-drawn vehicles to pass at certain spots. Even cyclists have occasionally to dismount or bend low in the saddle to avoid the projecting loads of the lorries, and, still worse, of their trailers. The drivers of ordinary motor cars are also very frequently foreigners or strangers, and drive at a speed unsafe along roads where no proper indications exist to mark dangerous bends or concealed crossings.¹⁴⁶

Gwynn called for those responsible to maintain the roads and to place warnings for all drivers at dangerous points along the way, but he rejected the implication that ratepayers should be required to foot the bill. Noting that part of the danger arose from “foreigners or strangers,” he inferred that the locals had managed to get along in the past, but were

¹⁴⁶ J. P. Gwynn, “Abnormal Traffic Due to Shannon Scheme—Interesting Letter,” *Limerick Leader*, (written 5 May 1926), 8 May 1926.

unprepared to cope with the arrival of Germans or Connemara men working for Siemens or the influx of visitors from Ireland and abroad who embarked on self-guided motor tours of the site.

While Gwynn's letter could read as alarmist coming from a resident who was dissatisfied with the negative impacts of increased activity to the area, he did have reason to be genuinely concerned for his neighbors' welfare. Elsewhere in his letter, he lamented the recent death of a young Irish woman who was killed in a car accident at one of the most dangerous crossroads, coming just weeks after another collision involving two vehicles at precisely the same location. The *Limerick Leader* reported that representatives of Siemens-Schuckert attended the funeral of Brenda Walsh, who was hired as a member of the secretarial staff and came from an esteemed family with local connections.¹⁴⁷ Few details were released by the press concerning the crash, but Gwynn's letter called attention to the community's loss and the necessity for traffic to the site to be managed in such a way as to ensure the safety of all. The Limerick County Council responded quickly to the tragic news of Walsh's death. Just five days after the accident, the local paper reported that the council had "decided to put danger signs where required on the roads. This is a forward step for which all progressives will be thankful."¹⁴⁸ The council claimed responsibility for erecting signs provided by the Automobile Association, but also noted that the Ministry for Local Government was providing a financial grant for the project.

¹⁴⁷ "The Clonlara Fatality—Funeral of Miss Brenda Walsh," *Limerick Leader*, 15 May 1926.

¹⁴⁸ "Foynes and District—Road Signs," *Limerick Leader*, 8 May 1926.

However, these road signs quickly took on political and cultural meanings that exceeded their significance as basic precautionary measures. Cultural nationalists maintained that language and placenames were an essential part of identity. As early as 1892, the founder of the Gaelic League, Douglas Hyde, claimed that “On the whole, our place names have been treated with about the same respect as if they were the names of a savage tribe,” but Hyde also looked to the future when “a native Irish government will be induced to provide for the restoration of our place names on something like a rational basis.”¹⁴⁹ Contemporary scholars have explored the significance of placenames in the fields of linguistics, history, and geography. For example, Catherine Nash’s article “Irish Placenames: Post-Colonial Locations” argues that “the understandings of history, culture and identity condensed in the discourses surrounding past and present placename changes are inseparable from the broader questions of Irish history and identity.”¹⁵⁰ Since the nineteenth century, the revival of the Gaelic language had gained political momentum, and the replacement of the colonizer’s English placenames with traditional Irish names was often seen by the movement’s supporters as a marker of cultural, if not political, independence. So, when the Limerick Council announced its plans to erect road signs in the spring of 1926, one newspaper optimistically declared,

A very favourable opportunity now presents itself to the members of the Council to do a bit for the Irish Language by seeing that the signals and directions are given in Irish and English. Many members of the Council are favourably disposed towards the language surely, all members are sympathetic enough to do this much on its behalf.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Douglas Hyde, “The Necessity for de-Anglicising Ireland,” in *The Revival of Irish Literature*, ed. Sir Charles Gavan Duffy (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894).

¹⁵⁰ Catherine Nash, “Irish Placenames: Post-Colonial Locations,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 4 (1999): 457-480 (458).

¹⁵¹ “Foynes and District—Irish and English,” *Limerick Leader*, 8 May 1926.

Although the Road Signs and Traffic Signal Regulations of 1926 required that “names of towns or places, or other words shall be shown in Irish and English in two parallel lines at least three quarters of an inch apart,” the Automobile Association did not erect its first bilingual road sign until 1937.¹⁵² It is not clear whether the Limerick Council took up the patriotic call and erected its own bilingual signs, but the fact that the Shannon Scheme facilitated such a conversation indicates that the dam had tangential consequences for a community coming to grips with how to handle tourist traffic. Road signs were both a pragmatic and tangible solution to the chaos brought about by gawking spectators zooming down unfamiliar country roads in the hope of seeing progress on the site. But the signs also allowed locals to consider the image they wanted to project to others because the adoption of bilingual placenames would physically and publicly demonstrate their support for the Irish language. This last point is particularly ironic considering that, as we have seen, the people of Limerick had a history of criticizing the actual use of the language by the Connemara men at the site as a symbol of difference rather than a celebrated feature of Irishness.

The erection of road signs was only facet of the program to ensure that motor cars, cyclists, horse-drawn carts, pedestrians, and work vehicles from Siemens could navigate local roads safely. Improvements to old roads and the construction of new ones were also necessary considering the destruction caused by the transport of heavy materials on roads that were not designed for such loads. Residents near the site were frustrated by potholes that often made the tracks impassible, especially in times of bad

¹⁵² Irish Statute Book, S.I. no. 55/1926, Road Signs and Traffic Signal Regulations, 1926, accessed 1 October 2013, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1926/en/si/0055.html>. Also see Nash, 462.

weather. The *Limerick Leader* was sympathetic to their plight and was pleased to report that damaged roads

are now receiving proper attention. Gangs of workers are employed by the contractors making good the damage done to these thoroughfares. Rebuilding of the entire road foundation is necessary in parts, so great was the havoc caused by the heavy lorries. All's well that ends well.¹⁵³

In some cases, however, it was not possible to rebuild roads since the construction of a new headrace and tailrace meant a restructuring of the local landscape. As one visitor to the site commented,

The most striking thing about this Shannon operation at all times is, I think, the continuous alteration in the topography of the country. This is particularly noticeable wherever we find one of those large diggers at work. The huge holes they tear into the bowels of the earth and the enormously large banks of material that rise skyward in a short time, are truly feats to wonder at. In a good many cases they have torn up large holes in old familiar public roads, necessitating the making of new roads, often causing a very long roundabout journey to places that were only a short time previously a mere stone's throw away. A particularly good example of this can be seen at O'Brien's Bridge. The road between O'Brien's Bridge and Bridgetown, at a point about a hundred yards from the first-named, has been torn up and closed to traffic.¹⁵⁴

New and longer routes were annoying for those who travelled them regularly, but they also had the potential to disrupt tourist traffic by making places inaccessible or too confusing to navigate for those unfamiliar with recent changes. Road construction could be especially stressful for travelers who did not know alternative routes. In rural Ireland in the 1920s, when roads were not necessarily well-marked, tourism advocates worried that the awe-inducing experience of construction at the Shannon Scheme also had the potential to deter visitors. For example, those who trumpeted the value of beauty spots and historic landmarks in the area found it deplorable that,

¹⁵³ "Ardnacrusha Roads," *Limerick Leader*, 10 July 1926.

¹⁵⁴ "Electric Sparks—Flashes from Shannon Scheme," *Limerick Leader*, 19 February 1927.

The aspect of this pretty centre is completely changed as a result of the Shannon Scheme operations. By the cuttings of old roads, and the making of new ones, it is almost an impossibility to discover Clonlara. The direct road from Limerick to the district is interrupted a little above the Blackwater Bridge, so that travelers must make a circuitous route.¹⁵⁵

While surrounding communities, like Clonlara, hoped to reap some of the benefits of tourism to the Shannon Scheme, the mundane topic of road construction proved to have material consequences when opportunities for tourism dollars were passed over in the name of completing the dam. Paving new roads for visitors to see ancient ruins in a nearby village carried little weight in the minds of Siemens' engineers who were responsible for finishing the project quickly and efficiently.

In the case of O'Brien's Bridge, new roads and the elimination of old ones as routes for tourists had devastating effects. As Constantine FitzGibbon recalled on her visit to Limerick and its surrounding areas in 1952, upon arrival at O'Brien's Bridge, she was struck by the lovely scenery, "but was told at once that it was a dying place."¹⁵⁶ The reason for this, according to her local sources, was that "since the building of the canal in connection with the Shannon Scheme it was no longer on the main road. The Shannon Scheme was the curse of that place. It was indeed, I was informed, the curse of that part of Ireland." Not only was the project blamed for the current state of O'Brien's Bridge in the 1950s, FitzGibbon also got a sense that "the scheme is in fact not popular among the simpler people hereabouts [and] the reason for its unpopularity . . . is disappointment."¹⁵⁷ That disappointment stemmed from the fact that many in the area had been optimistic that

¹⁵⁵ "Clonlara and District—Changed Aspects," *Limerick Leader*, 26 March 1927.

¹⁵⁶ Constantine FitzGibbon, "A Visit to Limerick 1952: Part Two," *Old Limerick Journal* 12 (Autumn 1982): 11.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

the electrification project would bestow great benefits on their communities and that they could look forward to decent compensation for their land if the government confiscated it during construction. The realities failed to live up to these expectations. Accounts like FitzGibbon's brought regional tensions over the Scheme full circle: great optimism was surpassed by a need to blame others for local shortcomings, and tourism, while the saving grace for some, further demonstrated that not all localities were blessed equally.

For the people living in and near Limerick, the Shannon Scheme fundamentally altered not only their sense of place, but also their understandings of the ways in which their regional identity made them, at once, both unique *and* representative of the Irish nation. The parallels that existed between promoting national electrification and local regeneration revealed that the hub of the Scheme did not always conform to the image promoters wished to project. While there was great hope and hype about what the project would do for Limerick, these positive associations were threatened by accusations of apathy and a failure on the part of the community to embrace hydroelectric development with open arms. On one level, encouraging regional competition relied on the conviction that things were improving in the Free State, but it also revealed deep schisms in coming to terms with what it meant to be Irish, unraveling the façade of national identity as a homogenous or static entity. Local and regional perspectives indicated that Irishness was multifaceted and was just as much challenged or supported from within national boundaries as from without. As a result of both the mental and physical transformations brought about by the electrification project, the people of Limerick were presented with an opportunity to interpret how Irish modernity would reshape their community. A combination of anxiety and hope for the future, expressed so well in the opening vignette

about Michael and Tom, characterized the processes by which locals embraced or rejected modernity. This chapter has analyzed the ways in which the Shannon Scheme transformed Limerick and its environs, in no small part as a result of the influx of visitors to the area who were curious to see this great national undertaking in the making. Now that we have seen the impact this had on the community, as it adjusted to its role as the central point of national electrification, it is time to turn to the experiences of those visitors themselves who toured the site and whose visits also shaped interpretations of Irishness.

CHAPTER VI

TOURISTS

In its inception, and still more in its completion, this colossal undertaking has stirred the imagination of the Irish people and has turned the eyes of other countries in this direction too.¹

—*Star*, 28 September 1929

Just as the nascent tourism industry had profound implications for Limerick and its environs, the experience of touring the Shannon Scheme had educational, recreational, and political implications for those visiting the area. Local businesses, including hotels, restaurants, and transportation companies catered to those coming to see the site, which expanded the scope of the tourism industry by encouraging reforms to make guests' stays as comfortable as possible. And, as seen in the previous chapter, tourism proved to be one of the most effective ways to promote the Shannon Scheme to an otherwise apathetic local populace. Indeed, the Electricity Supply Board established a Guide Bureau in 1928 to handle traffic to the site and provide accessible information about the benefits of electricity. It supplemented this effort with newspaper articles, lecture tours, films, and pamphlets to reach people who could not see the dam for themselves. The idea was to bring the Scheme into every Irish home. If people could not travel to the site, they would surely hear about it from people who had made the trip, and they would be updated on its progress through advertisements that often included images of construction. Promoters hoped that Irish citizens who visited Ardnacrusha would learn about the uses of electricity and appreciate the sheer magnitude of the project, so as to be more likely to wire their own homes and businesses. Tourism thus became a critical component of the educational campaign for electricity because firsthand experience with the project spread

¹ *Star*, 28 September 1929.

the news widely. Ephemera were also produced that not only contributed to these educational objectives, but also served as tangible memories of the experience.

As the epigraph to this chapter indicates, promoters believed that the Shannon Scheme captured the country's and the world's attention. In "stirring the imagination of the Irish people" and "turning the eyes of other countries" to the Free State, the Shannon Scheme facilitated two important, and often overlapping, processes. The link between these objectives was tourism. While the previous chapter described the ways in which the desire to lure potential for sightseers to Limerick exacerbated the transformations already taking place as a result of the Scheme, this chapter will analyze the ways in which the experience of tourism influenced visitors' perceptions of the Free State. Tourism provided ample opportunities for the Irish people to consider their own national identity. By encouraging visitors to partake simultaneously in industrial and scenic tourism, promoters sought to project an image of modernity that would reflect all that the Free State had to offer.

The impact of visitors to the site was twofold: they facilitated the growth of a local tourism industry that, in turn, had national implications, and they participated in discussions about Irishness and the future of the new nation by sharing their experiences of touring the dam with others. Both of these outcomes were predicated on the fact that tourists and promoters worked together to build a tourism industry from the ground up, and despite disappointments and frustrations on both sides, few who visited the dam in person were not struck by its magnitude and importance. While some people came to learn about hydroelectricity, others were motivated by the thrill of seeing the works, and, interestingly enough, their travel accounts were sometimes at odds with the messages

disseminated by the ESB. Domestic and foreign tourists represented an audience for the Free State to tout its political achievements, but the latter group proved to be especially controversial for advocates of tourism, because many nationalists feared that foreign influence would corrupt Gaelic traditions and provide unwelcome alternatives to Irish culture. In turn, tourists learned of the government's backing of the Scheme and they heard that in this newly independent state, industrialism could balance harmoniously with traditionalism to create an Irish modernity.

Tourism and National Identity

Historian Eric Zuelow recently focused on the connection between Irish tourism and the shaping of national identity, arguing that “tourism functioned as a nexus for debate about the very meanings and collective goals of Irish nationhood.”² Zuelow proposed that nations are not simply “imagined communities” but rather are “perpetually *re-imagined* through an ongoing exchange of ideas.”³ In the process, “older traditions, symbols and memories are constantly altered to serve successive generations, while at the same time new traditions are created to meet new demands.”⁴ While this model provides a fresh perspective on the relationship between tourism and national identity, Zuelow passed over the importance of tourism in the early years of the Free State. He claimed that “the government showed little concern with tourism until the end of the 1930s, and even thereafter it was often half-hearted as the role of tourism as a national interest was debated.”⁵ He further noted that it was not until 1952 that “there was finally widespread

² Zuelow, “National Identity and Tourism,” 170.

³ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Zuelow, *Making Ireland Irish*, xvi-xvii.

agreement that tourism development was in the national interest.”⁶ As the promotion of the Shannon Scheme demonstrates, however, the government was acutely aware of the benefits of tourism well before the 1950s. Irene Furlong, meanwhile, has argued that the importance of Irish tourism as a marker of social and cultural changes predated the Shannon Scheme.⁷ However, Furlong focused on tourism as a means to unify the Free State with Northern Ireland during this period and not on Cumann na nGaedheal’s efforts to promote industrial tourism within the Free State in its own right. Just as partition influenced the development of tourism in Ireland, the Shannon Scheme helped launch new interpretations of what bounded Irishness.

The ensuing debates enabled the ESB, Cumann na nGaedheal, and tourism promoters to appeal to national interests by resolving the apparent contradiction between the often conservative and agrarian ethos of Irish nationalism on the one hand, and the modernity of the hydroelectric venture on the other. In order to do this, the project was promoted in ways designed to make these apparently contradictory elements complementary. Promoters emphasized the fact that Irish modernity was different from industrialization elsewhere. Zuelow noted that Irish “tourism remained the bastard child of the Irish economy, standing uneasily on the cusp between modernity and ‘tradition.’ It did not ‘look’ modern enough to be as impressive as factories, but it hardly reflected de Valera’s bucolic vision of Irishness.”⁸ He further claimed,

⁶ Zuelow, “National Identity and Tourism,” 163.

⁷ Irene Furlong, *Irish Tourism, 1880-1980* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009).

⁸ Eric Zuelow, “The Tourism Nexus: National Identity and the Meaning of Tourism Since the Irish Civil War,” in *Ireland’s Heritages: Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity*, ed. Mark McCarthy, (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005), 199-200.

It was obvious in early guidebooks that promised ‘a country which has never been industrialised’ and in which ‘The scenery is rarely marred by screens of smoke from the batteries of chimneys such as besiege the skyline in cities and towns of the manufacturing countries’. Yet, a few pages later, the same guide carefully highlighted the successful industry in Ireland’s major cities. The ‘contradiction’ exists because both discourses are central to Irishness. On the one hand, there is a desire to spring forward into the modern age, to leave the thatched cottage and farm labor behind in favor of BMWs, urban houses, and high tech employment. On the other hand, there is a sentimental backwards glance at a past that has gone forever.⁹

Zuelow did not mention the Ardnacrusha site in any of his work on tourism in the period following the Civil War, but his description nicely applies to the early efforts to make tradition and modernity equally appealing aspects of Irishness in promoting the Shannon Scheme. According to a booklet promoting the *Come Back to Erin* exhibit of Irish travel posters in the National Museum of Ireland, Irish posters encouraging tourism had “an emphasis on rugged landscapes, ruins, ‘peasant’ scenes, fishing and golf.”¹⁰ This differed from English posters, which “often laid emphasis on engineering and architectural feats.”¹¹ However, as the promotional campaign to encourage tourism to the Shannon Scheme suggested, it was possible, and in some ways favorable, to incorporate a stereotypically British focus on engineering alongside advertisements that highlighted Ireland’s natural beauties.

Hotels, Restaurants, and Transportation Companies

Visitors contributed to the local economy in their interactions with businesses catering to tourists, including hotels, which often offered low rates to those wishing to see the Shannon Scheme. By the summer of 1928, it was apparent to contemporaries that the

⁹ Ibid, 200.

¹⁰ Séamas Mac Philib, *Come Back to Erin: The Irish Travel Poster Collection in the National Museum of Ireland* (Castlebar: National Museum of Ireland, 2007), 10.

¹¹ Ibid.

hydroelectric works had reinvigorated business interests in the area, and they appreciated that

The Shannon Scheme is proving a great boon to the city hotels. These establishments—at least the principal ones—are doing a record trade these times owing to the crowds who come daily to see the progress of the great project that is to supply cheap electricity to the whole Saorstát. The official returns show that during July 11,412 persons visited the works, while the number for August totaled no fewer than 17,522. The fact that such a huge and continuous stream of people make Limerick their headquarters during their visit is bound to be good for trade in the city, but it is clear that no class of business is benefitting more directly or more substantially by it than that of the hotel and restaurant proprietors.¹²

On 11 June 1929, the *Irish Independent* ran three separate ads for hotels in Limerick that capitalized on the Shannon as a tourist attraction. The Shannon Hotel in Castleconnell, County Limerick, claimed to be a “delightful resort for tourists and anglers,” that was also ideally located for a “ten minute drive to the principal portion of the Shannon Scheme.” The Royal George Hotel in Limerick also advertised a “comfortable and convenient stopping place for visits to the Shannon Electrification Scheme and to places of scenic and historic interest in the neighborhood.” Finally, the Shannon View Hotel, near Killaloe, stated that its facilities offered an “unrivalled position. Charming surroundings. Boating. Fishing. Beautiful drives. Tourists have described Lough Derg as ‘Surpassing anything they had ever seen.’ Three miles from the main portion of the Shannon Scheme.” This advertisement combined appeals to tourists interested in exploring the Irish landscape with those who hoped to see modern industrial development in Ireland. The Irish Tourist Association, meanwhile, published an ad declaring that the Shannon Scheme was “worth thinking of, and seeing, and marveling at this year.” Hotels also emphasized their modern and clean facilities to foreign tourists.

¹² “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 12 September 1928.

For example, the hotel advertisements bragged about “providing all that is efficient and up-to-date” to be sure that “commercial gentlemen tourists and others [are] assured of every comfort.”¹³

While hotels in the vicinity undoubtedly experienced a boom in business as a result of tourists, more people also meant more scrutiny and more frequent demands for modern improvements. At a meeting of the national executive of the Irish Tourist Association, a member announced that “hotels and other interests showed an average increase of patronage of 20 per cent in 1928 over 1927,” with a great number of these visitors making the trip to Limerick in order to see the dam in its final stages of construction.¹⁴ Complaints about the state of hotels near Limerick ran rampant as the building progressed and the project became synonymous with tourism in the area. The journal *Honesty* published a travel account purportedly of two friends from Dublin driving across the country to see the hydroelectric works. Appreciating the scenic beauty of the countryside along their journey to see the technological marvel, just as tourist promoters envisioned, the trekkers noted that “creature comforts as well as lovely landscapes are required to attract and maintain a stream of visitors. In this respect there is room for improvement, judging by the following experience.”¹⁵ Upon arriving at a hotel for dinner, the travelers wished to wash up before their meal, but were told that the water had been turned off. Expressing dissatisfaction at this inconvenience, the Dubliners noted, “any persons desirous of supplying the ordinary needs of tourists would have some

¹³ *Irish Independent*, 11 June 1929.

¹⁴ “Tourist Traffic,” *Limerick Leader*, 17 November 1928.

¹⁵ J. R. D. “At Ardnacrusha,” *Honesty* 5, no. 127, 30 July 1927.

ewers of water in the lavatory to meet such an emergency. Here we were within a few yards of Lough Derg, with water, water everywhere, but not a drop to wash.” Unsettled by the circumstances, the two visitors “were, therefore, constrained to partake of our dinner with unclean hands.” To make matters worse, they were not pleased with their dinner option which “consisted of two small brown trout each, with two new potatoes, and a tablespoon of bottled green peas for one, and some nice homemade bread and butter for the other. The charge for this repast was 2/6 each!!” Concluding the account of their visit to the local hotel, they advised tourists, “When you visit Killaloe, bring some washing water too.”¹⁶ Tales such as this one were particularly damaging to the nascent tourism industry in the Free State. Wealthy tourists from abroad who were interested in seeing the Shannon Scheme surely would have been leery of making the journey only to find the state of hotels in the area were below the European standard.

The effect of poor hotel reviews on tourism resulted in less attention being paid in travel accounts to the Shannon project itself and more unwanted attention for the perceived substandard quality of life in the West. For example, the *Limerick Leader* reprinted parts of an article from the *Free State Farmer* in which the writer described his “visit to Limerick recently to see the Shannon Scheme,” but focused entirely on a poor culinary experience. Stating that “he was served at breakfast in ‘a leading hotel in the Treaty City with some of the worst bacon he has ever tasted,’” the writer added insult to injury by noting that two English tourists at the next table had observed, “If this be Limerick’s famous bacon I shall know what to avoid for the future.” Leaping to the defense of the local community, the *Leader* speculated that hotels in Limerick were

¹⁶ Ibid.

actually serving Chinese bacon.¹⁷ Although these visitors had been drawn to the area to see the hydroelectric project underway, they left—quite literally—with a bad taste in their mouths, which certainly would have frustrated travel promoters.

Even accounts of hypothetical visitors to the city to see the Scheme portrayed local accommodations in an unfavorable way. For example, in an article on the project for the *Limerick Leader*, one writer shared an evocative tale of what a visitor's experience might be like. The journalist illustrated:

The scene at night is simply a blaze of electric light and looked at from a distance gives the impression of a brilliantly lighted large town, towards which the weary traveller may, if he is not in the know, turn eager eyes having visions of hot dinners in large and well-equipped hotels. But, friend, cast not the eye of longing in this direction as the *piece de resistance* in this phantom city is mud, and not having the digestive organs of a worm you would be wise to tarry not but avoid this orgy in which men and machines without a qualm of conscience, daily, and hourly pulverise old mother earth. So again, friend, be on thy way and 'judge not the cigars by the picture on the box,' for verily therein lies disappointment: 'tis withal but a 'mockery and a snare' to him whose mind's eye conjures up alluring visions of fat juicy steaks garnished with many onions.¹⁸

Instead of the sparkling hub of national electrification, the construction site itself was portrayed as a “phantom city,” with no decent meal or hotel room to be had. Far from a glowing advertisement for the area, this stylized account called attention to the many ways in which industries catering to tourists initially failed to meet expectations.

Indeed, hotels and restaurants in Limerick gained a reputation for offering substandard service at extortionate rates. While charging visitors more for their services might have made business sense to those hoping to capitalize on the needs of tourists, promoters of tourism cautioned against this line of thinking. In 1928, one local journalist

¹⁷ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 10 November 1928.

¹⁸ “How a Big Project Progresses,” *Limerick Leader*, 18 December 1926.

recommended that “hotels and restaurants should rise fully to the occasion and take steps in time to ensure that those who visit the city, either for a day or for a longer period, will, on their departure, have no cause to complain that they have been either badly treated or ‘fleeced.’”¹⁹ This was important because the community expected thousands of tourists to visit the site in that year and promoters encouraged the people of Limerick “to take in due time whatever steps are necessary to fain the greatest possible advantage from the coming amongst them of the numerous contingents to arrive in the summer.” But this statement was qualified by noting that “This is not to suggest any policy of ‘fleecing’ which is suicidal as well as being mean; it simply means that some practical and definite arrangements be made to provide for the treatment, comfort and convenience of visitors and to make their stay so pleasant and agreeable that they will be induced to come again.”²⁰

Dissatisfaction with businesses catering to tourists in the area did not go unnoticed by officials responsible for promoting tourism to the construction site. John Creagh, the manager of the Shannon Scheme Guide Bureau, discussed below, sat down with a journalist from the *Limerick Leader* to discuss “certain complaints made to him regarding hotel services, and in that connection he pointed out that business was lost to the city.”²¹ He predicted that future “tourist traffic would eclipse even the phenomenal record of the season now closing,” requiring him to reorganize the Guide Bureau, and he hoped that this news would spur “hotel proprietors and caterers generally to provide for

¹⁹ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 11 February 1928.

²⁰ “Random Gossip—Notes and Comments on Matters of Interest,” *Limerick Leader*, 31 March 1928.

²¹ “Thousands of Visitors—To Limerick and Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 24 October 1928.

the unprecedented influx of people to the city.” Not only did he advocate for hotels to consider quantitative problems arising from more visitors, but Creagh also expressed concern about qualitative issues within the industry. He recalled that “a number of people with whom I have been dealing—well-to-do-people—have said to me that they were told before they left Dublin not to have anything to do with Limerick hotels as they were impossible. They were told to go to either Adare or Castleconnell.”²² Particularly disturbing to Creagh were the financial consequences for the entire community when visitors complained about poor hotel service and high rates: “Limerick hotels are losing business and also the city in general because of these complaints.” Not losing sight of the mutual relationship between the Guide Bureau and other businesses in the community, Creagh cautioned, “there is something wrong when tourists, who come specially to see the Scheme, travel out to Adare notwithstanding the extra charge.”²³

Obviously frustrated by the domino effect that poor hotel reviews were having on the rest of the business community, Creagh noted that “if Limerick were to reap the full benefits from the tourist traffic something should be done along organised lines to make the city more attractive.”²⁴ For instance, he pointed to “the absence of facilities that were to be found in every tourist centre” and “at the same time, no concerted effort was made to develop the tourist industry, which was a great pity.” Despite his frank evaluation of the issues plaguing the tourism industry, he declared optimistically that turning things around

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

would not require very much effort, as the city abounded with historical associations and land marks, while the Shannon Scheme would continue to act as a magnet for generations to come. So far as his department was concerned they were prepared to co-operate with any organisation that may be formed to help in the development of the tourist industry.²⁵

Positioning the Shannon Scheme as the basis for tourism, he suggested that tours of the site could be expanded to show off other parts of the city. Proposals abounded for his department to offer a guide “to conduct visitors through the ancient and historical portions of the city,” in the wake of successful tours conducted by private individuals. Creagh admitted that he was considering such a scheme, but believed standardization for hotels and restaurants through the Tourist Development Association was necessary for tourism to be successful. He speculated that “if that were done luncheon tickets could be sold jointly with the excursion tickets, and which could be made to cover the trifling cost of conducting a tour through the city. In that way the hotels and caterers would be guaranteed a certain percentage of business.”²⁶ Also, standardization would allow the TDA to monitor quality, and punish hotels, like the one with a reputation for serving bad bacon, by removing them from the list of establishments recommended to tourists. Hotel proprietors were generally on board with Creagh’s proposals and appreciated the convenience of advanced notice that selling luncheon tickets would provide when preparing meals for large parties. However, one manager of a Limerick hotel appeared completely oblivious to the situation when he denied that improvements were necessary.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

“‘I have never heard of any complaints of inefficient service,’ he said, ‘and I am positively sure the service in Limerick is as good as, if not better than in Dublin.’”²⁷

As much as the Tourist Development Association may have wanted to modernize and implement standards for the tourist industry, outright denial that change was needed, coupled with the belief that quaint accommodations would appeal to visitors seeking a unique provincial experience, threatened to stall real progress. The sheer number of visitors to the Shannon Scheme placed Limerick at the center of discourses on hotels and tourism across Ireland, where this debate about the advantages of the modern versus the “rustic” played out on a national scale. A thorough analysis of the hotel industry in the Free State is beyond the scope of this work, and historians including Zuelow and Furlong have already situated the industry and some of its missteps in the broader context of Irish tourism. However, they have not paid due diligence to those anti-modern agitators within the tourism movement, whose opinions about hotels in particular were often at odds with the message propagated by official bodies.

Some of these nonconforming arguments defending the standard of Irish hotels will help to contextualize the Limerick hotel manager’s comments as something more than willful blindness or conservative penny-pinching. While those who believed that the media overstated the poor conditions of hotels or that those inferior qualities were charming to some guests were not the norm, they did have a voice and, very often, a political one. For example, Jay Veigh writing on tourist development in 1927 for *Honesty*, demonstrated that ignorance and detachment from reality were not necessarily the motivating factors behind the anti-modern faction. He stated,

²⁷ Ibid.

We are continually being told, by the tourist organisations' propaganda in the press, on the platform, on the wireless, and in every other way, that our hotels are still hopelessly out of date, inefficient and extortionate; that until our hotelkeepers mend their ways we cannot hope to attract visitors; and that, if we do not get visitors, they will, in the present state of many of our hotels, go away dissatisfied—never to return.²⁸

Veigh was not persuaded by these warnings and “venture[ed] to suggest that this alleged unsatisfactory condition of our hotels is very greatly exaggerated, and its constant reiteration is becoming somewhat tiring to those of us who know and love Ireland, and whose outlook is national rather than ‘West British.’”²⁹ Whereas the Limerick hotel manager viewed local conditions in comparison to the urban center of Dublin, Veigh expanded his comparison by speculating that guests in hotels across Europe suffered worse in places like Spain, Portugal, and Greece than they ever did in rural Ireland, yet they still came away with positive experiences. Invoking a distinctly post-imperial sensibility, Veigh instead blamed British tourists who did “not come prepared to find Ireland any different to England” for holding Ireland to Anglo-centric rather than European standards. In fact, Veigh turned the tables on tourist promoters by claiming “that those who seek to develop our tourist industry either do not realise this, or, if they do realise it, prefer to ignore it.”³⁰ His nationalist perspective called for Ireland to embrace its differences from Britain by encouraging visitors from across the Irish Sea to “come prepared to find customs and conditions differently [sic] and distinct; they will come in the spirit in which they would go to any other foreign country, interested in seeing a new people, new ideas and habits, enjoying a thorough change of environment.”

²⁸ Jay Veigh, “Irish Tourist Development—The National Aspect of the Matter,” *Honesty* 5, no. 124, 9 July 1927.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

If this were accomplished, Veigh predicted that “they will not be so ready to complain if the accommodation offered falls a little below the standard attained by their own holiday resorts which have been developing their resources for generations.” Though he did not go so far as the Limerick hotel manager in denying that improvements were needed at all, Veigh cautioned against condemning quaint rural lodging “just because the English element in our midst insists they do not reach English standards.”³¹

It is clear from this example that the range of dissenting voices within the tourism movement was varied, and that a reluctance to blame the hotel industry for its perceived faults did not necessarily emanate from a place of stubbornness or lack of awareness. While the Limerick hotel manager may have tended more towards this “stubborn” end of the spectrum, he also viewed his experience as a distinctly Irish one by rejecting the parochialization of his hotel vis-à-vis Dublin accommodations. What Veigh contributed to an understanding of tourism and the hotel industry was that there was room for the Free State to embrace the parochial, and in fact, to promote it as an endearing part of its national identity. Veigh’s message came at a felicitous moment, when promoters of tourism to the Shannon Scheme sought a balance between the ultra-modern aspects of the project and the bucolic surrounding countryside. Though it may have seemed justifiable to chastise hotel managers for offering pitiable services when the Shannon Scheme proved to be such a boost for local tourism, Veigh offered a counterargument that appealed to nationalist sentiments and bolstered attempts to use tourism as a means to foster a particularly Irish identity.

³¹ Ibid.

Like hotels, the bus service in Limerick both profited from its connection to the Shannon Scheme *and* became a contentious local issue. For example, the *Limerick Leader* celebrated the early boon to the city in 1926, years before the establishment of the Guide Bureau and the organization of official tours, and it announced:

The Limerick bus service has proved a great success and provides an undoubtedly useful facility. It is largely availed of by the citizens, and the Company, encouraged by such patronage, seem bent on many extensions of the service during the summer. A bus will start from opposite Cruises's Hotel at 7:30 each Monday evening for Killaloe, via Clonlara and O'Brien's Bridge, to give citizens an opportunity of seeing the Shannon Scheme operations, and also the natural beauties along the route. The first run took place on Monday evening last and was much enjoyed.³²

But by 1929, the obvious correlation between bus traffic and tourism to the Shannon Scheme had become politicized locally. The newly reelected mayor of Limerick, M. J. Keyes, whom Fianna Fáil supported by withdrawing its candidate in his favor, attempted to separate the issues by agreeing with a local priest's analysis of trade conditions in that "he would not attribute the prevailing prosperity primarily to the Shannon Scheme, but to the incidence of 'bus traffic."³³ Alderman James Reidy, the defeated Cumann na nGaedheal mayoral candidate, expressed disbelief as he quoted the mayor's previous statement that "it was 'bus traffic and not the Shannon Scheme which was primarily responsible for the prosperity enjoyed by Limerick for the past few years." The alderman criticized Keyes for opposing a proposal to develop bus transportation in Limerick, leading the mayor to clarify that he only objected to "'buses plying in the city, not to the 'buses coming to the city." This explanation was simply pedantic in Reidy's opinion as he maintained, "you now say the Shannon Scheme is not primarily responsible for the

³² "Random Gossip," *Limerick Leader*, 15 May 1926.

³³ "The Mayor's Protest—People Who Decry Their Own City," *Limerick Leader*, 1 July 1929.

prosperity of Limerick. I say it is. Thousands of pounds are paid in wages weekly on the Shannon Scheme, most of which finds its way into the shops of Limerick.”³⁴ The Fianna Fáil-backed mayor was not comfortable admitting a direct link between the Cumann na nGaedheal and the Shannon Scheme. He sought to remove the project from the equation by linking bus traffic to prosperity without acknowledging that the vast majority of those riding buses were coming to Limerick to see the hydroelectric works. Political divides at the local level over the Shannon Scheme reflected the national trends discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, but they are relevant here because they underscore the propensity to present information about tourism according to one’s own interests precisely because of the blurred contours of the industry, and regardless of direct evidence. As the Limerick community engaged in the process of defining its own local identity in response to tourism and the Shannon Scheme, it was presented with claims from its own mayor that the two were not related, further complicating correlations between the Shannon Scheme, tourism, and identity.

Politics aside, transportation companies benefited as a direct result of the traffic to the area and sought to increase their profits. The *Limerick Leader* reported that “with a view to promoting interest in the Shannon Scheme, arrangements are being made with the railway companies to run a series of special trains to Limerick at considerably reduced fares.”³⁵ Visitors who partook in these special excursions were given the opportunity to experience “an easy way of getting a good look round the actual magnitude of the Scheme, the progress of the work and the tremendous difficulties which faced the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 31 March 1928.

engineers and others in charge of the operations.”³⁶ The Great Southern Railway also ran advertisements in the *Irish Independent* that offered special three-day excursion fares and encouraged tourists to take part in organized tours. One advised, “DON’T MISS this opportunity of seeing the most Stupendous Engineering Feat ever undertaken in Ireland.” The same ad also claimed that “a short period spent investigating this busy hive of industry in all its branches will be of interest to you.”³⁷ In an announcement of Cosgrave’s plan to attend the official opening ceremony, the *Star* reported that “it is of special interest to note that the G.[reat] S.[outhern] Railway Co. are running cheap excursion trains, so that those who wish may avail themselves of this opportunity of taking part in what can be truthfully described as the greatest event in the history of Irish industrialism.”³⁸ According to the ESB, “an agreement was made with the Irish Omnibus Company to run a bus service at moderate fares twice daily from Limerick to Killaloe and back, via O’Brien’s Bridge, Parteen, Clonlara, and Ardancrusha.”³⁹ When 500 passengers made the trip by train to Limerick, despite inclement weather on a Sunday in October 1928, the *Limerick Leader* reported that many still chose to visit the site and “by means of ’buses, travelled the entire extent of the canal,” including large parties from Cork and Kildare.⁴⁰ Covering the arrival of “practically the largest excursion party ever to come to Limerick” in May 1929, the *Limerick Leader* noted that “three trains were

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *Irish Independent*, 5 October 1928. Capitalization in the original.

³⁸ *Star*, 20 July 1929.

³⁹ *Annual Report and Accounts of the Electricity Supply Board. Presented to the Minister for Industry and Commerce in pursuance of Section 32 (1) and Section 7 (4) of the Electricity (Supply) Act, 1927. For the Year 1st April, 1928 to 31 March, 1929*: Shannon Scheme documents, ESBA, 20.

⁴⁰ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 October 1928.

requisitioned to accommodate the visitors, and during the day the bus services to the Scheme were continuously in demand.”⁴¹ ESB efforts to promote tourism to the Scheme were complemented by advertisements and specials offered by local industries that foresaw the potential of more visitors to the area to increase business opportunities. The local press took great pride in acknowledging the success of these efforts, for example, praising transportation companies for making sure that “arrangements were perfect in every way.”⁴²

Not only did hotels and transportation companies take it upon themselves to attract tourists to increase private profits, but they also worked with the ESB for this purpose. In an interview with E. A. Lawlor, an ESB employee claimed that “there was an extraordinary number of visitors to the site because we had arranged easy tours by bus and by train.”⁴³ The daily and weekly newspapers, as well as foreign newspapers, became the primary focus of this type of advertising campaign. According to the Annual Report and Accounts of the Electricity Supply Board,

The co-operation of the Saorstát press proved most helpful to the [Electricity Supply] Board in their efforts to keep the public informed. Practically all foreign newspaper correspondents, resident or visiting, have been supplied, at their own request, with material for special articles. The progress of the Shannon Power Scheme and the work of the Board have thus received an almost world wide publicity.⁴⁴

⁴¹ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 May 1929.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “40 Light Years From Parteen”

⁴⁴ *Annual Report and Accounts, 1928-1929*, 19-20.

The *Irish Independent* also advertised *The Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme*, a publication that provided “a clear and concise explanation of this stupendous undertaking.”⁴⁵

Newspapers proved to be an invaluable tool for the ESB in its promotion of the Shannon Scheme by providing information to potential tourists.

Experiencing Tourism: Education, Recreation, and Politics

The Free State government was caught unprepared for the huge number of spectators who flocked to the Shannon Scheme. Unaccustomed to making accommodations for industrial tourism, the government first had to react to the initiative of curious visitors before it could embark on its own plans to attract even more people to the site. Construction sites pose numerous dangers to an unsupervised public, so the government developed an educational campaign to inform citizens about the hazards of live wires and the potentially deadly consequences of peering over unprotected embankments. Practical safety tips for visitors were often specific and indicated widespread unfamiliarity with electricity. For example, the *Limerick Leader* provided this note of caution in 1926:

While on the subject a few hints to intending visitors to the building sites on the Scheme may not be amiss. They would be well advised not to touch any kind of loose wires, no matter where they may be. It is also much safer not to handle wire fences which are adjacent to cable poles, because one cannot be sure where the cable may have come in contact with the fence wire. Current may be cut off in the following ways: By getting hold of the wire with a dry cap or coat and extracting the wire; by cutting the wire with an axe or shovel. The handle of the axe or shovel must be covered with the aid of a dry cap or coat, this being especially important in wet weather, or by throwing the wire, a chain, or a piece of iron over the uncovered wire which is conducting the current. A short is formed in this way and stops the current.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Irish Independent*, 11 June 1929.

⁴⁶ “Giant Strides Made in Harnessing the Shannon,” *Limerick Leader*, 30 October 1926.

Accounts in the press of civilians and workers who were injured or fatally electrocuted also served as deterrents for the curious by highlighting the deadly consequences of carelessness around the site. Speaking on the fatal consequences of “meddling with the power lines,” the *Star* reported that these tragedies were unfortunately to be expected because “in every community a few foolhardy irresponsible people who, not satisfied to accept the statements of others, prefer, through that insatiable curiosity inherent in youth, to investigate matters for themselves in order to find out ‘how things work.’”⁴⁷

Newspapers did their best to caution against “this fatal fascination for tampering with the unknown,” but safety remained a prominent concern for the contractors and the government.⁴⁸

However, these precautionary measures did not discourage the more daring, so the government also set up legal guidelines to prevent people from poking around the site without permission. The press informed the public of these new rules by reporting that “the Minister for Industry and Commerce to secure the safety of the visitors and the due prosecution of the works, has found it necessary to instruct Messrs. Siemens Schuckertwerke that no person must be allowed on or about any part of the works without the written authority of the Resident Engineer.” Fearful that inquiring passersby might come into harm’s way and then blame the contractors or the government for the misfortune, McGilligan’s department made it clear that,

There is serious danger from high tension electric wires and it is necessary that all visitors should make previous application in writing to the resident engineer for permits, so that arrangements may be made for the reception and for safeguarding

⁴⁷ “Shannon Power Lines—Interference with Lines Almost Certain Death,” *Star*, 10 August 1929.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

them from injury. Any visitor to the works is there at his own entire risk and if found without a permit will be removed.⁴⁹

The registers for the Shannon Scheme Collection held by the National Archives of Ireland list numerous applications for permits, but the documents themselves were destroyed when the ESB transferred its records. However, letters from those who received permits, as well as departmental memos facilitating the acquisition of official permission for distinguished guests, were preserved. Together they provide evidence for the how these visitation requirements operated on a bureaucratic level. By the late summer of 1926, Siemens believed that permits were not enough and declared, “it is no longer considered safe to let hundreds of people roam at will around the excavations.” The contractors “fixed certain days in the week for the inspection of their works” and attempted to keep onlookers out by surrounding buildings with barbed wire and placing “as many cautionary notices in English and German as will fit on them.”⁵⁰ In the context of earlier discussions of Irish-speaking workers on the site and the desire of some to have road signs appear in Irish and in English, it is worth noting that this report makes no mention of Irish-language danger notices being placed by Siemens at the site.

The process by which the Free State government and Siemens attempted to impose some type of crowd control on the unsupervised onlookers indicates that tourism to the Shannon Scheme began as an unofficial movement spurred by an understandable curiosity in the monumental undertaking. While promoting the project abstractly in newspapers or at political venues had been necessary to combat negative criticism, the

⁴⁹ Department of Industry and Commerce, “Shannon Development Works,” *Limerick Leader*, dated 17 May 1926, 22 May 1926.

⁵⁰ “Limerick Notes,” *Limerick Leader*, 14 August 1926.

idea of promoting the construction site itself as a place where visitors could congregate and develop a personal connection with the works and a sense of pride in the government was entirely overlooked because nothing like the Scheme had been built before in Ireland. Responding to the actions of citizens with no formal ties to the project, the government gradually came to understand the merits of industrial tourism and how it might assist the official effort to gain public and international support.

The first step the government took to transform an adventurous horde with a penchant for grabbing hold of live wires into an organized flock of industrial tourists was the establishment of the Guide Bureau. The ESB set up the first public relations department in Ireland, led by Lawlor, to handle not only promotion of the Scheme, but also to direct the tourists who came to see the works.⁵¹ In addition, “anticipating the desire of a large number of people to visit the Shannon Power works during the construction period, the board decided to establish a Guide Bureau at Limerick to facilitate and conduct visitors to the works.”⁵² Originally, only six staffers were fully employed to work at the office set up in Stand Barracks, Limerick. Given that the distance from Limerick to the construction site in Ardnacrusha was over 6 km (approximately 4 miles) and would have taken over an hour to reach on foot, “arrangements had been made for the erection of a hut at Ardnacrusha, where two guides would be stationed so that any party going out to the Scheme would be assured of being conducted over the undertaking.”⁵³ Records for the Guide Bureau were never transferred

⁵¹ “40 Light Years From Parteen.”

⁵² *Annual Report and Accounts, 1928-1929*, 20.

⁵³ “A Mecca for Tourists—Limerick and its Future—Shannon Scheme As A Permanent Attraction,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

to the ESB, meaning that the specifics about the day-to-day operations remain a mystery, and what can be ascertained about the tours comes mainly from newspapers or correspondence with the government. In spite of this limitation, a clear picture emerges of these early tours.

Although the ESB organized the Guide Bureau in June 1928, tourist traffic did not pick up until 20 July, when, according to the *Limerick Leader*, “the season opened in real earnest.”⁵⁴ According to the bureau’s official statistics, tourism increased exponentially from the outset as it recorded “for the month of June a little over 1,000 visitors were conducted over the Scheme. In July the number was 11,000; in August, 22,000; in September, 32,000, and for the month of October up to the present he estimated the number of tourists at 10,000.”⁵⁵ These numbers were impressive and by the end of the Scheme’s first official tourism season, the *Limerick Leader* happily informed its readership,

The Electricity Supply Board inaugurated a publicity campaign early this year with a view to inducing people to visit the Shannon Scheme. The result has been that since May last close on 100,000 visitors came to the city. The official returns from the guide bureau show that in the months of September and October there were over 50,000 visitors. On one Sunday in September, according to the ‘Irish Trade Journal,’ more than 8,000 people were shown over the works.⁵⁶

Expressing a positive outlook on the future of the bureau, Creagh “had no doubt that the number to come to Limerick and the Shannon Scheme in 1929 would eclipse the

⁵⁴ “Thousands of Visitors—To Limerick and Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 24 October 1928.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ “Things That Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 November 1928.

numbers this year by many thousands,” and he was correct.⁵⁷ While many more people still toured the Scheme independently, by mid-September of 1929, the Guide Bureau reported “during the past six months there have been more than 70,000 people conducted over the Scheme by the guides.”⁵⁸ According to Lawlor, over a quarter million people visited the Shannon Scheme in the ten month period after the Guide Bureau was established. As the statistics indicate, tourism to the Shannon Scheme was truly a force to be reckoned with, especially considering that precise numbers were difficult to come by when many visitors took it upon themselves to view the works from vantage points along the road.

Many visitors conveyed a sense of gratitude for the work being done by the Guide Bureau on-site staff, who proved both friendly and knowledgeable. As the tourism season started to gain momentum again in the spring of 1929, “the Whitsun [Whitsuntide holidays] week-end was an exceptionally busy time for the guides, who discharged their difficult duties in a very efficient manner, and—needless to remark—courteously.”⁵⁹ Later in that summer of 1929, the *Limerick Leader* noted a large crowd that came to visit the works, and “the Bureau guides had an exceptionally busy day, and so well did they discharge their duties that they were the recipients of hearty thanks from the visitors.”⁶⁰ Describing another visit to the Scheme, a journalist stated, “the guides had a very busy,

⁵⁷ “Thousands of Visitors—To Limerick and Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 24 October 1928.

⁵⁸ “A Big Attraction—Over 70,000 Visitors,” *Limerick Leader*, 18 September 1929.

⁵⁹ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 May 1929.

⁶⁰ “3,000 Visitors—To Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 12 August 1929.

though pleasant time explaining to the visitors, who took a deep interest in all they saw.”⁶¹

Friendly tour guides certainly improved the experience, but it was the knowledge they imparted that was especially important for promoters of the project. Tours were well publicized, as one newspaper column described:

The trips will be run regularly from all parts of Ireland and the excursionists, we learn, will be conducted over the works and explanatory statements made by competent guides. This latter is an excellent arrangement, which is bound to be much appreciated by visitors. There is a great deal to interest and instruct all along the whole line of the Shannon Scheme operations and the explanations will make all these things more interesting and instructive than they could otherwise be to the purely lay mind.⁶²

Promoters believed that if people saw the works and participated in the tours given by the Guide Bureau, then they would further the ESB’s goals “to make the country ‘electric conscious’, and to educate the public in all the possible benefits to be had from its use.”⁶³

Further, as the ESB reported to the Department of Industry and Commerce,

The board realized that the education of the public as to the progress and possibilities of the Shannon Scheme was essential to the success of the Scheme. A great deal of publicity and propaganda of an instructive and educational nature would be necessary to secure the utilisation of the Shannon Station and load and to make known to the householder and industrialist alike the benefits of a cheap and liberal supply of electricity.⁶⁴

Tourism was a facet of the broader educational campaign as people learned more about what was happening in Ardnacrusha and how it would impact their own lives.

⁶¹ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 6 July 1929.

⁶² “Random Gossip—Notes and Comments on Matters of Interest,” *Limerick Leader*, 31 March 1928.

⁶³ Manning and McDowell, 78.

⁶⁴ *Annual Report and Accounts, 1928-1929*, 18.

The Guide Bureau worked tirelessly to promote the project and educate the public. In fact, so rarely did it close its doors, that on 23 June 1929, when a High Mass in Dublin celebrating the centenary of Catholic Emancipation led to such a closure, it received attention in the newspapers. The *Limerick Leader* announced that

The members of the Guide Bureau staff on the Shannon Scheme had a day off yesterday. The centre of interest was transferred from the Lordly Shannon to the Liffey's banks, which were stormed by manhood and womanhood of the country, all anxious to make open profession of their Faith and to pay homage to God for the emancipation of their religion. Not since the first sod was turned on the Shannon Scheme was there such a dearth of visitors as was experienced yesterday, a circumstance the guides, it may be presumed, did not regret, for since the coming of summer they have had a particularly busy time.⁶⁵

Apart from the experience of touring the site, Siemens, the ESB, and local businesses also participated in distributing various kinds of memorabilia not only to further educational initiatives, but also to serve as tangible reminders of the trip. In 1927, Siemens-Schuckert published a guide for tourists who wanted to visit the construction site. This booklet gave complete details concerning “three excursions that might be very easily made. The first of these can be undertaken on foot, the second would be most suited to a cyclist and for the third a motor car or motor cycle would be required.”⁶⁶ For an afternoon visit, the booklet offered directions for self-guided tours. Since initially there were no signs explaining how to get to the site, the tourist was directed to take “the Ennis Road as far as the first cross roads. Here he must turn right and, after crossing a road at the transfer station of the building site, he comes to Longpavement Station. Our transport railway line can be seen on the right close to the road and, proceeding further,

⁶⁵ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 24 June 1929.

⁶⁶ *Development of the Shannon Water Power in Ireland: A Guide to the Building Sites* (Berlin: Siemens-Schuckertwerke and Siemens-Bau-Union, 1927): Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

the visitor crosses this line near the little village of Parteen.” The booklet also informed visitors that “at the power station it is possible to see many varieties of the work, including excavation, blasting, and all work connected with congregating. The chief buildings are the temporary power station, the workshops, the carpenters’ shops, the stores and a stone crushing and washing plant.” The booklet also advised visitors where to purchase refreshments and mentioned the location of hotels along the routes. Noting an interest in seeing the landscape, the booklet recommended the motor tour for “the visitor who wishes to visit the Shannon Works and also see some of the beautiful places on the river.”⁶⁷ By claiming that the aesthetics of the river were not ruined in the process of building the headrace, the authors echoed language used by promoters of the Scheme to reassure readers that modernity would not lead to filthy and polluted industrial centers as in Britain.

Shannon Power Development, a board established by the Department of Industry and Commerce to manage the promotion of the Shannon Scheme, also sought to make a profit and distribute information about the project as the final stages of construction were in progress. In a letter from J. M. Fay to the resident engineer in Limerick, J. K. Prendergast, he proposed collaborating with the Guide Bureau to sell copies of a booklet the government had published in response to requests from the public for details on the project. Fay asked if Prendergast would show reprints of articles from *The Engineer* “to Mr. Creagh of the Guide Bureau in order to ascertain if he thinks he could sell these copies to visitors at 2/6d. each.”⁶⁸ Shannon Power Development wondered if it would be

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ J. M. Fay, Letter to J. K. Prendergast, 28 March 1929: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA SS/12815.

“considered likely that the booklets can be sold by the Guide Bureau in much the same manner as the packets of post cards and photographs which were sold during the last year.”⁶⁹ Fay expected that the first 2,000 copies of the booklet would sell quickly, and he wrote to A. R. Vaughan of the Reprint Department that another order would likely be necessary to keep up with the demand.⁷⁰ Requests for copies of the booklet also came in the post, with visitors to the site requesting more information after their visit in postcards sent directly to Shannon Power Development, and Eason sold copies of the booklet in its railway book stalls.⁷¹ However, the success of this booklet seemed to be short-lived; a representative of the Guide Bureau informed Fay in November 1929 that he had “disposed of approximately 1,050 copies of the second series of Shannon Booklets. I have 250 copies on hand at present but I am doubtful if I can dispose of them as owing to the falling off in the number of visitors to the Scheme there is very little demand for them at present.”⁷² The ESB took over the publication of the booklet in 1930, leading the Department of Industry and Commerce to take a backseat in the promotion of literature on the project. The Irish Tourist Association wrote to Gordon Campbell, secretary of the Department of Industry and Commerce, requesting 200 free copies of the booklet for a special delegation representing the Institution of Electrical Engineers.⁷³ After a series of letters in which Campbell explained that the ESB was now responsible for all

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ J. M. Fay, Letter to A. R. Vaughan, 22 April 1929: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA SS/12815.

⁷¹ T. Harper, Postcard to J. M. Fay, 26 July 1929: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA SS/12815.

⁷² O. Dowling, Letter to J. M. Fay, 25 November 1929: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA SS/12815.

⁷³ Irish Tourist Association, Letter to Gordon Campbell, 8 April 1930: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA SS/12815.

communications dealing with literature, the secretary of the ITA stated that he regretted “that no copies are available for free distribution of the booklet with reference to the Shannon Scheme, issued by your Department.”⁷⁴ As the correspondence indicated, the government had been primarily concerned with recovering the costs of the publication before transferring control of the booklet to the ESB, and it seemed to lose interest in supplying the public with information, despite the negative reflection this likely had on their department when inquiries were turned away. In this sense, the Cumann na nGaedheal government lived up to its financially conservative reputation, but its handling of the booklet cannot be taken as representative of its dealings with the Shannon Scheme more generally.

Even though the ESB produced its own handbook to sell to visitors at the site, local businesses like T. C. Carroll & Sons took the initiative to establish themselves in the tourism industry by offering an alternative product. Thus in May 1929, the *Limerick Leader* ran an advertisement for “The Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme Handbook,” printed by T. C. Carroll & Sons in Limerick. Claiming to be “fully illustrated with a clear and concise explanation of this stupendous undertaking,” the company indicated that interested buyers could purchase the handbook for 1/- or by post for 1/2.⁷⁵ The booklet also promoted local businesses in Limerick, using advertisements from companies like the Limerick Steam Ship Company, the Royal George Hotel, National Omnibus

⁷⁴ Secretary of the Irish Tourist Association, Letter to Gordon Campbell, 12 May 1930: Shannon Scheme Collection, NA SS/12815.

⁷⁵ T. C. Carroll & Sons Advertisement, “The Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme Handbook,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 May 1929.

Company, and many local restaurants in order to offset the cost of printing.⁷⁶ Booklets such as this one were vital to visitors who were unfamiliar with the Limerick area, but wanted to make the most of their tours to the site.

Postcards featuring images of the Shannon Scheme were also appealing to tourists and served the promotional campaign by providing educational material and a profit for the distributors. Unlike booklets, however, postcards did not encourage the buyer of what to see during a tour, but rather they served as visual reminders of what they had already seen, often with informative text describing the scene. These descriptions were perhaps most useful to those who received the postcards and may have been confused by what was taking place during the construction phase. The scope of the educational campaign reveals that the ESB was supported by various entities in the tourism industry that were motivated to make a profit. As Figure 6.1 shows, private local businesses such as T. C. Carroll & Sons printed postcards that visitors to Limerick could purchase and share with others.⁷⁷ Siemens-Bauunion also got in on the profits by selling postcards that featured photographs taken by the contractors. The ESB Archive holds a set of five postcards made from photographs that had been altered to add hints of color.⁷⁸ The Limerick City Museum also has a collection of postcards, some of which have been addressed to people in Limerick, Meath, Dublin, and England. Though the messages are brief, often related to the weather or future travel plans, those on the receiving end would have appreciated the

⁷⁶ *The Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme* (Limerick: T. C. Carroll & Sons, 1929), National Library of Ireland.

⁷⁷ T. C. Carroll & Sons Advertisement, "Shannon Scheme Views," post cards, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

⁷⁸ "Set of Five Ardnacrusha Post Cards," post cards, Ardnacrusha [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

images of the project and details from the printer that usually described the scene.

Postcards were one of the few inexpensive items that tourists could purchase as personal mementos or to share with others.

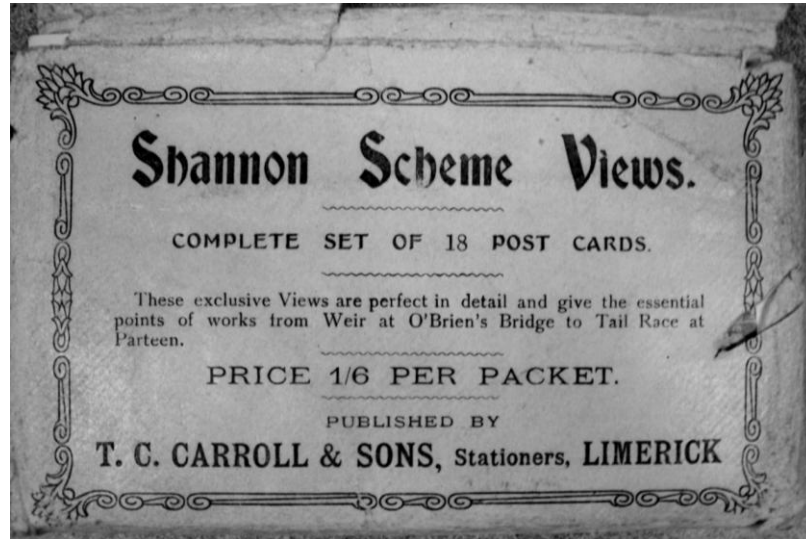


Figure 6.1 “Shannon Scheme Views,” ESB Archives.

Cigarette companies, which were not commissioned by the ESB or the Irish government, also participated in the promotion of the Scheme by likening the success of the project to the success of their brand. Sweet Afton Cigarettes, for example, advertised its brand and coupon offers in the *Anglo Celt* by stating that “Cleanliness—efficiency—economy—that is the service of electricity in the home. That is what the Shannon Scheme is providing for Ireland.”⁷⁹ The company thought it “fitting” that it should offer special discounts on electric appliances, claiming that providing “great savings” could also be had by purchasing its cigarettes.⁸⁰ In the *Connacht Tribune*, Wills’s Cigarettes, a British-owned firm which produced some of its lines in Dublin, capitalized on the Scheme in an ad depicting two men in top hats, long coats, and canes looking over the

⁷⁹ “‘Sweet Afton’ Lines up with the Shannon Scheme,” *Anglo Celt*, 26 July 1930.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

power station. The attire of these men suggested that they were affluent, and the language they used to describe the work incorporated the brand of cigarettes being advertised.

Thus, the conversation between the men developed as follows: “‘A great Scheme to light a great country, Mr. Gold.’ ‘Conceived, Mr. Flake, by Men with WILLS of their own—more power to them.’ ‘And knowledge is power, Mr. Gold. Others with WILLS of their own can learn about the Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme from pictures now in packets of Wills’s Cigarettes.’”⁸¹ Wills produced a series of forty cigarette cards that included a photograph on the front side with a small paragraph explaining various parts of the project in non-technical language on the back side (See Figure 6.2).⁸²



Figure 6.2 “The Head Race,” Wills’s Cigarette Card, no. 8.

As late as 1936, Clarke’s Tobacco in Dublin was also using the image of the Shannon Scheme for advertising purposes in its ad “The Peak of Perfection.” As a middle-age man

⁸¹ “Mr. Gold & Mr. Flake on the Shannon,” *Connacht Tribune*, 13 June 1931.

⁸² “The Head Race,” Wills’s Cigarette Cards, advertisement, no. 8, circa 1929: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

looked inquisitively at the power station with a pipe in his hand, the company claimed “Ardnacrusha bears witness to the search for perfection in light and power. Clarke’s fine factory typifies the production of perfection in plug tobacco.”⁸³ In the ads for both Wills’s and Clarke’s, the act of *viewing* the Shannon Scheme was deployed as a means to sell tobacco by likening the success that was apparent upon seeing the works with the success or knowledge that could be gained by purchasing their products. These companies demonstrated that the image of tourism to the site was a recognizable one, and like other companies, Wills’s responded to an interest for more information and images of the project with inexpensive cigarette cards that encouraged the Scheme as a topic of conversation.

In addition to postcards and other privately produced advertisements that were designed to celebrate the Shannon Scheme, the Irish Post Office issued a commemorative postage stamp in 1930. While postage stamps are generally celebratory by nature, they also served the promotional campaign since they were distributed widely on letters and postcards. The *Irish Times* announced the issuance of the two-penny stamp in October 1930 and included a large reproduction of the image designed by E. L. Lawrenson, who also designed the Free State bank notes (See Figure 6.3).⁸⁴ Featuring a view of the weir at O’Brien’s Bridge, the stamp also emphasized the work’s Irish connection by including the words, “Shannon Power Development,” in Gaelic, translated by the *Irish Times* into English for those who lacked the language. Stamps, like postcards, transmitted images of the Shannon Scheme to both Irish and international audiences. This purpose was not lost

⁸³ “The Peak of Perfection,” *Irish Independent*, 25 January 1936.

⁸⁴ “A Commemorative Stamp,” *Irish Times*, 13 October 1930.

on contemporaries, including the *Irish Times*, which acknowledged, “Modern Government, having discovered the uses of advertisements, are turning their postal systems into national shop windows.”⁸⁵ The article described international postage stamps used to “display . . . a country’s natural charms, its historical events and its economic progress.” According to the article, the commemorative stamp was significant for the Free State because it “records the fulfilment of the Shannon Scheme, and may lead ‘to extended use of the electric power thus provided.’”⁸⁶ Of course, precise data demonstrating a link between the stamp and an increase in the use of electricity would be difficult to ascertain, but its role in promoting the project was nevertheless identified by those without an official tie to advertising within the ESB or Post Office.

Despite recognition of the stamp as a promotional piece, its reception was decidedly mixed. Some criticized the image for emphasizing an industrial Ireland over an agricultural one, thus marking a change in outlook that made them uneasy. For example, the *Irish Times* reported “A Dialogue” between a middle-aged lady and a clerk at a post office in Dublin. Presented as a conversation overheard the previous day, the scene was set as the middle-aged lady came in to purchase a two-penny stamp and the “Clerk tenders the new common Shannon Scheme stamp.” “‘Haven’t you got the other kind?’” asked the customer, to which the clerk responded “‘No, not at present.’”⁸⁷ Explaining her request, the lady stated, “Well, I won’t take that. I don’t like it.” Apparently this rejection was taken well by the clerk, who was “in no way perturbed at

⁸⁵ “History in Stamps,” *Irish Times*, 22 October 1930.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ “A Dialogue,” *Irish Times*, 27 November 1930.

the failure to make a deal.” Standing at the counter with the letter in her hand, the middle-aged lady pondered her options for several seconds, until “inspiration” appeared and she inquired about buying a pair of penny stamps instead. Grateful to hear that this would be possible, the customer replied, ““Then, I’ll take two. I like the kind of stamps I am used to.””⁸⁸ Though some scholars have pointed to the potential shortfalls of stamps as historical sources since “few people can describe the stamp on a letter they received the day before,” this dialogue indicated that, for at least some consumers, the image of the Shannon Scheme was contentious because they did not support the project for a variety of reasons.⁸⁹ However, others expressed their support in private and praised the government for the accomplishment, including Kathleen Sullivan, who wrote a letter of congratulations to McGilligan upon the issuing of the stamp.⁹⁰ The stamp was certainly not at the forefront of the imagination of every letter mailer, yet Donald Reid has argued that “we subconsciously take much of their [postage stamps] symbolism for granted”; therefore, “stamps are excellent primary sources for the symbolic messages which governments seek to convey to their citizens and to the world.”⁹¹ So apart from stamp collectors, it is possible that the government’s intention to publicize the dam as an Irish accomplishment was transmitted to an audience that may have not consciously considered the stamp. Regardless, those who purchased the commemorative stamp in

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Donald M. Reid, “The symbolism of postage stamps: a source for historians,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19 (1984), 223-224.

⁹⁰ Kathleen Sullivan, Letter to McGilligan, congratulating him and enclosing the 2d commemorative stamp issued for the Shannon scheme, 17 October 1930, UCD Archives, McGilligan Papers, P35d/10.

⁹¹ Reid, 223-224.

Ireland and placed it on outgoing mail were active participants in promoting the Shannon Scheme. For tourists who had seen the project and also had an interest in philately, the stamp could also serve as memorabilia that captured an important moment connecting Free State history and their personal histories.

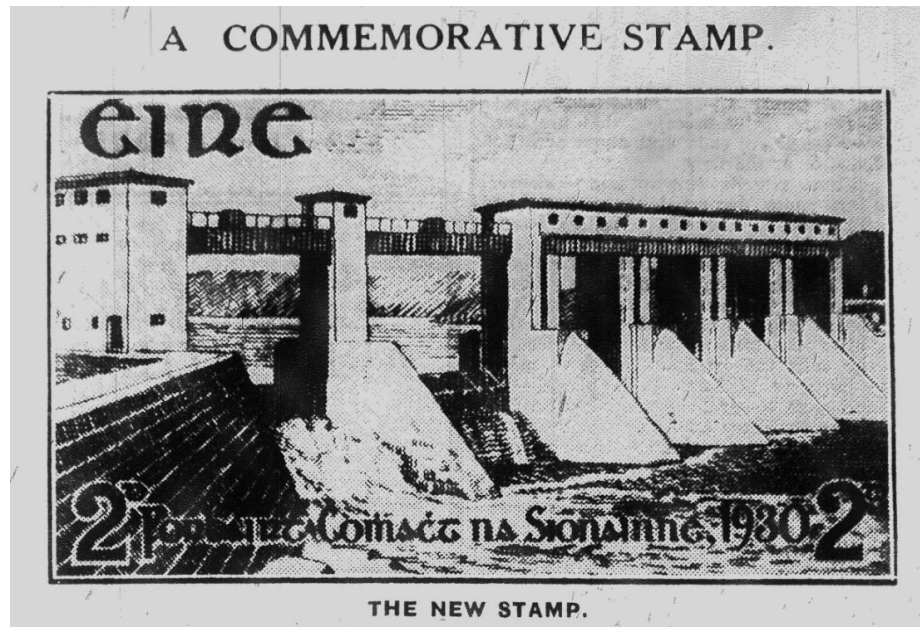


Figure 6.3 Shannon Scheme Commemorative Stamp

As many modern-day tourists can attest, souvenirs are tangible reminders of a unique place or event that arouse personal memories or allow visitors to share part of their experiences with family and friends back home. Today, the association of tourism in Ireland with Carroll's Gift Shops, found around every corner, and catering to foreigners who are eager to buy knickknacks plastered with sheep, four-leaf clovers, or leprechauns, has turned kitsch into profit. But the phenomenon is not a new one, as scholars such as Stephanie Rains have demonstrated.⁹² But apart from postcards or booklets that were sold for a profit by the Guide Bureau and independent stationers, few pieces of memorabilia

⁹² Stephanie Rains, "Celtic Kitsch: Irish-America and Irish Material Culture," *Circa Art Magazine* 107 (2004):52-57.

were available to the public who toured the Shannon Scheme. Furlong indicates that the Irish Tourist Board did not begin to produce quality souvenirs until the 1950s, so the lack of Shannon Scheme merchandise is perhaps not surprising.⁹³ However, in 2002, the 75th Souvenir Edition of the *Electrical Mail*, a newsletter published by the Electricity Supply Board, featured a photograph of one of the only Shannon Scheme souvenirs known to exist (See Figure 6.4).⁹⁴ According to the article, “Gerald Downing, retired ESB staff, and his wife Noreen had been given the two pieces of china from the parents of a lifelong friend, Eddie Quirke in Bandon.” The original owners, Mary and Ned Quirke from Tipperary, “would have visited the site of the Shannon Scheme with thousands of others during the construction phase.” Other than the fact that the cup and plate have been described to have “Germany” stamped on the bottom—indicating that it was produced overseas—no other details about the manufacturer, acquisition, or date of the souvenir are available.⁹⁵ While it is impossible to know how many pieces of such memorabilia have been forgotten about or misplaced, this cup and saucer provide a bit of insight into tourism at the Shannon Scheme. The juxtaposition of the construction site with the surrounding scenic views of the countryside provide further evidence that the two comfortably coexisted as spots worth seeing for visitors and in the minds of those promoting tourism.

⁹³ Furlong, *Irish Tourism 1880-1980*, 178.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ “Shannon Scheme souvenir unearthed,” *Electric Mail*, Electricity Supply Board, 75th Souvenir Edition, 2002, 9.

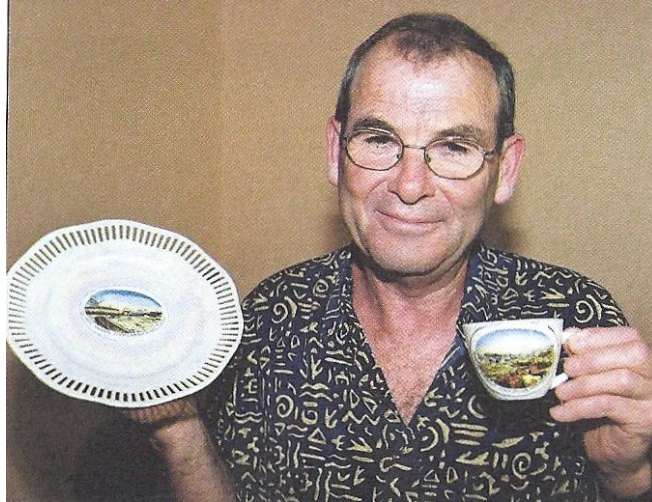


Figure 6.4 Shannon Scheme Cup and Plate.

Newspapers printed complete accounts of visitors' daily adventures at Ardnacrusha as a way to encourage travel and share the experience of tourism with those who were unable to go to the site. In October 1929, the *Star* ran an article in which “the writer, in summing up his experiences, wonders at the brains and brawn which have been responsible for this vast undertaking, and expresses the belief that the Scheme will be a brilliant success and a credit to Irish initiative.”⁹⁶ The writer described his second visit to Ardnacrusha with a friend and noted that “we could not help noticing on the journey that some of our fellow-travelers were on the same errand as ourselves. From their conversations we gathered that they were looking forward expectantly to the opportunity which was being afforded them of seeing the great engineering works in progress.” He also provided information about each stop along the way, including details about what they were told by the guide whose “remarks were interspersed with particulars of the acreage affected, the number of gallons of water to be stored, the raising of levels, etc., but it is not my intention to do more than refer to these particulars which may be found in

⁹⁶ *Star*, 26 October 1929.

the official guide books.” The visitor described the magnitude of the work at Ardnacrusha by claiming that “everything is on a mammoth scale. Huge constructional works are in progress which, viewed from below, appear to extend almost to the heavens, and produce a feeling of awe amounting almost to stupefaction.”⁹⁷ Meanwhile, according to a contemporary ad “Visit the Shannon Works! See this Mighty Project in the making,” tourists did not have to pay an extra fee to take these guided tours, but “those not wishing to avail of these Conducted Tours should apply direct for a permit, giving date of proposed visit.” In order to organize heavy traffic to the site, the Guide Bureau reserved “SUNDAYS for large excursion parties ONLY.”⁹⁸ Detailed accounts of one tourist’s experiences not only shed light on what occurred during the course of visits to the site, but also allowed those reading the newspaper article to participate indirectly as consumers of tourist propaganda.

Some statements to the press indicate that the fusion of tradition and modernity that planners hoped to achieve was not lost on casual observers desirous of sharing their personal support for the project. In 1929, a father of two took his family to Ardnacrusha and wrote a column in the *Irish Times* describing their visit. His emphasis on the strangeness of the site paralleled the previously mentioned tourist’s desire for an unusual experience, so instead of regurgitating scientific details and practical figures, he relied on mythical analogies to make the Shannon Scheme seem more in line with an ancient legend. For example, he repeatedly referred to Ardnacrusha as “the sacred city of the concrete and electrical gods” to which the banks of the river were “a sacrificial heap,”

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ “Visit the Shannon Works! See this Mighty Project in the making,” in Manning and McDowell, 42.

and were lorded over by “the great concrete Cathedral of the Power-House.”⁹⁹ This mystical rhetoric was also picked up by a correspondent for the *Daily Express*, who had toured the site several times before writing about his visit in October 1929. Referring to the Scheme as “the Irish Temple of Power,” he described “three slumbering monsters with conical steel heads sunk into the concrete color of the hall below, droning softly, possessed of gigantic energy—this was my first impression of the nerve centre of the Shannon Scheme.”¹⁰⁰

The tendency to resort to traditional tropes by applying spiritual or supernatural rhetoric to the dam, perhaps in an effort to come to terms with a lack of vocabulary for industrial tourism, was also parodied for entertainment value. Whereas the aforementioned pieces drew upon notions of Irish legend and mystery to romanticize the project, others deployed similar tropes to satirize Irish skepticism about modernity. A weekly columnist for the *Limerick Leader* came up with a fantastic ghost story in which a donkey gets stuck in the mud at the construction site. Unable to free himself, the animal dies a slow and horrible death. According to the story,

Every night people passing here report hearing gurgling noises, groans, and loud splashing and sounds of an asinine nature. Thus do we come possessed of another ghost story to be told round the rural firesides even after the Shannon Scheme has ceased to be a wonder. Personally I’m not too certain whether the asinine noises may not be traced to some human source; the race possesses asses in plenty.¹⁰¹

In the following weeks, the columnist alluded to a rival Shannon Scheme ghost story produced by natives of Roscommon, whose phantom motor car played on words like

⁹⁹ W. M. Letts, “The Shannon Harnessed,” *Clare Champion*, reprinted from the *Irish Times*, 26 October 1929.

¹⁰⁰ “Irish Temple of Power—In the Heart of the Shannon Scheme,” *Clare Champion*, reprinted from the *Daily Express*, 26 October 1929.

¹⁰¹ “Electric Sparks—Flashes from Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 15 January 1927.

horse power, which were frequently used to describe the dam. The columnist's aim to entertain readers also highlighted important regional tensions over claims to the national electrification scheme. Speaking of this rival spectre, he exclaimed:

I can hope it won't come 'trapesing' down Shannon way, for if it does and falls into one of our mud banks then of a surety will its days or nights be ended, and it will be well and truly 'laid,' for once embedded in that sticky mass its horse power will avail it nothing' and in any case our donkey ghost would kick it to smithereens, occupants included; even if they possess no heads, other parts of their anatomy wouldn't come amiss to our ass.¹⁰²

The reason why these ghost stories are especially insightful, apart from their obvious and silly humor, is that promoters of electricity were keen to dispel such negative stereotypes about Ireland in general and the West in particular. They speculated that, "it may be that Gaelic backed by electric power will provide an explosive mixture strong enough to smash the old molds and radically transform Irish mentality."¹⁰³

In an exceptional example of virtual tourism by means of travel accounts in the press, the *Irish Electrician* published an illustration which literally mapped out what touring the Shannon Scheme entailed (See Figure 6.5).¹⁰⁴ The diagram was based on a visit by the Institution of Electrical Engineers (Irish Centre) and the Engineering and Scientific Association of Ireland. As with other early accounts of visits to the region, it began with the visitor's unsatisfactory experiences of local hotels. Next, the author described the trek over the course of the works is described in an equally unenthusiastic tone. The depiction did not inspire readers to tour themselves when informed, as "for hours and hours, one walked, scrambled, hobbled over miles of rough country, viewing

¹⁰² "Electric Sparks—Flashes from Shannon Scheme," *Limerick Leader*, 29 January 1927.

¹⁰³ Palmer, "The Shannon Stirs New Hope in Ireland."

¹⁰⁴ "Shannon Scheme Reminiscences," *Irish Electrician* 3, no. 28, 1926-1927, 877.

the mess which is being made on a grand scale of a beautiful country.” Like most accounts of tourism to the site, the illustration listed prominent visitors by name. The drawing poked fun at the meaning of progress and was tailored to the “men’s club” mentality, suggesting that group tours of the Scheme were important social events. This pictorial representation of tourism highlighted the importance of meetings, dinners, and speeches which accompanied a tour of the Shannon Scheme as opportunities for groups like the IEE or the ESAI to discuss the project collectively and adopt resolutions to ensure its success.¹⁰⁵

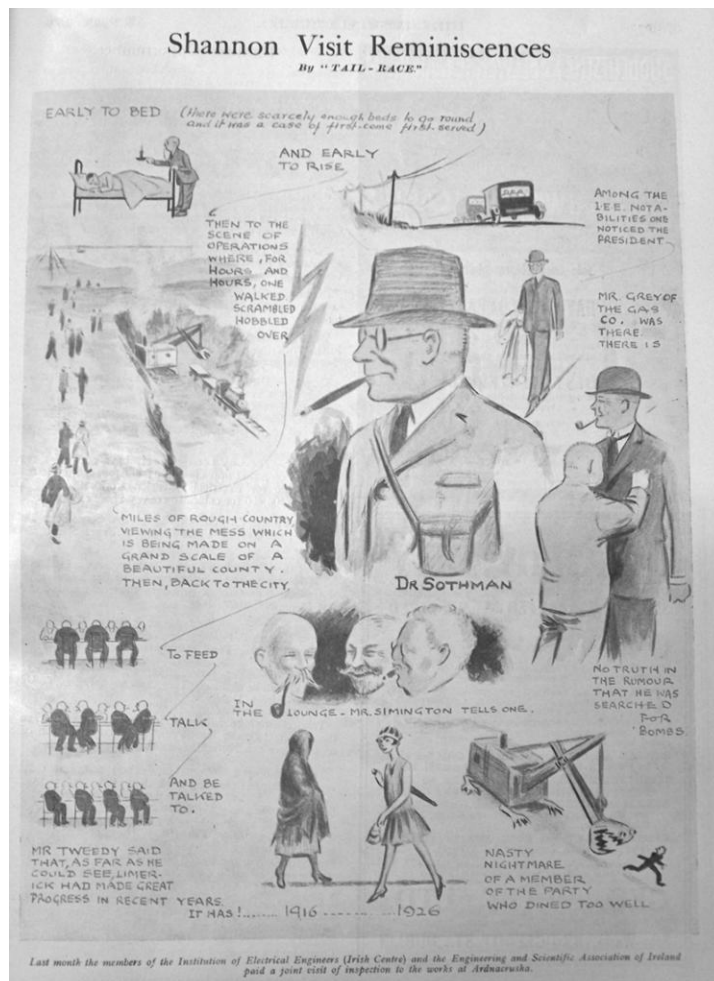


Figure 6.5 “Shannon Visit Reminiscences,” *Irish Electrician* 3, no. 28, 1926-1927, 877.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Many dailies and weeklies kept the public informed about the progress of the Scheme by including pictures of the construction site at various stages in its development. For example, in a spread called “Shannon Scheme: Special Pictures,” the *Limerick Leader* published its first pictures of the project in December 1927. It included one of Blackwater Bridge, another of a crane, and two more photos of workers’ huts. Additionally, two large photos of O’Brien’s Bridge and the intake works meant that photos of the Shannon Scheme took up nearly the entire page.¹⁰⁶ Including numerous photographs of the works, sometimes procured from German photographers, was popular among the national dailies and weeklies, as well.

Films were also pursued “for purposes of historical record and secondly for publicity with a view of beginning the creation of enthusiasm for the Scheme which . . . would serve to awaken the interest which must be directly stimulated if distribution is to succeed as well as to give a definite impression of the magnitude of the works and the responsibility of carrying them out.”¹⁰⁷ Siemens had been filming the construction of the project from the beginning, and hoped to capitalize on their efforts to document such an important undertaking in Ireland. I. W. Heintze, writing on behalf of Siemens-Schuckert, sent a letter to F. S. Rishworth, the Chief Engineer of Shannon Power Development regarding filming of the works. He wrote explaining that Siemens had received word that Rishworth “had the intention to give orders to cinema companies to take films of the Shannon works. We should be pleased to take your orders in this connection and to make our films more complete by doing so. We feel sure that this would make it far cheaper for

¹⁰⁶ “Shannon Scheme: Special Pictures,” *Limerick Leader*, 17 December 1927.

¹⁰⁷ Shannon Scheme: Filming of works. Proposal to arrange for the filming of civil and electrical engineering works at Shannon every 6 months, [n.d]: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/58.

you than giving the order to some Company.”¹⁰⁸ However, it was not until April 1928 that the ESB reached an agreement with the First National Pathé Film Company. The first film for educational purposes in Ireland

was taken during the summer months, and during the following autumn and winter it was exhibited by the Pathé Film Company in their Pathé Irish Gazette and the Pathé Pictorial in sixty of the principal cinema theaters in Dublin and throughout the Saorstát. Portion of the film was also included in the British and American of the Pathé Gazette and Pathé Pictorial. The Board purchased a copy of this film for exhibition in schools, colleges, etc. Facilities for taking films of the Works were arranged for other film companies at their own request.¹⁰⁹

The *Irish Independent* announced the expected release of the film one month before the agreement was reached:

Apart from the news value of the film, which is obvious, the taking of the picture was a happy thought for another reason. In the course of the next twelve months the present scheme will be completed, and after that it will never again be possible to get a pictorial record of the great scheme as it looks before the sluice gates of the weir are opened and the water allowed to flood into the head race.”¹¹⁰

According to the president of the Irish Tourist Association, “representatives of several news film agencies had come over specially to take views of the Scheme for exhibition in various parts of the world.”¹¹¹

Some of these films have survived and are available online, including one posted by Siemens to YouTube in 2008 depicting construction and the assembling of machinery inside the power station. Although Sorcha O’Brien has argued that technological images

¹⁰⁸ I. W. Heintze, Letter to F. S. Rishworth from Siemens-Shuckertwerke, 18 October 1926: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA, P35/58.

¹⁰⁹ Annual Report and Accounts, 1928-1929, 19.

¹¹⁰ “The Filming of a Great Work: Shannon Scheme Under Camera,” *Irish Independent*, 8 March 1928.

¹¹¹ “A Mecca for Tourists—Limerick and its Future—Shannon Scheme As A Permanent Attraction,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

of the Shannon Scheme were not favored in a country that thought “in terms of nature and romantic tradition, rather than technology and modernity,” these films—and the ESB’s pursuit of their promotion—indicated that the lines of differentiation were not as stark as O’Brien contended.¹¹² For example, in the film posted by Siemens, huge pieces of machinery were transported to the site by teams of horses.¹¹³ Film, an avant-garde medium, as O’Brien would attest, could also reveal that the Shannon Scheme, a symbol of technology and modernity, simultaneously relied on transportation that was far from being on the cutting-edge in anyone’s imagination. To be sure, ships, trains, and automobiles were used to move materials to and from the site quickly, and the spectacle of horses used in this capacity seems out of place at first glance. However, if one considers an Irish modernity that incorporated both technological advancements and a sense of tradition firmly rooted in agriculture, then the horses appear quite appropriate. The German contractors likely had a say in employing the horses, since they imported trains, tracks, and cement from Germany to fulfill their transportation needs, but the equestrian haulers would have hailed from Irish farms. While the hydroelectric project itself and film as a means to depict it were undoubtedly modern, the inclusion of the horses provided a decidedly Irish penchant for the traditional to a scene that was otherwise intended to portray the arrival of modernity to the Free State. They may also have indicated the necessity of relying on animal power to haul materials through muddied areas that were not yet fully paved. Thus, unlike O’Brien, rather than marking a clear division between nature/tradition and technology/modernity, these films, just like

¹¹² O’Brien, “Images of Ardnacrusha,” 85.

¹¹³ Siemens, “Hydroelectric Power Plant on Shannon River,” YouTube video, 01:32, accessed 1 November 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrluubEMZY>.

tourism more broadly, provided evidence of the blurred boundaries that incorporated all of these elements, in varying degrees.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the ESB arranged lecture tours in which experts on electricity traveled to the countryside and explained the benefits of electricity in the domestic and industrial spheres. For the present purposes, however, it is worth remarking that these talks played an important part in enticing the wider Irish populace to visit the works themselves. For example, “in October, 1928, a lecturing tour was arranged for the following towns of the Leinster Loop: Waterford, Wexford, Kilkenny, Portlaoighise [sic], Edenderry, Mountmellick, Naas, Bray, Arklow, Gorey, and Tullow.”¹¹⁴ The ESB stated that “these lectures dealt with proper systems of both lighting in the home and in the shop. The Board obtained the services of a lecturer from the Electric Lamp Manufacturers Association, and the lectures were a marked success.”¹¹⁵ As a result of its success, the ESB planned informal tours that utilized materials from the public relations department.

One of the most popular means utilized by the ESB to publicize the Scheme was a traveling model that received considerable attention in the press and attracted large crowds. Indeed, from the time that the government decided to construct the grid, models of the dam site became popular and were regularly featured at horse shows across Ireland, indicating a particular interest in the miniature among the more affluent classes in society. As early as August 1925, models became spectacles in their own right, as the *Limerick Leader* announced that “the model of the Shannon power scheme, which was on

¹¹⁴ *Annual Report and Accounts, 1928-1929.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

exhibition at the recent Dublin Horse Show, where it attracted much attention, will, it is stated, be on view in Limerick this week.”¹¹⁶ More so than others across the country, people in Limerick could certainly avail themselves of the opportunity to visit Ardnacrusha in person, but their lively interest in viewing the model is indicative of the fact that the spectacle of the Shannon Scheme, which captured the attention of tourists, did not necessarily require touring the project in person; catching a glimpse of the model appeared to be equally exhilarating for some. In an effort to bring the model to the masses, the Mayor of Limerick “arranged for the housing of the model in the old court room of the Town Hall, and from Wednesday next the citizens will have an opportunity of inspecting this miniature specimen of a vast national project,” before the miniature was transferred to another horse show.¹¹⁷ Equally telling, the paper reported that Lord Dunraven, the Mayor of Adare, had written to the Mayor of Limerick “in connection with his Lordship’s earnest desire that the model of the Shannon at present on exhibition at the Kilmallock Horse Show, should be made available for view by the residents of Adare and district.”¹¹⁸

Four years later, the *Irish Independent* reported again on the “unique exhibit” at the Royal Dublin Society’s Spring Show which took up the entire space of the newspaper’s stand. The representative for the *Independent* claimed to have seen a photograph of the model, sparking a curiosity to see the model in person, but this contributor was surprised to find “the photograph did not give an entirely adequate

¹¹⁶ “Shannon Scheme—Dr. McLaughlin’s Visit,” *Limerick Leader*, 17 August, 1925.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ “Lord Dunraven and Shannon Scheme Model,” *Limerick Leader*, 2 September 1925.

impression of a very remarkable exhibit.” According to the representative, photographs in the newspaper did little to “satisfy the curiosity that has been aroused in regard to the Stand.” The reporter concluded enthusiastically that “the desire now to see it has only been intensified.”¹¹⁹ The *Independent* praised the ESB for supplying the model, calling it “a piece of craftsmanship which is a masterpiece of its kind.” Describing it in minute detail, the paper declared that “great skill has been exercised in the construction of the model; even artistry has been invoked for the embankments are a rich verdant green, giving a very pleasing impression of the grassy slopes.”¹²⁰ The model was complete with a map that displayed the entire network, including lights of different colors to indicate the many transmission lines. The newspaper explained that “no one can look at the model without securing a most revealing knowledge of the Ardnacusha section of the scheme—the hub of the great undertaking.” The *Leitrim Observer*, meanwhile, also reported “unusual interest” in the model and declared that “lectures given in connection with this exhibit are followed with the closest attention.”¹²¹ While seeing the project in person remained popular, in a sense, the experience of tourism was replicated by spectators who wished to see the Scheme from a new perspective, gazing with wonderment in the skill and scale of the model in much the same way as they did with the real hydroelectric project.

Just as Irish men and women needed to be educated about the benefits of electricity, they also needed to be informed about the benefits of tourism. There was

¹¹⁹ “A Unique Exhibit—The Shannon Scheme in Miniature—Clever Craftsmanship,” *Irish Independent*, 7 May 1929.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Leitrim Observer*, 5 October, 1929.

much skepticism in Ireland about tourism, especially among cultural nationalists who feared that foreign visitors might corrupt their efforts to preserve traditional Ireland. The *Star* summarized this argument against tourism thusly:

It lays Ireland open to a very great intensification of the cheap, standardised Anglo-American townbred vulgarity from which she is suffering too much already. Irish people may be taught by association with the tourist traffic to despise their own country, its language, culture, and institutions, to dislike hard work, and to make the holiday activity of the very often uneducated and ill-bred townsmen with too much money into the ideal in pursuit of which they will forsake the ancient traditions of the country-side and the customs and ways of life which have grown noble through the centuries.¹²²

With many foreigners coming to see the Shannon Scheme located in rural Ardnacrusha, these fears about the impact of tourism on the Irish people were not unwarranted. The same article in the *Star* feigned sympathy with skeptics, but informed the public that

If the tourist traffic is, as there is no doubt, a permanent and growing feature of modern life, there is nothing to be gained by simply condemning it as evil. What is needed is not an attitude of superior contempt towards everything pertaining to tourists, but a clear recognition of the dangers that our visitors bring with them and a determination to resist these dangers in the best way possible—by educating themselves.¹²³

However, rather than fearing visitors from abroad, Cumann na nGaedheal and the ESB hoped that foreign tourists would come and be impressed by the dam as an example of what Ireland could accomplish in the absence of British rule. Therefore, in this role, the Shannon Scheme differed significantly from the previous focus of Irish tourism to promote the natural and Gaelic components of Ireland. Instead, the Irish paraded the Shannon Scheme as the result of their own ingenuity, not simply as a legacy of their geography.

¹²² *Star*, 14 September 1929.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

Many newspaper articles also supported the idea that Irish men and women could be further enlightened on the positive aspects of tourism if they participated in touring Ireland themselves. The same article in the *Star*, for instance, argued that fear of foreigners could be overcome through active touring by the Irish themselves:

The most valuable tourist traffic, when all is said and done, is that produced by the interest of our own citizens in their own country and themselves. If all Irishmen had the ambition to know Ireland and her people thoroughly, to steep themselves in Irish tradition and to develop their personality as Irishmen, we should possess at once the best antidote against the dangers of the tourist traffic and the best value to offer tourists.¹²⁴

John C. Foley, president of the Irish Tourist Association and an official for the ESB, stated “that all citizens of this country were shareholders in the Shannon scheme, and should be given an opportunity of visiting their property.”¹²⁵ The ESB also supported internal tourism to the Shannon Scheme as an act of patriotism to take an interest in such a great national undertaking. Reiterating these sentiments, the *Limerick Leader* noted that “apart altogether from the immediate and direct benefits these tours should confer on Limerick there is no doubt that they will also do much to bring home to the people as a whole the real significance and importance of the great electrification project.”¹²⁶ The paper concluded that “it is all to the good, therefore, that a special effort is being made to arouse general public interest in a project fraught with such wonderful possibilities of good for all classes in the community.”¹²⁷ Foley believed “that all citizens of this country

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ “The Antiquities of Killaloe—Shannon Scheme Attractions,” *Nenagh Guardian*, 25 August 1928.

¹²⁶ “Random Gossip—Notes and Comments on Matters of Interest,” *Limerick Leader*, 31 March 1928.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

were shareholders in the Shannon Scheme, and should be given an opportunity of visiting their property.”¹²⁸

The ESB and the Guide Bureau succeeded in their efforts to encourage domestic tourism. For example, over the course of one Sunday in 1929, 3,000 visitors to the site including,

Dubliners, Corkonians, Sligonians, Galweyians [sic], etc., were greatly impressed by the magnitude of the Shannon undertakings. They were shown over the Scheme by the officials of the Guide Bureau, who explained every phase of the project to them. This was, to the great majority of the visitors, a practical lesson in the potentialities of this wonderful national enterprise for the industrial future of the country.¹²⁹

Despite the concerns expressed by some cultural nationalists, the Irish-Ireland movement also encouraged Irish people to invest in the fledgling tourist industry. The *Leinster Leader* echoed the movement’s rhetoric when it claimed “what applies in the industrial sphere to the support of home manufacture might be applied in the same way to the support of the home holiday resort. After all, it would be illogical to expect people from other lands to spend their money amongst us until we have made our resorts worthy of spending our own money on them.”¹³⁰ Likewise, the *Limerick Leader* pondered the merits of founding an industrial association in Limerick and concluded that “apart from the work of educating the people on the wisdom and patriotism of giving preference to the products of their own country a combination of local industrial revivalists could be of immense service in bringing before the public the wonderful advantages the Shannon

¹²⁸ “A Mecca for Tourists,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

¹²⁹ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 May 1929.

¹³⁰ *Leinster Leader* quoted in the *Star*, 17 May 1930.

Scheme confers on Limerick as a centre in which to start new manufacturing enterprises.”¹³¹

Domestic tourism was particularly important to promoters because all visitors were potential consumers of electricity and had a vested interest in the national electrification project. According to a local newspaper, “Sunday excursions had proved to be a very popular way for Irish people to visit the Scheme, and they had come from all parts of the country.”¹³² A day trip in the morning to visit the works with a return ticket in the evening proved to be a popular way to see the Scheme for people who had seen Limerick before. As one report of tourism claimed, “on the past two Sundays big parties of excursionists from Athlone, Galway, and other centres came to Limerick. Their main object in selecting this city as the venue for their outing was to avail of the opportunity of seeing the Shannon Scheme works, of which they read and hear so much.”¹³³ Of course, the adoption of virtual tourism, including published photographs and descriptive stories about progress being made in the press, appeared to be a victory for promoters who hoped this practice would entice more people to take tours of the site. Similarly, the *Limerick Leader* noted the quantity of domestic tourists in another article, boasting that “there were thousands of visitors to Limerick on Sunday. There were excursions from Dublin and Waterford, both trains bring close on three thousand people. Hundreds of these made their way to the Shannon Scheme, which they toured from the head race at

¹³¹ “Town Topics—Why not an Industrial Association in Limerick?” *Limerick Leader*, 9 March 1927.

¹³² “A Mecca for Tourists,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

¹³³ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 June 1926.

O'Brien's Bridge, to the tail race at Ardnacrusha.”¹³⁴ While the process of educating the Irish about domestic tourism was ongoing, these depictions of Sunday excursions hint at the success of those efforts.

Referring to domestic tourists from outside the Limerick area, a local paper conveyed to its readers that “these visitors from outside who have already come amongst us have been deeply impressed by the nature of the huge undertaking and the enormous progress made in carrying it out. They will very likely, therefore, be the means of inducing many others to come and see the project for themselves during the remainder of the summer.”¹³⁵ Not only did Irish visitors inspire their friends and neighbors to tour the hydroelectric works, some were so enthusiastic about the project that they made multiple trips to see the undertaking. For instance, the Fermoy Commercial Club organized at least two excursions—one in the construction phase and the other after the official opening ceremony. Members of the club were eager to return to O'Brien's Bridge where “the guide took the party over the works there, and showed them the spot where President Cosgrave touched the button to allow the waters to flow into the canal which leads the Shannon to the great turbines at Ardnacrusha.”¹³⁶

Cumann na nGaedheal politicians also participated in domestic tourism, and the details of their visits were widely publicized, though their visits were often seen—with justification—as political maneuvering. For example, Cosgrave and McGilligan planned to inspect progress being made on the Scheme in July 1926. Their every movement was

¹³⁴ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 6 July 1929.

¹³⁵ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 19 June 1926.

¹³⁶ “A Day In Limerick—Visitors' Impressions,” *Limerick Leader*, 14 August 1929.

carefully cataloged in press accounts of their trip, distinguishing the formality of their visit from the casual, but informative tours of other citizens. Immediately following a political meeting in the Town Hall, the *Limerick Leader* reported that “the president and Mr. McGilligan motored to Ardnacrusha to inspect the Shannon Scheme. There was a military guard of honour in waiting. . . . A bugler sounded the salute, and the president then inspected the guard. He was then taken in hands by Mr. Prendergast, chief government engineer at the works, and shown over the Ardnacrusha site.”¹³⁷ The political spectacle, including the presence of the military guard, a bugler, and a personal escort, was strikingly different from what the average person would have experienced, especially at this early stage of construction. Nevertheless, coverage of their visit was undoubtedly welcome, as the government wanted to encourage those average citizens to follow their leaders’ example and participate in domestic tourism themselves.

But the concern expressed about foreign tourists coming to Limerick was understandable on another level. As Zuelow has noted, “on one hand, Ireland’s modern history was largely defined by nationalist struggle against English rule, while on the other, English tourists represented the major source of the country’s tourism earnings.”¹³⁸ Encouraging British tourists to see the Shannon Scheme was a difficult task given that most news of Ireland in the foreign press focused on the violence of the Civil War or Irish antagonism toward the British. One contemporary claimed that “many Englishmen are persuaded that there is an element of danger associated with a visit to Ireland, while many others are under the impression that they would not be received with favour in

¹³⁷ “Ministers in Limerick—Town Hall Convention,” *Limerick Leader*, 14 July 1926.

¹³⁸ Zuelow, “The Tourism Nexus,” 197.

Ireland.”¹³⁹ However, there was good cause to recruit British tourists to Ireland, and many saw the Shannon Scheme as a useful means to accomplish this goal. One reporter phrased it thusly:

If they could turn the British tourist tide, and he thought it could be done, towards this country, they would bring a fruitful form of revenue which would go a long way towards wiping out this adverse balance of trade. If they bought British manufactures they had a right to expect that they should purchase the beneficial effects of Ireland’s beautiful scenery; their pure and bracing air and green fields, and all the other natural endowments with which the country favoured. Limerick City had beauty spots and antiquities in the surroundings that, in his opinion, would form even greater attractions for the tourists when they became more generally known than even the Shannon Scheme.¹⁴⁰

Though showing a bias towards sightseeing in the countryside, the writer implied that the British were aware of Limerick *because* of the Shannon Scheme. Newspaper accounts of who toured the site reveal further that the hydroelectric project was a popular attraction among a wide range of British visitors; from politicians and engineering clubs to students and vacationers, the Shannon Scheme was a sight to see no matter any lingering national animosities.

However, British tourists were not the only ones interested in seeing the site, and newspapers regularly reported lists of important politicians and distinguished foreign guests who toured as well. A writer for the *Star* claimed,

As the Shannon Electricity Scheme is nearing completion popular interest grows more widespread. This summer it was a lucrative addition to the tourist attractions of the Saorstát. It would be interesting to have a record of the nationalities of the 70,000 odd people who inspected the works during the course of the last six months. Such a record would show how international is the interest taken in this titanic undertaking.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ *Irish Independent*, 29 July 1927.

¹⁴⁰ “A Mecca for Tourists,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

¹⁴¹ *Star*, 21 September 1929.

Money from foreign tourists was a boon to the economy, which had suffered greatly in the aftermath of the Civil War. The *Limerick Leader* was pleased to note that “during the present tourist season many distinguished people had visited the Shannon Scheme,” including prominent Irish bishops and “parties of engineers from Australia and Great Britain, as well as visitors from India, Canada and New Zealand, American and British tourists, including prominent British Labour Leaders.” The paper concluded, “in fact everybody of importance who had visited the country during the present season had gone to see the Shannon Scheme.”¹⁴²

Not surprisingly, visitors from Germany who toured the Shannon Scheme received special attention in the press. Interestingly, these tourists did not seem to incite racial prejudices in the same way that German workers on the project did, most likely because they were not perceived to be a threat to native employment, and their status as visitors meant they would only be in the country for a brief period. Unlike the xenophobia expressed in connection with Germans living and working in Limerick, German tourism was perceived more favorably. Important officials for the contractors, including Count Von Siemens himself, were noted as visitors to the site, but their tours were not highly anticipated by the Irish public who assumed business interests had spurred such trips. However, in 1928, the Irish were fascinated by the celebrity surrounding the German “Bremen Crew,” who successfully piloted the first transatlantic plane from the east to the west. Known as the “Three Musketeers of the Air,” Major James Fitzmaurice, Baron Gunther von Huenefeld and Capt. Hermann Koeh planned a visit to Limerick, where the reception committee had planned a grand welcome and “all

¹⁴² “A Mecca for Tourists,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

the city bands have been invited to take part in the reception, which is sure to be worthy of Limerick's hospitality." It was eagerly announced that, "a visit will be made to the Shannon Scheme Works, and at Ardnacrusha, the party will be the guests of the German engineers to luncheon."¹⁴³ Even though this visit to the site never happened because the crew had to return to Germany, the people of Limerick took great pride in thinking that these technologically savvy men might be interested in seeing the Shannon Scheme and their city. One of the most notable Germans living in Ireland, Colonel Fritz Brase, who conducted the Irish Army Band, was also mentioned as a distinguished visitor to the Shannon Scheme.¹⁴⁴ In the absence of an explanation for his visit, the paper left it to its readers to speculate if Brase was motivated to see the project out of patriotic feelings towards Ireland, given his profession, or if he felt compelled to celebrate the achievements of his fellow Germans. It is possible that Brase was influenced by both sentiments or simply got caught up in the spectacle of the project, but in what the newspaper did not say about his visit, there was room for readers to interject their own meaning.

Many other German groups, without direct ties to the contractors or claims to fame, also toured the hydroelectric works including a troop of thirteen German Boy Scouts, who were reportedly "much impressed."¹⁴⁵ Like the German Scouts, who were on a tour across Ireland, the itineraries of other groups suggest that they included the

¹⁴³ "Town Topics," *Limerick Leader*, 2 July 1928. On the Bremen's flight and the rapturous reception afforded the crew when they visited Ireland after achieving their feat, see Mike Cronin, *Doesn't Time Fly? Aer Lingus—Its History* (Cork: The Collins Press, 2011), 13-14. Fitzmaurice would become an important advocate for an Irish national airline.

¹⁴⁴ "Visitors to Shannon Scheme," *Limerick Leader*, 5 July 1926.

¹⁴⁵ "German Boy Scouts—On Visit to Limerick," *Limerick Leader*, 30 August 1930.

Shannon Scheme as one stop among many. For example, the schedule of one German party visiting from Killarney revealed that “the visitors spent the afternoon in an inspection of places of historical interest, and centres renowned for their natural beauty. To-morrow the party will make a trip over the Shannon Scheme, where they will be received by their compatriots.”¹⁴⁶ The diversity of German tourists and the depictions of their visits indicated that the project’s affiliations with Germany were often seen as a draw to the Free State for tourists who also participated in various sightseeing activities along the way.

American tourists, meanwhile, came in order to gather official information on hydroelectric projects and out of sheer curiosity while on vacation in the Free State with their families. In 1927, the Attorney-General for New York State, Albert E. Ottinger, arrived in Ireland, noting “that the particular object of his visit to Europe was to inspect the developments in electric power which are now taking place in Ireland and Switzerland, and he was especially interested in the Shannon river scheme.”¹⁴⁷ In an interesting echo of expert lectures that prompted domestic tourism, Thomas McLaughlin of the ESB visited the United States in 1928, and he “found that the Shannon Scheme was the one thing that interested everybody there, not only Irish-Americans, but native-born Americans, as it appealed to their imagination, especially in view of the great development on these lines in the United States.” According to McLaughlin, the Shannon Scheme “was to the American mind the one big and striking thing that the new government in this country had done, and, from an economic point of view, it would in

¹⁴⁶ “Town Topics,” *Limerick Leader*, 22 May 1929.

¹⁴⁷ “American’s Visit—To Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 8 June 1927.

future be of supreme interest to those people who combined a holiday with a study, however superficial, of the country's affairs."¹⁴⁸ However, this fascination with the project among Americans was not McLaughlin's final assessment of tourists from the United States. In contrast to the interest he observed while in the United States, he stated that American visitors to Ireland "whom he had taken over the Scheme had displayed extraordinary interest in the antiquities and historical associations of Killaloe." Speculating that "this, of course, was quite natural, as in their own country they had hydro-electric schemes far greater than the Shannon, but they had no ancient valuable buildings such as, for instance, the Oratory of St. Lua on Friar's Island," McLaughlin was one of the first to discern an unanticipated phenomenon among these visitors.¹⁴⁹ In McLaughlin's opinion, the Americans were interested in the Scheme in theory, but once they arrived in Ireland to see it, they were dazzled by the beauties of the countryside and cared less for the hydroelectric project underway. Thus, the lure of the modern could inspire interest in the traditional; this was a reversal of expectations, as Ireland's scenic beauties had typically been, and continued to be throughout the 1920s, the draw for most visitors coming to its shores.

Other press accounts indicated that Americans did impart a sense of appreciation for the project when they visited. For instance, on a trip with his wife to explore the home of his ancestors in Rathkeale, Cornelius Corcoran, the President of the Milwaukee Council, told a reporter for the *Limerick Leader* that "he was very proud of the Shannon Scheme project, and admired the Government for taking advantage of the magnificent

¹⁴⁸ "A Mecca for Tourist," *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

power that God had placed at the disposal of the people. It would help tremendously to develop their many other natural resources. Ireland, he maintained, should not be content with being an agricultural country.”¹⁵⁰ Not only did the Scheme capture the attention of a visitor who had not come to Ireland expressly to see Ardnacrusha, but it also resulted in the kind of praise highly sought after by the Free State government. Support from Americans, including tourists, was essential to the fledgling state attempting to boost national morale and situate itself as a respectable industrial nation.

Implicit in this last comment was Cumann na nGaedheal’s desire to use tourism as a means to achieve its own political goals. The Shannon Scheme was promoted to tourists as an achievement of the Free State government. The government leadership took credit for the project and used the Scheme’s success to demonstrate that the Irish could accomplish great things in the absence of British rule. McLaughlin noted that tourists to the Shannon Scheme viewed the project as “a striking illustration that the Irish Free State was no longer content to be a poor, backward country, and that the new regime meant business.”¹⁵¹ Cumann na nGaedheal also hoped that success would provide evidence for Ireland’s ability to compete with other independent nations of the world. Speaking of a range of government projects, including the Aonach Tailteann art competitions and the Shannon Scheme, Mike Cronin demonstrated that “these events were projected to a domestic and international audience. At home, the aim was to create supportive consensus among the populace for the nation as it actually existed, rather than as it had

¹⁵⁰ “His First Trip—Impressions of a Visitor,” *Limerick Leader*, 20 March 1929.

¹⁵¹ “A Mecca for Tourists,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

been conceived in the 1916-23 period. Externally, the initiatives were public announcements that independent Ireland was a reality.”¹⁵²

Inasmuch as the Cumann na nGaedheal leaders saw tourism as a means to overcome opposition, the party also promoted the Scheme as a representative example of their success as a government. In 1930, a group of engineers toured the site. Their visit inspired one journalist to claim that “there can be no doubt that the reputation of the Free State for efficiency as well as ‘vision’ has been enhanced in the eyes of electrical experts as a result of the visit.”¹⁵³ Another article stated that “we hope that the completion of the work will see the Free State on the high road to prosperity. It deserves to be there if only for the initiative and resource of its trustful young leaders.”¹⁵⁴ The government’s connection with the Scheme was celebrated when a group of 300 Meath farmers took a tour of Ardnacrusha in 1929. The local paper reported that “the tour must be made to appreciate the gigantic nature of the enterprise which the Free State in its infancy had the hardihood to tackle.”¹⁵⁵ Even the *Irish Army Quarterly* told its readers that “the main camp at Ardnacrusha is well worth a visit.”¹⁵⁶ However, McGilligan also recognized that some tourists “not always interested in the success of the scheme, have visited the works to find material for commendation or criticism of what is being done. Failure in any item will be given the same publicity as that which marked the inauguration of the

¹⁵² Mike Cronin, “The State on Display: The 1924 Tailteann Art Competition,” *New Hibernia Review* 9, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 51.

¹⁵³ *Star*, 14 June 1930.

¹⁵⁴ *Irish Times* quoted in the *Star*, 20 July 1929.

¹⁵⁵ *Meath Chronicle*, 15 June 1929.

¹⁵⁶ J. J. Comerford, “The Shannon Scheme: Its Origin and Construction and Some Points Regarding its Military Aspect,” *Irish Army Quarterly*, October 1927: Richard Mulcahy Papers, UCDA P7b/152.

scheme.”¹⁵⁷ As a result, McGilligan demanded that Siemens-Schuckert reorganize the way it was handling the project through subcontractors in order to ensure that tourists reported their experiences favorably.

Tourism provided an opportunity for Irish men and women to discuss the ways in which modernity and tradition influenced their sense of Irishness. Zuelow has argued that “a very large cross-section of Irish society, irrespective of rank or social class, took part in the process of making Ireland Irish. It [the process] paints a picture of a people who were very much involved in defining not only their tourist product but in defining themselves.”¹⁵⁸ In a newspaper article dedicated to “What the Shannon Scheme Will do for Ireland,” one writer claimed that modernity was already sweeping the country and replacing romantic notions of Ireland that were particularly interesting to many tourists.

But it is sad to think that the change will also sweep away the Erin beloved by the tourist. Even now it is only in the remote rural districts that the visitor may enjoy the blarney of the picturesque Pat, with his pipe in his hat and a shillelagh in his hand. As one Dubliner said to me: ‘There are plenty of shillelaghs now, but they are only for visitors. The modern Irishman wouldn’t know what to do with one.’ Even the modern colleen is sceptical about fairies, and there is no more trembling at the wail of the banshee. They are all too busily concerned over the ‘Come Back to Erin’ movement and the happy prospect of their pathetic manless cabins becoming once again little heavens.”¹⁵⁹

While tourists everywhere are attracted to the ‘otherness’ of the locations they visit, the Irish wished to strike a balance between Ireland’s difference and the reality that it was not as backward looking as it had been depicted. There was a genuine concern among the

¹⁵⁷ Patrick McGilligan, “Progress of Works,” Correspondence with Dr. von Siemens, 1 March 1928: Shannon Scheme Documents, NA, ESB6/11.

¹⁵⁸ Zuelow, *Making Ireland Irish*, xxxiii.

¹⁵⁹ *Star*, 7 September 1929. The “Come Back to Erin” movement targeted an Irish-American audience by encouraging them to return to Ireland on vacations and appreciate the scenic beauties of their native homeland. Balancing the natural and historical assets of Ireland with the nation’s desire to appear modern complicated the ways in which this movement promoted Ireland in the twentieth century.

Irish that “there is a tendency on the part of tourist promoters to exploit the Irish life, especially in the Gaeltacht, as a kind of circus curiosity for vulgar and uneducated strangers.”¹⁶⁰ The Shannon Scheme allowed them to decide the degree to which they celebrated their traditional cultural heritage, while simultaneously promoting a vision of Ireland as a modern nation.

With a thorough educational campaign, the ESB and the Cumann na nGaedheal government were able to accomplish many objectives. They worked to ease tensions about the negative impacts of foreign tourism, while also encouraging internal tourism as a means to demonstrate patriotic support for the Shannon Scheme. Cumann na nGaedheal leaders viewed tourists as an audience for the new state on display, and they promoted the Scheme as a major accomplishment of the government. Perhaps most importantly, tourism to the site opened up a new debate on Ireland’s national identity. Observers questioned whether Ireland’s celebration of this national electrification scheme contradicted or complemented previous perceptions of Ireland as a rural and conservative nation. The Cumann na nGaedheal leadership capitalized on this ambivalence in its promotion of the Shannon Scheme because it allowed them to use the language of modernity without appearing to challenge the ethos of Irish nationalism.

Chapter Epilogue

Tourism to the Shannon Scheme has slowed considerably in the eight decades since the establishment of the Guide Bureau. Though this is not an exhaustive study of tourism to the Shannon Scheme since its inception, contemporaries speculated about the future of tourism to the site, which deserves brief attention here. As early as 1930, the

¹⁶⁰ *Star*, 14 September 1929.

Irish Electrician praised Ireland for its “reputation for hospitality and cheerfulness,” but declared a sudden shift in the philosophy of tourism that had governed the previous five years. According to the engineering journal, tourism itself had embarked on a new period since “the ‘star turn’ of the Shannon Power Development at Ardacrusha hardly is needed to draw hundreds to our shores.”¹⁶¹ However, not everyone adhered to this interpretation, including the President of the ITDA, who also pondered the future of Irish tourism to the site and boldly predicted,

Not alone would the Shannon Scheme in its historic setting become an object of national interest to visitors from all parts of the world, but be the Mecca for the Irish youth of the future, as Irish schoolboys and girls would not be properly educated until they had visited the centre from which the country was getting its power supply.¹⁶²

Surprisingly, he was not far off. While Irish schoolboys and girls might not go so far as to describe the site as a “Mecca” on their organized field trips, they do make up a majority of visitors today. In addition to students, engineers and a handful of Irish and foreign tourists still come to see the works at Ardnacrusha. The Guide Bureau hut has been replaced with a small yellow structure, clearly labeled “Visitors,” and it is filled with floor to ceiling posters, framed photographs, and a model of the scheme. Visitors are encouraged to sign a “Visitors Book,” and are treated to a brief educational film describing the general history of the Shannon Scheme. As a tour guide recently admitted to another scholar, “Ardacrusha is no Disneyland.”¹⁶³ But this was not the case in the 1920s, when the Shannon Scheme became a symbol of Irish tourism and drew hundreds

¹⁶¹ “The I.E.E. Summer Visit,” *Irish Electrician* 6, no. 10 (April 1930), 957.

¹⁶² “A Mecca for Tourists—Limerick and its Future—Shannon Scheme As A Permanent Attraction,” *Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1928.

¹⁶³ Rubenstein, *Public Works*, 144.

of thousands of people from around the world to the site. The fact that the Scheme has been transformed into a destination for school children (probably as impressed by the huge machinery and rushing water as the original tourists), and has been virtually ignored by scholars of Irish tourism, has virtually erased the legacy of the Scheme for tourism as an industry. But the evidence presented here argues for a through reappraisal, and with the multifaceted ways it influenced local opinions, business developments, and perceptions of identity, its relationship to the nascent tourism industry was indisputable.

CHAPTER VII

WOMEN

There are two great unknown forces to-day, electricity and woman, but men can reckon much better on electricity than they can on woman.¹

—Josephine K. Henry, 1895

Home-making is the greatest industry in the world—the industry, in fact, for which all industries are operated.²

—*Star*, February 23, 1929

The campaign to promote electricity, which, in the Free State, was synonymous with the Shannon Scheme, reflected broader social dilemmas about proper gender norms. Advertisements and newspaper articles aimed at educating housewives about electricity suggest that many of those who supported the promotion of electricity intended to uphold the traditional roles of women in the home and that women's place in the new nation would not change as a result of the modernity brought about by Shannon Scheme. Electricity was strategically promoted to women based on imagery and rhetoric that emphasized a perceived set of common experiences. The government took pains to uphold traditional values concerning acceptable roles for women in the public and private spheres, while simultaneously encouraging Ireland to enter the age of modernity. In addition to focusing on issues that affected the entire nation, the promotion of electricity also highlighted benefits that advocates believed would be particularly attractive to women. These themes dealt mostly with physical appearance or personal happiness and promised circumscribed freedom, both in terms of labor and leisure time, as a result of

¹ Josephine K. Henry, quoted in *The History of Women's Suffrage*, vol. 4, edited by Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper (Rochester: Susan B. Anthony, 1902): 249.

² *Star*, 23 February 1929. All of the advertisements used in this chapter are available from the Electricity Supply Board Archives. For the purpose of providing references with greater accessibility, I have cited the *Star* in most cases.

the application of electricity to daily household chores. In order to meet women's demands to maintain the ideal home and reap the personal benefits of electricity, the ESB presented the Scheme to women in terms of its modernity, including its capacity to replace existing sources of power with cheap, efficient, safe, and clean energy. The promotion of electricity to women serves as a case study of the Free State's efforts to appeal to national interests by positing Irish modernity as complementary, rather than contradictory, to the conservative ethos of Irish nationalism. In seeking to balance perceptions of Irish identity that included traditional gender roles, promoters suggested that the spread of electricity would appeal to a feminine desire for modern trends, but still be restricted to the more traditional sphere of housekeeping. As a result, promoters and their audience established that equality in the public sphere and more contentious interpretations of modernity were to be avoided as subjects in electricity campaigns.

The ways in which electricity was promoted to this audience suggested that the ESB and its allies believed that women were more likely to respond to the perceived *personal* benefits that electricity would provide them. Advertisements directed towards housewives focused on electricity's capacity to maintain a woman's beauty, youth, and health, as well as to decrease the drudgery of household chores and to increase leisure time. Promoters discussed efficiency and modernity based on electricity's ability to free women from the time-consuming tasks and psychological burden of maintaining a well-kept home. Increasing women's economic productivity was not put forward as a desirable goal. Rather, there was an intentional effort to uphold the traditional roles of women in the home, such that the modernity wrought by the Shannon Scheme would bring only limited change to their place in the new nation. For example, while some women

expected a greater political role as a result of their participation during the revolution, Jason Knirck has shown that “pro-Treatyites also used images of the irrational, emotional, feminized political figure to castigate women and urge their exclusion from politics.”³ The Free State upheld perceptions of Irish identity that updated conservative gender roles and dispelled the fear that modernity would alter these traditional relationships. It suggested that the Shannon Scheme would not empower women to participate more fully in the public sphere—with the exception of shopping—but rather to improve their individual existences in the private sphere. While the early feminist movement dealt with similar issues, I will not be examining specific feminist interpretations of the project, but rather I am concerned with the rhetoric that promoters used, which often contradicted that employed by advocates for women’s rights. This chapter will address the relationship between women, nationalism, and modernity through an examination of the ESB’s promotional campaigns, including advertisements and other printed materials. After looking at the methods of making electricity appeal to housewives, I will analyze the educational motives of the campaign to highlight the ways in which women actively participated in learning and sharing information about electricity with others.

Nation Building and the Home

The prominence of the home in nationalist ideologies has typically limited the role of women as national citizens. Whether focusing on the home as a symbol of the nation or women as republican mothers, responsible for educating and instilling the values of the nation in their children, it was generally in the private sphere that

³ Jason Knirck, *Women of the Dáil: Gender, Republicanism and the Anglo-Irish Treaty* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 15.

nationalists expected women to demonstrate their patriotism.⁴ Ironically, such philosophical ideals received reinforcement from dramatic demographic shifts that resulted in a greater number of women leaving employment in the public sphere to become housewives at the time of Irish independence. According to Joanna Bourke, “in the generation prior to 1914 Irish women transformed their position in society: bidding farewell to labour in the fields and in other men’s homes, they enlisted for full-time work in the unpaid domestic sphere.”⁵ Thus, “in 1901 only 430,000 women in Ireland were employed, compared with 641,000 twenty years earlier.”⁶ As a result of these employment trends, the Electricity Supply Board promoted the Shannon Scheme specifically to a burgeoning audience: women in their roles as housewives and the primary consumers for the home. By increasing the demand for electricity in the private sphere, the government, through its links with the ESB, strengthened its chances of making the Shannon Scheme a successful financial endeavor while still reinforcing desired gender roles.

While the purpose of promoting electricity was to increase demand, the strategies that emphasized it as a cheap, healthy, and clean alternative to other energy sources

⁴ For more information on women and gender in modern Ireland, see Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy, eds. *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997); D. A. J. MacPherson *Women and the Irish Nation: Gender, Culture, and Irish Identity, 1890-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Gerardine Meaney *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change: Race, Sex and Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward, eds., *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004); Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, ed. *Gender and Power in Irish History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009); Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O’Dowd, eds., *Women and Irish History: Essays in Honour of Margaret MacCurtain* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997); and Margaret Ward *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (1989; rept., London: Pluto Press, 1995).

⁵ Joanna Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change, and Housework in Ireland, 1890-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*

highlighted the importance of the home in people's perception of Irishness and incorporated modernity into those same traditional notions of Irish identity. In August 1925, just as the first sod was being turned up at Ardnacrusha, *Honesty* published an article on the importance of reforming domestic work to elevate the home and meet modern demands, including using electricity. As "Garcon" described in the article, "there is much exalted sentiment abroad as to the home being the heart of a nation. The home is still talked of as a woman's proper sphere in life, and any woman who ventures to dispute this assertion is regarded as a unnatural monster."⁷ But improvements were overdue, according to the writer, who noted that "in spite of this extensive glorification, the home is one of the most unadvanced factors in modern life; science plays little part in its development." In an ad titled "The Home is the Cradle of the Nation," the ESB claimed that

This nation stands on the threshold of a new era of progress. The development of the Shannon Electric Power will bring in its train a new development of the industries and resources of the country. The home is the keystone of the social structure. The better the home the higher the country's civilization. The home deserves the best the country has to give. Electrified homes are *better* homes because Electricity does the house-work smoothly, swiftly, safely, and efficiently—giving Light, Heat and Power at the lowest cost, and saving endless time and toil.⁸

Echoing the link between the home and the nation in this advertisement, *Model*

Housekeeping published an article about electricity in the home in which it claimed,

The home, they say, is the cradle of the nation. Upon the happiness and well-being of the home depend the ultimate welfare of the nation. This being so, it is a pity that the making and keeping of the home have, until recently, meant so much drudgery, and the drudgery is such that it is a wonder that there are so many happy homes. In spite of the advance of civilisation, until the general use of

⁷ "Garcon," "Standardising Domestic Work," *Honesty* 1, no. 26 (22 August 1925): 13.

⁸ "The Home is the Cradle of the Nation," *Star*, 21 September 1929.

electricity, very little progress has been made in relieving the drudgery of housework.⁹

Modernity went hand-in-hand with hopes of progress, and modern homes increasingly came to mean those that were electrified. Progress did not threaten nationalists' efforts to preserve the home: according to the ESB, it would enhance them.

In addition to promoting the practical benefits of electricity, press advertisements also emphasized the importance of the home in people's perception of Irishness and incorporated modernity into those same traditional notions of Irish identity. In "Make Your Home Modern!" the ESB stated that "modern conditions demand modern equipment, and electricity provides the easy way by easy stages."¹⁰ Women factored into efforts to create such modern dwellings by purchasing electricity for their homes. This allowed them to "go about their job of turning housekeeping into homemaking without confusion or fuss. Instead of there being just one 'woman power' there are thousands of horse-power to do the work of the day. Modern life demands a great deal from women. The wise woman uses electricity to help her meet those demands."¹¹ Similarly, "The Measure of Civilization" was said to "be judged by the status of its women," and progress was equated with the use of electricity as a household aid. Modernity went hand-in-hand with hopes of progress, and modern homes increasingly came to mean those that were electrified. Women factored into efforts to create such modern dwellings by purchasing electricity for their homes. These positive associations of the home with the women who ran them were also featured in another ESB ad which posed, "If you want to have the

⁹ "In My Electric Home," *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 3 (Nov. 1930-Oct. 1931): 354.

¹⁰ *Star*, 8 June 1929.

¹¹ *Star*, 23 November 1929.

happiest home you must have an electric range.”¹² According to this advertisement, featuring a beautiful, young woman carrying a freshly baked meal, “the average household depends for its general tone of happiness or unrest on the woman of the house.” Not only would the housewife benefit personally, but her family would as well from “the added serenity which she gets from the continual success of her cooking—she can give them the atmosphere of ease and restfulness which is only possible when the woman of the house has ‘her home in order.’” Housewives were also encouraged to buy electric ranges in another advertisement which claimed, “You’re a modern woman and you want a modern cornerstone in your scheme of things.”¹³ Irish women were a crucial part of making the home modern and more pleasant for their families, and they were repeatedly told by promoters that electricity provided the means to accomplish both of these objectives.

However, there were also limits to the ways in which Irish women could participate within the structures of nationalism. These limits particularly restricted women to gender-specific tasks for which they were traditionally responsible including cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the home. As Bourke has argued, “women were increasingly excluded from nationalist aspirations. For instance, *Sinn Fein* published a column aimed at women, entitled ‘Letters to Nora.’ The letter on May 19, 1906 began: ‘The work is calling, I said. It awaits us in our own homes. No Irishwoman can afford to claim a part in the public duties of patriotism until she has fully satisfied the claims her

¹² “If you want to have the Happiest Home,” ESB advertisement, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

¹³ “The Cornerstone of a Comfortable Home,” ESB advertisement, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

‘home’ makes on her.’”¹⁴ The same article concluded that even though housework was burdensome, “it is a step in nation building all the same.”¹⁵ President Cosgrave’s message to the readers of the *Ideal Irish Home Journal* in 1925 underlined the continuing relevance of the home in the nation when he said, “the state must ultimately depend upon the home. There its foundations are laid, its problems discussed; and there the security and stability afforded by the state are most acutely realized.”¹⁶ A few months later, Brigid O’Higgins, wife of the minister for justice and vice president of the executive council, Kevin O’Higgins, echoed Cosgrave’s sentiments when she wrote of the importance of the home in nation building in an article for the same journal. She declared, “to build a great nation, first build great homes.”¹⁷ Such an attitude was not limited to the superficial means of applying methods of scientific management in the home; the link between the nation and the home was a central feature of nationalist ideology.

Target Audience—Defining the Modern Housewife and Others

While the relationship between the modern home and nationalism was not without its critics, defining the “modern woman” was the subject of heated debate in Ireland and elsewhere in the early twentieth century. Social conservatives in particular were concerned by what they perceived to be a threat to the family dynamic as younger women tended to embrace independence, challenge societal norms, and participate in the materialization of culture. Mirroring the image created by advertisers and providing them

¹⁴ “Letter to Nora,” *Sinn Fein*, 19 May 1906, quoted in Bourke, 268.

¹⁵ Bourke, 268.

¹⁶ “President Cosgrave’s Message to our Readers,” *Ideal Irish Home Journal*, 21 September 1925: 5.

¹⁷ Mrs. Kevin O’Higgins, “This Article Emphasises the Need for Scientific Management in Home-Making,” *Ideal Irish Home Journal* (May 1926) 1, no. 6: 277.

with inspiration, women actively shaped what it meant to be modern with new hairstyles, fashions, and lifestyles. Promoters of the Shannon Scheme had to confront both the desire of these women to be modern and the reality that many people in Ireland were anxious about what this would mean. Priests, community leaders, and private citizens were outspoken about women's attempts to model the iconic "modern woman," for better or for worse. Some commentators, including A.V. Hart, used sarcasm to dismiss the anxieties expressed in newspaper columns about the effects of modernity on women. Writing in response to a series of letters that appeared in the *Limerick Leader* in the fall of 1927, Hart ironically noted, "only a mere woman can appreciate the idealism that prompts these gentlemen to attempt, through the channels of wonderful prose, to li[f]t woman out of the mire of modernity and to warn the girls of Limerick that honey-mouthed monster, 'the modern world,' who stalks about seeking fresh victims."¹⁸ The fact that this article appeared in the regional paper that served the population living around the Shannon Scheme is relevant. It indicated that, even in the heartland of Ireland's most modern venture, there was tension about the relationship between gender roles and modernity, so selling the Scheme required tact.

Those who supported the project could not rely on the candid approach taken by people like Hart for it had the potential to alienate future consumers who may have been more amenable to the modernity of electricity even if they were opposed to the representation of the "modern woman." However, they also had to consider how to make electricity appeal to their audience since women were the primary consumers for the home, and other advertisements already used the appeal of the modern to market

¹⁸ A.V. Hart, "The Modern Woman—Man's 'High Idealism'—A Contribution in Sarcastic Vein," *Limerick Leader*, 14 September 1927.

products, like cosmetics and clothing, to them. Therefore, electricity advertisements in Ireland appealed to the modern woman who used current from the Shannon Scheme in ways that reinforced the family and her traditional place in the home.

Promoters often used electricity in these campaigns as a synonym for the modern, distancing their messages from the widely feared negative interpretations of modernity because “their” modern woman remained focused on the duties of a housewife. For example, the ESB captured the essence this balance between tradition and modernity in its ad “A Valiant Woman.”¹⁹ According to the ad,

The successful management of a home under modern conditions is a task to call forth the utmost valour in the modern woman. High cost of living, inadequate income, complex household duties, shortage of domestic help, wide field of interest outside the home, reaction against the drudgery of old-fashioned home-work—a pretty problem and where is its solution? *Electricity*.²⁰

This was a strategy used by the ESB for several years because it allowed promoters to posit electricity as a solution to the problems of modern life, which were not necessarily glamorous or appealing. Here, the phrase “modern conditions” was used to mean contemporary issues that were not necessarily unique to the 1920s or 1930s. Upon closer examination, these problems were only modern in the sense that people at the time experienced them, when in fact, almost any generation could lay claim to the woes described. Nevertheless, electricity was presented as the means by which women could tackle these modern issues: confronting modernity on their own terms, rather than passively responding to it. When the ad went on to describe electricity as “the modern help for the modern woman in the modern home,” it was clear that the ad men interpreted

¹⁹ “A Valiant Woman,” ESB advertisement, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

²⁰ Ibid.

electrical current in a limited capacity—these women and these homes were made modern because of electricity, while the social meaning of both remained unaltered. The difference then between a home and a modern home or a woman and a modern woman was whether or not the former was wired and the latter used electricity as an aid for housework. Just as the sense of home was not changed by this, neither was the understanding of the modern housewife—and unlike the stereotype of the “modern woman,” norms presented in these advertisements were reinforced rather than challenged. The modern woman of Ireland’s electrical age was remarkably traditional and, in many ways, the antithesis of all that was worrisome about the ideal “modern woman” presented elsewhere.

Promoters of electricity usually targeted a specific type of housewife in their campaigns, but women of all social classes felt pressure from the demands of modern life and were affected by the lack of industrial development prior to the Shannon Scheme. Nevertheless, women on the farm were only occasionally the subjects of electricity propaganda. The *Star* reported that “there is a new gleam of hope in the eyes of hundreds of husbandless Irish colleen[s] [whose] hopes are rising at the dawn of a new era in the country, when work will be plentiful again, the emigration drain on the country’s manhood stopped, and the exile will come back to share in the prosperity.”²¹ In addition, forty years after the scheme’s completion, the video “40 Light Years From Parteen” reminded its Irish viewers that “looking back today, the farmer’s wife recalls how life has changed for her as she remembers how her mother slaved away to keep home and farm

²¹ *Star*, 7 September 1929.

going.”²² The potential for electricity to change the pattern of emigration (making more marriages possible) and ease the chores of women on the farm was also included in the promotional campaign directed towards the entire agricultural community.

By focusing its advertisements on an audience of women who were already housewives or had ambitions to become housewives, the ESB ignored the other significant role of women in nationalist ideology: motherhood. One of the few advertisements that depicted women in their capacity as mothers was “Light! For Your Child’s Sight.” The advertisement showed a child doing homework by the light of an electric lamp. Though the illustration depicted a child, the advertisement was targeted at mothers, who were warned that “your child’s sight is a precious thing, and once injured the injury can never be undone.” Not only would electric light prevent children from straining their eyes while reading, but “there may be no heavy shadows and no badly lighted corners,” for youngsters to injure themselves.²³ Other advertisements that included children featured them playing alone in their bedrooms and pressed that women have their homes wired to prevent nursery fires. The relative lack of attention paid to women as mothers, however, appears to reflect a greater emphasis on other duties women performed in the home, and that emphasis was not necessarily representative of a shifting reality. Bourke noted that for women in the private sphere, “much less time was spent on child care than on cleaning and cooking.”²⁴ However, she further articulated that “the movement of women into the household allowed more time to be devoted to child-

²² “40 Light Years From Parteen.”

²³ *Star*, September 1930. At this time, the *Star* was published monthly.

²⁴ Bourke, 226.

rearing.”²⁵ The ESB could have argued that electricity also would increase time mothers spent with their children through the use of labor-saving devices. Yet, as the advertisement implied, spending time with children was not identified as a promotional strategy. Rather, children were involved in unsupervised activities, including reading and wandering in dark passageways. Identifying ways in which electricity would be of particular interest to mothers was less useful than indentifying tasks associated with housewifery. Perhaps advertisers assumed that electricity’s primary functions in the home for heating, lighting, cleaning, and cooking purposes were shared by all women working in the home, regardless if they were mothers.

The ads for the consumption of electricity in the home rarely included men. But when they were portrayed, the ads normalized the ways in which men were supposed to behave at home. In a rare ESB ad directed toward a male audience, the illustration depicted a young man reading by the light of an electric lamp. Unlike advertisements intended for a female audience, “Light! For Your Own Comfort” emphasized the application of electricity to tasks that were familiar to a male audience. It stated that comfort could be guaranteed “for reading by the fire—for writing in a corner—for working in the garage—for negotiating stairs and passages—for shaving in the bathroom—for reading in bed—there is all the difference in the world between a light that is just anywhere and a light that is placed exactly where you want it.”²⁶ The ESB was also using gender stereotypes of masculine behavior in its ad “Science and Sense,” which featured a male scientist laying out the “basic facts [for] any reasoned attempt to arrive at

²⁵ Ibid, 228.

²⁶ *Star*, October 1930.

an ideal heating system. Unlike ads which featured women, no specific mention was made of the home, but rather the heating of generic “rooms and buildings” came through the application of science. The masculine nature of the ad was also enhanced by rhetoric that paralleled the depiction of males as the rational and scientific sex. For example, the ad stated, “Science is defined as ‘knowledge systematized’ and Sense as ‘discernment: understanding: soundness of judgment: reason.’” Any of these terms would have been appropriate to describe men in general at the time, revealing a conscious effort on the part of advertisers to market electricity to men and women in different ways.

While men could actively participate in the placement of electric outlets or heating systems to ensure their comfort, women did not usually attain the same level of decision-making power. For example, in a discussion of wiring houses, one writer noted that “the housewife should also have sufficient of those little wall power stations known as ‘convenience outlets,’ so that she will not wish that wire were made of elastic or that step-ladders opened and shut like men’s opera hats. The convenience obtained from a sufficient number of outlets means a great deal of labour saved, and it ensures greater leisure for the housewife.”²⁷ It was a man’s job to make sure that his wife did not have to “wish” for electric outlets to be placed in the correct location for her to complete her household chores. Instead, as another newspaper article noted

While this work of harnessing the Shannon is in progress, the aim of the housekeeper must be to have her home ready to ‘take the current when it serves.’ It is not the woman’s role to inquire into the size of the wires which supply the current to her house. Her job must be to figure out what appliances and fixtures she will want immediately and make allowance for future needs. She must then see that the house is fitted with sufficient wall-plugs or outlets to make the use of this equipment convenient.²⁸

²⁷ *Star*, 26 January 1929.

²⁸ *Star*, 6 April 1929.

In order to ensure that the house was properly wired, this advertisement allowed far greater agency than most to women in dealing with the technical arrangements and electricians.

If farmers' wives, mothers, and men were generally absent from the promotional campaign to increase the use of electricity in the private sphere, often middle-class, urban housewives played a critical role in shaping some perceptions of the "modern woman" in Ireland. Promoters of the Shannon Scheme focused on national interests, including the role of women in the new state, in order to suggest that Cumann na nGaedheal was upholding the conservative—and Catholic—views that influenced Irish nationalism. This link was strengthened by an association with religious rhetoric that defined appropriate roles according to strict gender divides. For example, at a Lenten lecture series in 1925, Rev. P. O'Donoghue, S.J., spoke in Limerick on "The Worker at Home" and based his ideal model on the home of Nazareth.²⁹ He acknowledged that "men build houses, but women build homes," and, based on this premise, he placed the onus of marital stability on women since "the success or failure of married life depends ultimately on the wife and on the home which she creates." According to O'Donoghue, the wife in the home "shall be the heart and soul of it, the very 'angel of his house.'" He suggested that the husband needed to be more considerate of just how boring his wife's daily life was, for she "has to remain indoors day after day in the same surroundings, and so she cannot get away from the little trials and worries of the house." O'Donoghue believed that "the perfect wife, the perfect housekeeper, has raised up womanhood from a state of slavery to the dignity of a

²⁹ "The Sanctuary of Home," *Limerick Leader*, 13 April 1927.

queen enthroned in the house.”³⁰ So despite the fact that his conservative conception of women’s rightful place within the home limited their roles to a lackluster existence, O’Donoghue elevated their place as homemakers to something to be honored and praised.

Promoters suggested that electricity supported women behaving according to accepted gender roles, creating the ideal spouse for Irish men. For example, in the ad, “An Angel, a Beauty, and a Cook!” the Electricity Supply Board claimed these to be “the **ABC** of a man’s ideal woman!” (See Figure 7.1). The advertisement went on to claim,

We offer the electric range as a step towards the realization of this modest ideal. Angelic temper is hard to sustain if cooking makes you ‘all hot and bothered.’ **ELECTRIC COOKING IS COOL.** Beauty can only be kept if your work is done under good conditions, and so easily that you do not continually feel tired. **ELECTRIC COOKING IS EASY.** Cooking is judged by results—and for amateur and skilled cook alike the heat-regulation is all-important. Electric cooking gives the best results.³¹


In a Lenten lecture delivered by Rev. C. Doyle, S.J. at the Church of St. Francis Xavier on “The Making of a Home,” he discussed the ideal woman and used language reminiscent of this advertisement. According to the Jesuit’s lecture, “Some men, when asked why they never married, would answer that they had not yet seen their ideal woman. They seem to want a combination of cook, angel, and goddess. The girl to marry was the girl who had the qualities to make a happy home. He advised young men not to marry masculine-minded women, or flirts, or a woman who was not religious.”³² Presumably, a “masculine-minded” woman would be one who sought an education in

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “An Angel, a Beauty, and a Cook!” *Star*, 10 May 1930.

³² “The Marriage Market—Advice of Eminent Preacher,” *Clare Champion*, 3 March 1928.

fields traditionally reserved for men, and was thus seen as neglecting her proper feminine role within the home.



an **A**ngel
a **B**eauty
and a **C**ook!
This is the **GO** of a man's ideal woman

We offer the Electric Range as a step towards the realization of this modest ideal. Angelic Temper is hard to sustain if cooking makes you "all hot and bothered."

ELECTRIC COOKING IS COOL.

Beauty can only be kept if your work is done under good conditions, and so easily that you do not continually feel tired.

ELECTRIC COOKING IS EASY

Cooking is judged by results—and for amateur and skilled cook alike the heat-regulation is all-important.

ELECTRIC COOKING GIVES THE BEST RESULTS

We are offering a most attractive series of Electric Ranges on Hire Purchase Terms. If you will call to the Demonstration Kitchen at our Showrooms, 25 St. Stephen's Green, our Home Service Experts will be glad to show you the Ranges. You can arrange to attend a free demonstration at our Grafton St. Showrooms.

ELECTRICITY
SALES SHOWROOMS
(Operated by the Electricity Supply Board)
25 ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN, DUBLIN

Figure 7.1 "An Angel, a Beauty, and a Cook!" *Star*, 10 May 1930.

Conversely, women who did not use electricity as an aid in the home ran the risk of failing to live up to the standards of an ideal, charming housewife. For example, an ESB booklet entitled “Why do you sigh?” scolded those who washed clothing the old-fashioned way for “how foolish of the woman to persist in undermining her health and making herself for one day at least, a disagreeable companion.”³³ The answer, as per usual, was that electricity would save the day because it “seems to be solving every one of the problems of domestic work.” Advertisements such as these reinforced the ESB’s identification of women as housewives or potential housewives. The belief that the majority of Irish women were or desired to be housewives drove the ESB to focus on common perceptions of what an ideal wife should be in its electricity campaigns—beautiful, youthful, charming, and efficient.

Class and Means—Narrowing the Female Audience

Targeting a female audience not only required promoters to negotiate concerns about nationalism, modernity, and religion, but they also needed to appeal to a particular group of women who were primarily middle-class, urban, and married or at least interested in marriage. Similar to their use of the term “farmer,” promoters of electricity cast a wide net to argue that as many women as possible would be prime beneficiaries of the power offered by the Shannon Scheme. However, using ambiguous language allowed the ESB to mask the fact that the benefits of electricity initially would not be evenly distributed. Certainly, class was a major difference that divided women in Ireland in the early twentieth century. But in the ad “For Cottage or Castle in the Service of All,” the ESB downplayed the class distinctions that divided women. This advertisement was

³³ “Why do you sigh,” ESB booklet, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

clearly playing off of middle class women's hopes to raise their standard of living. Although they could not likely afford domestic servants, these women were told that "Electricity is the perfect servant," since "however big or small your house you want the best service in it . . . however big or small your income you want the best value for your money."³⁴ These themes were echoed in another ESB ad featuring an illustrated booklet "The House you Want." Here, the ESB claimed that there were "a thousand different visions in a thousand women's dreams! Great House, little house—old house, new house—tall house, low house—house in a flowering garden, house in a city square—as many women as there are in the world."³⁵ Class distinctions were also deemphasized by *Model Housekeeping*, which told its readers in a Christmas article that "you can be sure that your electrical gift will be keenly appreciated by the busy housewife or the lady of leisure or the bachelor-woman who is lucky enough to receive it."³⁶

It is unlikely the ESB or other promoters had affluent women in mind when considering their campaigns to sell electricity, since many of these women already had access to electricity from smaller supply companies, over which the ESB only later assumed control. Even though the number of servants was declining during this period, elite women typically did not do housework themselves, but rather had servants who did most of the chores. The benefits these women received from electricity were more indirect than those of middle class women. For example, ESB advertisements depicting women as slaves to their household duties were not aimed at women who were wealthy

³⁴ *Star*, 31 August 1929.

³⁵ "The House you Want," ESB advertisement, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

³⁶ "Christmas in the Electric Homes," *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 2 (Nov. 1929-Oct. 1930): 77.

enough to have others do their work for them. Nevertheless, the ESB did recognize the fact that electricity in wealthier homes was limited mostly to lighting and that there was a market for labor-saving devices. It is equally unlikely that lower class women were the targets of ad campaigns given that their household incomes were insufficient to include the additional expense of electricity. Instead, the ESB claimed that “for the first time it is possible for the woman of moderate means to run her own home efficiently and economically without slaving from morning to night” as a result of the electricity provided by the Shannon Scheme.³⁷

The female audience for electricity advertisements also differed considerably based on where they lived. Urban women, especially those living near Dublin, were more familiar with electricity and had greater prior access to power generated by local plants than did rural women. Even so, Dublin lagged behind other major cities in Europe in terms of the number of electrified homes. According to a government publication, “in Dublin City there are 40,000 houses, of these only 13,000 or less than 1/3 have electricity installed. Cork has a population of 76,000 and has only 3,500 electricity consumers i.e. roughly 23% of the possible number. Limerick has a population of 6,850 and 620 electricity consumers or 9% of the possible total.” However, the same document claimed that 87% of homes in Amsterdam and 70% of homes in Vienna were hooked up to electricity.³⁸ Even though these statistics suggest that electricity was far from universal in large urban areas, one writer reflected the ESB’s ambitions for rural electrification by predicting that “the women living in the small towns will be able to make their homes as

³⁷ *Star*, 4 May 1929.

³⁸ “The Shannon Scheme,” Government publication, [n.d.]: Patrick McGilligan Papers, UCDA P35/10.

attractive and as easy to manage as city homes. They will be able to use the most modern of labour saving appliances and to command the same leisure as the city woman.”³⁹

However, as Mary Daly noted, “the contrast between the attention given to rural water and rural electrification and the slow rate of improvement in rural water supplies reveals much about the status of women in rural Ireland at this time.”⁴⁰ Though Daly’s study focused on the decades following World War II, her point remains relevant in the present context because this trend was still obviously prevalent in Ireland forty years after the launch of the Shannon Scheme.

Health, Beauty, and Youth

With a clearly defined audience of middle-class, urban housewives, the ESB structured its advertising campaign according to personal benefits, such as health, beauty, youth, and greater leisure time, that were perceived to be of particular interest to this group of women. Described by *Honesty* as an “eminent and widely known health lecturer,” Dr. Woods Hutchinson (who also preached the benefits of eugenics) argued that health and housework went hand-in-hand: “the healthiest women are those who do housework, and that the idle, frivolous women are usually unhealthy.”⁴¹ However, advocates of electricity proposed that this work could be made more beneficial to a woman’s health if old methods were swapped for electric appliances. For example, one way in which electricity could improve a woman’s health was to replace coal used for heating and cooking purposes. Coal was not favored by the Free State government

³⁹ *Star*, 11 May 1929.

⁴⁰ Mary Daly, “‘Turn on the Tap’: The State, Irish Women, and Running Water,” in Valiulis and O’ Dowd, 218.

⁴¹ M. G. “The New Woman and the Marriage Problem,” *Honesty* 5, no. 111 (9 April 1927): 9.

because Ireland had to import most of its supply from Great Britain. In turn, the ESB told women that coal was economically less advantageous than electricity, and that it was hazardous to their health. For example, one advertisement stated that “from the standpoint of health, comfort and efficiency, greater pains should be taken in equipping the kitchen with adequate wiring than any other room in the house. ‘Convenience outlets’ should be provided for the electric iron, fire, grill, cooker, kettle, etc., so that labour may be saved in this department—the workshop of the home.”⁴² Coal fires also contributed greatly to soot in the home, and women read that “health and cleanliness go hand in hand, and nothing is more calculated to keep the home spotless than a complete installation for the use of electricity.”⁴³

Promoters emphasized cleanliness of the home in yet another way, claiming that electric cleaners were more efficient and thorough at removing dust than were traditional methods. An article in *Model Housekeeping* warned that “dust is the enemy of the housewife.”⁴⁴ It went on to outline that “dust creates work, in sweeping and cleaning, and is one of the most dangerous causes of disease.” Informing its readers that it was necessary to “banish dust from the home,” the journal speculated that “it may be dust, which harbours and breeds germs, that is the real cause of children’s colds, or mother’s influenza.”⁴⁵ In fact, according to an article about women in *Honesty*, some experts believed that simply by performing household chores, women would be better able to

⁴² *Star*, 26 January 1929.

⁴³ *Star*, 15 February 1930.

⁴⁴ G. Baseden Butt, “Keeping the Home Clean,” *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 1, (Nov. 1928-Oct. 1929,) 179.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

maintain their health. For example, the article stated, “we know that a sensible woman is queen of the house as she is queen of a man’s heart, and Dr. Woods Hutchinson, the eminent and widely known health lecturer, has stated that the healthiest women are those who do housework, and that the idle, frivolous women are usually unhealthy.”⁴⁶

One newspaper article stressed not only cleanliness and convenience, but also noted another factor of particular interest to women: the costs of electricity:

Electric light is the most satisfactory artificial light because of its convenience and cleanliness. You switch it on and the flood of light is instantaneous. You switch it off with the comfortable feeling that it is there again at the touch of the switch. You escape the worry of finding a match—the work of cleaning up the matches used—the groping in the dark to find your way to the fitting—the fumes and smoke that accompany other lighting methods. And for the cost of the match you have saved you can light an average room with a 40 watt lamp for half an hour.⁴⁷

Electricity would not only improve a woman’s health, since she would no longer breathe in the smoky air and be near the heat of a coal burning stove, but it would also help her keep her house clean and affordably replace coal. As the primary domestic consumers, women who did not have electricity in their homes were understandably concerned with the cost of using the current. The expenses of electricity were often explained to women in terms of how much work could be done on household tasks with which they were already familiar. For example, the ad “Electricity is so cheap!” told women that “at the new rates issued by the Electricity Supply Board that for 1d. you can do 2 ½ to 3 hours of ironing with the ease and safety and comfort that only Electric ironing gives.”⁴⁸ Women were told that “money spent on wall outlets in every room is money well spent, because it

⁴⁶ “The New Woman and the Marriage Problem,” *Honesty*, 9 April 1927, 9.

⁴⁷ *Star*, 5 October 1929.

⁴⁸ *Star*, 26 October 1929.

is an insurance on your comfort and happiness.”⁴⁹ Another ad encouraging people to “Come and See Electricity House,” claimed that “electricity lightens labour, and saves time and money in the modern home.” It also stated that electricity was “the best and cheapest household help.”⁵⁰

The ESB also identified maintaining youth and beauty as major interests of Irish housewives, and much of its advertising portrayed electricity as the key solution to these age-old concerns. In its ad campaign, the ESB continually referred to electricity’s potential to improve women’s skin, hair, health, and overall appearance as a result of less stress and labor. Unlike the material benefits invoked to persuade farmers to use electricity on their farms, the ESB’s strategy in promoting electricity to women focused on its personal benefits. The ESB encouraged women to “take no chances with your youth, your looks and your health. Every woman spends a certain amount of time on the care of her skin and hair—and thousands of women counteract all the time thus spent by working in hot stuffy kitchens over smoky fires or hot smelly stoves.”⁵¹ Instead, the ESB presented electricity as a remedy in ads like “Electrify Your Home,” which promised women that “for the first time it is possible for the woman who works at home to cook without broiling her face, wash without smothering in steam, clean without swallowing dust.”⁵² In other advertisements, women were faulted for compromising their beauty if they chose not to live in electrified homes. For example, one ESB ad informed women,

⁴⁹ *Star*, 18 May 1929.

⁵⁰ *Star*, 12 January 1929.

⁵¹ *Star*, 2 August 1930.

⁵² “Electrify Your Home,” ESB advertisement, published in *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 1, (Nov. 1928-Oct. 1929), 246.

“you’re losing beauty unless you’re using electricity. Beauty follows naturally on the use of the electrical method of housekeeping.”⁵³ Not only was this correlation natural, but “beauty comes to the housekeeper through increased leisure, increased peace of mind and increased pride in the perfection of her home.” Electricity was given added appeal in these kinds of advertisements because they spoke directly to women’s concerns about their own femininity and personal quests to remain beautiful. This was a ubiquitous practice in the marketing world—everything from night creams to pantyhose was linked to beauty, and its inclusion in campaigns to sell anything powered by electricity was both in line with contemporary advertising techniques and an early indication of how electricity would be promoted based on gender for decades to come.

Beauty was also the main theme of the ESB’s first booklet designed to demonstrate the ways in which electricity could be used in the home (See Figure 7.2).⁵⁴ Titled “Aids to Beauty in Distress,” this piece of promotional literature explicitly tied a feminine concern with appearance to selling electricity from the Shannon Scheme. The booklet also laid out the ways in which “electricity solves the problem of the home.” Posing the questions that the ESB assumed were on the minds of many women, the booklet speculated

How shall woman’s work be done so that she shall continue to give efficient service while conserving her youth and energy and beauty? How shall her work be done so that she shall have leisure to enjoy her home—to rest and improve her beauty—to read and improve the beauty of her mind—to think and act and speak restfully to those about her, so that the home shall be a shrine of peace in which she can mould and influence the minds and lives of her children? How shall this be achieved? The answer is: *By Electricity*.

⁵³ “You’re Losing Beauty Unless You’re Using Electricity,” [n.d]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

⁵⁴ “Aids to Beauty in Distress,” ESB booklet, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

The use of the phrase “woman’s work” in many of these advertisements demonstrated that this was synonymous with housework and followed traditional interpretations of gender roles.

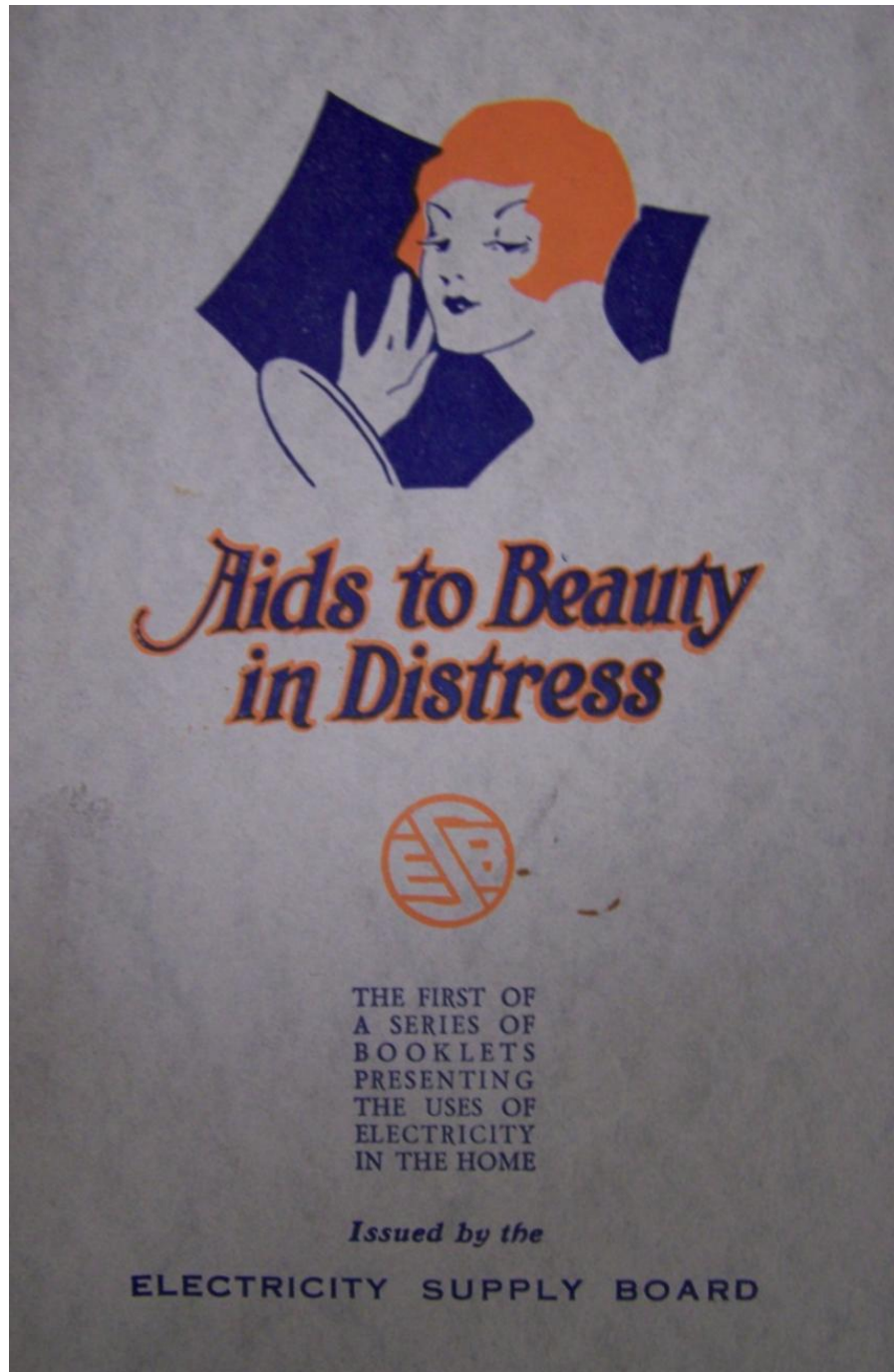


Figure 7.2 “Aids to Beauty in Distress,” ESBA booklet, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

Those with a vested interest in selling electricity proclaimed that in addition to maintaining the beauty of housewives, the current from the Shannon could be put to use in keeping them young. In “Women Who Stay Young” (See Figure 7.3), the ESB declared,


In times long past wise men have sought the elixir of life that they might enjoy perpetual youth. Wise men have not found it, but they have found something else. They have discovered how to use electricity so that the woman who does her own house-work may retain her youth for many years—may have leisure for the pursuits of youth—may have in her work the freedom from worry and the pride of accomplishment that preserves her the bright eyes, clear smooth skin, and joyous step of healthy, happy youth.⁵⁵

This adds an interesting perspective by attributing to men a desire to search for ways to keep themselves, not women, young. In addition, “wise men” are given credit for finding electricity that would retain the youth of housewives. In its description of the benefits to women, the ad focused on stereotypical female behavior, such as worrying and concern with physical appearance. Thus, while men had agency to affect the world around them, women were portrayed as passive beneficiaries of male accomplishments. The ESB dallied with hyperbole when it promised in its ad “Youth, Beauty, Health Are Yours for the Keeping,” because electricity would “save you from the fate of so many home workers who grow old and worn before their time.”⁵⁶ Instead, the ad enticed women who desired everlasting youth and beauty to get their homes wired because “the woman with an All Electric House can keep them [youth, beauty, and health] indefinitely,” yet another allusion to the fountain of youth. Using promises of youth to entice women to buy

⁵⁵ “Women Who Stay Young,” ESB advertisement, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

⁵⁶ “Youth, Beauty, Health Are Yours for the Keeping,” [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

electric current proved to be an effective strategy for the ESB since many of its other advertisements relied on similar themes.



**WOMEN
who stay young!**

In times long past wise men have sought the Elixir of Life that they might enjoy Perpetual Youth. Wise men have not found it, but they have found something else.

They have discovered how to use *Electricity* so that the woman who does her own house-work may retain her youth for many years—may have leisure for the pursuits of youth—may have in her work the freedom from worry and the pride of accomplishment that preserve for her the bright eyes, clear smooth skin, and joyous step of healthy, happy youth.

*LET ELECTRICITY
DO YOUR HOUSEWORK*

**ELECTRICITY
SALES SHOWROOMS**

Operated by The Electricity Supply Board
25 ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN, DUBLIN

Figure 7.3 “Women Who Stay Young,” ESB advertisement, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

The presumption that modern appliances reduced the strain of housework appealed to women because less stress meant they could retain youthful appearances. For example, the ad “The Year is Young and Youth is the Season of Promise,” most clearly connected youthfulness to labor-saving devices that might reduce the housewife’s work load. The ad claimed,

This year promises to you who work in homes a freedom from drudgery that you have never known. The year as it matures will fulfil for thousands of home workers the promise of its youth by placing at their command the service of Electricity for every household task. The use of Electricity for lighting, heating, cleaning, cooking, and hot-water heating will change the drudgery of household work into a joyful occupation and a proud achievement.⁵⁷

Irish women would maintain their youth, according to the ESB, if they did not have to devote so much time and effort to household duties.

Claims that electricity would improve personal beauty and maintain youth were representative of a larger promotional strategy that focused on progress. The idea that electricity from the Shannon Scheme would change Irish lives for the better also translated to the types of homes that women kept. Electricity became a necessity for the modern home, and in turn its adoption came to symbolize the ideal home. One observer noted that “the ‘ideal home’ is that in which one can live healthily and be as free as possible from those household worries which cause so much discomfort and drudgery. A house fitted up so that electricity can be used everywhere provides such a home.”⁵⁸

Improving the quality of life in the home became synonymous with progress. One article linked the appearance of the home with the pressures put on a woman’s physical appearance by claiming, “the fact is established that electrified homes are more charming

⁵⁷ *Star*, 4 January 1930.

⁵⁸ *Star*, 15 February 1930.

places in which to live, and women have more leisure and comfort when they get electricity to do the body-breaking, mind-destroying tasks which for so many centuries constituted woman's entire field of endeavour."⁵⁹ Though this statement clearly misrepresented the history of housework and women's roles both inside and outside of the home, it highlighted an attempt to make electricity appear to be the long-awaited answer to what were really more recent issues for women. As a result of such inventions as the vacuum cleaner and the electric iron, some argued that "a new era began to dawn for the housewife. To-day in most countries electricity is regarded as indispensable to domestic comfort, and, consequently, the 'Electric Home' is the new standard of luxury."⁶⁰ Luxury, typically an exclusively elite concept, was also introduced as a class equalizer in discussions of how electricity was going to change the status quo. For example, in the article, "Lightening the House Work," published in *Model Housekeeping*, the author claimed that electric egg-whisks and electric drink-mixers were not essential to the running of the home and "are in a sense luxuries."⁶¹ In a statement that summarized this approach to advertising, the author, appealing to the middle class in particular, noted, "with electricity it is possible to have that strange and rare paradox: an inexpensive luxury." The Shannon Scheme symbolized the Free State's ability to bring about progress and improve the lives of Irish men and women.

⁵⁹ *Star*, 6 April 1929.

⁶⁰ *Star*, 15 February 1930.

⁶¹ The Housekeeper, "Lightening the House Work," *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 1 (Nov. 1928-Oct. 1929), 181.

Selling it to Women—Promotional Strategies

I. Servants

For middle class families in the 1920s, being able to employ servants or maids to help with household duties was a symbol of their economic and social rank. Electricity could be harnessed to act as a servant for women who struggled to achieve this mark of status, either through lack of interested employees or the lack of funds to keep them on. For such potential customers, the ESB would argue that electrical devices could take the place of a maid by aiding in household chores and decreasing the amount of energy housewives expended. One advertisement stated,

There was no time in the history of the world when housewives did not wish for something which would ease the load of their domestic duties. Every page of the world's social history gives instances of the desire to pass these burdens on to the shoulders of others. Those blessed with the world's goods commanded their slaves, henchmen and servants—the poor had only the consolation of their wishes. But the last half century has introduced a servant willing to work for rich and poor alike. Electricity has been steadily loaded with work which formerly required human effort, and it has never failed.⁶²

In a newspaper article claiming that the “Shannon Energy Will Solve Servant Problem,” the writer noted that “the occupation of housekeeping is the oldest vocation in the world. It may not have always been house-keeping, but it was cave-keeping or hut-keeping, and they are all the same when viewed from the standpoint of drudgery.” The servant problem referred to the fact that fewer Irish women were willing to work in middle-class homes as servants than had in the recent past. The solution to “the steadily increasing difficulty of obtaining satisfactory human servants,” was that “electrical servants will be more and more in demand.”⁶³ According to promoters, electricity could act as a social

⁶² *Star*, 23 November 1929.

⁶³ *Star*, 6 April 1929.

equalizer among middle-class women across Ireland, since the housewife “will forget that at Ardnacrusha, which may be ten or a hundred miles from her home, there will be a great water-power station running ceaselessly to provide service at her beck and call.”⁶⁴

Prior to the 1920s, the majority of employed single Irish women worked as servants, but as Bourke has demonstrated, this trend was rapidly changing. She argued that “girls and women who, in previous decades, might have gone into service increasingly regarded it as an inferior type of employment.”⁶⁵ In 1925, “Garcon,” writing for *Honesty*, suggested that the old ways of doing housework, without modern devices, made domestic work “a drudgery instead of a science, as it should be, and to aggravate the trouble, it deters women with intelligence and ambition from seeking to earn their living in the domestic sphere.”⁶⁶ This was not an insurmountable problem though, for the writer indicated that “when houses are scientifically constructed, furnished, and fitted so as to involve a minimum of labor for the domestic worker, there will be no difficulty in getting girls to enter service.”⁶⁷

Similarly, Rev. Fr. Florence McCarthy, parish priest of Aughadown, Skibbereen, identified the tendency for domestic work to be looked down upon as problematic and attempted to counteract this perspective on female servants at the Technical Congress held in Limerick in 1928.⁶⁸ Speaking about the Shannon Scheme, McCarthy told the 200

⁶⁴ “Women Emancipated—Electricity in the Home,” *Limerick Leader*, 24 December 1928.

⁶⁵ Bourke, 69.

⁶⁶ “Garcon,” “Standardising Domestic Work,” *Honesty* 1, no. 26 (22 August 1925): 13.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ “Fallacies Exposed—Dr. McLaughlin and the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 June 1928.

delegates that he hoped “its introduction would help take the stigma of drudgery from their homes.” He went on to say,

I do hope...that one effect that the Shannon Scheme will have in our country will be to wipe out of our vocabulary two words, and these are ‘servant girl. Somehow or other it has come, unfortunately, to be looked upon as a stigma amongst our Irish girls, with the result that it is the very lowest form of employment that one of our girls will do, and when they take it up it is with a certain amount of opposition. Now that is the wrong outlook, and if the electrification scheme will help to get rid of that idea—the drudgery attached to domestic service—it will in our life have achieved one great result.

He speculated that the negative outlook on domestic service as a form of employment meant that “the Irish farmer cannot get domestic help, and the same applies to the towns.” Bourke has explained that this was because ““many an intelligent farmer’s daughter considers it a great comedown in the world, a disgrace even, to become a domestic servant. A sense of slavery and servitude seems to have attached itself to the idea of domestic service.’ Servants recognized their subservience. Tenant farmers objected to marrying former domestic servants.”⁶⁹ McCarthy suggested that the Irish public, in the wake of the Shannon Scheme, needed to conceptualize domestic servitude differently as an admirable profession and one that would prepare Irish girls and young women for housewifery. “But should a servant girl be looked down upon?” he continued, “Far from it. It is the highest form of service, because every girl in doing it is preparing to make a home of her own. Every girl should go through such a course, and the phrase, servant girl, should be got rid of, and she should be called lady’s assistant.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Bourke, 69.

⁷⁰ “Fallacies Exposed—Dr. McLaughlin and the Shannon Scheme,” *Limerick Leader*, 23 June 1928.

Despite McCarthy's support for women and domestic servants in particular, he ended his speech with a joke that denigrated women's work and undermined his earlier positive remarks by characterizing them as wasteful consumers. Comparing Irish women to women on the continent, who "worked equally as hard at the men," he claimed that "the women in Ireland were at present doing far less work than their mothers and grandmothers did." Deemphasizing the drudgery and workload of women in the home, which were central features to others who promoted electricity, McCarthy claimed that "In days gone by the women made all their own clothing—he did not mean dress, because there was a vast difference between clothing and dress (laughter) It was the dress that broke the husbands' back and not the clothing (renewed laughter)."⁷¹ The priest's comments reflected his desire to maintain the traditional roles of women in the home because he envisioned electricity as a resource that, instead of releasing women from household duties, would rather alter the form of training needed to complete those tasks. Appealing to husbands as wage earners also contributed to his conservative message and reinforced his belief that women needed to be trained for work in the home.

After McCarthy spoke at the Technical Congress, a Mrs. Kettle rose to address the crowd in what the newspaper called "a witty speech."⁷² Arguing that modern society presented greater demands on time and energy, she believed understanding the ways in which electricity could ease these pressures "concerned women a great deal more than men." Using humor to indicate gender differences in the application of electricity in the home, Kettle stated, "your cooking apparatus is more attractive which means a good deal

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

to a woman, and their [sic] cooking is better, which means a good deal to a man (laughter).”⁷³ According to the paper, she also took on some assertions made by McCarthy when “she said that in her opinion all men should serve an apprenticeship of one year to domestic work, and she did not agree that such work was looked upon by her sex as being menial. It was only looked upon in that light by the men. They did not recognise it on the same standing in their exams, and in the intermediate it was not reckoned as being a high subject.”⁷⁴ Unlike McCarthy who thought electricity would only change the way women were taught the same domestic skills, Kettle expressed what, at first, appeared to be a more feminist take on women’s work when she said, “every girl should be able to earn her own living, but if any woman wanted to choose a career her advice would be, let her never choose domestic service, because it was badly paid and was not a career at all. If she wished to be trained to do house work she could do so in her leisure hours by attending classes.”⁷⁵

However, Kettle, like McCarthy, upheld the notion that women desired to be housewives when she acknowledged that, “in her own opinion the proper equipment for a woman was that she should be economically independent, because if not she would not be able to choose a husband for whom she had given up her career to marry, because was she not a partner in the house (applause).” Even though Bourke’s study demonstrated a sharp decline in the number of women working outside of the home, the sentiment expressed here by Kettle would have appealed to those women who were flirting with the

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

notion of becoming modern and independent, but who nevertheless ultimately desired the security and social acceptance of housewifery. She continued to press that in cultivating “a spirit of partnership in the home life,” women, in some way, would gain equality with their husbands.

Kettle also claimed to disagree with the statement made by McCarthy in regards to women working less in Ireland, noting “that they had a far better type of woman to-day than their ancestors were.” Concluding her speech with a misquotation of Kipling’s *An Imperial Rescript*, which states “You can lighten the curse of Adam when you’ve lightened the curse of Eve,” Kettle actually reversed its meaning when she proclaimed, “if you are lightening the curse of Adam, you are lightening the curse of Eve.” Kipling’s original phrasing could be read to imply that bringing electricity into the home to lighten women’s household duties would benefit men who undoubtedly had to listen to complaints about these chores. However, Kettle’s rendition, which was received with laughter and applause, lacked context because she never spoke of men’s work or the application of electricity to the burden of tilling the soil.⁷⁶ Regardless, Kettle’s contribution to the Technical Congress reiterated that career aspirations for women were circumscribed by their apparent desire to become housewives eventually. For her, the independence of the modern woman was turned on its head; women could decide to relinquish this if they found the right husband. Similarly, equality with men was not to be expected in the public sphere, according to Kettle, but women could seek to achieve some level of parity with their husbands in the home. By describing the ceiling for women’s work in terms of marriage, both McCarthy and Kettle reflected conservative societal

⁷⁶ Ibid.

norms that tended to temper modernity with a strict adherence to traditional values—the very same strategy that the ESB and other promoters relied on in speaking about the Shannon Scheme to women as housewives in their ad campaigns.

The ESB also used strategies to promote electricity to women that depicted them as slaves to their housework in homes without electricity. The key to liberating these women from the toil of daily chores was electrification. The ad “Electricity Will Set You Free!” clearly relied on the rhetoric of slavery to entice women to have their homes wired. As a woman scrubbed the floor and dreamt of what it would be like to have the time to enjoy a cup of tea with others, the advertisement inquired,

If you are the slave of your home—If your day is one long succession of dreary tasks from which the only ease is the sleep of utter weariness—If you sometimes pause in your work to dream of green fields and running water—of waves washing on a sunny shore—of books and thought and talk in pleasant places—If you long for leisure to live—If you yearn for freedom from unending work—Electricity will set you free.

This advertisement connected electricity’s potential to solve Irish problems to the pastoral sentiments of Irish nationalism. In fact, the writer posited electricity as a means of freeing Irish women from the modern chores of housework in order to enjoy the outdoors. The ad further advised women to “not set a limit to your freedom. In a fully electrified home you will be free from work and worry.”⁷⁷ By suggesting that there was a connection between electricity and unlimited freedom, promoters were utilizing the language of nationalist themes that demanded similar liberties in a broader political sense.

Just as promoters used examples of other nations in Europe to convince farmers of the benefits of electricity, similar comparisons were invoked to show Irish women how

⁷⁷ *Star*, 20 July 1929.

their lives could change. An article in the *Star* specifically compared Ireland to Norway and stated that in the latter, “the effect [of electricity] on industry was immediate and far-reaching, but the effect on the home life of the nation was equally tremendous, and to us at any rate, more interesting.” Echoing the language of slavery, the article noted that because women in Norway “now had controlled heat their cooking problems were smoothed out and they were freed from bondage of the cook stove. Another miraculous event.” It went on to suggest that “we in Ireland are witnessing the completion of the Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme which will accomplish for women in this country what similar schemes have done for the women of Norway—freeing them from the slavery of heavy household work.”⁷⁸

More broadly, the ESB frequently invoked such rhetoric in its promotional campaign. For example, in an informational booklet, the ESB announced, “In homes served by electricity woman will not be the slave of the home, but its guiding genius. . . . The release of the Shannon power will make it possible for every Irish home to be served by electricity and for every home to be the *Home of a Hundred Comforts*.”⁷⁹ In another booklet, “Elbows or Electricity,” the ESB opened with a conversation between housewives and electricity: “‘Slavery was abolished . . . ‘! ‘Was it?’ say millions of overworked housewives. ‘Domestic slavery is being abolished’ says Electricity.”⁸⁰ The image of white, middle class women as slaves in their own homes was inconceivable and increased the appeal of electricity as a means to rectify such an injustice. Prior to the

⁷⁸ *Star*, 27 July 1929.

⁷⁹ “Aids to Beauty in Distress,” ESB booklet, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

⁸⁰ “Elbows or Electricity,” ESB booklet, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

Shannon Scheme, it made little sense to suggest that women were slaves if there was no recourse. Women were depicted as slaves of the home only after electricity from the Shannon was available to set them free.

II. Reduce Drudgery

The most consistent strategy used by promoters of electricity to women was to emphasize its capacity to reduce what was seen as the drudgery that was inherent in obsolete ways of going about household chores. As the Scheme was getting underway in 1925, *Honesty* claimed that domestic work in Ireland had failed to modernize up to that point and a visitor to an Irish home would “find a sweating woman laboring over a coal fire—a large well-equipped gas or electric cooking stove being still a rarity.”⁸¹ The writer of the article further described the “Iron-Age Methods” displayed in Irish homes:

He will find that domestic science is so unadvanced that vegetables and fruit are still peeled, cut up, or shelled by hand and knife; that bread is still labourously sliced with a clumsy knife, and that in many houses milk has to be skimmed by hand for the daily supply of cream; and that, generally speaking, mechanical contrivances for time saving in the preparation and cooking of food are unknown. If he penetrates further he will see that sweeping, scrubbing and cleaning are still carried on in the most primitive fashion involving a maximum of labour and time.⁸²

Ironing, cooking, and cleaning occupied much of a housewife’s day. Without the efficiency and convenience of electric power, women devoted their attention to cleaning clothes by hand, cooking in coal stoves without consistent temperatures, and sweeping the grime built up from using coal in the home. The *Limerick Leader* optimistically informed its readers that “by the pressure of a switch or button here and there the duties that now entail such drudgery in the kitchen will be performed by machinery in less time

⁸¹ “Garcon,” “Standardising Domestic Work,” *Honesty* 1, no. 26 (22 August 1925): 13.

⁸² *Ibid.*

and at less cost, and with more ease and comfort, than could by any stretch of the imagination be expected under the antiquated methods now generally in use.”⁸³ This depiction of methods that did not apply the use of electricity as outdated was echoed in another article printed the following month by the paper. Looking to the future, the newspaper predicted that “there will be a revolution in Irish kitchens. The modern Irish home will become a much different place from the home of the past.” This transformation to the modern home was to be rapid, according to the article, since “many electrical devices will be used in Irish homes and they will become so commonplace that the mistress will forget that they are actually the products of the last few years. She will go through her routine tasks without the old effort which resulted in aching muscles.”⁸⁴ Another article published in the *Limerick Leader* also warned that “a few hours of a hot summer’s day spent in the stuffy environment of the old-fashioned kitchen is guaranteed to leave most women prostrate. . . . The modern kitchen, however, equipped with electrical appliances lays no heavy tax on the housewife’s power.”⁸⁵ Listing “lighting, heating, cookery, laundry, cleaning, and a hundred and one other things that now make the housewife’s life anything but a bed of roses,” the *Limerick Leader* claimed that electricity could be applied to all of these tasks, and “it should be the aim of the Shannon Supply Board to bring all these and the other immense and varied possibilities of current in public in the way best calculated to ensure the largest measure of utilisation of power

⁸³ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 17 November 1928.

⁸⁴ “Women Emancipated—Electricity in the Home,” *Limerick Leader*, 24 December 1928.

⁸⁵ “Things That Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 3 July 1929.

from Ardnacrusha from the very beginning.”⁸⁶ Endeavoring to overcome antiquated means of housekeeping was a constant theme in electricity promotion.

Related to the rhetoric of slavery noted above, and connecting to the centenary of one of Catholic Ireland’s great political achievements, the ESB and the press described the anticipated completion of construction at the site as a moment of emancipation. For example, the *Limerick Leader* reported that “1929 will prove an epoch making year. . .for the housewife. . .[because] our women folk may claim that they are at last emancipated from drudgery by the introduction of electricity to the home.”⁸⁷ In a similar fashion, *Model Housekeeping* told its readers that “there is no reason why Irishwomen should not enjoy the same service [electricity in the home] when the Shannon power will be distributed throughout the country and the cost of electricity will be so low that nobody can afford to stick to the old-fashioned methods.”⁸⁸ Presenting the Shannon Scheme as a liberator from drudgery for Irish housewives allowed promoters to project a positive image of modernity.

Advertisements and promotional literature about the ways in which electricity from the Scheme would put an end to the drudgery of housework were typically straightforward, but they also clearly tended to exaggerate. This was an effective strategy because their messages were directed at an audience who would have been sympathetic to a bit of embellishment about household duties and little familiarity with the ways that electric appliances would transform work. For example, the ESB ad “Don’t wear yourself

⁸⁶ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 17 November 1928.

⁸⁷ “Women Emancipated—Electricity in the Home,” *Limerick Leader*, 24 December 1928.

⁸⁸ “Modern Service for the Model Home,” *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 1 (Nov. 1928-Oct. 1929), 408.

out!” told women to “let electricity do the work,” since household chores left a woman “tired in mind and body—weary to the soul of you” (See Figure 7.4). The advertisement depicted a woman holding her head in her hand while sitting at the kitchen table, wearing an apron with a dust rag in hand.

Your back and arms and shoulders ache from washing and polishing and cleaning. Your head aches from the heat of the kitchen fire, over which you have been cooking and near which you have been ironing. Your brain aches from the thought of the endless drudgery that is your life.

However, women could “take heart of grace,” since “Electricity will save you from drudgery—Electricity will do your work under your direction. Electricity will add hours of leisure to your day and years of pleasure to your life.”⁸⁹ The *Limerick Leader* similarly framed housekeeping as “the most exacting of all the professions,” but expressed hope that it “will be rendered far less arduous and entirely more pleasant and efficient by liberal use of electricity.”⁹⁰ In an article published in *Model Housekeeping* aimed at persuading women to purchase electric vacuum cleaners, the author claimed, “nothing gives more happiness than labour-saving equipment, for without such equipment, beautiful furniture and a nice home are just a weariness and burden.”⁹¹ Another article in the same magazine echoed these sentiments when it claimed, “in fact, with its [electricity’s] aid the housewife now escapes from her former deadening and depressing

⁸⁹ “Don’t wear yourself out!” Electricity Supply Board advertisement, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

⁹⁰ “Random Gossip,” *Limerick Leader*, 17 November 1928.

⁹¹ G. Baseden Butt, “Keeping the Home Clean,” *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 1, (Nov. 1928-Oct. 1929): 180.

routine of sweeping, cooking, fire-laying, washing, ironing, and finds that leisure, not routine is the real blessing.”⁹²



Don't wear yourself out!

LET ELECTRICITY DO THE WORK

Cooking, cleaning, washing or ironing can be a source of joy if you direct the work and Electricity does it. Have your home wired so as to get the best possible electrical service. Money spent on wall outlets in every room is money well spent, because it is an insurance on your comfort and happiness.

Tired in mind and body—weary to the soul of you!

Your back and arms and shoulders ache from washing and polishing and cleaning.

Your head aches from the heat of the kitchen fire, over which you have been cooking and near which you have been ironing.

Your brain aches from the thought of the endless drudgery that is your life.

Take heart of grace.

Electricity will save you from drudgery—Electricity will do your work under your direction.

Electricity will add hours of leisure to your day and years of pleasure to your life.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY BOARD
Showrooms: 25 ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN, DUBLIN

Figure 7.4 “Don’t wear yourself out!” Electricity Supply Board advertisement, [n.d.]:Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

⁹² “In my Electric Home,” *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 2, (Nov. 1929-Oct. 1930): 517.

III. Increased Leisure Time: Enjoying the Outdoors

Reinforcing rather than challenging existing understandings of gender roles, the promotional literature often emphasized tasks for which women were traditionally responsible. The selling point here was that electricity, according to promoters, could provide a heightened sense of accomplishment and enjoyment in these tasks. For example, one advertisement enthusiastically declared that electricity

Puts into the house a value far in excess of the small sum which it costs—value that will prove an inexpensive avenue to the important goal of domestic economy, and at the same time make life more enjoyable for the overworked housewife. With the complete electrification of the home the dish-cloth and the broom will cease to be her coat of arms, and home-making will be elevated to the high place it deserves.⁹³

Thus the place of the home in perceptions of Irishness remained unaltered, as it was seen as the place in which women made their most significant contribution to society in their capacity as wives and mothers. Electricity advertisements also suggested that women would find more enjoyment in their chores if they purchased electric appliances. The *Irish Home Journal* informed its female readers that labor-saving devices “also make work more interesting. This makes it seem easier. Work that is disliked is always unattractive, and therefore never seems easy.”⁹⁴ One ESB ad claimed that “little by little the running of the home may be changed from a daily round of hard work to a regular sequence of interesting occupations.”⁹⁵ The ESB booklet “The Housewife’s First Aid: Electricity for Cleaning and Other Domestic Appliances,” posited that “without an electric washer ‘wash day’ is the bane of the housewife’s existence. But with this

⁹³ *Star*, 26 January 1929.

⁹⁴ “Labour Saving in the Home,” *Irish Home Journal*, September 1928, 240.

⁹⁵ *Star*, 8 June 1929.

wonderful modern aid ‘wash day’ literally becomes a pleasure.”⁹⁶ The presumption behind this as is that women would perform the same tasks that they did before, but electricity somehow made those tasks more interesting or pleasurable. In fact, an ESB advertisement in the Christmas season of 1929 noted the novelty of electricity in Ireland since “thousands of people are now using electricity for the first time.” However, the newness or modernity of electricity produced by the Shannon Scheme was tempered by rhetoric that favored the commonplace: “they find it so clean and convenient that they will welcome any electrical appliance which provides an easy electrical way of doing a familiar task.”⁹⁷ In yet another marketing effort to sell appliances that season, the ESB supposed that an electric iron would make the perfect gift for any Irishwoman, since “ironing is one household task in which every woman is interested—and an electric iron makes this task a joy.”⁹⁸ Another advertisement for an electric iron suggested that the product “is a constant source of pride to the woman who works with it because no other iron can attain such exquisitely perfect work.”⁹⁹ The idea that women could somehow reclaim a sense of joy and accomplishment in their work was a persistent theme in ESB advertisements.

With less time devoted to chores, these women could also expect more leisure time than they had known before. According to one ad, this was a “right” of all women,

⁹⁶ “The Housewife’s First Aid: Electricity for Cleaning and Other Domestic Appliances,” ESB booklet, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA,

⁹⁷ “Here are Gifts,” *Limerick Leader*, 14 December 1929.

⁹⁸ “Whoever she may be,” *Limerick Leader*, 21 December 1929.

⁹⁹Ibid.

though generational issues separated modern women from those of the previous generation, who needed more convincing:

There can be no doubt but that electrical house equipment has introduced leisure and freedom to the housewife for the first time. There can be no doubt but that the older housewives have had to be converted to the use of this equipment. But the younger women, more highly educated in the most cases than were their parents, demand electrical household equipment as their right and due—and they must get it. This demand is world-wide, and it is with the purpose of satisfying the demand in the Saorstát that the Shannon Power Scheme is being developed.¹⁰⁰

In an ad called “Leisure,” the ESB described “the mistress of the home free from unnecessary toil—free from health-destroying fatigue—free to rest and read and recapture that sense of buoyant joy in life which comes from congenial work and compensating ease” (See Figure 7.5).¹⁰¹ The Shannon Scheme was directly referenced in the ESB ad, “The Stately Shannon Flows,” and women were reminded that “as it flows it works for you.”¹⁰² Accompanied by a picture of the works with power lines, the advertisement declared that electricity from the Shannon Scheme “gives you the chance to lessen your labour and double your leisure. . . . It gives you the chance that has only come to this generation—electricity for every household task.” In a similar advertisement featuring the weir, women across Ireland were united by electricity “Straight from the Shannon into your home,” since no matter where they lived, current from the hydroelectric dam would provide “energy and power that enable you to conserve your own energy and time, to produce better housekeeping results and to reduce housekeeping costs” (See Figure 7.6).¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ “The Electric Home, Leisure and Freedom for Irish Housewives,” *Star*, 6 April 1929.

¹⁰¹ “Leisure,” *Star*, 25 May 1929.

¹⁰² “The Stately Shannon Flows,” [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA,

¹⁰³ “Straight from the Shannon,” [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA



Leisure

THE house fragrantly clean. The laundered things crisp and snowy. The food easily and perfectly cooked. The Mistress of the Home free from unnecessary toil—free from health-destroying fatigue—free to rest and read and recapture that sense of buoyant joy in life which comes from congenial work and compensating ease.

ELECTRICITY

LIGHTS	COOKS	WASHES
HEATS	CLEANS	IRONS

with the highest degree of comfort and efficiency for the lowest expenditure of energy, time and money.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY BOARD
Showrooms : 25 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin

To enjoy the full benefits of electricity the home should be wired not merely for lighting, but also for the use of electrical appliances. This is the really essential factor which is usually forgotten. When your home is being wired, insist on it being adequately fitted. In that way only can you have perfect electrical service.

Figure 7.5 "Leisure," *Star*, 25 May 1929.

**Straight
from the
Shannon**

into your home. Immense reserves of energy—enormous supplies of power. Energy and power that you can direct in the performance of your housework. Energy and power that enable you to conserve your own energy and time, to produce better housekeeping results and to reduce housekeeping costs.

**USE ELECTRICITY
for every household task**

ELECTRICITY
SALES SHOWROOMS
(Operated by the Electricity Supply Board)

25 ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN & 39 GRAFTON ST., DUBLIN.

Figure 7.6 “Straight from the Shannon,” [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA

Such promotion raised many important questions about the role of women in the new, and increasingly modern, state. While the American journalist M. G. Palmer encouraged the Irish “to seize the opportunities which the Shannon Scheme has opened up . . . so as not merely to affect a material revolution, but also to bring about a new flowering of the Irish mind,” this sentiment clearly meant something different for Irish women than it did for Irish men.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, another writer optimistically proclaimed that “electricity has released women for ever from the everlasting struggle with dirt and darkness and victuals. It has given women the time and the strength to use the brains God gave them.” However, the same article noted that since electricity in other electrified nations, “has not built up industry to the point where [women] are needed, women are going in for cultural pursuits. Sports, flowers, reading, clubs, music and such things are filling in the hours electricity has given them.”¹⁰⁵ All of these cultural pursuits reflected rather conservative notions of acceptable behaviors for women in the public sphere. According to this example, it was only proper for women to “use the brains God gave them,” so long as that use did not conflict with usual gender roles. These women were encouraged to fill the hours of their day with flowers and music, not to pursue opportunities for personal independence or careers that would compete with those of men.

Similarly, the *Irish Home Journal* supposed that less time wasted on unnecessary work in the home meant more leisure for healthy outdoor exercise, more time for study,

¹⁰⁴ Palmer, “The Shannon Stirs New Hope in Ireland.”

¹⁰⁵ *Star*, 27 July 1929.

and more opportunity to help the children in work and play.”¹⁰⁶ According to the *Limerick Leader*, “housekeeping at all ordinary times is a burdensome and wearying task, but in summer the demands of the household are particularly trying [and it was] no wonder many a housewife feels her lot unbearable when she has to spend her day cooking and cleaning and washing while her soul aches for sunshine.” If one were to believe the *Leader*, this yearning to be outdoors was apparently a new development that coincided with the Shannon Scheme since “fifty years ago she may have been content, but now-a-days women agree with Stevenson that it is not life we enjoy but living. It is here electricity comes in.” The article claimed that electric cookers would not only promote cooler cooking in the summer months, but that women also would not have to “stand over it. . . . [and that] in the meantime a read beneath the sun in her garden makes the housewife very happy.” In addition to these examples, the *Limerick Leader* provided “many other ways in which electricity can give time to be spent out of doors,” in the hope that “by using electrical appliances intelligently and consistently the housewife will find that she has not only the leisure but the energy to enjoy summer as it should be enjoyed.”¹⁰⁷

Electricity’s capacity to allow women greater time to enjoy the outdoors was, according to promoters, based on several factors. Thus, an ESB advertisement in 1929 informed women that “your work will be easy, your home will be perfectly kept, and your long leisure hours can be pleasantly spent in using the money that electricity will

¹⁰⁶ “Labour Saving in the Home,” *Irish Home Journal* 3, no. 9 (September 1928): 240.

¹⁰⁷ “Things that Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 3 July 1929.

save you.”¹⁰⁸ Newspaper articles claimed that “by using electrical appliances intelligently and consistently the housewife will find that she has not only the leisure but the energy to enjoy summer as it should be enjoyed.”¹⁰⁹ Similarly, the ad, “Fresh Air and Freedom,” promised these benefits to women “all the summer for you if you make full use of electricity in your housework.”¹¹⁰ The *Limerick Leader* also suggested that as a result of the Shannon Scheme, “for the first time the domestic load has been so lightened that women are having a chance of resting on their oars and looking about them. They are realizing that the world is not bounded by the walls of their homes and that there are more interesting and elevated things to do than merely cook and clean and sew.”¹¹¹ These suggestions were vague and focused on the personal benefits women would experience if they had electricity installed in their homes. Clearly though, amusing oneself with the “interesting occupations” of household chores and relaxing outdoors in the summertime did not imply that women were to strive for greater political or economic equality with men. Instead, Irish housewives were to maintain their place in the private sphere in spite of the liberties offered by the Shannon Scheme.

This message was explicitly repeated in *Model Housekeeping*’s article “Making Time for Outdoor Sports,” authored by “Cora.” Marriage, according to the piece, kept women from enjoying the outdoors because they had to spend all of their time taking care of the home. However, this was a perspective that the magazine proclaimed was something of a bygone era: “Two decades ago marriage almost automatically shut out the

¹⁰⁸ *Star*, 17 August 1929.

¹⁰⁹ *Star*, 6 July 1929.

¹¹⁰ “Fresh Air and Freedom,” ESB advertisement, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

¹¹¹ “Things That Matter,” *Limerick Leader*, 20 July 1929.

young wife from the sports and activities of outdoor life, save for the occasional picnic or the annual holiday. Housekeeping then was a whole-time affair, well earning the tab that women's work was never done."¹¹² Emphasizing the link between electricity and the opportunity for married women to reclaim a sense of independence, the article continued,

The young wife of to-day enjoys more than the freedom of custom, for home ties are no longer a bondage. She has time for the tennis court, the links, and the open road. She can plan her pleasures and her outings with almost equal freedom to that of her unmarried sister at the office. This, of course is assuming that she is a modern young woman, alive to the advantages of introducing modern ideas in the planning of her home. Electricity has so simplified housekeeping that it is no longer a task.

A new generation of women in the 1930s was on the brink of limited change because, Cora contended, housewives would be able to spend their leisure time enjoying the outdoors.

The Truth about Labor-Saving Devices: To Use or Not to Use?

Freedom from drudgery and increased leisure time were based on the premise that labor-saving devices, such as electric washing machines, stoves, irons, and vacuum cleaners, would cut down on the amount of work women had to do in the home. One commentator stated that "every woman realises, either consciously or sub-consciously, the importance and value of domestic electric labour-saving, and comfort-inducing appliances."¹¹³ However, Daly has noted that "it is also apparent that the spread of labour-saving household gadgets has not necessarily brought a reduction in the number of hours devoted to housework. In the United States the average amount of time spent on

¹¹² "Cora," "Making Time for Outdoor Sports," *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 4 (Nov. 1910-Oct. 1932): 496.

¹¹³ *Star*, 23 November 1929.

housework actually rose during the first half of the twentieth century.”¹¹⁴ Daly attributed this phenomenon to the fact that “purchasing a washing machine simply meant that people washed their clothes more frequently; buying a vacuum cleaner meant a lower tolerance of dusty floors and a greater tendency to install fitted carpets.”¹¹⁵ However, contemporary accounts anticipated the impact of labor-saving devices optimistically. For example, the *Limerick Leader* thought that the adoption of such devices to reduce drudgery would be seamless because women would be eager to embrace the modernity of electricity. The newspaper predicted that “many electrical devices will be used in Irish homes and they will become so commonplace that the mistress will forget that they are actually the products of the last few years.”¹¹⁶ Regardless of whether or not labor-saving devices actually provided Irish women with less work and more leisure time, the fact is that promoters of electricity used such language in an effort to persuade women to have their homes wired.

However, when women refused to use labor-saving devices in their homes, promoters alleged that they alone were responsible for feelings of despondency in the home. For example, the journal *Ideal Irish Home* (later the *Irish Home Journal*), published an article asking “Are Women too Conservative?” and stated that “it has often been said that a woman’s interest in conservatism is responsible for much of her unhappiness.”¹¹⁷ Speaking of conservatism in its broadest sense to mean an affinity for the traditional, the article went on to say, “the average woman is afraid of change, old

¹¹⁴ Daly, ““Turn on the Tap,”” 208.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ “Women Emancipated—Electricity in the Home,” *Limerick Leader*, 24 December 1928.

¹¹⁷ “Are Women too Conservative?” *Irish Ideal Home* 1, no. 7 (June 1926): 441.

things are sacred to her and she dreads the fascination of the new. It matters not very often that the welcome of new things might mean the lifting of a burden from her shoulders. Curiously she prefers the burden she knows, to the simpler prospect of change.” Claims such as this indicated some of the challenges promoters of the Shannon Scheme faced when trying to sell electricity to women. According to the article cultural inertia was particularly problematic in home affairs since, “of recent years many labour-saving devices and gadgets have been placed upon the market, yet the majority of women refuse to be tempted. They still go down on their knees to scrub instead of using a long handled mop; they still use pans that require constant watching instead of the handier and more efficient double cooker.” The most interesting aspect about this article, however, was its interpretation of the motivation behind women’s conservatism and general lack of attention to modernity within the home. The author concluded that

Women make house-keeping a martyrdom. I wouldn’t care to suggest that the keeping of a home is an easy task. It isn’t. It’s a job that requires infinite tact and patience and intelligence of no uncommon order if it is to be accomplished with anything like perfection. But women deliberately make it more difficult than it really is. When help is offered they scoff and go about doing a thing in the most laborious possible fashion. Their work is never finished because they won’t take the trouble to plan it properly and choose labour-saving aids that are practical and good whilst at the same time being in reach of the average purse.¹¹⁸

By this reasoning, women’s conservatism was the only thing standing in the way of their saving themselves from drudgery largely because they did not want to give up complaining about how much work they had to do. “Until women manage to put their conservatism behind them and look upon labour-saving devices with tolerant and

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

unprejudiced eyes,” the article concluded, “housekeeping can be nothing less than drudgery.”¹¹⁹

This article concerning women’s conservatism prompted many readers to write in to the *Irish Ideal Home* with their own opinions on the matter. Ellen, who won the prize for the best response to the article, suggested that women’s conservatism was the fault of men’s conservatism and blamed the limited number of labor saving devices on the opposite sex:

It is true that women have never invented labour-savers for the home, but until recently women were not supposed to invent, or indeed even think very much. Men did the inventing, and it’s no tribute to them that so few aids to housekeeping were invented by them until recently. In any case it’s not fair to decide woman’s conservatism by labour-saving methods; they are but the product of very recent times, and man has not been any more willing to accept recent inventions in a hurry than women have.¹²⁰

Another writer, Miss McGleone, attributed women’s conservatism toward labor-saving devices to their concern with home finances and the expense of having homes wired for electricity. She noted, “owing to the fact that there is so little demand for them in this country, most labour-saving devices are expensive. Perhaps things may be better when the Shannon Scheme is in full swing.”¹²¹

On the other hand, J.T. Walsh sympathized with the original article on women’s conservatism and claimed that

Many women object to labour-savers because they actually like to make their work as difficult as possible. Make housekeeping pleasant and cosy, and a woman’s chief source of complaint is gone. She’d feel dull and desolate if she

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ellen, “The Man’s Part,” *Irish Ideal Home* 1, no. 10 (September 1926).

¹²¹ Miss McGleone, “The Fault of the Home,” *Irish Ideal Home* 1, no. 10 (September 1926): 441.

couldn't grouse about the labour of scrubbing the floor or the vagaries of the coal fire. The martyr instinct is inherent in every woman.¹²²

According to Walsh, women adopted this stance in order to control their husbands because "many women in relating their housekeeping worries, trade on a man's sympathy. There would be no sympathy forthcoming if they were provided with mechanical agents to help them out and lessen the burden." Unlike promoters who banked on women wanting to be freed from drudgery, Walsh concluded that, when it came to housework, women "are content to look upon it as a drudgery, and so long as this attitude persists labour-saving inventions will be neglected. It is necessary to train women to look upon housewifery as a profession. Otherwise, they'll remain, not merely conservative, but inefficient and stupid, where all household work is concerned."¹²³

While all of the other respondents published by the magazine identified themselves as women by using feminine prefixes or first names, Walsh's gender ambiguity allowed the writer to express a more critical view of housewives. The other women tended to blame men for their perceived conservatism, claiming that the hesitance to use electrical appliances was the result of their husbands' conservative control of the household budget. However, Walsh's contentions offered the misogynistic view that women purposely made chores drudgery and that they rejected labour-saving devices and electricity because they sought attention for the time spent on chores.

In taking a negative approach to address why some women might not use labor-saving devices, these readers were still providing support for a campaign to encourage women to use electricity in their homes. For example, instead of appealing to what

¹²² J.T. Walsh, "Woman as a Martyr," *Irish Ideal Home* 1, no. 10 (September 1926): 441.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

women wanted to be (healthy, beautiful, or young), writers like Walsh were turning the conversation towards what women did not want to be (inefficient and stupid). Walsh also alluded to a key point that others also emphasized: turning housewifery into a profession. However, before that could happen, the writer “Garcon” warned that deeper issues needed to be addressed:

It is useless to institute colleges and classes for domestic science until the real problem is attacked and people realise that there is no virtue in drudgery, either outside or inside the home, It is useless to complain on the one hand that women no longer take a real interest in domestic work, and on the other, that those who do run a house know nothing about anything else.¹²⁴

While “Garcon” sought to standardize domestic work, Grace Joyce called for all women to look on homemaking as a career.¹²⁵ She found that “most women [were] unhappy in their homes because they are inclined to regard their work as drudgery,” and believed that other professions would be more pleasant. For Joyce then, eliminating drudgery in the home was two-fold: labor saving devices could physically do the tasks required, but women also had to adjust their mindset about housewifery in general. To Joyce, there was a correlation between drudgery and intelligence: “The less intelligence she has the more inclined she is to look upon household work as drudgery.” The consequences of this perspective were particularly worrisome to Joyce, who feared that a woman who was not properly prepared to run a home “lets her home go, even as she sometimes lets her personal appearance go after marriage, and the results are disastrous.”¹²⁶ Reinforcing the fact that promoters of the Shannon Scheme intentionally targeted women who were

¹²⁴ “Garcon,” “Standardising Domestic Work,” *Honesty* 1, no. 26 (22 August 1925): 13.

¹²⁵ Grace Joyce, “Look on—Homemaking as a Career can make quite a difference in a Woman’s life,” *Irish Home Journal* 2, no. 12 (November 1926).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

housewives or were women planning to wed, Joyce concluded that “no woman should marry until she has taken the trouble to find out how to run a house. It’s not fair to herself—it’s not fair to her husband. If she doesn’t regard home-making as a high and honorable career she will be much happier single.”¹²⁷

The Educational Campaign and Women’s Participation

In an effort to professionalize homemaking and to educate women about the ways in which electricity could be used in the home, technical schools and other educators reached out specifically to women interested in formal courses on domestic science. As Chapter 3 explained, the Shannon Scheme sparked debates about technical education in Ireland, but there were a few notable differences regarding women’s courses specifically that will be noted here. This chapter has explored the tensions between women, modernity, nationalism, and homemaking, which were highlighted in discussions of how women should be educated and the types of skills they would need to possess as ideal housewives. As the Shannon Scheme neared completion, conservatism continued to dominate women’s education in Ireland and understanding how to incorporate the modernity wrought by electrification without overturning social norms proved to be a challenge the project’s supporters had to overcome. Brigid O’Higgins, writing in the pages of the *Ideal Irish Home Journal*, offered one possible solution—placing homemaking in the forefront of national regeneration through the adoption of “scientific” techniques. She supposed that “it is the young girls, the potential wives and mothers of the future, who will require to have a lively interest in the science of home-making—

¹²⁷ Ibid.

woman's supreme profession."¹²⁸ She went on to note that "it's the state's responsibility to see that the women of New Ireland receive a suitable, liberal, and technical education, for are they not the treasure houses of the nation's future? The need is cultivated, well-trained, healthy home-makers, plucky women, who, having visualised their vital mission, are prepared to take a sporting stand beside their men in the gigantic task of nation building."¹²⁹

Two years later, in an annual meeting of the Swinford Technical Schools, the Bishop of Achonry, Most Rev. Dr. Patrick Morrisroe, spoke on the education of girls in similar terms. He did not believe that the new Education Act of 1924 was sufficient because eight years of schooling was not enough for the Free State's young people. Bishop Morrisroe argued that "there was . . . a prejudice in places against domestic service. This was about as reasonable as the dislike in certain quarters to urge boys to go in for scientific agriculture. It was a gross error to suppose that brains are not required for domestic work." He further claimed: "Clever girls are indeed needed for the domestic hearth, and it will be all the better for national economics, as well as for workers themselves, when . . . it is realised that there is a great need for brains in the kitchen as there is in the university class-room." Referring to a common theme when discussing women's work, the bishop concluded that "as to household service being a drudgery or a dishonor, this idea is the offspring of false pride, and whoever kills it will do a service to the country."¹³⁰ Education was one way to "kill it," and one article published in *Honesty*

¹²⁸ Mrs. Kevin O'Higgins, "This Article Emphasises the Need for Scientific Management in Home-Making," *Ideal Irish Home Journal* (May 1926) 1, no. 6: 277.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ "Domestic Science—What Irish Girls Need," *Clare Champion*, 7 July 1928.

advised that “every girl who wishes to have a home some day should take out a domestic course in a technical school. . . .It is the woman with some little brains, method, and not a little foresight, who contributes to the making of the home.”¹³¹ Anxious that Irish women were neglecting their duty to learn about domestic science, Helen McConnell, an Irish emigrant who ran a seminary in Montana, wrote in to the *Saturday Herald*. The *Clare Champion* reprinted part of the article in which McConnell “expressed the opinion that the majority of girls of the present day could not properly boil an egg.” Just as Joyce thought the consequences of women failing in home making could be disastrous, cooking, according to McConnell, ““is a lost art in Ireland. I have heard competent medical authorities state that most of the dyspeptic ailments at the moment are attributed to defective cooking.””¹³²

Additionally, technical schools worked with the ESB to reach out to communities to put on special demonstrations with the goal of increasing the use of electricity in the home. In the spring of 1930, just after the completion of construction at Arndacrusha, the *Limerick Leader* reported that the “municipal technical schools under the auspices of the Electricity Supply Board,” were hosting several electric cooking demonstrations during the week. Experts delivered lectures each day of the week, except Saturday, and “all interested [were] cordially invited” to attend the afternoon or evening sessions. The paper indicated that “there was a very large following at the opening exhibition on Monday afternoon, which proved to be both interesting and educative.”¹³³ Demonstrations such as

¹³¹ “Of Interest to Women,” *Honesty* 10, no. 243 (19 October 1929): 11.

¹³² “Modern Irish Girls—An uncomplimentary Critic,” *Clare Champion*, 30 November 1929.

¹³³ “Cookery Exhibition,” *Limerick Leader*, 21 May 1930.

these were not unusual given the fact that the Home Service Department of the ESB regularly conducted cooking courses and other demonstrations in its showroom on Grafton Street. According to *Model Housekeeping*, these events were well-attended and those who had failed to enroll in the courses ahead of time were turned away since space was limited (See Figure 7.7).¹³⁴ Some of these courses taught women how to prepare entire meals using electric appliances, as the ESB ad “Another Matinee” described in detail (See Figure 7.8).¹³⁵



Figure 7.7 “In My Electric Home,” photograph, *Model Housekeeping* vol. 3, (Nov. 1930-Oct. 1931): 48.

¹³⁴ “In My Electric Home,” *Model Housekeeping* vol. 3, (Nov. 1930-Oct. 1931): 48.

¹³⁵ “Another Matinee,” ESB advertisement, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.



ANOTHER MATINEE
TO-MORROW the second Cooking Matinee will be presented by our Home Service Section at 3 o'clock in the Demonstration Kitchen at 25 St. Stephen's Green. Visitors will be very welcome, and we can promise they will enjoy the afternoon.



This menu will be demonstrated and discussed:—
 Roast Lamb and Mint Sauce,
 Seakale and White Sauce,
 New Potatoes,
 Gooseberry Tart,
 Strawberry Parfait,
 Griddle Scones.



ELECTRICITY
 SALES SHOWROOMS

(Operated by the Electricity Supply Board)

25 ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN, DUBLIN, AND BRANCHES

Figure 7.8 "Another Matinee," ESB advertisement, [n.d.]: Shannon Scheme Documents, ESBA.

Apart from formal schooling, women in Ireland also had other avenues to address their questions about electricity and learn new skills for using electricity to complete a variety of household duties. As the majority of ESB ads during this period pointed out, many people in Ireland were still not sure how the current provided power to electric appliances. In addition to newspaper advertisements, booklets sent to homes, demonstrations held at the Electricity Supply Board Showroom in Dublin, and travelling lecture tours, women also organized associations to educate the wider public on the uses of electricity in the home. Some of these lessons offered more advanced information to women, but others were far more basic and depicted a clear lack of knowledge on the part of consumers. For example, the advertisement, “Make your Home Modern!” depicted several electric appliances, including a vacuum and an iron, with the electric cords and plug-ins prominently displayed in the drawings.¹³⁶ Since later advertisements for appliances do not show the cords, this suggests that the audience for the ESB campaign still needed to be educated about how to access electricity supplied to their homes as late as 1929—they could not encourage women to have their homes wired if they did not know what being “wired” meant.

For many with questions about electricity, one of the most important people in their communities who was educated and they trusted for advice was the local priest. The population’s superstitious beliefs about electricity also reinforced the need for the educational campaign given that the Catholic Church, a fundamental institution for education in Ireland, voiced its own concerns about electricity’s effects on Ireland. Hikondelle, a writer for the women’s section of the *Star*, described meeting a woman

¹³⁶ *Star*, 8 June 1929.

who still used an iron heated on a coal stove. The author lamented, “I would have very little patience with the housewife who is dependent on an old fashioned range all during the summer.” Upon meeting such a housewife Hikondelle “asked her if she had ever heard of the Shannon Scheme.” The woman replied that “she had previously received circulars informing her of the advantages of electricity, but that she told me that she had no head for figures, that an iron would run away with a lot of money, and that she was afraid of it.” The writer concluded this anecdote by informing the readers that the woman decided to try electricity and was “using the electric iron on the sporting chance that electricity does not emanate from the devil!”¹³⁷ Thus educational tracts were a vital part of the ESB’s promotional strategy, not only because some women were unfamiliar with its actual uses, but also because they were afraid of it and looked to the Church, which was not always supportive, for guidance.

Women with questions who did not turn to public demonstrations or the Catholic Church had other outlets for learning about electricity. For example, *Model Housekeeping* published a monthly column entitled, “Modern Service for the Model Home,” through which the women’s journal sought “to familiarize our readers with the uses of electrical equipment.” The magazine specifically encouraged women to send in their questions “about the use or suitability of any electric device.”¹³⁸ Later, the journal also encouraged women to seek advice, writing, “We shall be glad to have suggestions for this ‘Electricity in the Home’ page, and to answer queries on readers’ electrical

¹³⁷ *Star*, 3 May 1930.

¹³⁸ “Modern Service for the Model Home,” *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 1 (Nov. 1928-Oct. 1929), 407.

problems.”¹³⁹ The journal eventually proposed that readers to seek out the opinion of experts when it “established an Information Bureau on all matters concerned with electrical equipment in the home, the hotel, and institution.”¹⁴⁰ This was a free service that promised prompt responses: “if you are in a great hurry for the answer to any question you can be sure of receiving the reply by post within two days.” For those who did not include a stamped addressed envelope, their questions were to be answered in the following issue of the magazine. Located in the *Model Housekeeping* offices near Sackville Place, Dublin, the Electrical Information Bureau fashioned itself as an educational outlet for the community because “no matter how big or how small your problem may be, please feel that it will give us real pleasure to help you.”¹⁴¹

Readers responded to petitions from magazines like *Model Housekeeping* with all manner of questions. For example, K.I. from Dun Laorhaire wrote into the magazine demonstrating a concern about cost and efficiency: “One of my friends tells me that it is cheaper to cook with square saucepans on an electric range. Is this so, and do you think it would be worth while [sic] buying new saucepans for the amount I would save?”¹⁴² The electricity expert assured the writer that “experience has proved that the round or oval saucepans are the cheapest in the end. The square ones are difficult to clean and they lose their shape after being in use for a short time.”¹⁴³ B.F. from Wexford wondered, “in

¹³⁹ “Electricity in the Home—The Comfort and Convenience of Electric Cooking,” *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 2 (Nov. 1929-Oct. 1930): 32.

¹⁴⁰ “In My Electric Home,” *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 2 (Nov. 1929-Oct. 1930): 580.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² “Answering your Letters on matters concerned with Electricity,” *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 2 (Nov. 1929-Oct. 1930): 582.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

cooking a meat dish in an electric oven is there any danger of fire if the gravy boils over in the process of cooking?" The magazine's expert responded that there was "no danger of fire."¹⁴⁴ Most questions dealt with issues related to cleanliness, concerns about ventilation, and methods of improving efficiency in the kitchen. The mundane nature of many of the inquiries suggested widespread ignorance about the application of electricity in the Free State, making education a necessity if the Shannon Scheme was going to be a success.

Taking on the role of providing knowledge about electricity to women was a multifaceted task, and *Model Housekeeping* was committed to being a reliable source of information on this topic. Thus, in addition to answering basic questions about appliances, it also highlighted specifics about cooking, including offering recipes for a range of simple to extravagant dishes that women could prepare using their electric cookers by comparing the old ways of preparing food to new methods. An entire dinner menu appeared in a 1929 issue that was accompanied by a detailed set of instructions for women interested in "Making the Christmas Dinner on your Electric Cooker."¹⁴⁵ Though *Model Housekeeping* tended to term non-electric means of doing housework "old-fashioned" or "outdated," as was in line with other promotional campaigns, it recognized a need to educate its readers since "we know that this magazine circulates among large numbers of women who are new users of electricity, and we feel that they will be interested to read the following brief summary [about electrical appliances]."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ "Answering your Letters on matters concerned with Electricity," *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 3 (Nov. 1930-Oct. 1931): 51.

¹⁴⁵ "Christmas in the Electric Homes," *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 2 (Nov. 1929-Oct. 1930): 77.

¹⁴⁶ "In My Electric Home," *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 2 (Nov. 1929-Oct. 1930): 117.

While traditional methods of doing housework could be presented as outdated by those looking to promote electricity, the actual chores maintained a sense of continuity with the past. For example, the ESB relied on advertisements, as described above, that denigrated cooking without gadgets like electric cookers, but it also still encouraged women to do the cooking themselves in the home. Groups like the ESB had an interest in selling not only electric appliances, but also the current itself, so sustaining a high level of usage was vital to its strategy of directing women to apply electricity to the plethora of tasks they already did. In the eyes of the promoters, chores like cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry would not cease to be women's work; they would just be easier, more efficient, or more enjoyable. Therefore, household tasks could only be considered "outdated" if women failed to take advantage of modern the methods provided for by electricity.

Promoters walked a careful line in distinguishing old-fashioned techniques from the traditional understandings of women's work. For example, in the ad "The Craft of Cookery," the ESB described cooking as "one of the oldest crafts on earth and its importance is greater to-day than, perhaps, ever before."¹⁴⁷ Explaining the reasoning behind cooking's elevated place in contemporary society, the advertisement stated, "The speed and pressure of modern life make great demands on the human body, and proper nourishment depends as much on the preparation as upon the quality of the food." Such an argument was typical of the way that electricity advertisements sought a balance between tradition and modernity; an old craft like cooking could be fused with electricity to make the process modern, without changing the social dynamics of what was

¹⁴⁷ "The Craft of Cookery," ESB Advertisement, ESBA.

understood as women's work. Similarly, *Model Housekeeping* encouraged women to spend more time in the kitchen when it lamented, "the pity is that cake-making is fast losing its place among the arts."¹⁴⁸ Many women, who complained that making cakes took too much time and attention, preferred to buy their treats from the store. The magazine noted that "it is quite incomprehensible to us how our grandmothers could have been content to spend so many hours in the kitchen," but it suggested that with an electric cooker, women could "make delicious cakes at home without any of the trouble usually connected with this work."¹⁴⁹ Therefore, women could remain in the home, doing familiar tasks, but they could transform themselves and their work into modern entities if they used electricity for household duties.

In addition to relying on the knowledge of others to learn about electricity, women were also active participants in electrical associations established concurrently with the construction of the Shannon Scheme. Unfortunately, I have found no collection of their minutes and without the written records of the Irish Women's Electrical Development Association, newspapers are vital to understanding the women's involvement in the promotion of electricity. While most articles and advertisements discussed earlier have suggested particular top-down messages and depictions of ideal housewives, women participating in the promotional campaign often echoed the gendered rhetoric that appeared in electricity advertisements. For example, in November 1927 the *Irish Independent* reported on the founding of the Women's Association. It had formed to promote the benefits of electricity to other women, and it was highly organized with officers and meeting agendas. Though the *Independent* claimed there was "no connection

¹⁴⁸ "In My Electric Home," *Model Housekeeping*, vol. 2 (Nov. 1929-Oct. 1930): 361.

with the Electricity Supply Board,” this could only be considered accurate on a superficial level given that the majority of high ranking women were married or related to top officials in the government and ESB. Thus, Mrs. Hugh Kennedy, wife of the chief justice, and Mrs. J. J. Murphy, wife of the chairman of the ESB, were both elected as members of the first board. Mrs. T. A. McLaughlin, wife of the managing director of the ESB who had facilitated negotiations between the Free State and Siemens, served as president of the Association.¹⁵⁰ It is therefore not surprising that the messages expressed by the Women’s Association mirrored the gendered language of the advertisements published in Irish newspapers. However, they differed slightly in that these women were more likely to acknowledge feminine agency by arguing that only women could comprehend the complex workings of the home and how electricity could be best applied.

Like the *Independent*, the *Kildare Observer* described the I.W.E.A. as “a body of lay women interested in popularizing the labour-saving methods of electricity and has no connection with the Electricity Supply Board.”¹⁵¹ “As Miss Cosgrave said at the Irish Women’s Electrical Association meeting in Dublin, ‘Anything that helped to make the home life run smoothly helped towards the joy of life.’”¹⁵² According to the *Kildare Observer*, the Association planned its first event for 7 December 1928, “when a series of lectures on the use of electric appliances will be given. A model electric home will be provided, where the members can see the meals being cooked, and where they can quickly learn to apply the lessons in their own homes.”¹⁵³ A few months later, in

¹⁵⁰ “Dublin and District,” *Irish Independent*, 16 November 1927.

¹⁵¹ “Electricity in the Kitchen,” *Kildare Observer*, 17 November 1928.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

February 1929, the Women's Electrical Association hosted "an enjoyable dance" for 150 guests including prominent members of the government, ESB officials, and Dublin socialites and their wives.¹⁵⁴ The success of the women's group in Dublin inspired others, including one writer for the *Kildare Observer* who claimed, "we in this country have little or no experience of the manifold uses to which electricity may be applied, and if this association was spread throughout the country it would be a splendid means of diffusing a knowledge of the subject, without which full advantage cannot be taken of this great scheme now nearing completion."¹⁵⁵ The newspaper admired the association's goal "to interest women in the use of electricity in the home, and especially in the kitchen," by claiming that such a purpose "is deserving of emulation in other centres."¹⁵⁶ Convinced that "so far, hardly an effort has been made to educate the public in its [electricity's] use in the home and for domestic purposes," the newspaper hoped that its female readers "will be heartened by the example of the women of Dublin, who have taken into their own hands the question of educating housewives in the various uses of electricity, which will eliminate drudgery from women's house work." Acknowledging that different localities had different capacities, the *Kildare Observer* stated that "no doubt, the Dublin association will have special facilities which may be lacking in country towns," but the paper expressed that "there's no reason to believe that any difficulties that may arise cannot be overcome by the women of Naas, for instance, or any other town in

¹⁵⁴ "Dublin and District," *Irish Independent*, 5 February 1929.

¹⁵⁵ "Electricity in the Kitchen," *Kildare Observer*, 17 November 1928.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

the Saorstát.”¹⁵⁷ As Chapter 5 indicated, the Shannon Scheme, though a national project in scope, had a tendency to make regional differences more pronounced, but in this case, the outlook was relatively optimistic.

Conclusion

The ESB and other promoters of the Shannon Scheme targeted women in their campaigns to sell electricity because women were responsible for purchasing items for the home and managing household chores that could be aided by the use of electrical appliances. However, *why* they featured in these advertisements is far less interesting than *how* they appeared in them. The language and images designed to appeal to women’s perceived desires, including maintaining their health, beauty, and youth reinforced the idea that many women gauged their self-worth on superficial qualities that would attract husbands. Similarly, by presenting electricity as a servant that would reduce the drudgery of housework and lead to greater leisure time, promoters constructed an image of the modern woman, who used electricity in her home, but remained remarkably in sync with conservative understandings of gender roles. While suffragettes, nationalists, and feminists challenged these norms in Ireland and elsewhere, the ideal woman presented in electricity advertisements tended to reinforce the idea that a woman’s place was in the home as a wife and mother. The Shannon Scheme symbolized progress and modernity; however, when applied to gender, these words assumed dangerous and unstable meanings. Therefore, promoters carefully orchestrated the presentation of these qualities to a female audience in ways that underscored how electricity would assist them in becoming the women they wanted to be and thought men preferred. Women were not

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

passive participants, who unthinkingly internalized the promotional messages about what they should aspire to become: they actively responded to these strategies and spread the word about electricity themselves. Although the electricity campaigns focused on a narrowly defined female audience, the broader implications of the ways in which electrification influenced gendered discourses are pertinent here. The Shannon Scheme contributed to discussions of what it meant to be Irish, including the appropriate roles for women in the new Irish Free State. For promoters, figuring out the precise balance between tradition and modernity in ways that allowed women to appreciate the benefits of electricity without neglecting their duties in the home, assumed the utmost importance.

CONCLUSION

To my mind, it [the Shannon Scheme] is not a question of success, but how great and stupendous that success is going to be.¹

—Patrick McGilligan, “The Shannon Scheme,” *Clare Champion*, 15 September 1928

Whether or not history has judged the Shannon Scheme to be a success, it was certainly promoted to Irish farmers, women, and tourists as such. Many Irish people—both within and outside of government circles—had high expectations for the project and hoped that it would set the stage for electrification throughout the Free State in the late 1920s. The apparent disjuncture between the promotion of the scheme as “national” and the slow pace of rural electrification may reflect the over-optimistic view of the ESB in the beginning. It also may reflect the political necessity for Cumann na nGaedheal to present itself as a national party, one that appeared to be dedicated to improving the lives of all Irish citizens without succumbing to pressures of particular factions. The Catholic Church, women, and domestic and foreign tourists were three important audiences to examine because the promotional campaigns intended for them highlighted broader political, economic, and cultural issues. More importantly, these issues made a significant contribution to debates about the nature of Irish nationalism and the shaping of an Irish national identity.

Part of this debate centered on justifying the project to Cumann na nGaedheal’s political opposition, and also to a war-weary and increasingly disillusioned population who had little faith in what an independent Irish government could do for them. The staggering cost of the Shannon Scheme was a risky expenditure for the new state. Many people believed the money could be put to better use by parceling the money out to

¹ “The Shannon Scheme,” *Clare Champion*, 10 September 1928.

farmers, who could consolidate their lands, or to the unemployed, who needed government assistance to remain in Ireland. It was also critical for the Free State to reach out to specific groups of potential consumers in order to make the Shannon Scheme a paying proposition. The promotional campaigns showed the practical reasons for adopting electricity, as well as the national and particular interests the government hoped to address.

The methods used by Cumann na nGaedheal and the ESB to make the Shannon Scheme especially attractive to various constituencies provide a glimpse into how promoters wanted people to imagine how electricity would change the way that they lived. Educating the population about the benefits of electricity was necessary because, apart from heating and lighting, many Irish people were unaware of the ways in which electricity could be applied to daily life. In addition, tourists, who were generally familiar with the scenic appeal of Ireland, needed to be encouraged to participate in a new type of industrial tourism that had little to do with projecting the west of Ireland as a repository of Gaelic tradition. The Free State emphasized that modernity could positively influence people's lives without completely replacing the basic tasks that provided them with a sense of purpose and distinct identity. Whether this meant easing familiar chores on the farm or in the home, or suggesting that tourists pay a visit to the site as they traveled the countryside, there was a sense that the Shannon Scheme meant progress, but not necessarily a departure from the comfort of tradition.

These particular interests were also directly connected to issues of wider national appeal and reflected ideological tensions between tradition and modernity. The Shannon Scheme was as a nexus where interwar and postcolonial issues converged and provided a

space for the Irish to examine intricate facets of their local and national identities. For example, the manner in which politicians, electricians, businessmen, journalists, priests, and ordinary citizens articulated emerging theories about politics, religion, education, race, and gender spoke to issues outside the scope of electrification. By focusing on the *promotion* of the Scheme, I have reconstructed the ideal image of Irishness its advocates sought to cultivate, with Irish, imperial, and international audiences in mind. Universal themes like nationalism, identity, and modernity, expand the significance of this research beyond the study of a particular dam or country. Ireland's former colonial status dictated the particular contours of identity formation, but perceptions of nationalism, modernity, and Irishness were multifaceted and shaped as much from within national boundaries as they were by global responses to the new state's hydroelectric venture.

The modernity of the Shannon Scheme seemingly threatened familiar understandings of Irishness because it appeared to be irreconcilable with notions of Ireland that emphasized an agrarian and Gaelic past. It was essential for the Free State and its supporters to promote electrification as a symbol of Irish modernity that did not carry with it the negative associations people often made with industry and technology. The ways in which these tensions played out in terms of how the Irish defined themselves politically, religiously, racially, and regionally, indicated that perceptions of Irishness depended on a number of factors that, at times, could be at odds with one another. Politically, the dam was a watershed event for the Cumann na nGaedheal government. Particularly in their recognition of the project's potential to demonstrate the Free State's separateness from Great Britain and the party's commitment to national interests, Cumann na nGaedheal leaders linked the Shannon Scheme to their own political goals

and their assertion of revolutionary principles. But along with the creation of a state eager to establish that Ireland was not British came the uncertain task of defining what the new nation should look like. In this vein, the Catholic Church and other educational leaders worked to educate the public about electricity and transform pedagogical approaches to the teaching of science by modernizing the curriculum without sacrificing traditional learning objectives. The presence of German engineers at the site also contributed to interpretations of Irish identity by bringing conversations about race and Ireland's relationship with other European nations, especially Britain, to the forefront. Finally, those living near Limerick experienced the dam in dramatically different ways than did the rest of the nation, and manifestations of regional loyalty provided an alternative interpretation to the national focus espoused by the dam's promoters.

Today, this gigantic undertaking has largely been forgotten, as additional dams, peat and other types of energy have largely replaced or surpassed the Shannon as suppliers to Ireland's national grid. Although contemporaries who believed Ireland could never consume that much electricity criticized the project for its size, only two percent of Ireland's total energy needs are currently met by the Shannon Scheme.² But the dam was not simply an exception to Cumann na nGaedheal's financial policies, or the flagship project for future national electrification, as many historians have argued. In doing so, these historians have ignored the broader cultural significance of the Scheme because it does not adhere to their models or interpretations of the Free State. Taking a wider view, the hydroelectric project serves as a lens through which historians can reassess Cumann na nGaedheal, Irish nationalism, and Irish national identity. The project's connection with

² "Ardnacrusha," ESB website, accessed 12 June 2013, <http://www.esb.ie/main/about-esb/ardnacrusa.jsp>.

modernity and industrialism underscored the challenges faced by Irish leaders, who desperately wanted to put Ireland on a path towards progress, but who were unwilling to wholly reject traditional elements Irish nationalism. The Shannon Scheme also did more than initiate an expansive national electrification scheme. It launched a debate over what the future of Ireland should look like and how Free State leaders should adjust their policies in order to meet that objective. The dam revealed that tensions between tradition and modernity were not fixed but in constant flux, and an analysis of its contribution to the process of nation building has served to complement what other scholars have already discovered about Ireland in the 1920s, exposing the ideological intersections and conceptual frameworks of forces within Irish society in ways that general studies of the period cannot attempt to access.

This study primarily has focused on political, religious, racial, and regional issues that shaped the promotion of electricity in the Irish Free State, and includes specific examples demonstrating the ways in which these strategies were altered to meet the perceived desires of constituencies, including tourists and women. But there are many other topics related to the Shannon Scheme that are in need of investigation in order to address the gaps in the historiography. Promotional campaigns also targeted the agricultural community, people concerned with the environmental impacts of the dam, and private suppliers of electricity, and these are interesting avenues for future research. Similarly, a deeper analysis of the Free State's own comparisons to other small European nations would help broaden the history of the Shannon Scheme and draw attention to important international connections, as the issues raised by modernity certainly echoed debates in other industrialized nations. A global interpretation would also situate the

project within the history of hydroelectric development during this period. Evaluating methods employed by other countries to promote comparable projects, like Dnieprostroi in the Soviet Union or the Hoover Dam in the United States, would provide valuable insight into how electrification and modernity were linked to national identity in places with dramatically different political situations and cultural practices. These examples of yet un- and under-explored topics reveal that there is still much more that the study of the Shannon Scheme can tell us about the Free State period, Irish nationalism, and perceptions of Irish national identity.

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