

# Dublin Metropolitan Police Telephone.

No. of Message. \_\_\_\_\_ Date, 5.5.1916  
Temple Station of Origin. Received at \_\_\_\_\_ M.  
Sent at \_\_\_\_\_ M.

From Supt O'Connell | To Moses Byrne  
1 Kimmage Rd.

Beavers are loyal subjects  
want to get to their home  
at 36 Lower Mt Street  
City

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## Subscribe

Every quarter, Reading Ireland will publish an E-Journal, Reading Ireland: The Little Magazine, which will be available to subscribers for an annual fee of \$40. The magazine will be published in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. The aim of this publication is to provide in-depth analysis of Irish literature, past and present, through a series of essays and articles written by myself and other Irish and American writers and academics, along with opening a window onto the best of contemporary Irish poetry, prose and drama. To honor the tradition of Irish Literary Magazines, each issue will also focus on a specific “Little Magazine” from the first half of the twentieth-century.

<http://www.readingireland.net>

## Contributors

Editor: Adrienne Leavy  
Design: Eric Montgomery – [giantboy.com](http://giantboy.com)

\* The cover photo is a copy of the Police Pass issued to Miss Rosalie Byrne to enable her to cycle through Dublin city to her home on Lower Mount St. during Easter Weekend 1916. Byrne, who was one of the first women to qualify as a Pharmacist in Ireland, was studying in Dublin at the time of the Rising. She was the paternal grandmother of the editor.

# Introduction



Welcome to the summer 2016 issue of Reading Ireland, which focuses on the Centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising. Earlier this year, most notably over Easter weekend (March 27-March 28), and on the actual one hundred year anniversary of the Rising (April 24-April 29), various commemoration events were held in Ireland and abroad. These events took the form of government sponsored initiatives as well as community and school based activities and individual remembrance projects.<sup>1</sup> Several endeavors have focused on reestablishing the vital role that women played during the Rising, while others have focused on the forgotten victims, specifically the approximately forty children that were killed during Easter weekend. Whatever their character, the overwhelming majority of commemoration events have been characterized by a welcome degree of introspective questioning, along with an acknowledgment of the myriad nuances of our recent history. Writing about aesthetic approaches to the centenary in the Irish Times Fintan O' Toole made the following observation:

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It is, of course, much too early to say what the overall response of artists to the 1916 centenaries will look like. But one thing we can say is that an old template has been shattered. There used to be a choice for artists – reverence for the Rising or scathing skepticism. Now, it is possible to be scathing and reverent at the same time. The Rising may at once be upheld as a gift from the past, a rebuke to the present and a challenge for the future.

The approach of this issue of Reading Ireland is to first concentrate on certain aspects of the cultural ferment that was stirring in Ireland in the years prior to 1916. Much has been written about the literary aspects of Irish Revival, which were sphere-headed by W.B. Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, J.M. Synge and the Abbey Theatre. Here, we begin by

focusing on two under-scrutinized aspects of cultural revival: the grassroots activities of Gaelic League organizers, who were charged with translating Douglas Hyde's vision of de-anglicizing Ireland into a localized reality, and *The Irish Review*, a literary magazine published during the period 1911-1914 and edited for part of its run by Joseph Mary Plunkett and Thomas MacDonagh.

In his introduction to the Gaelic League's (Chonradh na Gaeilge) yearlong 1916 commemoration program Cólín Ó Cearbhaill, the President of the League, wrote as follows:

When a small group set out to fight for their freedom 100 years ago, they were motivated by a vision of the type of country they would like to create and it is clear that the cultural and language revival which had gathered momentum in the years before 1916 played a key role in the development of the attitudes, philosophy and vision that drove them.

Drawing on original Irish and English language source material from the Gaelic League's archives, Cuan Ó Seireadáin's essay on the work of the travelling organizers (Timire) of the League demonstrates the extent to which the grass roots activities of the organization spread throughout the parishes of Ireland during the first decade of the 20th century. His research also reveals that many of the League's full-time teachers and organizers were funded by American financial contributions.

Following this is my essay on *The Irish Review*, a monthly periodical which demonstrates the extent to which decolonization and modernization debates formed a vital part of Irish literary life prior to 1916. In addition to the contents, this Little Magazine is of particular historical significance due to the involvement of Patrick Pearse, MacDonagh and Plunkett, both as contributors and editors. As one critic has noted, "in its pages we can examine the transition from the literary and cultural pre-occupations of the Celtic Revival to the more political and 'visionary' approach of those who gathered together to organize the Irish Revolution."<sup>2</sup>

We then move forward to the aftermath of the Rising, specifically to a consideration of W.B. Yeats's famous poem, "Easter 1916." Characterizing the poem as a "prophecy," Irish Revival scholar Gregory Castle draws attention to the manner in which the poem invokes the future, writing that "while it memorializes the dead it is in fact asking questions of those who will read it in the coming times." Castle juxtaposes the poem with Yeats's earlier "September 1913," and also examines several mid-career poems such as "The Fisherman" and "An Irish Airman foresees His Death" in the context of his analysis. In Castle's reading, "Easter 1916" "puts the past into play for the future, which is the role of poetry in difficult times."

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As is often noted, the leaders of the Rising were lecturers, poets, artists and writers, so it is therefore fitting that we concentrate on the tremendous aesthetic response to the 1916 centenary by contemporary Irish poets, playwrights, filmmakers and historians. We are delighted to highlight a number of these endeavors in the pages of Reading Ireland.

In a project that was undertaken as part of Art 2016 and funded by the Arts Council of Ireland, The Irish Writers Center commissioned six acclaimed Irish poets, Theo Dorgan, Paul Muldoon, Thomas McCarthy, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, and Jessica Traynor to bring some of the iconic people and places of 1916 to life with newly commissioned poems and commissioned original music from Colm Mac Con Iomaire.<sup>3</sup>

Artistic responses to the Rising also involved the dramatic arts. *Signatories*, the theatrical project commissioned by University College Dublin, asked eight of Ireland's foremost writers to re-imagine the final moments of the rebellion through the eyes of the seven signatories of the Proclamation

of the Irish Republic and Nurse Elizabeth O'Farrell, the woman who delivered the letter of surrender to the British. Each writer wrote a short dramatic monologue, and these eight elements were first staged in Kilmainham Goal, under the direction of Tony Award winning director Patrick Mason, and subsequently published in book form. A discussion on the theatrical event and the published text is included in this issue.<sup>4</sup>

Several literary journals, most notably *Boyne Berries* (poetry and fiction), *Poetry Ireland Review* (poetry) and *The Stinging Fly* (poetry and fiction), devoted a recent issue to a consideration of the 1916 centenary, inviting writers to respond to these historic events through poetry or prose. Included is a review of these special issues which reveal the broad range of responses from a wide variety of Irish writers.

Next, James Moran reviews *Vivid Faces*, historian Roy Foster's account of the generation of men and women who created the conditions for revolution in Ireland in the early years of the twentieth century. Also included here is Ronan McGreevy's discussion of his anthology, *Was it for this? Reflections on the Easter Rising and what it means to us now*, which covers the ten decades of coverage of the Rising in the Irish Times since 1916.

We then follow with a spotlight on several 1916 related publications from Cork University Press and the Royal Irish Academy.

Ireland's first 1916 exhibition, *Birth of a Nation – The Evolution of Irish Nationhood, 1641-1916*, is located in the Louth County Museum, in the town of Dundalk. Officially opened on February 26th 2015 by the Taoiseach Enda Kenny, the exhibition will run until the end of 2016. Situating the 1916 Rising in the historical context of centuries of opposition to British rule, this impressive exhibition includes an array of important historical artifacts, including an original 1916 Proclamation and hand-written documents by Patrick Pearse, W.B. Yeats and Roger Casement. We are grateful to *History Ireland* for allowing us to reprint their review and also to Brian Walsh, the curator at the Louth County Museum, for supplying the introductory art-work for this issue of *Reading Ireland*.

As evidence of the significant impact that Global and Diaspora funding have had on the international centenary efforts, we also include information on the 1916 exhibition and lecture series in the McClelland Library at the Irish Cultural Center in Phoenix, Arizona: *Remembering the Easter Rising: Historical Context and Cultural Legacy*. This commemoration series was partially funded through the 2016 Global and Diaspora Programme of the Department of Foreign Affairs with the assistance of the Irish Consulate in San Francisco.

Finally, we close this issue with a link to several documentaries by Irish independent filmmaker Marcus Howard. Howard's moving documentaries on Pádraig Pearse, James Connolly and Michael Mallin, which include interviews with the descendants of the executed leaders, is one example of the many locally based commemorations that have been taking place in Irish communities throughout the year.

Adrienne Leavy, editor.  
August 2016

1. The official Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme (Clár Comórtha Céad Bliain) has seven distinct program strands: State and Local Ceremonial Events; Historical Reflection; The Living Language; Youth and Imagination; Cultural Expression; Community Participation; and Global and Diaspora.
2. Ed Mulhall, "From Celtic Twilight to Revolutionary Dawn: The Irish Review 1911-1914."
3. We would like to gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and assistance of Valerie Bistany, the Director of The Irish Writers Center, and Pádraig Burke, in the preparation of this section of *Reading Ireland*.
4. We would like to gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and assistance of Mary Staunton, the Communications Projects Manager at UCD Communications, in the preparation of this section of *Reading Ireland*.

# Culture Warriors: Exploring sources on Gaelic League organisers

by Cuan Ó Seireadáin

At its height in the middle of the first decade of the 20th Century, the Gaelic League's organiser system employed over 60 full time teachers and organisers, and reached into every parish in Ireland. This article is intended to provide an insight into some of the English and Irish language sources which reveal the work done by the Gaelic League in the late 19th and early 20th Century. There is much to discover in these sources, which are becoming more accessible as a result of the Gaelic League's digitisation programme. Over the next few years, as these sources are explored comprehensively for the first time, our understanding of pre-revolutionary Ireland, and the means by which the groundwork for the fight for independence was laid will be greatly enhanced.

Published in 1944, Peadar Ó hAnnracháin's *Fé Bhrat an Chonnartha* (Under the Flag of the League), is a vivid and exhaustively detailed account of his sixteen years working as a *Timire* (travelling organiser) for *Conradh na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic League) between 1901 and 1916. The 743 page book bursts with recollections of the hardships suffered and challenges faced in his efforts as a key player in the Gaelic League's outreach programme to rural communities across Ireland. If it was, as Patrick Pearse wrote in 1908, Eoin Mac Néill's achievement

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to develop the League's ideology, and Douglas Hyde's to explain it to the masses, it was people like Peadar, chronically tired, poorly paid, and constantly exposed to the perils of Ireland's atrocious roads and unreliable weather, armed only with bicycles and the burning sense that Ireland could only develop if her cultural confidence could be restored, who built the system with which the Gaelic League attempted to rebuild Ireland's culture. To the young enquirer who remarks that Peadar must have had a very easy life spending his time travelling around Ireland on two wheels, he replies:



Peadar Ó hAnnracháin

“What would you say to that merry easy life that you'd have on a rough dark wet night, with nothing but your bicycle as a means of transport, and walking down the hill for a mile, because no one, even in the middle of the day, could control a bicycle on that same hill, if it was against him, and then facing into the west wind, and the rain, without any pity for you, lashing heavily down on you, and in against your two knees as soon you sat onto the bike; and without much delay your skin would be wet and your feet would be covered by wet stockings inside your shoes, and the wind, torturing you, slowing you, tiring you, would be your relentless enemy as you moved west.

You would have no company but your bicycle, and your prayers, maybe, if you could remember them in your distress. Without a strong will you might give up due to the loneliness of your life and the lack of respect you felt people had for you. But you'd have to put up with

it and a lot more, because weren't you the person who was spreading the noble gospel of the League, and it would be a scandal if you surrendered in the heat of battle because of your skin getting soaked occasionally.

But all the same the dissatisfaction would taunt you, and who could say you hadn't made a mistake by not staying by the fireside in An Ghort and forgetting about the Scailp and the people of Scailp that night. What is it to you anyway, if the language is dying? What good will it do you to break your health for its sake?



And who was living in Scailp anyway but poor people who knew nothing outside of their own lives, except perhaps an old woman who sang Irish songs they like, and that you liked too, maybe.

And who knew what you would say when you reached your lodging at a quarter past eleven, with no light in the house until you lit a candle yourself, and climbed the stairs, after throwing your bicycle to one side, and your cape soaked, and your cap, wetter still, hung up somewhere. What would you say when you fell to your wet knees to talk to God, and to give thanks that you had managed to arrive safely? Wouldn't it be difficult to say prayers?

Might you not be considered a fool? And when you lay on your bed, perhaps you'd feel a cloud of loneliness around you until the sleep you so richly deserved cast its nets over you."<sup>1</sup>

The Gaelic League was not the first organisation to identify the cultural catastrophe threatened by the rapid decline in the number of speakers of Irish in the decades after the Great

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1. "Cad déarfá leis an saoghal suairc aerach a bheadh agat dá dtagthá amach oidhche fhliuch dhorcha gharbh, agus gan agat ach an rothar mar ghléas iomchair, agus míle a shiubhal anuas an cnoc, mar ná féadfadh éinne, fiú amháin i lár an lae, rothar a chosc ag teacht an cnoc céadna, dá mbeadh sé anáirde air, agus annsan aghaidh a thabhairt i gcoinne na gaoithe siar, agus an fheathainn, gan aon truaigh dhuit, ag bualadh go trom anuas ort, agus isteach i gcoinnibh do dhá ghlún an túisce go ragthá anáirde ar do rothar; agus gan mhoill ró mhór bheadh do chraiceann fliuch agus bheadh stocáí fliucha mar chlúdach ar do chosaibh istigh id bhrógaibh, agus bheadh an ghaoth mar namhaid aniar id aghaidh ad chrád, agus ad mhoilliú, agus ad thuirsíú.

Ní bheadh cuideachta ar bith agat ach do rothar, agus do phaidreacha, b'fhéidir, dá gcuimhnightheá ortha san le linn géibhinn. Muna mbeadh neart toile agat is beag ná gcoilfeá toisc a uaignighe a bhí an saoghal agat agus gan meas ró mhór ag a lán ort, dar leat. Ach bheadh ort cur suas leis agus le mórán eile, mar nach tusa an duine a bhí ag craobhscaoileadh soiscéil uasail an Chonnartha, agus ba scanail dá ngéillteá i lár an chatha mar gheall ar do chroiceann a bheith fliuch oidhce anois is arís.

Ach mar sin féin bheadh mí-shásamh ad phriocadh, agus cá bhfios na go n-abróchtha go raibh botún déanta agat nuair nár fhanais le hais na teine sa Ghort agus leigint don Scailp agus do mhuintir na Scailpe an oidhche sin. Cad é sin duit-se dar ndóigh, má tá an teanga ag fághail bháis? Cad é an tairbhe dhuit-se do shláinte do chailleamhaint dá chionn?

Agus cia bhí ar an Scailp ar aon chum ach daoine bochta gan breis eólais ar an saoghal aca, siúd is go raibh bean aosta ann a chan amhráin Gaedhíle a thaitn leo san a bhí istigh agus leat-sa, leis, b'fheidir.

Agus cá bhfios cad déarfá nuair a bhainfeá an lóistín amach ar ceathramha tar éir a haondéag, gan solas sa tigh go lastá féin coinneal, agus an staighre suas a chur díot, tar éis do rothar do chaitheamh ar leath-taoibh, agus an cába fliuch báidhte, agus an caipín, a bhí níos fhliche fós, do chur ar crochadh in ait éigin. Cad déarfá nuair a thiocfá ar do ghlúnaibh fliucha chun labhairt le Dia, agus chun buideachas a thabhairt dó toisc gur éirigh leat teacht slán? Na beadh sé deacair ort paidreacha a rádh?

Cá bhfios na go gceapfa gur duin gan chiall tú? Agus nuair a luighfeá ar do leabaidh b'fhéidir go mbraithfeá scamall uaignis id thimcheall go dtí go gcuireadh an codla a bhí tuille go maith agus a líontán agus a cheangal féin i bhfeidhm ort." Peadar Ó hAnnracháin, Fé Bhrat an Chonnartha, 1944

Famine. The Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language been founded in 1876 and the Gaelic Union, which began publishing *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* (The Gaelic Journal) in 1882, had emerged in 1880. These organisations however, were primarily concerned with the study of Irish, and what made the Gaelic League different from the very beginning was it's attempt to develop a means of systematically slowing the decline of Irish, and preserving



and encouraging it's use as a spoken language. The vision that took hold of the imagination of its leaders was a positive one, intended to reinforce Irish identity in a distinctive and affirmative way, defined by religious and political plurality, rather than a narrowly and intolerantly nationalist one. As Hyde said in 1892: "When we speak of 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising the Irish Nation', we mean it, not as a protest against imitating what is best in the English people, for that would be absurd, but rather to show the folly of neglecting what is Irish, and hastening to adopt, pell-mell, and indiscriminately, everything that is English, simply because it is English (...) In order to de-Anglicise ourselves we must at once arrest the decay of the language."

Encouraged by Hyde's speech, Eoin Mac Néill, a young legal clerk from Co. Antrim who had learned Irish extremely rapidly, spending around a quarter of his income on lessons, wrote an article for the March 1893 edition of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* outlining his "Plea and a Plan for the Extension of the Movement to Preserve and Spread the Gaelic Language in Ireland". In the article he explained that sitting around merely "book-teaching" in Dublin was not the way to increase the use of Irish:

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"Gaelic is the language of 100,000 homes. It is impossible to appeal seperately to every household. It is, therefore, necessary, to address ourselves to numbers at once. Under present conditions, large numbers will not come far to hear us. We must, therefore, address small numbers, organizing our movement on, perhaps, a parochial basis.

A movement of this kind requires a number of active promoters. It also requires funds. To supply men and funds an organisation is necessary. (...) The organization would probably be centred in Dublin, but its main activity would be provincial."

The positive responses to the anonymously published article embolded Mac Néill to invite interested parties to a meeting at 9 O'Connell Street Lower, Dublin. Hyde's answer to the invitation was enthusastic. Despite not knowing each other yet, Hyde and Mac Néill

2. "Do labhair mé ar an gceist seo trí bliadhna ó soin i Nuadh Eabhrac i láthar cruinnithe mhóir daoine & dúirt mé nach raobh aon chaoi eile leis an nGaedhilg do choingebháil beo, ach dream de dhaoine do siúbhal ar fud na tíre o thigh go thigh do díreach mar do rinne Riobard Stiofáin nuair bhí sé ag cur na Féinne ar bun, tar éis Éire do bheith fágtha mar chorp marbh ar chlár bog déal faoi scian na ndochtúir. Chuaidh Stiofáin ar fud an oileán an sin, o bhaile go baile & ó thigh go thigh & tháinig anam úr ais ins na daoine." Hyde to Mac Néill 26.6.1893 (Cód LNÉ)

appeared to have a common vision: “I spoke about this question three years ago in New York at a large meeting and I said that there was no other way to keep Irish alive other than for a small group of select people to walk across the country from house to house just as Robert Stevens<sup>a</sup> did when he was establishing the Fenians, after Ireland had been left for dead on the bog deal board under the knives of the doctors. Stevens went all over the island then, from town to town and from house to house and a new spirit returned to the people.”<sup>2</sup>

The Gaelic League was founded at that meeting, which took place on the 31st of July 1893. Ten men were present, and Hyde was elected President of the new organisation which was called *Connradh na Gaeilge*, The Gaelic League, in reference to *Connradh na Talún*, The Land League. Despite the ambition reflected in the name of the new organisation it grew slowly though steadily over the next five years. Eoin Mac Néill and Hyde’s vision of the need for systematic growth, had to wait as it was “obvious that until the Treasurers had in hands a sum more than sufficient to meet all the initial expenses of the society.. nothing could be done towards carrying an active movement into the provinces.”<sup>3</sup>



Tomás Bán Ó Concheannain

1896 brought hope that those funds might soon become available when it was learned that Patrick Mullen, a wealthy Donegal-born Irish-American had died in New York leaving an estate valued at 80,000 dollars, and that “(b)y his will he (had) directed that after the payment of certain debts and legacies, the residue should be devoted to the preservation of the Irish language.”<sup>4</sup> Two years later, in September 1898, after much legal wrangling, and submissions by all active Irish language groups, the decision was made by the executor of the will to grant the Gaelic League £100 a year for 10 years, together with the interest from the fund, to enable it to employ paid organisers. If American money would be used to revive Ireland’s ancient language, where was the talent to implement the strategy to come from? By a curious coincidence it was to come from America too.

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Tomás Bán Ó Concheannain was born in Inis Meáin (one of the Aran islands in Galway bay) in 1870. In 1887 he emigrated to the U.S. and spent over ten years there, travelling throughout North America as a rubber stamp salesman, working on his half brother Séamus’ vineyard in Livermore California<sup>b</sup>, and studying business in Boston and Livermore before graduating with an M.A. in Accounting from Eastman College in 1896. His range of experience in North America was wide- as was later written of him in the *An Claidheambh Soluis* (The Sword of Light), *Conradh na Gaeilge*’s weekly newspaper:

“He has gathered oranges in Florida, grapes in California, bananas in Mexico. He has seen a revolution in the streets of Santiago de Cuba, and has joined the thousands that thronged to witness the bullfights in the cities of the old kingdom of the Aztecs.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite having grown up on Inis Meáin, one of the strongest Gaeltacht communities then as now, and having recieved a full primary education on the island as well as two years of secondary education in Galway City, it was while selling rubber stamps in Mexico that Tomás Bán first encountered the Irish language in written form and heard about the efforts being made to revive Irish in Ireland. He was 27 years old. His brother Máirtín, who managed a

3. Annual Report of the Gaelic League 1894, page 15

4. Annual Report of the Gaelic League 1896, page 9

5. ACS 23 July 1899

Hacienda near Mexico City, was a subscriber to *The Irish World*, which he received regularly from New York. The effect on Tomás of seeing Irish in print must have been profound, as he became determined to learn how to read and write Irish, subscribing to several publications with links to Ireland and Irish, commissioning the construction of a special Gaelic Font typewriter in Chicago, and donating money to causes which promised to strengthen the Irish language. “Sitting on the patio of the Hacienda and reading about historic events,”<sup>6</sup> he soon began to toy with the idea of returning home to Ireland for a few months. The illness of his mother prompted Tomás’ return home in 1898.



Group photograph of Timirí taken in August 1903.

Standing, from the left:  
Seán Mac Éinrí, Séamas Mac an Bhaird, Peadar Ó hAnnracháin, Pádraig Ó Cadhla, unidentified

Seated, from the left:  
Tomás Ó Míodhcháin, Tomás Ó Concheanainn, Fionán Mac Coluim, Donncha Ó Laoire.

His roundabout way home to Inis Meáin took Tomás through Los Angeles, where he met the ailing Father Eugene O’Growney (the former editor of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*, former Vice President of the Gaelic League, who had written the main Irish primer in use at the time); Boston, where he spoke before a gathering of Irish language supporters; and Galway city, where he made a great impression on the members of the Gaelic League branch located there.

Having arrived to Inis Meáin in midsummer, he met the 18 year old Patrick Pearse, who was on his first trip to the Aran islands. Together they decided to found a branch of the Gaelic League there. Pearse recalled the encounter, which must have had a profound influence on both men, in his first article for the newspaper *Fáinne an Lae* (The Dawn- lit. The Ring of the Day):

“One afternoon I walked to na hAillteachaoi, and on my way home I spotted a young man before me sitting at the fire. I knew immediately it was Tomás Concannon. He rose and (like Napper Tandy) “he took me by the hand,” and believe me, he shook it well. We went up to the fire then and started to talk.

6. “Bhí mé i mo shuí ar patio an Hacienda agus mé ag léamh faoi na rudaí stairiúla sin agus spreag an léitheoireacht mé cuair a thabhairt ar Éirinn agus rún agam trí nó ceathair de mhíonna a chaitheamh abhus.” Lecture in Áras na nGael, Galway, 22.10.1943
7. “Tráthnóna amháin hsiubhlas go dtí na hAillteachaoi, & ar theacht a bhaile dhom chonnacas fear óg romham na’ shuide ag an teinibh. Bhí ‘fhios agam ar ball burbh’ é Tomás ‘Ac Concheanainn do bhí ann. D’éirigh sé ‘na sheasamh & (dálta Napper Tandy) “rug sé ar mo lámh,” & creididh uaimse gur chraith sé go tréan í. Theannamar suas chuig an teinidh annsin & thosnuigheamar ag caint.

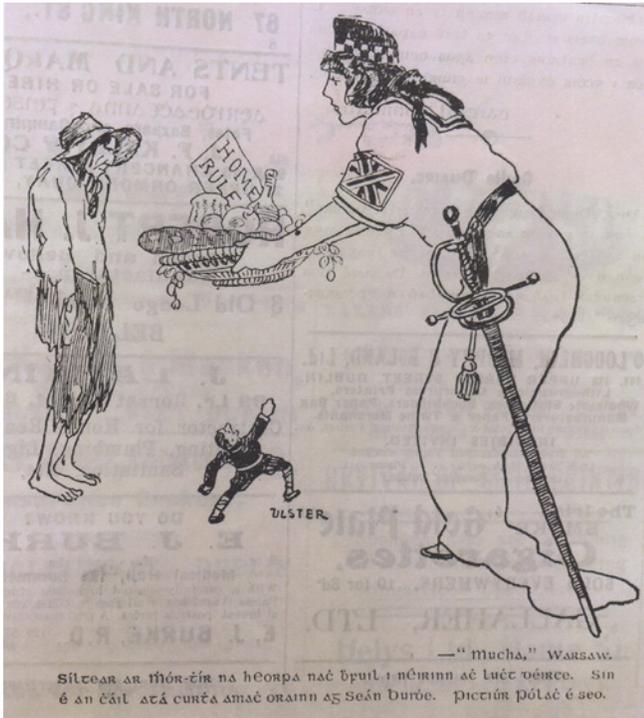
An lá ar n-am bhárach chudhamar síos go dtí an cladach. Shuidheamar síor ar an dúirlinn & bhí caint fada againn ar an nGaedhilig & gach uile rud bhaineas léi.

“A’ measann tú, a Phádraig”, arsa Tomás, “ó tharla go bhfuilimid annseo, gur féidir linn craobh de Chonradh na Gaedhilge do chur ar bun i n Árainn?” *Fáinne An Lae*, 12 November 1898, page 155

The next day we went down to the strand. We sat down on the dune and we had a long conversation about the Irish language and everything to do with it.

“Do you reckon, Pádraig”, said Tomás, “since we happen to be here, that we could get a branch of Conradh na Gaeilge going in Árann?”<sup>7</sup>

Contacts such as this with other branches and senior figures in the Gaelic League over the summer and autumn of 1898 convinced the leadership of the League that Tomás Concannon was the right person to be given the task of expanding the organisation in the manner that Mac Néill and Hyde had always intended, and he was offered the post of first Timire (Organiser) of the Gaelic League. Although Concannon accepted the appointment, on the 6th of December 1898, he was not without his doubts as to his suitability for the task, and understood that he was also choosing a difficult path:



“When I was chosen as the Conradh na Gaeilge Timire in Connacht, I knew in my heart that I was not able to do the job properly, that I was not the right man in the right place. But they made such a strong case to me in asking me to take on the task that I was unwilling to refuse. I made the decision to do that rather than return to Mexico, and of course, as inadequate as I am, I will do my best, and the proverb tells us that it is enough if the unable person does their best.

If I went to the New World, as I had intended, it might perhaps be thought that I was turning my back on this great work, indeed I thought so myself, I have to admit. Wouldn't I be just like a soldier who turned his back on the enemy in the middle of battle. For those two reasons... I decided to do a manly deed for the sake of my country.”<sup>8</sup>

Despite his doubts (or perhaps false modesty), he quickly settled into the work. His method, informed by his experience as a travelling salesman in North America, was thorough:

“First I endeavour to obtain all information possible before going to a place as to the likelihood of finding sympathisers there. Then, on arrival, I pay a round of visits to the priests, teachers, professional men and shopkeepers. I make it a point always to see every influential person in the community, talk the cause over with them, and distribute propagandist literature.

8. “Nuair a toghadh mé mar thimire Chonradh na Gaeilge i gCúige Chonnacht, bhí a fhios agam i mo chroí istigh nach raibh mé in ann an obair a dhéanamh mar ba chóir, nárbh mise an fear ceart san áit cheart. Ach chuardar orm chomh mór san ag iarraidh orm an obair do thógáil suad nár mhaith liom iad a eiteach. Thug mé toil sin a dhéanamh in ionad dul transna go Meicsiceo agus dár ndóigh dá dhona déanfaidh mé mo dhícheall, agus deir an seanfhocal linn gur leor don duine dona a dhícheall a dhéanamh.

Dá n-imeoinn go dtí an tOileán Úr, mar a bhí rún agam, b'fhéidir go gceapfaí go raibh mé ag iompar mo chúl ar an obair mhór seo, go deimhin cheap mé féin é, caithfidh mé a admháil. Nach mbein go díreach glan ar nós an tsaighdiúir a bhéarfadh a chúl ar an namhaid i lar na troda. Ar an ábhar san, chomh maith leis an gcúis thuas, thug mé toil in ainm Dé agus Muire cion fir a dhéanamh ar son mo thíre.” An Claidheamh Soluis, Cuairt Mhíosa i Connamara, 18 March 1899

After having secured the support of the clergy it is necessary to find a teacher willing to give his services. When this difficulty is surmounted we then settle upon the best way of drawing public attention to the matter. In almost every case it has been found expedient to announce our meeting from the altar a week previous, so as to give the people time for reflection, and as a result this arrangement usually ensures a large gathering. In some instances, the local bellman has been our herald on market days.

It is my invariable custom to talk to the people I meet with along the roads - stonebreakers, farmers, cartmen, children going to and from school, women herding, and to exhort those who know the language to speak it on every possible occasion in the house and out of it; and these casual conversations have been of great benefit as a result, since the story is carried from one to the other, and causes the subject of the Revival to come under discussion.”<sup>9</sup>

It was during one of Tomás’ trips through Munster that he and Peadar Ó hAnnracháin met for the first time. Peadar had already developed a great interest in the Irish language, but it was his encounter with Tomás Concannon which led him to dedicate the next eighteen years of his life to the revival of the Irish language, at first in his own family, and then as an *Timire* for the Gaelic League:



“And then when Tomás Ó Coincheannainn in the course of his work travelled down to Munster in the year 1900, preaching the gospel of the League, I used to read the reports he wrote for the *Claidheamh Soluis*, and I was very interested in them, and I could hardly wait for him to come to my own area to see if any of the people there could be awoken.

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He came to *Scoil Muire* or to *Scumhal* as some authors say, and there was a meeting there on the 6th of July. That area is around twenty miles from *Insín na gCiotach*, the place in which I was living, but myself and a friend of mine from *Skibbereen* arranged that we could go there. And go we did. I borrowed a bicycle and we set off, but that was only my third time on a bike and the hills wore me out quickly. Also, I was after mowing an acre of grass the previous day, which had been sweaty work, and tiring. But we reaching the meeting on time and remained in the company of the *timire* after the meeting. That was the first time I had heard *Connacht* Irish being spoken, and it led me astray a little bit, but the *Connacht* man (*Ó Coincheannainn*) realised the problem and adjusted his speech so that we could understand each other well enough.

But I paid the price for that meeting before I arrived home that evening. The tiredness of the two days was weighing on me and I had to stop frequently before I had completed the last few miles of the journey. I fainted during one of the stops, something that had never happened to me before that, and has never happened since. I experienced a sort of baptism in to the creed of the *Timirí* that day, and it is no wonder that I would still remember it. I remember it indeed. But my father felt that I had left the farm out of *teaspach* (an excess of spirit) that Sunday, and I had to put in long day’s work the next day, working with the hay.

While working the hay that day I don't think I had anything else on my mind but the talk that I had heard from Tomás Ó Coincennainn, on the journey west and east on the long rough road, the work that the Gaelic League was doing in the country, and how little of that work we had done in our own area.<sup>10</sup>



President Michael D. Higgins and his wife Sabina Higgins with Cuan Ó Seireadáin reviewing the Gaelic League's 2016 commemoration exhibition.

happen, will become clearer, and the contribution of many forgotten figures to Irish history will at last be properly recognised.

10. “Annsan nuair a tháinig Tomás Ó Coincennainn ina chúrsa aníos go Cúige Mumhan sa bhliadhain 1900, agus é ag craobhscaoileadh soiscéil an Chonnartha do léighinn na tuairiscí a scríobhadh sé don Chlaidheamh Soluis, agus ba mhór an

a. sic- Hyde was almost certainly referring to James Stephens and his 3,000 mile walk prior to the foundation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

b. The Concannon Vineyard, established in 1883, is still going strong today.

c. This is a reference to the 1798 Rebellion-themed song “The Wearing of the Green”-

“I met with Napper Tandy, and he took me by the hand

And he said, “How’s poor old Ireland, and how does she stand?”

“She’s the most distressful country that ever yet was seen

For they’re hanging men and women there for the Wearing of the Green.”

Note that 1898 was the Centenary of the 1798 Rebellion, and this was very much in the minds of those active at that time.

spéis a chuirinn ionta, agus b’fháda liom go dtagadh sé dom cheantair féin féachaint an ndúiseachadh aon chuid dár muintir.

Tháinig sé go Scoil Mhuire nó go Scumhal (Mhuire) mar deirid ughdair áirithe, agus bhí cruinniú ann an 6adh lá de Iúl. Tá an ball san nach mór fiche míle ó Inisín na gCiotach, an áir ina raibh cómhnaidhe orm-sa, ach shocrúigheas féin agus cara liom ón Sciobairín go raghaimis ann. Chuadhmar, leis. Fuaras rothar ar iasacht agus thugamar fén mbóthar, ach b’é sin an tríomhadh bhuaire agam-sa ar rothar agus thuirsiú na chnuic go seoidh mé. Rud eile, bhíos tar éis acra féir a spealadh an lá riomis sin, agus do allumhar an obair é sin, agus ba thuirseamhail. Ach bhíomar ag an gcrúinniú go háraithe agus chaitheamar tamall i gcuideachtaí an timithre tar éis an chruinnithe. B’shin é an chéad uair a chuala Gaedhilg Chonnacht á labhairt agus chuir sí amugha beagán mé, ach thuig an Connachtach ca mhíóadh an fhadhb agus réidtigheadh sé dhom thar bárr í i dtreo gur thuigeamar a chéile maith go leor.

Ach d’íocas as an gcrúinniú san sul ar bhaineas mo bhaile amach an oidhce sin. Bhí tuirse an dá lá ag imirt orm agus bhí orm stad go minic le linn an chúpla míle deireanach den turas a bheith á chur díom agam. Thuiteas i bhaddtais de shaghas éigin uair amháin nuair stadas, agus b’shin rud nár thuit amach riamh roimis ná ó shoin. Sórt baiste i gceideamh na timthreacht a deiseadh orm an lá san, agus ní hiongna go gcuimhneochainn fós air. Cuimhnighim, leis. Ach mheas mo athair gur le teasbach a chualas as baile an Domhnach san, agus bí orm lá fada oibre a chur isteach amáireach a bhí chugainn, i bhfeighil fhéir.

Agus mise i bhfeighil an fhéir an lá san ní dóigh liom gur air a bhíos ag machtnamh ach ar an gcaint a chuala ó Thomás Ó Coincennainn indé roimis sin agus ar an dturas úd ar an mbóthar fada garbh siar agus aniar, agus ar an obair a bhí á dhéanamh ag Connradh na Gaedhile sa tír, agus ar a laighead a bhí déanta cois baile againn féin de.” Fé Bhrat an Chonnartha, 1944

# Cuan Ó Seireadáin



## Bio

Cuan Ó Seireadáin is the 2016 Coordinator and Archivist at Conradh na Gaeilge (The Gaelic League). Born and raised in an Irish-speaking family in Rathfarnham, Dublin, he moved to Germany in 2002 to pursue a career as a classical musician. Following a decade of study and engagements with orchestras throughout Europe, Cuan returned to Ireland in 2014 to dedicate his time to the Irish language movement.

In his work with the Gaelic League, Cuan has planned and initiated the digitisation of *An Claidheamb Soluis*, the Gaelic League's newspaper which was a key publication during the early 20th Century in Ireland, organised 1916 commemorative events throughout Ireland and in the United States, and begun the work of uncovering, assessing, and cataloguing the Gaelic League's rich archives. Working from the Gaelic League's historic headquarters in No. 6 Harcourt Street in Dublin, Cuan is a regular contributor to Irish and British broadcast media.

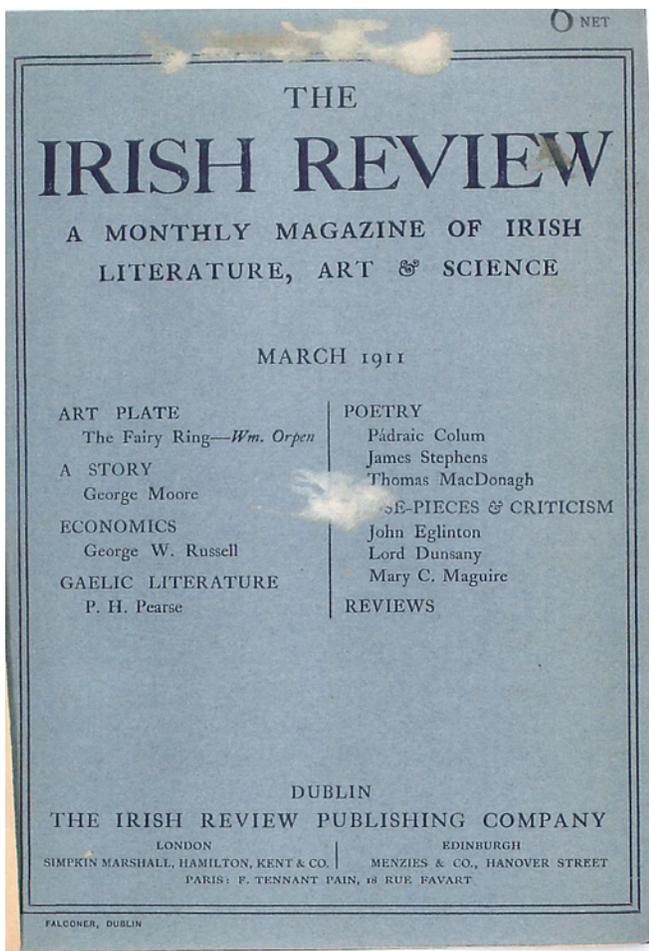
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## Conradh na Gaeilge (The Gaelic League)

Conradh na Gaeilge (The Gaelic League) is the democratic forum for the Irish-speaking community, and its main aim is to promote the use of Irish as the standard language in Ireland. The organisation works on behalf of the Irish language and the people who use it throughout the island of Ireland and around the world. There are almost 180 branches of Conradh na Gaeilge and it is also possible to register as an individual member. Since the foundation of Conradh na Gaeilge by Eoin Mac Néill and Douglas Hyde on the 31st July of 1893, its members have been active in promoting the Irish language in every aspect of life in Ireland – from legal matters and education issues, to developments in the media and Irish language services. Conraitheoirí are at the forefront of campaigns to secure and strengthen the rights of the Irish-language community, and all members of Conradh na Gaeilge work hard to develop the use of Irish in their own areas. More information can be found on their website at [www.cnag.ie](http://www.cnag.ie)

# *The Irish Review: March 1911–November 1914*

by Adrienne Leavy



In what is generally considered to be the premiere journal of its day, the *Irish Review* began as a collaboration between five young Irish intellectuals: David Houston, a lecturer in the Royal College of Science; poet and writer James Stephens; poet and playwright Padraic Colum; poet and academic Thomas MacDonagh; and the poet Joseph Mary Plunkett. The first issue, which announced itself as “A Monthly Magazine of Irish Literature, Art & Science,” appeared in March 1911 at a cost of 5/6. Houston was the initial editor, with Colum assuming this responsibility a year later in March 1912. Aside from its literary merits the magazine is also of great historical interest because of the disparate elements of politics and art, nationalism and literature, which co-existed between its covers. These polarities were due to the active involvement of three of the main participants in the Easter Rising who were also poets and writers: Plunkett, who served as editor from 1913-1914, MacDonagh, who was associate editor from 1913-1914, and Pádraig Pearse, who contributed poems, translations and essays throughout the journal’s run.

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Plunkett came from a prominent Dublin family and was the most affluent member of the group of leaders of the 1916 Rising. His father was a barrister and a papal count, and he was also descended from the martyred bishop Oliver Plunkett. A committed nationalist and a poet, he was the principal military strategist for the Rising. Widely travelled, Plunkett was an intellectual and an accomplished linguist, with a

broad range of interests that included philosophy, Catholic mystical writing, physics, chemistry and photography. His first poetry book, *The circle and the sword*, was published in 1911, with a posthumous collection, *The poems of Joseph Mary Plunkett*, published in 1916. Many of his poems were first published in *The Irish Review*. On the eve of his execution he married his fiancée Grace Gifford in the chapel of Kilmainham jail. He was executed on May 4, 1916.

MacDonagh was a poet, playwright, teacher and literary critic. He met Plunkett in 1910 by responding to an advertisement that Plunkett placed for an Irish language teacher, and the two developed a close friendship through their mutual interest in poetry, history, language and art. In 1908 he was appointed by Pearse to be deputy head-master of the latter’s new secondary school, Scoil Éanna (St. Enda’s), a position he held until 1910, when he scaled back to part time teaching until 1911 when he joined the faculty of UCD as a full-time assistant lecturer. His



second play, *Metempsychosis: or A Mad World*, was published in *The Irish Review* along with his poetry and critical writings. MacDonagh was working on his Ph.D. dissertation on the theme of language in Ireland at the time of his execution on May 3, 1916.

Prior to his engagement with the nationalist movement Pearse had established his reputation as a poet, playwright, journalist and teacher. A Gaelic revivalist, he was instrumental in popularizing the Gaelic League and from 1906-1909 he served as editor to the league's weekly newspaper, *An Claidheamh Soluis*. In 1908 he established the bilingual secondary school for boys, Saint Enda's, which was followed by Saint Ita's school for girls in 1910. Both schools emphasized a child-centered approach to education, intellectual independence and a bilingual conception of pedagogy. One of his most influential polemics on education, *The Murder Machine*, was first published in *The Irish Review*. The journal also published Pearse's translations of Gaelic poetry, *Specimens from an Irish Anthology*. In 1913 Pearse co-founded the Irish Volunteers and in December of that same year he was sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood and served on its Supreme Council.<sup>1</sup> During the 1916 Rising Pearse was the commander-in-chief of the insurgent forces and the President of the Provisional Government. He was executed on May 3, 1916.

Throughout its run, the magazine was simultaneously a social forum and an aesthetic journal, serving as an important vehicle for public debate in a deeply divided society that was trying to define itself. In the first issue the editors were at pains to stress the independent, apolitical nature of the publication, declaring that "*The Irish Review* will speak for Ireland rather than for any party or coterie in Ireland," and asserting that the magazine "belongs to no party." From the beginning, the journal was intended to be a serious intellectual endeavor, and within its pages one finds traditional literary and artistic forms comingling with political activism and the ideals of the cultural and literary revival. The opening editorial clearly signaled that the editors wished to create a discursive space for the exhibition and exploration of different perspectives:

*The Irish Review* has been founded to give expression to the intellectual movement in Ireland. By the intellectual movement we do not understand an activity purely literary; we think of it as the application of Irish intelligence to the reconstruction of Irish life. Science and economics will claim an increasing share of attention as our people progress toward the command of their resources. *The Irish Review* is prepared to give space to these interests as well as to the activities displayed in art, literature, and criticism.

With this open editorial policy, *The Irish Review* attracted contributions from the leading writers and intellectuals of their generation. George Moore, Colum and Stephens contributed short stories, while Standish O'Grady and Lord Dunsany contributed several plays and prose pieces, and each issue ended with a book review section. In addition to his numerous polemical essays Roger Casement also published several poems in *The Review*. The opinions of AE, Maud Gonne and Arthur Griffin were also reflected in the magazine. Many of the writers featured

1. The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was a secret separatist revolutionary organization that included among its members Eoin MacNeill, MacDonagh, Plunkett, Éamonn Ceannt, Seán MacDiarmada, Bulmer Hobson and Pearse.

were also regular contributors to *An Claidheambh Soluis* and both Northern Irish and English writers were given the freedom to express their intellectual and political viewpoints, particularly on the question of Home Rule for Ireland.

Although not an avant-garde magazine, one of the distinguishing features of *The Irish Review* is that it introduced its readers to different artists and art movements. Beginning with William Orpen's *The Fairy Ring*, each issue opened with a print from a painting by a contemporary Irish artist. Over the course of four years, paintings by artists as diverse as Richard Long, Orpen, AE, John B. Yeats, Jack Morrow, Grace Gifford, Nathaniel Hone and Estella Solomons were featured. The work of stained glass artist Harry Clarke also made an appearance, and Jack Yeats was a frequent contributor.

A review of the third issue from May 1911 illustrates *The Review's* characteristically eclectic mix of material, with artistic debates and cultural analysis sharing the same platform with politics. Political and economic essays in the form of "The Financial Relations of Ireland and Great Britain" and "The Prospects of Democracy in Ireland" appeared alongside Pearse's translations of an Irish keening song, "A Father Keens His Dead Child," and an installment of Stephen's "Mary: A Story." Stephen's contribution, which was serialized over eleven issues, was subsequently developed into his successful first novel, *A Charwoman's Daughter*. Also included in this issue was a feminist review of three of George Bernard Shaw's plays by Hannah Sheehy Skeffington.

Given that the major editorial positions were filled by poets it is not surprising that a major emphasis of the magazine was contemporary Irish poetry. Over the course of its run *The Irish Review* published poems by all the major poets of the day, including AE, Joseph Campbell, Colum, Daniel Corkery, Emily Lawless, MacDonagh, Stephens, and W.B. Yeats. Not all of the material has stood the test of time, with perhaps the most interesting work being that by Yeats and also Pearse's translations of Gaelic poetry. In December 1911 Yeats contributed "On those who Dislike the Playboy," and one year later "At the Abbey Theatre," opened the December 1912 issue. Beginning in 1912, the poetry of Plunkett, MacDonagh and Pearse dominates the publication. An on-going poetry feature was Pearse's Irish translations, which were chapters from an Anthology of Gaelic Poetry he was in the process of compiling.

In addition to poetry, fiction, drama and art, the magazine published a variety of lively essays and articles on topics as diverse as the Royal Hibernia Academy, the civil service, agriculture in rural Ireland, the state of Irish primary and secondary education, feminism, forestry, economics and philosophy. Essays on Home Rule, Nationalism and Imperialism from both Irish and Unionist writers sought to stimulate serious discussion and define the culture and identity of the yet to be formed Irish nation. In the October 1913 issue, a lead piece by James Connolly entitled "Labor in Dublin," comments on the impact of the Dublin Lockout on the members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. Decrying the living conditions of Dublin's working poor and the fact that Irish employers paid lower wages than were paid for similar work in England, Connolly defended the concept of the "Sympathetic Strike" as a means to achieve social justice.

From the inception, women writers were well represented in the magazine, their contributions mirroring the active involvement of women in organizations such as Cumann na mBan and Inghinidhe na hÉireann. The first issue included an appraisal of the work of J.M. Synge by the literary critic Mary Maguire, the future wife of *Review* editor Padraic Colum. The Colums immigrated to the United States in 1914, where Maguire enjoyed a successful writing career, publishing regularly in periodicals and newspapers such as *Scribner's Magazine*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, *The Dial* and *Poetry*. Maud Gonne contributed an essay entitled "Responsibility" in December 1911, highlighting issues of social injustice and the plight of the poor. Specifically, her essay drew attention to the starvation of poor children caused by the failure to feed pupils during school hours. Lily Fogarty introduced readers to the work of the young poet Francis Ledwidge in the March 1914 issue. Other women writers include Mary McCrossan, Emily Lawless, Susan L. Mitchell, Katherine Tynan, the historian and feminist Mary Haydon and Ella Young. Art plates of the work of Mary Duncan, Grace Gifford and Estella Solomons also featured prominently.

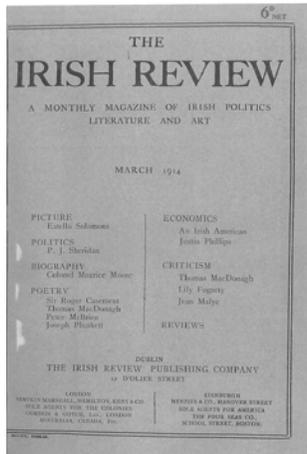
Several English women writers whose work was influenced by Ireland also feature. Miriam Alexander, a British author of historical novels with Irish settings, contributed two essays entitled "Irish History in English Magazines." In the 1914 issues, Eleanor Farjeon, a writer who ultimately achieved fame in England as a writer of children's books, serialized several parts of her novel, *The Soul of Kol Nikon*, a fantasy novel inspired by the Celtic Twilight.

In addition to including women as contributors, the magazine consistently championed equal rights for women and challenged conventional attitudes about the role of women in Irish society. For example, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington's essay, "The Women's Movement in Ireland," was the lead piece in the July 1912 issue, and the September 1912 issue contained a powerful piece from Fredrick Ryan arguing that the Women's vote must come with Home Rule. "Feminism and Women's Suffrage," written by Ernest A. Boyd and published in the May 1913 issue, was another strongly worded polemic in favor of equal rights for women.

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In July 1913 Plunkett purchased *The Irish Review* and assumed financial and editorial control of the magazine. Ed Mulhall argues that once Plunkett and MacDonagh assumed editorial control, "the *Review* moved from the literary and intellectual focus it had under Colum and James Stephens to one that was far more directly political and more directly linked to the revolutionary movement that shadowed it."<sup>2</sup> This transition from political non-partisanship was also heralded in the magazine's subtitle, which changed from "A Monthly Magazine of Irish Literature, Art and Science," to "A Monthly Magazine of Irish Politics, Literature and Art." As the momentum for war with Germany grew, numerous articles questioned the advisability of Ireland's involvement in the Great War, with the issue of whether Ireland should align itself with Germany in its attempt to win independence from Britain hotly debated. A representative example is the lead essay from the first issue under Plunkett and MacDonagh's joint editorship, "Ireland, Germany and the Next War," written by Roger Casement under the pseudonym "Shan Van Vocht." Casement's essay was a response to an article by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published in the English periodical *Fortnightly Review*, wherein Conan Doyle argued that it was in Ireland's best interests to stand with Britain in the event of war with Germany. High-

2. Mulhall, Ed. "From Celtic Twilight to Revolutionary Dawn: The Irish Review 1911-1914. ([www.rte.ie/centuryireland/images/uploads/further-reading/Ed13](http://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/images/uploads/further-reading/Ed13)), 4.



lighting the strategic maritime importance of Ireland, and the fact that Ireland was part of the European continent, Casement maintained that Ireland would stand to gain from a victorious Germany because it would be severed from Britain and become “a neutralized, independent European State under international guarantees.”

If the magazine was moving in a more confrontational direction politically, this shift was also reflected in its artistic tone. Pearse’s translations, “Songs of the Irish Rebels,” began appearing in August 1913, along with a number of Gaelic poems from 1573 and 1580. The April 1914 issue published Edward Martyn’s essay, “A Plea for the Revival of the Irish Literary Theatre,” in which he excoriated both Yeats and Lady Gregory over the preponderance of peasant plays produced at the Abbey. Characterizing Yeats and Gregory’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and Yeats’s *The Pot of Gold* as “both silly little plays for silly little people,” Martyn promised that the new theatrical company he hoped to establish would produce “native works dealing with the lives and problems of people more complex, if not more refined than the characters represented by the Abbey dramatists.” With MacDonagh and Plunkett he founded the Irish Theatre in 1914 with the intention of producing indigenous original plays that were not peasant dramas, along with translations of continental drama.

As Tom Clyde points out, *The Irish Review* is “the most forceful and celebrated example of the interface between cultural politics and the rather more risky traditional kind, and the preoccupations of the editor and major contributors began to impinge more forcefully from June 1914, when the first of several versions of a proposed manifesto for the Irish Volunteers appeared.”<sup>3</sup> Pearse was one of the founders of the Irish Volunteers, which was established in November 1913, in part as a reaction to the formation of the Ulster Volunteers earlier that year. The main objective of the organization was to press the case for Home Rule and “to secure the rights and liberties of all the people of Ireland.” Subsequent inductions into the movement included Plunkett in August 1914 and MacDonagh in April 1916. Clyde is correct that the openly-politicized style that emerged under Plunkett and MacDonagh’s stewardship is a departure from the magazine’s initial editorial stance; however, even in its final months, the *Irish Review* continued to publish a mixture of political, cultural and literary content.

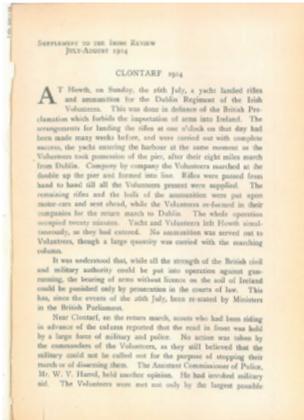
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The June 1914 issue opened with the “Manifesto of the Irish Volunteers,” which was signed by Eoin MacNeill and L.J. Kettle. Noting that it was nearly seven months since the Irish Volunteers were called into being in November 1913, the manifesto asserted that “the right of a free people to carry arms in defence of their freedom is an elementary part of political liberty,” and demanded that the prohibition on importing arms into Ireland be lifted. The inclusion of primary political documents of the Irish Volunteer movement within the pages of *The Irish Review* underscores the validity of Mark Morrisson’s observation that “studies of the politics of modernism have also begun to take little magazines as political texts and primary documents.”<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding the growing importance of politics and the revolutionary movement under Plunkett and MacDonagh’s editorial stewardship, it would be an exaggeration to view the magazine as simply a forum for nationalist propaganda. Directly after this Manifesto is Pearse’s

3. Clyde, Tom. *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 162.

4. Morrison, Mark, “Preface” in *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*. Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKible editors (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), xvi.



essay, “An Ideal In Education,” wherein he argued that the goal of education should be to foster and inspire students in a manner similar to the old Irish system. There follows a poem by Plunkett and another by his sister Geraldine, along with a critical essay on “Language and Literature in Ireland” by MacDonagh. Closing out the June 1914 issue is a comedic drama, *The Walls of Athens* by Eimar O’Duffy, an essay on Lord Dunsany’s plays by Padraic Colum, and a book review by Constant Maxwell of *A Short History of Ireland*. A similar mix of politics and literature is evident in the remaining issues.

Yet there is no doubting the shift in emphasis, as events in real life took precedence over aesthetic considerations. The July-August manifesto, dated 30th June, 1914 and published in the July 1914 issue, was a call to unity: “Every Irish Volunteer will recognize the duty, as binding on his own personal conduct, of endeavouring to secure the unity of all Ireland and of all Irishmen on the ground of national liberty. Irish Volunteers will therefore discountenance all manifestations of ill-will as between different sections of Irishmen, and will do their utmost to promote peace and goodwill throughout Ireland.” The outbreak of war in August 1914, and the postponement of the Home Rule Act for Ireland, further intensified the activities of the Irish Volunteers, who saw Britain’s distraction as their opportunity.

The dynamic nature of the magazine, wherein contemporaneous events were directly commented on, is evidenced by a four-page supplement attached to the July issue. Titled “Clontarf 1914,” this last-minute addition to the magazine provided a detailed description of the events that occurred after the Irish Volunteers unloaded a cache of arms and ammunition at Howth harbor in County Dublin on July 26. Over the previous three weeks Erskine Childers had sailed his yacht, *Asgard*, out into the North Sea where he and his crew rendezvoused with a German tugboat from which they received a cargo of 900 Mauser rifles and 29,000 rounds of ammunition. The weapons were intended for the Irish Volunteers and were subsequently used in the Easter Rising. The supplement, which was written and signed by “Thomas MacDonagh, Company Commander,” details what happened when the authorities in Dublin Castle became aware of the Howth landing and dispatched a force to intercept and disarm the Volunteers.

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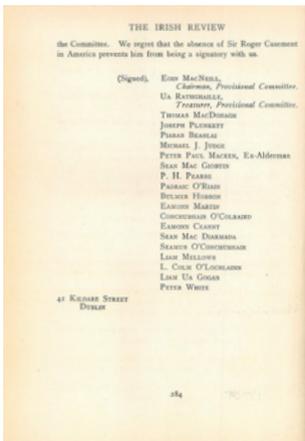
As the Volunteers were marching into Dublin with some of the weapons, they were confronted in Clontarf by the military and police authorities. After some negotiations back and forth, a brief skirmish occurred and the authorities eventually withdrew their forces. MacDonagh ends his first-person description of the day’s events with an historically triumphant allusion to the Battle of Clontarf, clearly designed to impress the historical significance of the event on his readers: “At Clontarf in 1914, as at Clontarf in 1014, has been won a national victory. For the Irish Volunteers now: discipline, vigilance, confidence.”

The economic impact of the First World War on the magazine’s fortunes was evident by September 1914 as foreign subscriptions from overseas markets were cut off and advertizing revenues virtually dried up. In what was to be the final publication, the issues for September, October and November were combined. A significant factor in the demise of *The Irish Review* was the fact that much of the journal’s conservative readership base (mainly civil servants), was alienated by the drift towards nationalist politics and cancelled their subscriptions. In addition



to the magazine's shrinking revenue, manpower was another challenge for the condensed publication, for as Plunkett informed his readers, "our entire staff has for some time past been working full-time and overtime (if such a thing were possible) in the Irish Volunteer organization."

The break with John Redmond, the leader of the Irish parliamentary party in Westminster, is evident from the third and final manifesto published in this issue. In June 1914 Redmond confronted the standing committee of the Irish Volunteers and demanded that his party nominate half of the standing committee. Dated "Thursday, 24th September, 1914," and signed by a "majority of the members of the Provisional Committee of the Irish Volunteers," the manifesto in the September-November issue of *The Irish Review* charged that Redmond tried to bring the movement under his control by insisting that twenty five of his nominees be appointed to the Provisional Committee. In order to avoid disruption to the movement Redmond's nominees were admitted; however, after Redmond gave a speech advocating for the Irish Volunteers to enlist in the British Army, the Provisional Committee rebelled, and expelled both Redmond and his followers from the movement.<sup>5</sup> What's remarkable is that this public rebuke of Redmond and his followers was aired in the pages of *The Irish Review*: "Having thus disregarded the Irish Volunteers and their solemn engagements, Mr. Redmond is no longer entitled, through his nominees, to any place in the administration and guidance of the Irish Volunteers organization."



In Clyde's estimation, "the quality of the material which appeared in *The Irish Review* throughout 1912 and into 1913 is astounding; no contemporary Irish magazine could touch it, and only a few from any era have come close."<sup>6</sup> A vibrant contribution to Irish artistic, cultural and political life, the magazine provided a forum for artists and intellectuals to debate the economic, intellectual and political direction of the nascent Irish nation. What makes this publication especially historically significant is the fact that, as Mulhall points out, "we can trace through its pages how emerging young writers of that generation changed their focus from one concerned with literary and cultural pre-occupations to one that was increasingly political and how that politics, influenced by external events, moved from parliamentary to revolutionary."<sup>7</sup> Reading through the magazine in its entirety reveals how Plunkett and MacDonagh transformed *The Irish Review* into what Lawrence William White terms "a virtual mouthpiece for Volunteer policy."<sup>8</sup> The medium of the little magazine was used to advocate and politically justify the aims of Irish nationalism as espoused by the Irish Volunteers. Within two years of closing its doors, Pearse, MacDonagh and Plunkett put the revolutionary ideas expressed in *The Irish Review* into practice.

5. On September 20 1914 Redmond addressed a group of Irish Volunteers who were drilling at Woodenbridge in County Wicklow wherein he pledged the support of the Volunteer movement for Britain in the First World War.  
 6. Clyde, 162.  
 7. Mulhall, 4.  
 8. White, Laurence William. 1916 Portraits and Lives. (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy), 168.

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## Adrienne Leavy

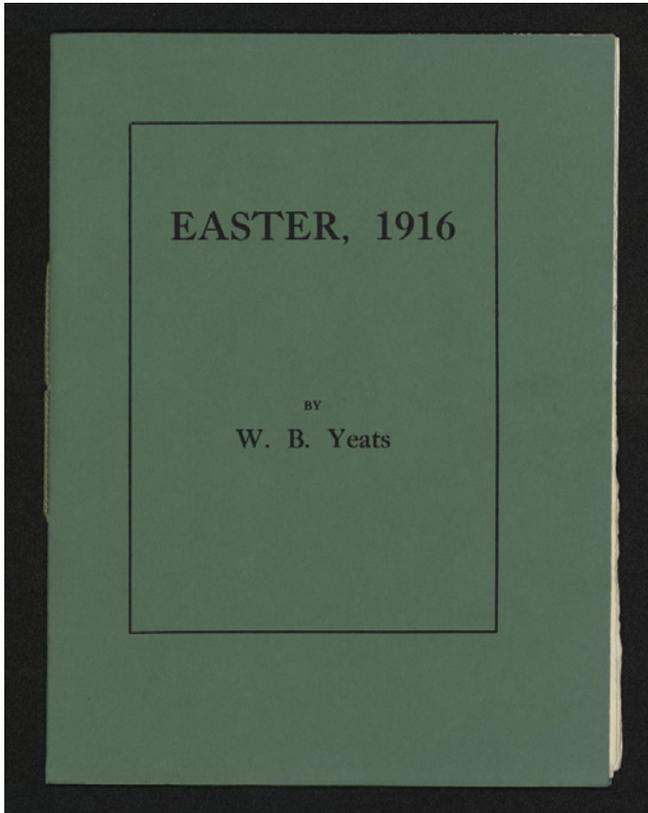


### Bio

Adrienne Leavy was educated at Trinity College Dublin and The Honourable Society of Kings Inns before immigrating to the United States. After practicing law in Arizona for ten years she returned to college to study Irish Literature. She holds a Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies from Arizona State University and a Ph.D. in English Literature, also from Arizona State University. The focus of her dissertation was the poetry of Thomas Kinsella. She is the editor and publisher of *Reading Ireland: The Little Magazine*, and is currently working on a collection of essays, *From Beltaine to The Bell: Fifty Five Years of Irish Literary Journals*. Her poetry has been published in Ireland in *A Modest Review*, *Boyne Berries*, *Crannóg*, *Revival* and *The Stony Thursday Book*.

# “O when may it suffice?”: W.B. Yeats, the Rising, and the Poetry of Difficult Times

by Gregory Castle



Rare early printing of W. B. Yeats's iconic poem 'Easter, 1916'. It is the fourth of only 25 copies that Yeats allowed to be printed between completing the poem in September 1916 and publishing a slightly revised version in *The New Statesman* in October 1920. This copy, published by Clement Shorter in 1917, was donated to University College Dublin by Joseph M Hassett in 2016.

One hundred years from this time  
Will anybody change their minds  
And find out one thing or two about life?  
People are always talking,  
You know they're always talking.  
Everybody's so wrong  
That I know it's gonna work out right.  
Nobody knows what kind of trouble we're in.  
Nobody seems to think it all might happen again.

Gram Parsons, "One Hundred Years from Now"

I would like to contemplate the role of poetry in difficult times, when faith confronts faithlessness like stone beasts thrashing on a dark plain, and I'd like to take as my text W. B. Yeats's "Easter 1916." We don't really need another close reading of this great poem, nor do we need another appreciation of Yeats. We need instead a consideration of what the poem promises, specifically the way it invokes a future precisely when it seems to be commemorating the last vestige of Romantic Ireland. There is a testamentary quality to "Easter 1916"—a disposition of heroic virtues that gives

equal measure to friend, helper and lout, that weaves allegory into political elegy and puts the past into play *for the future*, which is of course the role of poetry in difficult times.

One hundred years from the *now* of Yeats's poem—a time of "casual comedy" and "hearts of stone," a time for "terrible beauty"—we can see clearly the dialectical *frisson* of what the poet confronted, the excitement of revolutionary movement and the additional excitement of contemplating it and recreating it in verse. These three phrases mark the argument of the poem, the points at which Yeats skewers his own elegance, throws a spanner into the dialectical process in order to prod or jolt it into new configurations that evade closure by dictating new terms for it, "in time to be, / Wherever green is worn."<sup>1</sup> The dialectical image of a "terrible beauty" is a process that *concludes without concluding*, that leaves behind an excess of meaning and possibility, a sublime surplus that the poet seizes upon as the defining characteristic of the flawed and reckless heroes he commemorates. The image of "terrible beauty" is meant to be binding, meant to support the weight of the poem's excesses and ambiguities, its concessions and its triumphs. It is meant, in short, to be the guarantor of the future.

Reading Yeats's "Easter 1916" in the centenary year of 2016 is, in a salutary sense, an exercise in failure: for how can we possibly come to such an iconic poem, one hundred years since the poet wrote down the first draft, but with expectations that have nothing to do with its words, its images and the feelings it has on reserve? We come to the poem now, one hundred years later, and we read it with the air of an audience waiting for the poem to explain itself. This was my first thought when I sat down to write this essay. It was no doubt what Yeats's first readers thought in the autumn of 1920, when they contemplated a poem about the Rising at a time when England and Ireland were at war.<sup>2</sup> I could spend the next half dozen pages illustrating what many great critics have said about this poem in terms of what it meant *for other people back then*. For this, the reader is advised to go elsewhere.

What is left, after our failed expectations and the recitation of astute critics reading a great poem about an iconic event?

As I've suggested, there is something vital left, and that *something* is what the poem promises. "Easter 1916" moves us not so much because we understand the words in their procession in verse, nor because we understand the idea of a "terrible beauty" that the poem solicits, the glimmer of an unrecognizable future, terrible *and* beautiful, that is capable of standing for a world. It moves us because we understand implicitly that what we are feeling is a promise, one that reverberates in the poem's most minute structures, a promise that the sacrifice made for such an idea may *one day* suffice. But who makes this promise? We could say, facetiously, the speaker, but what actually happens is that the poem itself, the vital living voice of its being read, makes this promise about sacrifice by raising questions about its very necessity. As readers, we are seduced into the speaker's position; in being swept up by the poem's sentiments and rhymes, rhythms and associations, we are borne along on the poet's testament, his covenant, his promises. And all of his questions about the future become ours. As readers, we are also heirs.

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Yeats's poetry is filled with such speakers, the heralds of coming times, those curious orators who face backward and march forward, in order to alert reader to the future that is right behind them, that is advancing in order to be recognized as *what is to come*. "Easter 1916," with its temporality of hindsight, indicates that the path to recognition is a humbling, even downgrading one.

I have passed with a nod of the head  
Or polite meaningless words,  
Or have lingered awhile and said  
Polite meaningless words,  
And thought before I had done  
Of a mocking tale or a gibe  
To please a companion  
Around the fire at the club,  
Being certain that they and I  
But lived where motley is worn. (ll. 5-15)

At one time, the speaker says, I have behaved in a thoughtless way with thoughtless words that have demeaned thought. I have given freely “a mocking tale or gibe” because it seemed that little else mattered. It all fell into a great “motley” that fit like a uniform, that testified to a kind of uniformity. The poet dwells on what he *has done*, when he *but lived*, when he *had lingered awhile*, a time when meaningless and polite things *had been said*—and would likely continue to be said, such is the rhetorical force of all these perfect-tense locutions. Polite society is a prevaricating ruse, a “mocking tale” or the kind of “gibe” that is filled with unspoken knowledge. The terrible thing that undoes this complacency, and the “grey / Eighteenth-century houses” (ll. 3-4) that prop it up, goes totally unheard by those around the “fire at the club,” though on the streets the newspapers were spelling it all out.

Yeats himself rolled out the powder keg well in advance with *Poems Written in Discouragement* in 1913, which contained “September 1913,” a incendiary attack on the Dublin political establishment for its money-grubbing commercialism that also managed to deliver an eloquent eulogy to “Romantic Ireland,” proclaiming that it’s “dead and gone, / It’s with O’Leary in the grave” (ll. 7-8). The dialectical excitement of the poem—social critique paired with Revival commemoration—is dampened in “Easter 1916,” but not by much. The main effect is rather a teasing out, especially in the problematic third stanza, of that which resists dialectical closure: the ambiguities and tensions of a revolutionary process that, in the earlier poem, are seemingly resolved in the melancholy recognition that Romantic Ireland is *dead and gone*. “Easter 1916,” by contrast, resists any such resolution and raises new questions of the sort that characterize the mature Yeats, the kind of rhetorical questions that, as Paul De Man once noted, both require and discourage an answer.<sup>3</sup> “September 1913” comes complete with its answer, its smooth dialectical energies suitable to the polemical nature of *Discouragement*. “Easter 1916,” in its cadences and syntax, its stanza forms and arrangement, refuses to say clearly what is terrible and what is beautiful and, in fact, concludes by wondering if the sacrifice celebrated in the poem was necessary after all. In this respect, “Easter 1916” tell us less about revolution than about the movement *into* revolution, the moment when ambivalence and reflection (reflection on ambivalence) begins to displace the boneheaded certainties and ideological limits on display in the earlier poem. One hundred years on, we are living in the same moment, when stone beasts fight in the dark.

24

In “September 1913,” Yeats revolts against a Dublin establishment that refused his proposal to build a museum for modern European and Irish art. In the stately scene of recognition that unfolds in “Easter 1916,” we see a definite change in the poet’s attitude about “Romantic Ireland.” From grief over dead ideals to bafflement before a sublime sacrifice, this “terrible beauty,” Yeats’s attitude toward social change matures. He begins to understand the crucial power of the poet to re-establish the past on a new footing, on new “grounds of recognizability,” to borrow a phrase from Walter Benjamin, who writes that “[e]very present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each ‘now’ is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time.”<sup>4</sup> Removing the images belonging to a particular epoch threatens to decouple them from the contexts in which they were recognizable as particular kinds of images, with a local ground for meaning. “September 1913,” gains much of its power from the historical time in which the images of the poem can be recognized in a *particular way* (for example, as referencing Dublin Corporation attitudes about municipal investment). “Easter 1916” is tasked with finding a new localized ground for meaning, one on which Romantic Ireland takes yet *another stand*. In this regard,

it resuscitates John O’Leary, whose recalcitrant spirit menaces the formal elegance of the poem in a manner that registers the continuance of Irish resistance to oppression. It registers, too, the formal dynamics of the poem in which the images of Irish nationalist resistance (“Romantic Ireland”) are offered up to recognition *once again* as a vital part of the poem’s indigenous temporality, one shared by the reader who accepts its invitation.

One hundred years on, we might learn much from the poet’s open invitation, his embrace, albeit ambivalent, of mocking tales and gibes.

With “Easter 1916,” Yeats enters into a phase in his career that is marked by the horseman’s glance, the magisterial gaze that he casts on his own prior works as he continues to create new ones.<sup>5</sup> Around the time he was writing “Easter 1916,” he published “The Fisherman,” a poem that explicitly rewrites and corrects his own romantic tendencies when it comes to representing the rural Irish.

Maybe a twelvemonth since  
Suddenly I began,  
In scorn of this audience,  
Imagining a man,  
And his sun-freckled face,  
And grey Connemara cloth,  
Climbing up to a place  
Where stone is dark under froth,  
And the down-turn of his wrist  
When the flies drop in the stream;  
A man who does not exist,  
A man who is but a dream;  
And cried, “Before I am old  
I shall have written him one  
Poem maybe as cold  
And passionate as the dawn.” (ll. 21-36)

25

An imitation driven by scorn is bound to be distorted, but it would not for that reason fail to render the kind of resemblance that the poet sought, a resemblance that is true to the experience of the Connemara man imagined by the poet, an imagined man who *necessarily* “does not exist,” who is *necessarily* nothing “but a dream.” For how else are we to read these enigmatic lines but as an address to what his own prior self imagined, a man who had misrecognized an imagined man? In “The Fisherman,” Yeats rectifies his own stance as a Revivalist who had for years confused the necessity of creating what “does not exist” with the strategy of imagining that an imagined man could stand as surety for the man himself. What the poet imagines now is the man he *should* have imagined, and it is for *him* that he seeks, while young enough for the labor, to write a poem that was effectively a new world, as “cold / And passionate as the dawn.” These lines are addressed from the standpoint of the maturing poet who has learned that misrecognition is a vital and necessary step toward the kind of poem that expresses the dawning of a new world (*an elsewhere*) in which an imagined man might finally *be recognized*.<sup>6</sup>

The reminder that things are not exactly what they seem was salutary in 1916, when Yeats wrote his poem about the Rising. And it's salutary now: for we too look forward to something terrible, certainly at a minimum, something terrible this way comes. It could very well be coming toward Bethlehem. And like Yeats, we struggle with how we will recognize what comes out of this cold and passionate dawn.

The question for us, as it was for Yeats, is this: will it also be beautiful?

Yeats wrote "Easter 1916" in the middle of a revolt, and it seems to suggest that the energies of revolution, the desperate need for change, made possible an opening, an accommodation of people from all walks of life—the "vivid faces" on the street, the "helper and friend," the lout— and that this accommodation itself constitutes a form of the beautiful on the national scale: the assimilation of every tension, every combative element into a singular, unified and unifying idea: the Nation.<sup>7</sup> Of course, this accommodation is also the seedbed of a great and terrifying convulsion, pitting neighbor against neighbor. One hundred years later, as we read this poem of sacrifice, we confront only the specter of terror, of convulsion and self-destruction, without any of the accommodations—the openness and vitality of revolution as *movement* itself—that make disparate people into comrades-in-arms. What is missing for us, today, is the dialectical balance of terror and beauty that had provided a starting point for the Irish nation and its people and that stabilized sublimity (the terrible) under the founding power of beauty. On this view, "Easter 1916" promises an accommodation, a balancing act in the name of humanity, in which the individual is commemorated even as the nation's drive toward an independent future takes aim at the very qualities of individualism—heroic recklessness, courage, creativity, openness, love—that Yeats had long promoted.

26

This balance, like the *frisson* of what is best and worst in us, is also missing, one hundred years along.

"An Irish Airman foresees His Death," written just after "Easter 1916," articulates with dialectical serenity this balancing act between desire and necessity, life and death:

I balanced all, brought all to mind,  
The years to come seemed waste of breath,  
A waste of breath the years behind  
In balance with this life, this death. (ll. 13-16)

The chiasmic chiming of "balance," "breath" and "death," depend on the word "seemed," which throws into doubt the reckless heroism of the airman who sees the future as an obliterating "tumult in the clouds" (l. 12). A fatal pause in the triumphant march of the airman's thoughts, a "lonely impulse of delight" (l. 11), strikes a balance: a life given away or lived—"this life, this death"—is in any case a "waste of breath."

In "Easter 1916," Yeats establishes a similar ambivalent scene of reckless heroism. In the second stanza, a stately order is achieved in the roll call of artists, writers and educators, all but one dead long before the poem's publication: "That woman's days . . . This man . . . This other his helper . . . He might have won fame . . . this other man . . . He had done most bitter wrong . . . He, too . . . He, too." Something singular, a "drunken, vainglorious" voice,

halts and balances this unnamed multitude:

He had done most bitter wrong  
To some who are near my heart,  
Yet I number him in the song;  
He, too, has resigned his part  
In the casual comedy;  
He, too, has been changed in his turn,  
Transformed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born. (ll. 33-40)

We can easily identify with the “young and beautiful” partisan, the “man [who] kept a school” and “rode our winged horse,” but Yeats wants to call into question just this ease, the lonely *but beautiful* impulse of the airman who strikes a risky balance with the sky. And so he chooses the lout, who must be included in the song and who is transformed by the revolution to which he has sacrificed himself. Though the poet will again issue a roll call, naming names in the last stanza, he is satisfied at this point to establish the kind of duality he favors in the middle period, the *Hic* and *Ille* (this and that) of “Ego Dominus Tuus” (1919):

*Ille.* By the help of an image  
I call to my own opposite, summon all  
That I have handled least, least looked upon.  
*Hic.* And I would find myself and not an image.  
*Ille.* That is our modern home . . . (ll. 8-12)

27

The struggle with balance and opposition, the struggle to conceive of opposition as a form of balance, is evident in poems throughout this period. Strikingly, Yeats calls upon the *image* to facilitate a balanced opposition, to bring into appearance the force of one’s opposite, one’s anti-self. In “Easter 1916,” we can chart Yeats’s growing awareness that images are themselves a living index of an opposition *that is absolutely necessary*.

Opposites call to each other in the second stanza of “Easter 1916,” the “helper and friend” call to the “daring and sweet” and both call to the “vainglorious lout” (ll. 30, 32). But as if in acknowledgment of his own tendency to romanticize, Yeats focuses the poem’s argument on the lout, “this other man I had dreamed” (l. 31). Like the fisherman, this man who “had done most bitter wrong,” is also an *imagined* man, and as such must be “numbered in the song”: not only named (as in the final stanza), but *counted* as a beat in the trimeter line. If there is a symmetry and balance to this stanza, it is not marred by McBride’s dominance in the final lines. He is the dialectical image of what ought to matter most and what is “least looked upon” (“Ego Dominus Tuus,” l. 10)—what is terrible in league with what is beautiful, the friend with the lout.

This “casual comedy” is the poet’s “modern home” in the sense that the terrible beauty the Rising inaugurates marks precisely the futurity dreamt of by the ancient bards. The present balances the future on the fulcrum of the past. But Yeats, master dialectician, requires more than balance. As “Airman” and “Fisherman” show, he requires the horseman’s glance, the “cold eye” of rectification, which is to say, he requires error and misprision. Dialectics

is, for Yeats, a struggle to see clearly along the lines of sight that he has laid down *for himself*. His strong visual imagination makes my recourse to Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image—one in which dialectics comes to a standstill—the recognition of a deep affinity between the two men.<sup>8</sup> For I think that Yeats eschews the formalist (and formulaic and oppressive) closure of poetic dialectics in favor of something more fluid and, at the same time, more powerfully redemptive.

This *something* brings me to the “living stream” in the third stanza of “Easter 1916,” which presents the reader with a tableau that evokes an organic and incorporative balance. At this point, the poem enacts the sublimity it narrates precisely by upsetting the poem's formal symmetry, for the third stanza lacks the refrain “a terrible beauty is born” that firmly roots the rest of the poem in a ballad tradition. “Yeats singles out the stanza about nature's active changingness,” Helen Vendler writes, “as an example of the beautiful, in contrast to the revolutionary sublime of the other three stanzas. . . . [T]he refrainless stanza of change is thereby put outside narrative and into the genre of meditation.” With this last sentiment, I wholly agree, but I would want to reverse the polarity of Vendler's aesthetics, for I see the revolutionary ballad that unfolds in stanzas one, two and four as a balanced and symmetrical work of beauty, while the third stanza with its barely controlled excesses, functions as the sublime moment in the poem, the moment when revolution moves toward accommodation.

In stanza three, the poet introduces a landscape that accommodates the stone-like reality of “hearts with one purpose alone” and offers the heart so “enchanted” another purpose, a new ground for recognizability “in the midst of all”:

The horse that comes from the road.  
The rider, the birds that range  
From cloud to tumbling cloud,  
Minute by minute they change;  
A shadow of cloud on the stream  
Changes minute by minute;  
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,  
And a horse plashes within it;  
The long-legged moor-hens dive,  
And hens to moor-cocks call;  
Minute by minute they live:  
The stone's in the midst of all. (ll. 45-56)

As Calvin Bedient has pointed out, Yeats's modernism is all about *movement*.<sup>9</sup> However, despite the high drama of the surrounding stanzas, there is little of real motion, only addressing and proclaiming, the murmuring of names: the poetic equivalent of a sculpture garden. The layering of vocations and temperaments, the conjunction of images of change and immobility exemplify “dialectics at a standstill,” which for Benjamin was a way for the past to “shine forth” in the work of the present. In Yeats's work at this time, heroism is depicted as reckless and violent, but also virtuous in the way that great men and women can afford to be, as the poet indicates in *Responsibilities*, from 1914, when he writes, “Only the wasteful virtues earn the sun.”<sup>11</sup> Hence, in the third stanza we are presented with a world in which violence and movement are assimilated into the environment, where they are natural, even inevitable: the

“horse-hoof slides on the brim” of things, amid the diving moor-hens and the moor-cocks calling. The rhythms and repetitions act like the stream, an ambient, elemental force that takes in *all of this* including the stone, and *perforce*, the enchanted heart.

Metaphor and reality coalesce in a process that produces a new dialectical image of “minute by minute” change, the slipping, sliding and splashing of natural existence that Yeats, in a fit of pessimism, would later call “frog-spawn.”<sup>12</sup> But there is nothing pessimistic about this stanza, which, as Vendler hints, is a lovely meditation on non-violent inclusiveness. Taken as an *entr’acte*, however, we can see the third stanza as the point at which the poet’s image of a “casual comedy” is countered by an image of a stone’s resilience. It allows for the poem’s transition to a new stance, one of ethical and political skepticism about the value of reckless heroism, of the willingness to strike a balance with death on one’s own terms. The third stanza thus serves a vital structural as well as symbolic purpose. The image formed of rider, horse, hens and cocks, the stone “in the midst of all” ennobles the granite certainties and sacrifices that are inevitable in revolutionary times. The poet is right to leave to Heaven the pressing question, “O when may it suffice?” (l. 59). For if, as Michael Wood argues, “[s]acrifice can be measured” and “there can be too much of it,” then what is at issue is a proper level of restraint, for the question itself “clearly denies the infinite attraction of the old hard service which delighted in the excesses of renunciation.”<sup>13</sup> The poet transforms this excess into the poem’s promise, which is also a responsibility to “murmur name upon name, / As a mother names her child” (ll. 61-2). Like the “living stream” that accommodates the stone, the poet who names brings everyone—friend and lout, mother and child—into “the midst of all.”

In this respect, the third stanza of “Easter 1916,” is an enigmatic conjunction rather than a non-sequitur and looks forward to “The Tower,” specifically to a strange transitional image of nesting. The opening section of Part III is a testamentary moment that is both a declaration of faith and a mockery of idealism, humanity’s “superhuman, / Mirror-resembling dream” (ll. 164-5). Before Yeats can return to the idea of the “upstanding men” who will carry on his legacy, he points to a queer opening:

29

As at the loophole there  
The daws chatter and scream,  
And drop twigs layer upon layer.  
When they have mounted up,  
The mother bird will rest  
On their hollow top,  
And so warm her wild nest. (ll. 166-72)

The testamentary and summative dynamics of this complex mid-period poem are usurped by a homely natural image, like the “stare’s nest” that erupts in “Meditations in Time of Civil War.” The movement from “Mirror-resembling dream” to a daw “warm[ing] her wild nest” results in a dialectical image of chattering, dropping, mounting, warming, resting, resisting life. Suspended in the boughs of the poem, the image of the daw’s nest precariously knits together the totality of the poem’s imagined world, just as the poet finds the “upstanding

men” of the future on his own artistic pride: “I declare / They shall inherit my pride” (ll. 126-7). Having passed through the loophole, the poet makes an appeal to a future that will not belong to him:

When the swan must fix his eye  
Upon a fading gleam,  
Float out upon a long  
Last reach of glittering stream  
And there sing his last song. (ll. 140-44)

The poet is like the swan fixing his eye on the “fading gleam” of coming times, ready to declare his faith in such a way that constructs the poem *as an invitation*, an opening to the future, even (perhaps especially) “When all streams are dry” (l. 138). Like the fisherman imagined by the poet, whose “flies drop in the stream,” or the “upstanding men / That climb the streams until / The fountain leap” (ll. 122-4), the poet looks to turbulent waters and sees futurity in their turbulence. The repetition of images of running or “darkening” water that surrounds obstacles or annihilates them provides an index of the poet’s changing ideas about the role of poetry in times of violence and social disorder. Poetry is both the stream and what stands amid its powerful forces: “the stone in the midst of all.”

Always sensitive to the status of images, Yeats finds especially valuable those images that function dialectically, that redeem the past by including it, by accommodating rather than resolving the tensions arising from it. In “Easter 1916,” however, this accommodation is tempered by more questions, the kind of political questions that bedeviled Yeats and continue to bedevil Ireland to the present day: does nationalism only ever lead to “needless death”?

30

What is it but nightfall?  
No, no, not night but death;  
Was it needless death after all?  
For England may keep faith  
For all that is done and said.  
We know their dream; enough  
To know they dreamed and are dead;  
And what if excess of love  
Bewildered them till they died? (ll. 65-73)

These questions come from the co-author (with Lady Augusta Gregory) of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), a play that romanticized sacrifice for the idea of a Sovereign Irish nation: “there were a great many in the west, some that died hundreds of years ago, and there are some that will die tomorrow.” Allegiance to the Old Woman in that play (an ancient Irish Sovereignty figure) requires total sacrifice: “If any one would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all.”<sup>14</sup> Barely fifteen years later, Yeats poses serious questions about this mode of sacrificial heroism, which can be seductive and even life-affirming (as we see in “Airman”), but which comes, for the poet, to feel like a needless, perhaps a hopeless, desire for balance, a desire mocked in the poet’s finely-turned judgment: “they dreamed and are dead.”

The mid-career works I've been alluding to have turned a corrective gaze on the poet's canon and returned to those moments when the poet fails to recognize his own poetic creations, moments of bewilderment caused by an excess of the same love that motivates his heroes: the desire for that exquisite, that *terrible* balance, "now and in time to be." He finds that balance now in a recitation of proper names:

I write it out in a verse—  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born. (ll. 74-80)

By supplying the names of the leaders of the Rising in neat trimeter lines, the poet accommodates them not only to the rhythms of his poem—"I write it out in a verse"—but also to the image of an inclusive and tolerant future promoted by the "living stream." The loftiest, the dreamiest, the most just, *and the lout*—these four create a rhythm of their own, the beating of a heart that, if one is not careful, can be *made into stone*. But another equally implicit message is conveyed: what is made can be unmade, or even better, *remade*. This is the promise of the last stanza, that the "excess of love" and the bewilderment will be ratified if not resolved. On this view, these four men stand for all the "vivid faces," all the murmuring actors who have played their part in the comedy. These four, the apostles of a new nation, of a terrible beauty, recast the traditions of heroism that the young Yeats learned from O'Grady, Lady Gregory and John O'Leary. But in the very process that gives them a name, the poet's heroes have been de-idealized, their romantic heroism sublimated into a murmurous repetition—like the mother naming her child, the poet assuages his own scarcely veiled bewilderment by asking questions meant for these heroes, who "[a]re changed, changed utterly." This is no longer a "casual comedy" but a memorial in which sacrificed heroes find their eternal fame "now and in time to be."

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"Easter 1916" is an elegy for those who sacrificed their lives in the Rising. But it is also a prophecy, which springs from the third stanza, for in that brief moment at the stony heart of the poem, the poet seems to address us, one hundred years on, as we contemplate the motley crew that dominates our own "casual comedy." This poem is a prophecy in a sneaky lyrical way, the same way that Yeats's "Second Coming" (also published in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*) is, in a sneaky lyrical way, about origins: "Easter 1916" memorializes the dead but is in fact asking questions of those who will read it in coming times; "Second Coming," in one striking image after another—"A shape with lion body and the head of a man, / A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun" (ll. 14-15)—conjures a terrifying future, but the same images lead us to think mostly about the primeval beginnings of *whatever slouches toward Bethlehem*. Both poems use rhythm and repetition, and layers of misprision, to call into play a temporality that moves counter to the poem's temperament. In "Easter 1916," which is cast in a jaunty trimeter rhythm, Yeats commemorates "Romantic Ireland" once again, but this time he cannot say that it is dead and gone, for it reverberates in all the murmuring voices that will continue to utter the names of those sacrificed to revolution. All he can wonder, along that bouncy triple beat, is whether that sacrifice was needless, whether those who sacrificed

themselves were bewildered. The “terrible beauty” is the awful future of uncertainty that comes from radical change *and* from a stony heart. It also comes from letting that heart’s stoniness accommodate “all” that surrounds it. It comes even from breaking the stone, which is arguably Yeats’s job in writing the poem, particularly in asking the questions he asks, which are directed at coming times, not those in the past he commemorates nor those in the present (the *now* of 1916), who might not feel consoled by his skeptical elegy. They are directed at those to whom the poem issues its promise, those people, like us today, who keep insisting that it all won’t happen again, who confuse what is necessary with what will suffice.

1. W. B. Yeats, *The Poems*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, vol. 1, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1983, 1989), XX. All quotations from Yeats poetry are drawn from this volume.
2. Yeats worked on the poem in the period May–September 1916; it was first issued in a private printing of 25 copies by Clement Shorter, in August 1917. It appeared in October 23, 1920, in *The New Statesman* and *The Dial* published it in November 1920. *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* was published the following year, which marks the poem’s entry into Yeats’s canon.
3. Paul de Man argues that a poem like Yeats’s “Among School Children,” which ends with a dramatic question—“O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance?”—can be read in two very different ways. According to De Man, referring to the final question, “two entirely coherent but entirely incompatible readings can be made to hinge on one line, whose grammatical structure is devoid of ambiguity, but whose rhetorical mode turns the mood as well as the mode of the entire poem upside down” (“Rhetoric and Semiology,” in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 12).
4. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 1999), N3, 1. On the dialectical image see 458, 473ff.
5. See Yeats’s “Under Ben Bulbin,” the concluding stanza with the poet’s epitaph:
 

On limestone quarried near the spot  
By his command these words are cut:  
Cast a cold eye  
On life, on death.  
Horseman, pass by! (ll. 90–4)
6. It is worth noting, that in terms of Yeats’s oeuvre, “Easter 1916,” which appears in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), comes *after* “The Fisherman,” which appears in *The Wild Swans of Coole* (1919), a volume that marks the beginning of Yeats’s Anglo-Irish Revival. Taken together these two volumes fully explore the dialectical complexities that are so tightly compounded in the four stanzas of “1916.”
7. Yeats’s early admiration for Standish O’Grady’s *History of Ireland* and the Revival historicism that sought historical knowledge in bardic literature stands behind this aesthetic standpoint on revolution and the idea of the postcolonial Nation.
8. For Benjamin, the dialectical image emerges when “what has been comes together in a flash with the now [“now time,” *Jetztzeit*] to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill” (*The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 1999), 463).
9. Vender, Helen. *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 20.
10. See Calvin Bedient, *The Yeats Brothers and Modernism’s Love of Motion* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).
11. *Responsibilities* was first published in a Cuala Press edition in 1914; Macmillan brought it out in New York and London in 1916.
12. See “A Dialogue of Self and Soul,” in *The Winding Stair* (1929):
 

I am content to live it all again  
And yet again, if it be life to pitch  
Into the frog-spawn of a blind man’s ditch,  
A blind man battering blind men. (ll. 57–60)
13. Michael Wood, *Yeats and Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 199.
14. W. B. Yeats and Lady August Gregory, *Cathleen Ni Houliban*, in *The Plays*, eds. David R. Clark and Rosalind E. Clark vol. 2 of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Scribner, 1989), 90.

# Gregory Castle



## **Bio**

Gregory Castle is a professor of English and Irish Literature at Arizona State University. He writes on Irish Revival, modernism, the novel and literary theory. His books include *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge UP), *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (UP Florida), *Literary Theory Handbook* (Wiley-Blackwell); he has edited *A History of the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge UP) and (with Patrick Bixby) *Standish O'Grady's Cuculain: A Critical Edition* (Syracuse UP); he is currently editing, also with Patrick Bixby, *A History of Irish Modernism* (Cambridge UP).

At present, he is writing mainly on Joyce, Yeats and the Irish Revival.

# The Irish Writers Center: *A Poet's Rising*

Newly commissioned poems from **Theo Dorgan, Paul Muldoon, Thomas McCarthy, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Jessica Traynor**

by **Adrienne Leavy**



Located at 19 Parnell Square, in the heart of northside Georgian Dublin, the Irish Writers Center is the flagship resource organization for writers in Ireland. The mission of the IWC is to support and promote writers at all stages of their development. The IWC provides professional support to meet the needs of writers through training, information, networking opportunities and programming events. The IWC also offers a diverse program of writing courses and workshops led by established writers across a range of genres including memoir, poetry, playwriting, writing for screen, crime fiction, writing for children and young adults, short stories and the novel. In addition, the IWC runs seminars, lectures and readings related to the craft of writing. For more information visit their website, [www.irishwriterscentre.ie](http://www.irishwriterscentre.ie) or call (+353) 18-721-302.

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As part of Art 2016, the IWC commissioned six Irish poets (one for each day of the Rising) to bring some of the iconic people and places of 1916 to life with newly commissioned poems which were accompanied by original music from composer Colm Mac Con Iomaire. Titled *A Poet's Rising*, the writers involved were Theo Dorgan, Thomas McCarthy, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Paul Mul-

doon and Jessica Traynor. An *RTE* documentary of each poet commenting about his or her approach and reading their poem in a site specific area in Dublin was subsequently released.

Ní Chuilleanáin was filmed reading her poem, “For James Connolly,” in front of his memorial statue under the bridge at Beresford Place on Eden Quay. She spoke about Connolly’s internationalism and how she tried to calibrate the gap between where we as a society are now and where Connolly was in terms of his quest for economic and social justice. Paul Muldoon read his poem “Patrick Pearse: A Manifesto,” in front of and inside the GPO, where Pearse read the Proclamation on Easter Monday 1916. Muldoon admitted that the fact that Pearse was also a poet made the task of writing about him all the more daunting; however, he tried to find a voice not untrue to what may have been going through Pearse’s head when the leaders “were leaving the GPO and stepping into history.”

Jessica Traynor was filmed reading her poem for Kathleen Lynn, “A Demonstration,” in the Rotunda Hospital. Lynn, who was made a captain of the Irish Citizen Army on Easter Monday, was also a doctor who ran St. Ultan’s hospital in Dublin for thirty-five years. A

great humanitarian, she was also involved with woman's suffrage and supported Dublin workers during the great Lockout of 1913. In approaching this poem, Traynor said that she was interested in the women who had been written out of history and she also wanted to address the emergence of a state that didn't have a place for them.

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's poem addresses the spirit of Michael Joseph O'Rahilly, the only leader of the rebellion to be killed in action. A founding member of the Irish Volunteers, he became known as "The O' Rahilly," and is famous as the leader of a last stand charge on Moore Street against entrenched British soldiers. As Ní Dhomhnaill's writes, he was "the only one to meet his end on the field of slaughter." The documentary shows the poet visiting O' Rahilly Parade, where a memorial sculpture containing the rebel's last letter to his wife is displayed. This letter was composed by The O'Rahilly as he lay dying from gunshot wounds, and the poet is understandably distressed at the area where the memorial is situated as it has fallen badly into disrepair.

Theo Dorgan poem, "We Carried It To Here As Best We Could," takes as its subject nurse (and Cumann na mBan member) Elizabeth O' Farrell who was chosen by Patrick Pearse to contact the British military on the morning of April 29 to discuss the terms of surrender. Famous in one regard as the woman airbrushed out of the surrender photograph with Pearse and Brigadier W.H.M. Lowe, Dorgan sets the record straight citing subsequent interviews with O' Farrell and family members that she did not want to be in the photo as it could be used for propaganda purposes by the British Army.

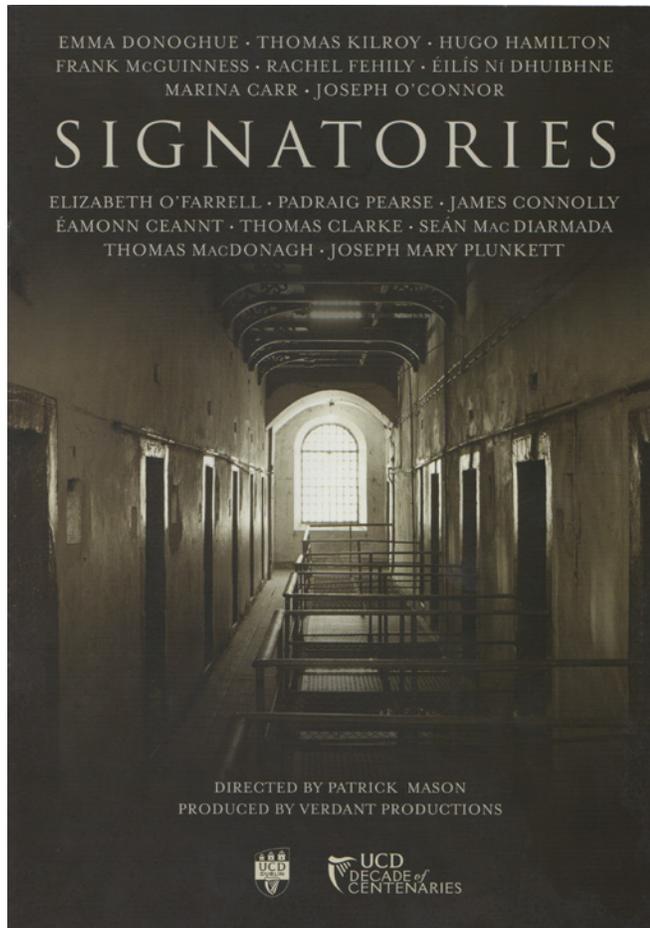
Thomas McCarthy is filmed in *The Garden of Remembrance*, reading his poem of the same name. McCarthy, who admitted being troubled by the excluding nature of the rising for many of Ireland's citizens, spent a lot of time in the Garden, which is dedicated "to all those who gave their lives in the cause of Irish Freedom," watching the people who visited it and contemplating what it means to be an Irishman in these times.

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For more information on how to access the podcast of *A Poet's Rising* please e-mail [projects@writerscentre.ie](mailto:projects@writerscentre.ie)

# *Signatories*: A theatrical and literary commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising

by Adrienne Leavy



*Signatories* is a specially commissioned theatre piece from University College Dublin as part of UCD's public engagement program to commemorate the Decade of Centenaries and the University's unique cultural legacy.<sup>1</sup> The project, which was the brainchild of Eilís O'Brien, UCD's Director of Communications, and playwright Frank MacGuinness, professor of creative writing, began in 2015 when a number of authors were invited to participate in creating a performance around the leaders of the Rising. Each of the eight Irish writers commissioned were asked to write a short dramatic monologue for the seven signatories of the Proclamation, along with one for Nurse Elizabeth O'Farrell, who delivered the surrender.

The writers selected were Emma Donoghue (Nurse Elizabeth O'Farrell), Thomas Kilroy (Pádraig Pearse), Hugo Hamilton (James Connolly), Frank McGuinness (Éamonn Ceannt), Rachel Feehily (Thomas Clarke), Éilís Ní Dhuibhne (Seán MacDiarmada), Marina Carr (Thomas MacDonagh) and Joseph O'Connor (Joseph Mary Plunkett).<sup>2</sup>

Under the direction of Tony Award winning director, Patrick Manson, *Signatories* was first staged in Kilmainham Goal, the site of the imprisonment and execution of the rebels, on the exact weekend of the Rising centenary. In a variation of the concept of Theatre in the Round, the play was conceived

as a promenade production, with a unique staging that complemented the individual performances. Every monologue was staged in a different area of the central chamber of the goal, with the standing audience following each actor as they appeared around the space on a collection of small stages. The organizing principle was to begin with Nurse O'Farrell in the GPO, who then walks through the City of Dublin bringing notice of the surrender to the various rebel garrisons, finishing with the monologue of Joseph Mary Plunkett, the last of the signatories to be executed in the stonebreakers yard in Kilmainham.

1. For further information, visit [www.ucd.ie/centenaries](http://www.ucd.ie/centenaries)

2. The actors performing the monologues were: Barbara Brennan (Nurse Elizabeth O'Farrell); Peter Gaynor (Padraig Pearse); Lisa Dwyer Hogg ([James Connolly] Young Woman); Ronan Leahy (Éamonn Ceannt); Joe Taylor (Thomas Clarke); Roseanna Purcell ([Seán MacDiarmada] Min Ryan); Stephen Jones (Thomas MacDonagh) and Shane O'Reilly (Joseph Mary Plunkett).

In the director's note to the program Manson explained that the production was meant to be experienced as theatre, not as history:

These monologues are not historical documents. Neither are they acts of national piety. They are acts of theatre – imagined, artistic responses to people and events of the past. All such acts of imagination, like all acts of commemoration, are complex, fraught, and, inevitably, to be contested. But they are a vital part of the way in which we seek to grasp the significance of our history, and the meaning of our modern nation.

After the initial shows in Kilmainham the production went on tour around Dublin, culminating in a May 5th 2016 performance at The National Concert Hall. Ultimately, the producers would like to stage *Signatories* in the United States at a future date.

In addition to the theatrical staging, University College Dublin Press has gathered the material into a handsomely bound text which also includes commentary by O'Brien, Manson and Professor Lucy Collins.<sup>3</sup> Although it is not possible to replicate the energy of the live theatrical performance in a book format, reading through each monologue enables the reader to more intimately appreciate the representations of these individuals.

Interestingly, although each writer worked in isolation without any pre-conceived direction or ideas, they all concentrated on exploring the humanity of the figures they were, rather than their ideological positions. As a result, *Signatories* is less about characters immortalized by the sanctified gaze of the past, and more about what Collins terms “the uniqueness of each man's temperament and motivation.” As one reviewer noted, these short vignettes focus on “the personal, private, public and political thoughts of the seven signatories as they await execution.”

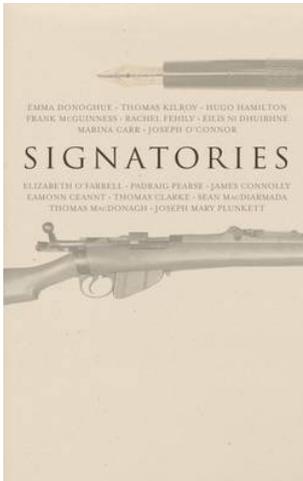
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O'Donoghue's monologue functions as a kind of prologue, imagining an older Elizabeth O' Farrell (who died in 1957), remembering her walk through the war zone of the Dublin streets, white flag held high, delivering messages between the rebels and the English command. A member of *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* and *Cumann na mBan*, it was Farrell who took Pearse's Order of Surrender to the various rebel outposts including the College of Surgeons on St. Stephen's Green, the Four Courts on the quays, Jacobs's Biscuit Factory and Boland's Mill.

Thomas Kilroy draws a deeply introspective portrait of Pádraig Pearse, pictured alone in his cell sitting by a table containing a blindfold, a crucifix and his writing material. The monologue reveals Pearse's struggles with issues of identity and faith, death, and masculinity. The ringing declamations and highly charged rhetoric of Pearse's prose style are invoked by Kilroy when Pearse exults that his father “has shaped me into the image of the Angel of Death. I am the messenger, the harbinger of the future. I am no longer matter. My useless body has melted away. I am now light and air.”

3. *Signatories* can be purchased from UCD Press at [www.ucdpress.ie](http://www.ucdpress.ie) The recommended retail price is twenty euro.

Hugo Hamilton represents revolutionary socialist leader James Connolly via a third party, specifically a young woman living in Birmingham in the 1970's who recalls her Irish babysitter's love for Connolly. The woman recalls how she and her two sisters were rescued from an attempted kidnapping and how their babysitter Angela comforted them by singing and telling stories about Connolly, the man who tried to rescue the Irish working class from grinding poverty and social injustice.



Frank McGuinness's profile of Éamonn Ceannt reveals him alone in his cell, contemplating his fate and asking his only child to forgive him for "doing what was needed." Committed to achieving Irish independence through force, the condemned man asks himself, "what can I leave you to remember me, Éamonn Ceannt? Only these. A watch. A chain. A rosary. A few shillings."

Thomas Clarke's commitment to the cause of Irish freedom is teased out through his realization of what this sacrifice has cost his family, including his unborn child whom his wife does not discuss when she visited him in the hours before he was executed. Reveling in the "magnificent moment" and singing the rebel song, "A Nation Once Again" to boost his spirits, Rachel Fehily reveals a loving father and husband who had no choice but to devote his life to the fight for independence.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's Seán MacDiarmada is mediated through his fiancé Min Ryan, a Cumann na mBan activist, who along with her sister Phyllis was with him in his cell during his last hours. Dark haired and handsome, MacDiarmada's gregarious personality is revealed in the scene where he tears the buttons off his jacket and instructs Min to distribute them to his ex-girlfriends: "I die so Ireland can live. A free and happy nation will be my legacy. . . And buttons for the girls."

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Marina Carr's portrait of Thomas MacDonagh, a poet and lecturer at UCD, demythologizes the notion of heroic sacrifice, instead revealing the harrowing experience of waiting in the jail cell for the executioner's call. MacDonagh is shown thinking about his mother and worrying about the future of his children and his highly-strung wife Muriel Gifford. The reality of the situation is quietly captured in Carr's monologue: ". . . what I feel right now is that there is nothing great or glorious in finding yourself about to be taken out between the hours of three and four in the morning to be shot. In fact I find it ridiculous and faintly embarrassing and somehow not real, as if it is happening to someone else." Yet in the end, MacDonagh is seen as heroic, gallantly offering his last cigarettes to the men who are about to shoot him.

Joseph O' Connor's portrayal of Joseph Mary Plunkett makes clear the relationship between the historical context and the living present as Plunkett directly addresses the audience as he recalls his jail cell marriage to Grace Gifford just hours before his execution. At various points in his monologue Plunkett alludes to Ireland's contemporary problems and observes that the audience looks like the kind of audience who would attend a pantomime at the Gaiety Theatre. His Plunkett also warns the audience not to "belittle" the people who fought in the Rising, reminding them that "you sleep in silent safety because of what they choose to do for you."

In her introduction to the published text Collins writes that “the effect of these executions was to generate support for the rebels and widespread respect for their heroism,” and that “these responses extended beyond those who were close to the men, revealing the lasting impact of their ideals as well as their actions.” A hundred years after the Rising the voices of the signatories of the Proclamation can be heard loud and clear thanks to this imaginative reenactment of their last hours alive.



# Journal reviews

## *Boyne Berries, Poetry Ireland and The Stinging Fly*



### ***Boyne Berries 1916***

Published twice a year in spring and autumn by the Boyne Writers Group, *Boyne Berries* features both poetry and prose from Irish and international writers.<sup>1</sup> *Boyne Berries 1916*, a special commemorative issue which was published in spring 2016, reflects a variety of responses to the legacy of the Rising as writers contrast contemporary Irish society with the ideals espoused by the 1916 leaders.

In her editorial introduction Orla Fay writes “I noted from the pieces submitted the recurring outline of the man who was Padraic Pearse. Who was this giant?” One of the stronger poems about the rebel leader is Patrick Devaney’s “Easter Monday, 1916,” which is dedicated to Pearse. The poem assesses Pearse’s achievements in galvanizing national pride by successfully invoking the mythic hero Cuchulain and “the outcast goddess *Éire*.” In “Revolution 1916,” Tom Dredge laments that “Pearse and Plunkett’s dream/ sold for a mess of pottage,” while Connolly’s vision of social justice has been “usurped by a shady politic.”

A number of poets put the poem’s speaker in the shoes of actual or imaginary participants in the events of Easter 1916. Historian and poet Michael Farry draws on the life and death of RIC Constable James Gormley, a Sligo native stationed at Longwood, County Meath, who was shot dead by a local unit of the Irish Volunteers on April 27 1916. Amid rumors of Germans invading after “the Dublin rumpus” he and his brigade were dispatched to guard Slane Castle, where he discovered no Germans, “just ourselves/ alone shooting at each other from / behind hedges.” Carolyne Van Der Meer imagines a posthumous letter from Joseph Mary Plunkett to his fiancée Grace Gifford, whom he married in Kilmainham jail on the eve of his execution. “First Martyr, 1916,” is about the pacifist, feminist and humanitarian, Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, who was arrested while returning home on April 25 1916. Two days later he and two other civilians were shot on the orders of the mentally unstable Captain John Bowen-Colthurst. Tim Dwyer’s poem imagines the social justice activist Sheehy-Skeffington as someone who would not be out of place at an anti-Vietnam war rally.

Several contributors take 1966 as their poem’s starting point, which was the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising. John Saunders recalls a drawing he made of Pearse as a school child, and contrasts the vision of the leaders with the political climate of the twenty first century: “Europe stained by death/ wrapped in religious dress/ where division is the international call to arms. In “Back Then,” Iseult Healy interrogates the pious conservatism that permeated Irish society after independence, offering an alternative vision through the poetry of “Kavanagh, Yeats, Synge and Beckett.”

1. The Boyne Writers Group was established in February 2006 to give writers in the south Meath area a forum for sharing and discussing their work. *Boyne Berries* magazine is one aspect of the work of the Boyne Writers Group.

In Fay's artful Shakespearian sonnet, "First Frost in the Park," the issue of children as casualties of the Rising is brought to the fore. "Little Sticky Faces," by Frances Browne, also deals with this loss of life and the postscript to her poem reminds us that "Forty children lost their lives during the 1916 Easter Rising." Órla Ní Shéaghda's poem "The Boy Soldiers," reminds us that many of the Irish Volunteers who took part in the Rising were little more than children, "boy soldiers, / Who swapped hurleys for a gun."

Stephen O'Brien's bi-lingual poem "Conversing with our History," is another poem which examines the disconnection between the ideals of the rebel leaders and contemporary Ireland. O'Brien rhetorically asks: "Would our Nation's/heroes, / Like so many others, / Be disillusioned with/ Today?" More importantly, he answers this question with another, as the poem concludes, "And would we/ ourselves, / Their sons and/ daughters, / Understand what they/ have to say?"

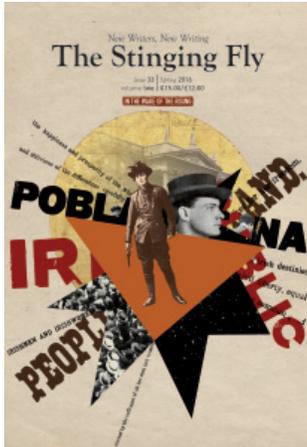
"Camden Street 1916" is a moving excerpt from James Lawless's novel, *Peeling Oranges*, which describes a son talking to his elderly mother about the death of his grandfather, a union representative, who had been shot by a stray bullet during Easter week. As a young girl, the mother had witnessed two volunteers being executed in the street, and she recalls the gruesome details of scooping one of the dead men's brains back into his cap so he could "be buried whole." Despite a weakening memory, the mother accurately sums up the flawed idealism of the rebels: "The trouble with noble people is that they presume nobility in others." Other prose entries include an historical essay by Noel French and Paul Kerr's story about a middle aged woman reflecting on how the events of 1916 changed her life and her family's prospects.

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In his introduction to this commemorative issue Tom French states that "Weaving through the pages of this centenary *Boyne Berries* are anger, humour, reflection, spikiness, wistfulness, regret and raw emotion." The impact of the Rising is evidenced by the diverse range of responses published in this collection. In various creative ways, the writers remember the events and ideals of the past while simultaneously considering the extent to which they have shaped the present, and may inform the future.

Adrienne Leavy

To subscribe to Boyne Berries visit [www.boyneberries.blogspot.com](http://www.boyneberries.blogspot.com) or e-mail the editor at [orla.a.fay@gmail.com](mailto:orla.a.fay@gmail.com)  
<https://www.facebook.com/boyne.writers>



## *The Stinging Fly: In the Wake of the Rising.* Spring 2016. Issue 33/Volume Two.

In his introduction to this special edition of *The Stinging Fly* guest editor Seán O'Reilly sets forth the aesthetic agenda that underlined the journal's public call for submissions:

"The issue would open up an alternative space for writers to re-read and respond to the events of that Easter Monday, the background and the legacy, and to the Proclamation itself, a founding document of the Republic, outside the official events and memorials planned by the government of the day."

Throughout the volume, contemporary Ireland is examined and found wanting when examined through the prism of the revolutionary promises and aspirations contained in the Proclamation. Desmond Hogan turns a caustic eye on homelessness and traveler experiences in Dublin, while Kevin Barry admits he suffers from a common disenchantment: "I believe that national politics is largely just a distraction from the fact that we're essentially owned and run by commercial, financial, and technological concerns, the same ones who own and run our neighbours across the Irish Sea." Iggy McGovern's humorous description of Irish-American sentimentality in the 1970s unearths a strain of racism in an ethnic group that had forgotten their own marginalization in an earlier era. A number of contributors deliberately shy away from any reference to the events of 1916 or its legacy, which makes their inclusion in this particular issue puzzling. Some of the more experimental poems and prose pieces seem gimmicky; however, this impression may be the result of their incongruous fit in this particular issue.

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Short stories cover a broad historical spectrum, ranging from the immediate aftermath of the Rising, the War of Independence and the Civil War, to the fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1966 and more recently to the era of "The Troubles" and the unsettled environment of post-peace process Northern Ireland. One of the most accomplished is "Aiséirí," by Patrick McCabe. The story reveals how the sectarianism of Northern Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s spilled over the border into Southern Ireland and its toxic effect on the lives of two brothers. Another story from playwright Jimmy Murphy, "Hard Up for Heroes," addresses the impact of the 1981 Hunger Strike, while Grahame Williams writes about the IRA's practice of kneecapping informers in the ironically titled "Marching Season."

The poetry selection is equally eclectic, with poets commenting both on the events of the Rising and on its contemporary impact. Jessamine O'Connor's poem details the last visit Éamonn Ceannt's family made to Kilmainham on the eve of Ceannt's execution. Written in the form of a Found poem, wherein the words of the poem are taken from other texts, O'Connor uses

Richard Kent's description of the event to craft an intimate and moving portrayal of the executed leader. "Blessed," by A.M. Cousins features Patrick and Willie Pearse's mother bitterly rejecting the words of comfort (*You must not grieve, / you too will be blessed*) which Pearse wrote to his mother before his execution: "Blessed. Ha! / I tend the graves. / I feel the burn of lime / on my boys' flesh." Anthony Hegarty weaves allusions to Yeats's "Easter 1916" into a poem about gay rights and "the creative dignity / of kissing in the street," while Ashing Fahey's poem "Recovering History" reflects on the nuances of displacement as an English-born child of Irish parents tries to reclaim her history: "My bones know a history / that wasn't taught in my East London state secondary school." Elaine Gaston's "After 1916" quietly nods to the prevalent intimidation throughout the countryside, in this case "north of the border," during the Civil War and the War of Independence. The volume closes with a passionate one-man play by Donal O' Kelly about the executed pacifist, feminist, socialist and atheist Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, who was executed during Easter week after being arrested by British soldiers as he tried to prevent looting in the streets of Dublin.

Welcome inclusions are a number of interesting essays. Catriona Crowe, Head of Special Projects at the National Archives of Ireland, writes about the wealth of archival material now available to both writers and the general public as a result of advances in technology and the digitization of records. In her essay, "How do We Know What We Know?" Crowe highlights the sources of much of this archival material, such as the records of the Bureau of Military History which were released to the public in 2003, and the larger collection of records in the Military Service Pensions Project, which are currently being prepared for release to the public. With regard to the pension archives, Crowe states that "the collection comprises ca. 285,000 files dealing with applications for pensions from survivors and dependants of those killed during the period 1916-1923, under various Army Pensions and Military Service Pension Acts, 1924-1949." This collection will be released online, free-to-access, in phases up to 2023. Additional records relating to this period, in particular those relating to the first Dáil including the full record of the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations, will soon be released on-line by the National Archives of Ireland.

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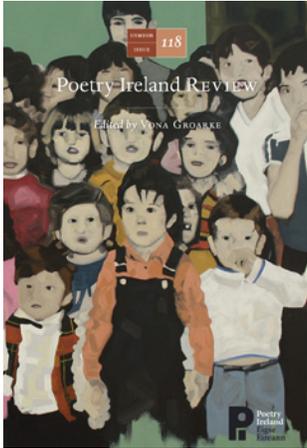
In a cautionary essay on the power of language, Lia Mills's essay, "It Could Be You," remembers the forgotten casualties of the Rising: ordinary people caught up in a struggle not of their making. Describing the myopic manner in which history used to be taught in Irish secondary schools, she acknowledges, "I knew and loved the story of the Rising. It has all the elements of great fiction. . . but in all that time I managed never to look at the numbers." Another interesting essay is Hilary Lennon's piece, "Frank O'Connor's 1920s Cultural Criticism and the Poetic Realist Short Story." Contrasting Irish society in 1966, when Evelyn Conlon remembers reading the Proclamation in school, with 2016 Conlon observes, "This time around different things will be talked about. It will not be such a shock if some smart-arse girl remarks that De Valera wouldn't allow women into his battalion." Dave Lordon reflects on the state of contemporary poetics, arguing that "poetry is undergoing its second, great, global revolution, self-transforming from a dominantly textual art form into a dominantly digital and performance one."

At the beginning of the volume O'Reilly poses a pertinent question, "can we rekindle any of the energy of that time and use it for ourselves in our own day as we look for a better way of organizing this society?" On the strength of the contributions to this collection the answer is

“yes.” Reviewing the Rising issue Diarmaid Ferriter sums up the material thus: “The diversity and unpredictability of this volume are its strengths and there is much here to savour. Pretty much anything goes, and the variety of tones is striking: weaving through these pages are anger, humour, reflection, spikiness, wistfulness, regret and raw emotion, in the form of fiction, memoir, poetry, history and drama.” Overall, *The Stinging Fly* has set the bar high in terms of aesthetic interrogations of the meaning and legacy of the Rising.

Adrienne Leavy

To purchase this issue of *The Stinging Fly* or to subscribe, visit [www.stingingfly.org](http://www.stingingfly.org)



## ***Poetry Ireland Review: The Rising Generation*** **Issue 118 edited by Vona Groarke.**

To honor the 100th anniversary of the Rising *Poetry Ireland Review* has published an impressive anthology of poems by new and emerging Irish poets, the “rising generation” of Irish writers. Compiled by the journal’s editor, Vona Groarke, her selection criteria were that the poets “had to have published a pamphlet or a first collection in Irish or in English within the last five years.” While she acknowledges that her selection may in time “look fusty or airy,” Groarke argues that she is confident that “there’s good and exciting work here, work that will continue to be honoured and enjoyed in all its many shades.” Groarke, a skilled poet and astute critic, need not second guess her selections as the material reveals an exciting array of talented voices and poetic styles. In all, the issue features thirty-six new poets, isolating, as John McAuliffe contends, “a particular set of poets in order to present a snapshot of current practices in poetry.”<sup>1</sup>

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For an appreciation of the diverse poetic voices represented in this issue of *Poetry Ireland Review* the reader is advised to purchase a copy from Poetry Ireland. In this article, I choose to examine the range of private responses which the poets gave to one of many questions posed by Groarke that are published directly after the individual poet’s work. Each of the contributors was invited to answer some or all of a series of thirty questions which Groarke says were included because she thought “it would help show, alongside the poems, what kind of attitudes new poets strike when it comes to thinking about poetry and how it slips into or chafes against their otherwise lives.” Among the most interesting questions Groarke asked was the following: *It’s the centenary of the Easter Rising: does this fact matter to you and if so, in what way?* The responses she received underline the obvious fact that the Rising means different things to different people. Most crucially, all of the poets who choose to answer this question did so with honesty and eloquence, reflecting unsentimentally on the idealism of the past and the shortcomings of the present.

Several poets talk about the importance of remembering why people were willing to sacrifice their lives and expressed the hope that “the commemorations don’t awaken old hatreds and enmities.” Other facets of the Rising’s legacy are also explored: Jim Maguire writes that “elements of the darker side of nationalism were still very much in the air when I was growing

1. John McAuliffe, “Review salutes selection of new ‘Rising Generation’ of poets.” *The Irish Times* Saturday, April 23 2016.

up in the 1970s,” while Christodoulos Makris observes that “how the Rising is understood (and argued about) seems to revolve around a binary view of Ireland which I am not sure is applicable any more.”

The loss of idealism is a recurrent preoccupation for many of these writers. Geraldine Mitchell responded that the centenary of the Easter rising matters to her “a lot,” because of “the tragic loss of brutally executed leaders; for betrayed ideals.” Sarah Clancy writes: “I find the Proclamation very affecting, especially the tender fierceness of the word ‘Cherish.’ To look at our state now and how certain classes or categories of human are treated within it with the word cherishing in my mind is very sobering; surely we can do a bit better?” The “long period of stifling repression” that followed the Rising is commented on by several poets, with Jessica Traynor arguing that “the divided but diverse Dublin of the pre-Rising years is only alive on the pages of *Ulysses*, because in Traynor’s view, “the intervening generations wiped it out.”

Many poets view the centenary as an opportunity to reflect on the shortcomings of contemporary Irish society. Bi-lingual poet Doireann Ní Ghríofa considers “how saddened those who participated in the Rising would be at the treatment of Irish today.” Mary Noonan writes that “we got our republic, but the violence meted out to the people – and their language and culture – in the pre-Republic past did not go away, it simply went underground, to re-emerge in manifold forms of power abuse within the Republic.” Noonan further elaborates thus: “the centenary has shown me that it takes a long, long time for extensive brutality to be redressed. Perhaps by 2116 Ireland’s story will have evolved.”

Jane Clarke’s response reflects on the uncomfortable detachment that many contemporary Irish adults felt toward this aspect of their history when growing up, while allowing that the centennial year provides an opportunity to reengage with the legacy of the past:

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Growing up in the 1960s and ‘70s in a small Church of Ireland community and also being drawn to feminism and pacifism, I felt alienated from much of what was taken to be ‘Irish,’ including pride in Easter 1916. In 2016 the recollections on the rebellion allow for a much broader range of questions, giving us an opportunity to pause and reflect on the society we have created and our visions for the future.

Ailbhe Darcy challenges the current Republic to remember the the kind of pluralistic society that the leaders of the Rising were striving for:

The fact of the Easter Rising matters to me. Its theatricality, the way it conjured a Republic out of thin air, gives me hope that we might yet have the gumption and wherewithal to construct an idea of Ireland that would do us all proud. If a commemoration can inspire us, I’m all for it. At a remove, though, it’s hard to be inspired. The victory for gay marriage was explosive, but I haven’t seen much else exciting coming out of Ireland of late.

For Carolinn Hughes, “this will be a year of remembering Irish history; reassessing our cultural and social standing in light of what’s changed, and indeed, what hasn’t.” And as Ciarán O’ Rourke states, “the Rising continues to ask the most vital questions of us. What principles currently govern our political life? What kind of society do we want to live in? What forms of commitment to that goal are possible now?”

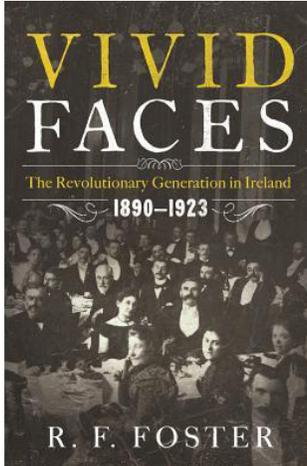
In addition to showcasing a variety of new and stimulating work in this anthology, Groarke has presented an array of serious and thought provoking aesthetic responses to the simple yet profound question that Irish people everywhere are asking themselves this year: *It’s the centenary of the Easter Rising: does this fact matter to me, and if so, in what way?*

Adrienne Leavy

To purchase Poetry Ireland Review: The Rising Generation, please visit Poetry Ireland’s website at [www.poetryireland.ie](http://www.poetryireland.ie) or e-mail [info@poetryireland.ie](mailto:info@poetryireland.ie)

# Review of R.F. Foster's *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890-1923*

by James Moran



A Terrible Beauty

James Moran (University of Nottingham, UK)

R.F. Foster. *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890-1923*. New York: Norton, 2014, xxiii + 464 pp.

The title of Roy Foster's book is filched from W.B. Yeats's poem, "Easter 1916," a touchstone of the Irish cultural debate, and never more so than during this centenary year of the Rising. Yet the purpose of Foster's study is to kick away some of the foundational ideas that Yeats's famous verse articulates. For one thing, Yeats's poem declares that the rebels bore "Hearts with one purpose alone."<sup>1</sup> But Foster has mined the copious archival material associated with dozens of these insurgents and instead places these individuals in a rich and varied world of intellectual and social tumult. Foster's rebels aren't simply fixated upon a narrow Irish-Catholic nationalism, but are stimulated by an interlaced set of radical and cosmopolitan ideas. Thus, *Vivid Faces* is less concerned with how Thomas MacDonagh and Patrick Pearse spent time pondering whether to become ordained priests and more with how Constance Markievicz traveled to London Art School, how Rosamund Jacob pored over Freud, and how a number of rebels may have been qualified to join Roger Casement in penning homosexual diaries.

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For another thing, in "Easter 1916" Yeats's list of named rebels is an entirely male one. True, Yeats does allude to Constance Markievicz (she is "That woman" in the poem). But the climactic catalogue in Yeats's poem is that of "MacDonagh and MacBride / And Connolly and Pearse."<sup>2</sup> Foster, on the other hand, takes issue with the assumption that women were somehow marginal to the Easter Rising. By contrast with many gun-and-guts accounts of the military combat, *Vivid Faces* strives to show how the shared cultural activity of the preceding period depended on many women, whose work formed part of an important confluence of unconventional thought and discussion that gave the Rising its philosophical underpinning. In the years before the insurrection, feminism and suffragism were explored alongside socialism, secularism, and vegetarianism, by a group of bourgeois Irish rebels who were often, as Foster puts it, determined to reject "the values and ambitions of their parents" (xxii). In *Vivid Faces*, a series of gerundic chapter titles thus indicate the radical possibilities explored by the "revolutionary generation," in terms of "Learning," "Playing," "Loving," "Writing," "Arming," and "Fighting." These chapters are diligently if unfussily footnoted in order to appeal to the general as well as the academic reader, and they are, it must be said, expressed quite brilliantly by a historian who also happens to be a master stylist in the English language.

1. Yeats, 'Easter 1916', *Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume 1: The Poems*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran, part of 14 vol collected works, rev. edn (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991), I, 181.

2. Yeats, 'Easter 1916', p.181.

Fascinatingly, Foster also sets about tracing the fact that, amongst the “revolutionary generation,” “sexual unconventionality was not unknown” (123). He describes the doctor Kathleen Lynn, a nationalist and member of the Citizen Army who acted as a medical officer during the Easter Rising, but who was also a suffragist who lived together in what looks suspiciously like a marriage with Madeleine French-Mullen. Foster adds, “Besides Lynn and French-Mullen, female couples were well known among socialist and radical circles, such as Louie Bennett and Helen Chenevix, and Elizabeth O’Farrell and Julia Grenan; to a certain extent, lesbians may have been drawn to such organizations in order to meet each other” (133). He also describes how a figure such as Rosamund Jacob, involved in a number of nationalist organizations, could also write in her diary:

I certainly am in some ways a man in disguise. My love for Tony [Farrington] is more masculine than feminine. I love him, not spiritually & patiently & unselfishly, as a woman is supposed to love a man, but physically and impatiently & selfishly, as a man loves a woman. (130)

Of course, we must beware of imposing our modern notions of sexuality onto the figures of 1916, and we should not ignore the fact that many rebels seem to have led unremarkable sexual lives that proceeded in accord with the conventions of the time. But Foster has done a great service in highlighting not only the variation in experience that did exist amongst this group, but also in showing how such acceptance of difference was ultimately bulldozed out of the post-revolutionary state. He argues that, by contrast with the sense of transformative possibility that was articulated from the 1890s by the “revolutionary generation,” a more narrowly religious set of ideas came to dominate the later memorializing of the event, when “Redemption, epiphany and resurrection provided recurring tropes for the Rising and its aftermath” (291). He quotes from Bulmer Hobson’s disappointed reflection of 1956 that “the phoenix of our youth has fluttered to earth” as “a miserable old hen” (289). More disturbing, by far, is the arresting image Foster reproduces from a January 1922 edition of D. P. Moran’s newspaper, *The Leader*, in which a cartoon entitled “some work before us” shows an upright man labeled “soul of Ireland” sweeping away a black man holding a drum bearing the legend “jazz dance music” (288).

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If this important book harbors a flaw, it is that middle-class people tend to leave a greater wad of written records behind them than do members of the working class. Consequently, a volume of this sort, which so diligently relies upon the archives, is inevitably likely to devote more attention to the bourgeois members of the “revolutionary generation.” As John Borgonovo has already pointed out in the *Dublin Review of Books*, sixty per cent of those who are described in the biographical appendix to *Vivid Faces* come from the privileged backgrounds of the upper or middle class; hence, “The book’s evidence base is therefore dominated by social elites and Dubliners, and underrepresents men and women outside the capital and activists from the working and lower middle classes.”<sup>3</sup> Foster certainly has fewer things to say about the working-class component of that generation, and although he assiduously acknowledges the socialist dimension within nationalist thinking of the era, the lives of those from outside of the middle or upper classes remain comparatively obscure. Some of Foster’s emphasis is therefore nuanced by other recently published volumes that take a different

3. Borgonovo, ‘Bright Spirits’, *Dublin Review of Books*, <http://www.drbc.ie/essays/bright-spirits>.

tack. After all, volumes such as Joe Good's *Inside the GPO* and Fearghal McGarry's *Rebels* have printed overlooked, firsthand testimony that emphasizes the devotion to the rosary that existed amongst the insurgents outside the leadership cadre. Indeed, part of the sting of Sean O'Casey's assessment of the Rising in *The Plough and the Stars* depends on the recognition that, from the tenements at least, the rebellion might have looked like "A few hundhred scrawls o' chaps with a couple o' guns an' Rosary beads."

Still, *Vivid Faces* surely deals a deathblow to any lingering "faith and fatherland" interpretations of the Easter Rising, as well as exploring with boldness some of the areas that remain neuralgic in contemporary Ireland. His work resonates powerfully, for instance, with developments at the Abbey Theatre since last October, when the national playhouse set out details of the program that would mark the centenary of the Easter Rising. Almost immediately after that announcement, a hullabaloo ensued because, for this commemorative year, the Abbey had included ten plays on the program, but only one of them (a touring production for schools) was written by a woman. A campaign against the Abbey's crass judgment quickly mushroomed on social media, engendering a broader debate about gender inclusivity in the arts, with the Abbey's program title, "Waking the Nation," triggering the antagonistic Twitter hashtag, "#WakingTheFeminists."

The Abbey might not have found itself in this position if only the theater's artistic director had kept a copy of Roy Foster's *Vivid Faces* on the bedside table. For Foster reveals just how much the Easter Rising owed in the first place to the theatrical enterprises of various nationalist women. As Foster reminds us, the Abbey playhouse of a century ago featured the prominent leadership of Lady Gregory, whose "allegorical historical plays such as *Kincora* (1905) and *Dervorgilla* (1907) carried a distinct political message about the corruption of English domination, and the need to recapture a Gaelic independence" (85). In the light of Foster's analysis, the absence of any work by Gregory in the Abbey's 2016 commemorative program looks like a particularly sad omission. But Gregory wasn't alone in creating revolutionary theater during the build-up to 1916. Elsewhere, as Foster reminds us, Countess Markievicz wrote and acted in plays for the Theatre of Ireland before fighting during the Rising in the College of Surgeons. Similarly, Alice Milligan scripted pageant-plays, such as *The Wearing of the Green* (1898) and *The Last Feast of the Fianna* (1899), dramas that "affected young nationalist activists in the provinces" (87). And Milligan's scripts were produced by Maud Gonne's radical women's group, Inghinidhe na hÉireann, whose activities allowed future theater stars such as Sara and Molly Allgood to learn their craft in the same organization as actors such as Helena Molony and Máire nic Shiubhlaigh, who would both mobilize during the rebellion. As Roy Foster shows, then, the revolutionary generation of 1916 included a component that was itself determinedly "#WakingTheFeminists."

As the entirely justified anger over the Abbey Theatre's 2016 program has revealed, Ireland's recent history may still have much to teach us, and that is why *Vivid Faces* deserves a wide and enthusiastic audience. Roy Foster has written a brilliantly readable book that reveals the radical currents that ran through a revolution whose aftershocks will continue to reverberate for some time to come.

# James Moran



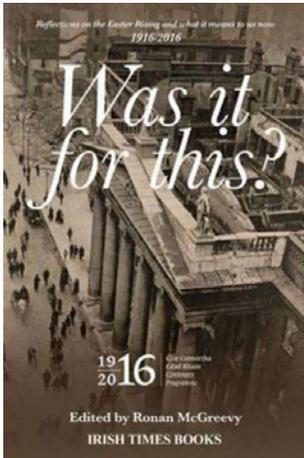
## Bio

James Moran is Professor of Modern English Literature and Drama at the University of Nottingham, UK. His recent books include ‘The Theatre of D.H. Lawrence’ (Bloomsbury, 2015), ‘The Theatre of Sean O’Casey’ (Bloomsbury, 2011), and - as co-editor with Neal Alexander - ‘Regional Modernisms’<sup>1</sup> (Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

This review was originally published in Breac: A Digital Journal of Irish Studies ([www.breac.nd.edu](http://www.breac.nd.edu)). The original review can be located at <https://breac.nd.edu/articles/65625-a-terrible-beauty/>

# *Was it for this? Reflections on the Easter rising and what it means to us now.*

by Ronan McGreevy



The opening sentence of The Irish Times editorial on the day after the Easter Rising is a master of understatement. “This newspaper has never been published in stranger circumstances than those which obtain today. An attempt has been made to overthrow the constitutional government of Ireland.”

The Irish Times was not a disinterested observer in the Rising. Its offices in Lower Abbey Street were in the firing line and were badly damaged during Easter Week. Its chairman Sir John Arnott’s flagship Arnotts store was also perilously close to the GPO.

The editorial counselled: “At this critical moment our language must be moderate, unsensational and free from any tendency to alarm.” The rebellion would have only one end – defeat for the rebels. “The loyal public will await it calmly and confidently”.

A week later the editorial had an altogether less measured tone. The Rising had been a “criminal adventure”, the ruined Liberty Hall “a sinister memory”, Sir Roger Casement was “an Irish renegade”.

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Contrary to what has often been suggested since, The Irish Times never explicitly called for the executions of the leaders of the Rising, but neither did it condemn them. In August 1916, the newspaper suggested the hanged Sir Roger Casement deserved his fate.

Was it for this? – Reflections on the Easter Rising begins and ends with Irish Times editorials, the first from Easter Tuesday, 1916, the last from January 1st, 2016, but it is much more than a collection of editorials.

It consists of editorials, letters and columns from those who have written about the Rising in either the newspaper over the last 100 years or in 1916: The Easter Rising. That book, which included an article written in 1916 by Vladimir Lenin about the Rising, arose out of a supplement in The Irish Times to mark the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966.

Among the contributors featured in *Was it for this?* are two former taoisigh, John Bruton and Garret FitzGerald, three of the greatest writers post-independence Ireland has produced, Séan O’Casey, Seán Ó Faoláin and John McGahern, and some of the best-known Irish commentators and historians of the past 50 years. These include Conor Cruise O’Brien, Declan Kiberd, Michael Laffan, Ronan Fanning, Ruth Dudley Edwards, John A Murphy, Diarmaid Ferriter and John Horne.

It would be difficult to assemble such an array of heavyweight commentary if one were to try and do it from various sources. Indeed, one could argue that such a book would not be possible except through the archives of *The Irish Times*, which has been a forum for all shades of Irish opinion over the last century.

Ireland 2016, the State commemoration agency, has recognised the significance of this book to the debate about the Rising by being our partners in its publication.

*Was it for this?* spans the spectrum of opinion, from the nationalist view of the Rising as espoused by Gerry Adams, Tim Pat Coogan and James Connolly Heron to that of those, most notably, Kevin Myers and Ruth Dudley Edwards, who have long held that it brought more harm than good. Dudley Edwards and the Cambridge historian Brendan Bradshaw had a particularly bitter spat in 1991 over the legacy of the Rising. That exchange is reproduced in this book.

Not even the taoisigh featured can agree on the legacy of the Rising. John Bruton has always maintained that the Easter Rising was unnecessary and that independence could have been achieved without resorting to violence. Garret FitzGerald, whose parents Desmond and Mabel were both in the GPO, has a counterargument, which he articulated in 2006 for the 90th anniversary of the Rising.

In what is one of the most challenging articles in the book, FitzGerald confronts head-on the revisionist school of thought led by Bruton, which insists there was an alternative peaceful path to Irish independence.

Such a belief, FitzGerald wrote, was “alternative history gone mad”. He explained: “It does not follow that Home Rule would have led peacefully onwards to Irish independence.”

He advances two reasons for this. Both are worth quoting in full.

“There is little reason to believe that Britain would have permitted Ireland to secure independence peacefully at least until many decades after the second World War.

“Secondly, long before that point could have been reached, the growth of the welfare state within a United Kingdom of which Ireland remained a part would have involved a scale of financial transfers from Britain to Ireland that would have made the whole of our island even more financially dependent upon Britain than Northern Ireland is today.

“By the time that Britain might finally have been prepared peacefully to concede independence to our part of Ireland, the financial cost of such a separation would have been so great for our people – probably entailing a drop of 25 per cent or more in living standards – that it is highly unlikely that the Irish people would have been prepared to accept such a sudden and huge drop in their standard of living.

“The truth is that we got out from under British rule just in time – at a moment when the cost of the break was still bearable, involving as it did only a small reduction in public service salaries and in the very limited social welfare provisions of that period.”

It is clear from a lengthy first-hand account of the Rising by Garret FitzGerald's father Desmond that the rebels themselves were confused as to what kind of society they envisaged.

FitzGerald's account was first published in *The Irish Times* in 1966, almost 20 years after his death. It contains some fascinating vignettes from inside the GPO. He depicts Patrick Pearse as a forlorn figure observing the looting and realising that the responsibility for inevitable defeat would rest primarily with him.

"I could not look on Pearse's face without being moved. Its natural gravity now conveyed a sense of great tragedy. There was no doubt in my mind that when he looked round at the men and girls there, he was convinced that they must all perish in the Rising to which he had brought them."

Desmond FitzGerald's account created a sensation at the time as he alleged that the rebel leaders were thinking of installing a German prince on the throne of an independent Ireland. They even had Kaiser Wilhelm II's sickly son Joachim in mind.

A German prince, they reasoned, would bind an independent Ireland to Germany and prevent a re-conquest of the country by the British. FitzGerald explained: "Such a ruler would necessarily favour the Irish language for it would be impossible to make the country German-speaking, while it would be against his own wishes to foster English."

It is clear from the response by Ernest Blythe a few weeks later in *The Irish Times* that there was a lot of incredulity around at the notion that the rebels planned to replace one monarchy with another.

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Blythe did not participate directly in the Rising but was privy to its planning and confirmed that the German prince proposal was indeed all true. He revealed that the true motives of the rebel could be surmised in two words, "Brits Out".

On April 15th, 1966 he wrote: "It is necessary to remember that for a long time, the term republic had been for most people in this country simply a code word for complete independence and separation from Britain and scarcely excluded the idea of a democratically accepted constitutional monarch."

In recent decades, debates about the Easter Rising have been as much about the state of contemporary Ireland as they are about the past. The dominant emotion in so many of the articles republished in this book is disappointment.

Whatever society the rebels had envisaged – and one wonders if they even knew themselves – it had not come to pass. The Rising and its legacy has always stood for an idealised Ireland which has never matched the reality.

The joylessness of post-independence Ireland was referenced in an article written for *The Irish Times* by Seán O'Casey, defending his play, *The Plough and the Stars*, which was the subject of riots when it opened at the Abbey Theatre in 1926.

“They [protesters] objected to volunteers and men of the Irish Citizen Army visiting a public-house. Do they want us to believe that all these men were sworn teetotallers? Are we to know the fighters of Easter Week as ‘the army of the Unco Guid?’ [The Unco Guid were a strict religious sect].”

That disappointment was also articulated fiercely by one Irish Times letter writer, known only as Needled, in 1956. Needled noted that on Easter Sunday, 1956, while the 40th anniversary of the Rising was commemorated, copies of the Observer newspaper were confiscated at Dublin Port because they contained information about contraceptives – banned in Ireland at the time.

Needled sneered at those who railed against the division of Ireland while making the southern State as inimical as possible to northern Unionists.

“How long will anti-partitionists continue to live in a dream world? Is this what the men of Easter Week died for? I must withhold my name for the usual, obvious reasons. For the present, I must live and work here.”

In 1966 Seán Ó Faoláin, an old republican, was equally dismayed by the State he and others had fought for. “We have set up a society of urbanised peasants whose whole mentality, whose image of life is, like that antiquated society, based on privilege. Instead of empire we invoke the nation.”

Conor Cruise O’Brien enumerated the many ways in which the Irish State of 1966 had fallen short of the ideals of Pearse, most notably the partition of Ireland and the failure of the bilingual programme. The Irish State was “only 75 per cent free and 0.6 per cent Gaelic”. In 1991, to mark the 75th anniversary of the Easter Rising, John McGahern lamented the nexus of church and state which had led to a stifling mediocrity. He concluded: “I think we can best honour 1916 by restoring those rights and freedoms that were whittled away from the nation as a whole in favour of the dominant religion.”

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In reality the Easter Rising has always been and always will be seen through the prism of contemporary concerns. In 2006, at the height of the Celtic Tiger when Ireland’s future prosperity seemed unassailable and Irish optimism was at its zenith, the newspaper published this editorial.

“The flourishing state of our economy was one reason why people were happy to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Easter Rising and to feel grateful towards those seen as having, at a high price to themselves, taken a decisive step towards independence.”

The success of the Celtic Tiger economy was proof, the paper opined, that Irish people were confident that some day independence would be worth it “as has now happened far beyond any previous reasonable expectation”.

Four years later in November 2010, though, the chimera of the Celtic Tiger had disappeared, resulting in the State surrendering the same sovereignty that the leaders of the Easter Rising had given their lives for.

In the immediate aftermath of the bailout, The Irish Times published a headline invoking the WB Yeats poem, September 1913, first published in this newspaper as Romance in Ireland. The book takes its name from the headline: “Was it for this?”

“It may seem strange to some that The Irish Times would ask whether this is what the men of 1916 died for: a bailout from the German chancellor with a few shillings of sympathy from the British chancellor on the side. There is the shame of it all. Having obtained our political independence from Britain to be the masters of our own affairs, we have now surrendered our sovereignty to the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.”

The Easter Rising is the most exhaustively covered event in Irish history. The National Library of Ireland lists 1,022 titles about the Rising, dozens of which have been published in the past year. Quantity has been matched by quality. I reviewed several of them earlier this year. They were all well-written, well-produced books.

In such circumstances, any publisher would be right to ask themselves the simple question: does the world need another book on the Easter Rising?

But *Was it for This?* differs from all the other titles. They are about what happened. The book I have edited is about what the Rising means. It is clear that it means something different to everyone and every generation sees it differently.

The last article in the book is The Irish Times editorial from New Year’s Day, 2016. It expresses a hope that in the centenary year of the Easter Rising that Ireland, as a nation, would have the maturity to now put the events of Easter Week 1916 in their proper context, take pride in the achievements of nationhood yet resolve itself in the name of the Republic to put right those things that are wrong.

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It is clear from the commemorations that Irish people are proud of their country, the achievements of Irish independence and the men and women who strove to bring it about.

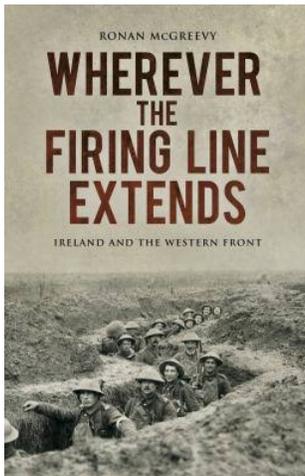
That is the way it should be, but the Easter Rising will be contentious history forever. It would be a lot less interesting as a historical event if it were not so. We hope that this book will facilitate debate and be an entertaining read for all concerned. It has been 100 years in the making.

# Ronan McGreevy

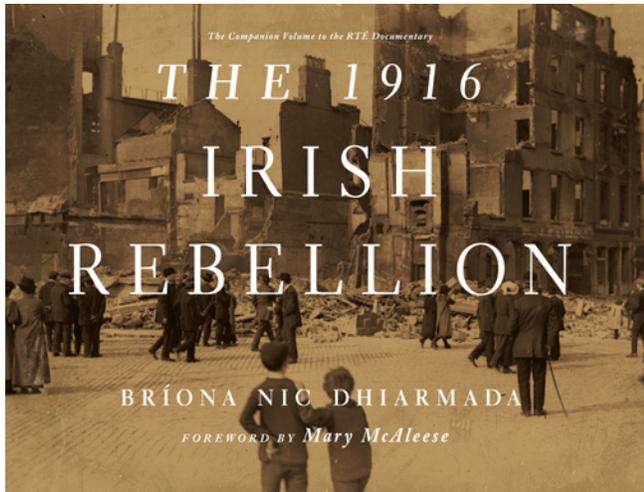


## Bio

Ronan McGreevy is a journalist and videographer with The Irish Times. Prior to joining The Irish Times, he was a television and radio producer with Sky News and the BBC. He is the author of *Wherever the Firing Line Extends: Ireland and the Western Front*. He is the editor of three books based on The Irish Times archives. *Was it for this? Reflections on the Easter Rising* is a paperback published by Ireland 2016 and The Irish Times. He has also edited ebooks, *'Twas Better to Die: The Irish Times and Gallipoli 1915-2015* and *The Mad Guns: Reflections on the Battle of the Somme*.



## Spotlight on 1916 Centenary Publications from Cork University Press and the Royal Irish Academy



### THE 1916 IRISH REBELLION

The 1916 Irish Rebellion with a foreword by Mary McAleese is the companion book to the RTE three-part documentary series to be broadcast on February 10th, 17th and 24th. Both The 1916 Irish Rebellion book and the related documentary are part of the Keough-Naughton Institute's aim to broaden public understanding of the historical interconnections between Britain, Ireland, and the United States, connections that continued to have significance up to and including the recent peace process in Northern Ireland –The 1916 Irish Rebellion ( 9781782051916, €29.95 £20, Hardback, 234 x 156mm, 384 pages, Published by Cork University Press).

Documentary writer, producer, and scholar Bríona Nic Dhiarmada has seized the occasion of the centenary of the Irish Rising to reassess this event and its historical significance. Her book explores the crucial role of Irish Americans in both the lead-up to and the aftermath of the events in Dublin and places the Irish Rising in its European and global context, as an expression of the anti-colonialism that found its full voice in the wake of the First World War. The 1916 Irish Rebellion includes a historical narrative; a lavish spread of contemporary images and photographs; and a rich selection of sidebar quotations from contemporary documents, prisoners' statements, and other eyewitness accounts to capture the experiences of nationalists and unionists, Irish rebels and British soldiers, and Irish Americans during the turbulent events of Easter Week, 1916.

The documentary, which is narrated by Liam Neeson, and its related seventy-minute version, which will be live-streamed on March 16th event to Irish embassies and consulates around the world in an effort to reach the 70 million people of the Irish diaspora, are initiatives of the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame. The series was produced by COCO Television and will broadcast on RTÉ and American Public Television.

Nic Dhiarmada suggests that the Irish Rising, its ideals, and the subsequent election of members of the nationalist movement to prominent government offices were instrumental to

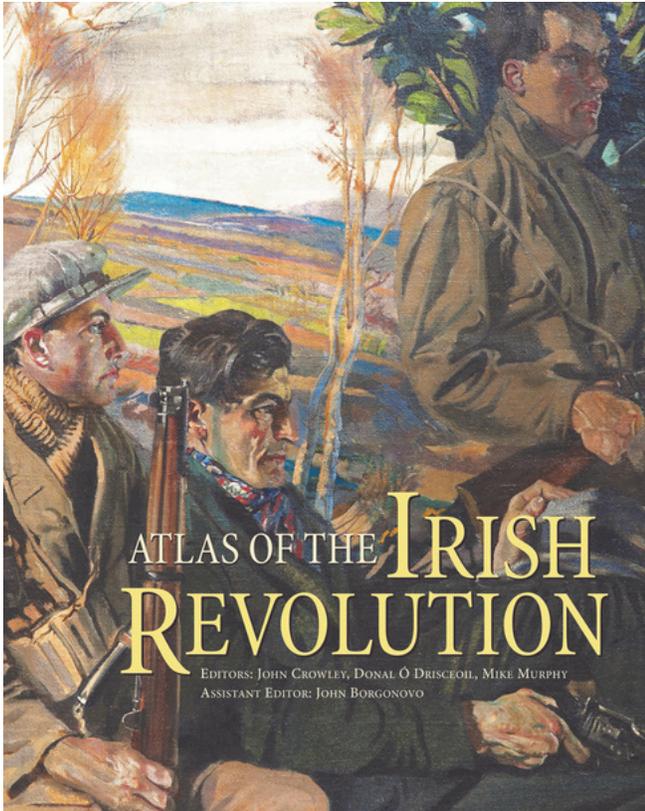
the later creation of the sovereign Republic of Ireland, as well as an inspiration to anticolonialist insurrections elsewhere in the world.

The 1916 Irish Rebellion will be launched by Declan Kiberd who is Donald and Marilyn Keough Professor of Irish Studies and Professor of English and Irish Language and Literature, University of Notre Dame at 6 pm O'Connell House, 58 Merrion Square, Dublin 2, Thursday 18th February 2016.

Bríona Nic Dhiarmada is the Thomas J. & Kathleen M. O'Donnell Professor of Irish Studies and concurrent professor of Film, Television, and Theatre at the University of Notre Dame. Professor Nic Dhiarmada is originator, writer, and producer of the multipart documentary series on the Easter Rising of 1916.

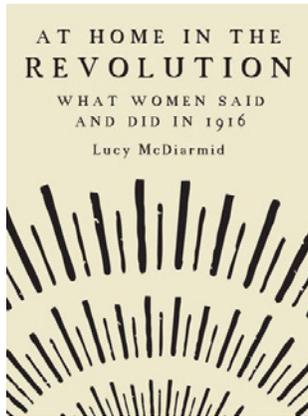
For more information about The 1916 Irish Rebellion or a review copy please contact:  
Mike Collins, Cork University Press, Youngline Industrial Estate, Pouladuff Road, Cork, Ireland. Tel: 00 353 (0) 21 490 2980 Fax: 00 353 (0) 21 431 5329  
Email: [mike.collins@ucc.ie](mailto:mike.collins@ucc.ie) web: [www.corkuniversitypress.com](http://www.corkuniversitypress.com)





## Atlas of the Irish Revolution

“The 1916 centenary celebrations will be a big talking point throughout next year’s cultural calendar. One of the biggest books in the field of history will likely be Cork University Press’s mammoth Atlas of the Irish Revolution (May), edited by John Crowley, Donal Ó Drisceoil and Mike Murphy, which aims to do for the revolutionary period what the award-winning Atlas of the Great Irish Famine did for the second half of the 19th century. It will combine cutting-edge “big issue” research with stories of people, provinces and parishes” - Armintha Wallace, The Irish Times



# IN THE REVOLUTION

what women said and did in 1916

Lucy McDiarmid

On Monday morning 24 April 1916, Catherine Byrne jumped through a window on the side of the GPO on O'Connell Street to join the revolution; Mairead Ní Cheallaigh served breakfast to Patrick and Willie Pearse, their last home-cooked meal, and then went out to set up an emergency hospital with members of Cumann na mBan; Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh persuaded Thomas MacDonagh to let her into the garrison at Jacob's Biscuit Factory; and Elsie Mahaffy, daughter of the Provost of Trinity, was in her bedroom 'completing her toilet' when her sister came in to tell her that 'the Sinn Féiners had risen.'

*At Home in the Revolution* derives its material from women's own accounts of the Easter Rising, interpreted broadly to include also the Howth gun-running and events that took place over the summer of 1916. These eye-witness narratives – diaries, memoirs, letters, autobiographies, and official witness statements – were written by nationalists and unionists, Catholics and Protestants, women who felt completely at home in the garrisons, cooking for the men and treating their wounds, and women who stayed at home during the Rising. The book's focus is on the kind of episode usually ignored by traditional historians: cooking with bayonets, arguing with priests, resisting sexual harassment, soothing a female prostitute, doing sixteen-hand reels in Kilmainham Gaol, or disagreeing with Prime Minister Asquith about the effect of the Rising on Dublin's architecture. The women's 'small behaviours', to use Erving Goffman's term, reveal social change in process, not the official history of manifestoes and legislation, but the unofficial history of access to a door or a leap through a window; they show how issues of gender were negotiated at a time of revolution.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Lucy McDiarmid received her Ph.D. from Harvard University and is currently Marie Frazee-Baldassarre Professor of English at Montclair State University. Her scholarly interest in cultural politics, especially quirky, colourful, suggestive episodes, is exemplified by *The Irish Art of Controversy* (2005) and her most recent book, *Poets and the Peacock Dinner: the literary history of a meal* (2014). She is a past president of the American Conference for Irish Studies and a former fellow of the Guggenheim Foundation and of the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library.

ISBN: 9781908996749 ● Paperback ● €25 / £20 ● Pre-order at [www.ria.ie](http://www.ria.ie)

# MUSEUM EYE

## 'BIRTH OF A NATION—THE EVOLUTION OF IRISH NATIONHOOD, 1641–1916'

County Museum,  
Jocelyn Street, Dundalk  
dundalkmuseum.ie

By Tony Canavan

**D**undalk has been quick off the mark in mounting the country's first exhibition about the 1916 Rising, which was officially opened by Taoiseach Enda Kenny. Situated on the top floor of the museum, it is free to the public.

The exhibition area is rectangular and you go through it clockwise, beginning with the Cromwellian era. One is immediately struck by the enlarged banners, photos and posters which hang around the room, and the clear, calm, disembodied voice reading the Proclamation (there could have been an interval of more than a few seconds between readings, although on the other hand I can now recite the Proclamation by heart). Between the display cases, large panels convey information on the events and set them in context.

The exhibition situates the 1916 Rising in the historical context of centuries of opposition to British rule. It begins with artefacts related to the Cromwellian era, such as broadside pamphlets, letters and government proclamations. The next cabinet looks at the eighteenth century and the growth of a patriotic movement.



Among the objects on display here are a sword from the Drogheda militia and a mess spoon of the Louth militia. This century ended with the United Irishmen's rebellion of 1798, followed by union with Great Britain.

The next display looks at the nineteenth century, beginning with Robert Emmet's rebellion in 1803, which is represented by his death-mask, made after his execution. Look out for an impressive silver-plate urn used in a money-raising drive to create a 'patriotic fund'. Here, too, we take in Daniel O'Connell's successful campaign for Catholic Emancipation and his failed attempt to repeal the Act of Union, the Great Famine, the Young Irelanders and the Land League. All of this reflects a turbulent century, which also saw the Home Rule campaign. These episodes are represented by letters, posters and other documents, including a ration card from the Famine.

One of the strengths of this

exhibition is that it manages to combine the national and the local and this becomes more apparent as it approaches the 1916 Rising, with references to County Louth events and people becoming more frequent. The run-up to the Rising covers the Home Rule crisis. A copy of the anti-Home Rule 'Solemn League and Covenant', a recruitment poster for the Irish Volunteers, photographs and even contemporary film footage illustrate the febrile atmosphere surrounding the passing of the Home Rule Act, which of course was shelved on the outbreak of the First World War.

The growing momentum for a rising is well illustrated with photographs, letters and posters relating to events such as the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa, the Howth and Larne gunrunnings and so on, and there are display cabinets related to the cultural and political organisations active at the time, from the GAA to Inghinidhe na hÉireann.



Among the things to look out for are a silk handkerchief that belonged to O'Donovan Rossa and a set of 'lucky charms' owned by the veteran Fenian John Devoy.

Prominence is given to Roger Casement, reflecting his humanitarian work prior to 1914 and his negotiations with Germany. There is the map of the Kerry coast that he had with him when he landed there just before the Rising was due to start. His story is carried on through to his execution.

The main focus of the exhibition is the back wall of the gallery. Photos and images display aspects of

Opposite: The centre-piece of the exhibition is a neo-classical arch, which surrounds an ornately framed original copy of the 1916 Proclamation.

Above left: Trophies awarded to Lord Henry Murray for his role in suppressing the 1798 Rebellion in Coleraine (right); silver spoon from the Louth Militia (bottom); cross-belt plate, also Louth Militia (left).

Above right: Displays highlighting the cultural renaissance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Right: Items associated with the funeral of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa in Glasnevin Cemetery on 1 August 1915, including his silk handkerchief.

(All images: County Museum, Dundalk)



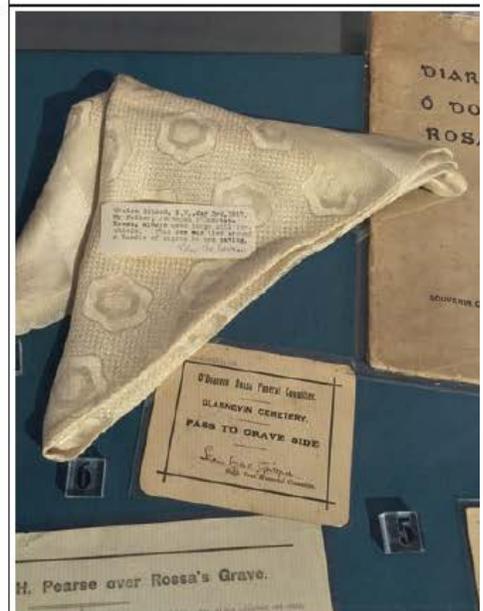
the events of Easter Week 1916, with two screens running film from the time, much of it new to me. The centre-piece is a neo-classical arch surrounding an ornately framed original copy of the 1916 Proclamation. All this impressively conveys how momentous the Rising was in Irish history.

Beyond this symbolism, the events of that week are represented by documents such as the 'Irish War News' (the rebels' communiqué from the GPO), a proclamation of martial law by the British authorities and a map showing other places where the Rising took place. A more human face is put on this with an exhibit dedicated to the seven signatories of the Proclamation and Countess Markievicz, with a photograph of each and a brief biography. Of course, the signatories and nine others were all executed. Next to this a display cabinet contains Volunteer and RIC uniforms alongside two Lee Enfield rifles, one used by the RIC, the other by the Volunteers. The exhibition concludes with the Rising's aftermath.

This is an impressive exhibition that lives up to its ambitious title. It packs a lot in, combining both the local and the national but managing to be coherent, interesting and

informative as well. I found myself getting lost in the detail of each display cabinet, whether taking a closer look at medals or trying to decipher letters (a transcript of all letters is available). Not content to rest on its laurels, the museum is already planning another major exhibition on the War of Independence.

*Tony Canavan is editor of Books Ireland.*



# McClelland Library exhibit: *Remembering the Easter Rising: Historical Context and Cultural Legacy.*

Under the direction of Chas Moore, the head librarian at the McClelland Library in Phoenix, Arizona, the Irish Cultural Center and the McClelland Library have created a full year of programming surrounding the commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising. In addition to lectures, book discussions and a film series, the Library is host to an exhibit which provides a visual history of the Rising and its role in the development of modern Ireland.

Partially funded by the 2016 Global and Diaspora Programme of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the Irish Consulate in San Francisco, the exhibit was officially opened on October 10 2015 by Philip Grant, the Consul General of the San Francisco Consulate. The only exhibition of its kind on the west coast, the exhibit explores Irish history from the 17th Century through modern times. In addition to providing a brief overview of many major topics in Irish history, the exhibit analyzes the events of Irish history in the context of the 1916 Easter rising.

Further information on the exhibit, which will run through the end of 2016, and on the McClelland Library and the Irish Cultural Center, can be found at [www.azirish.org](http://www.azirish.org) or at <http://www.facebook.com/McClellandIrishLibrary>



Philip Grant  
Consul General  
Consulate General of Ireland, San Francisco  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Photo - Bob Rink

Norman McClelland  
Co-Chair, McClelland Library, Treasurer, Irish Cultural and Learning  
Foundation

Paul Ahern  
President of the Irish Cultural and Learning Foundation



Photos - Caroline Woodiel



# Easter Rising Stories: the documentary films of Marcus Howard.

by Adrienne Leavy

In Closing.....

Throughout Ireland this year there has been a tremendous response by local artists, schools and community groups to the 1916 centenary, with many cultural contributions characterized by a distinctly personal narrative. In many of these projects, the Rising becomes a vibrant living legacy rather than a distant cataclysmic event, which in the past often evoked partisan stock responses. Two examples from the town of Dundalk, County Louth, are illustrative of these local modes of commemoration.



## Marcus Howard's Easter Rising Stories

Marcus Howard is an Irish independent film maker and the creator of the You Tube channel Easter Rising Stories, which showcases a series of documentaries he has made about the 1916 Rising. Drawing on interviews with surviving family members, and witness statements compiled by the Bureau of Military History, Howard has created a series of moving testimonials which emphasize the humanity of the rebels and their followers, as opposed to the received orthodoxy which too often has calcified the leaders into divisive symbols. Among the many individuals he has interviewed are descendants of Thomas Clarke, James Connolly and Patrick Pearse, along with Father Joseph Mallin, the only surviving child of the executed leader Michael Mallin. Howard is also a descendant of Arthur Greene, a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood from 1912-1916, and a Sergeant Major of the Irish Volunteers in Dundalk, County Louth. In addition to directing documentaries Howard has written on Greene's experience during the Rising using the latter's witness statements to the Bureau of Military History:



Photos - John Ayers

<https://ireland-calling.com/arthur-greene-easter-rising/>

James Connolly documentary (36mins approx):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lawq612im>

Patrick Pearse documentary (50mins approx):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4efCh9W-hs0>

Michael Mallin documentary featuring his son, Father Joseph Mallin (12mins approx):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzaET7y8>

Dundalk Volunteers documentary (39mins approx):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoM52vcWfLk>

## **The Dundalk 1916 Relatives Committee**

Howard also serves on the board of the Dundalk 1916 Relatives Committee, which was founded by Pádraic Agnew, a descendent of another Irish Volunteer, Hugh Kearney. The Relatives Committee was established to “commemorate all Volunteers in County Louth who mobilized on Easter Sunday morning 1916.” A special commemorative Medal, designed by Agnew, and funded by Louth County Council under the Irish government project “Ireland 2016,” was issued to the families of the Volunteers who mobilized on Easter Sunday morning in 1916 with the intention of marching to Dublin to support the Rising.

Retrieving the forgotten contributions of local residents in the Louth area was paramount according to Agnew, who has stressed the non-partisan nature of their mission: “We are non-political and are independent of any other organization or party, we are just ordinary people commemorating an extraordinary event which shaped our local, regional, and national history since 1916.” Over a two year period the group worked with a community groups throughout the country, and exhaustively researched the Bureau of Military History witness statements that the Louth Volunteers gave in the 1930s. This work enabled the group to first identify the participants from County Louth, and then notify their surviving relatives, many of whom gathered in Dundalk and in Dublin for the Easter 2016 commemoration events.