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Editorial

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According to William Butler Yeats, Easter 1916 would leave the country of Ireland 'changed, changed utterly'. With this seminal aphorism, Yeats, Ireland's foremost modernist poet, apprehended that the Easter Rising of 1916 had altered, fundamentally, the dynamics of Irish politics. However, with this pithy line Yeats also anticipated that, on foot of the Rising, the very dimensions of Ireland itself would be re-wrought anew.

Before the Easter Rising of April 1916, Ireland had been an integral component of the United Kingdom. It had, therefore, been at the heart of an empire that had enveloped the four corners of the earth. In little over five years after the Rising, however, the greater part of the island of Ireland would decouple from the United Kingdom and the new Irish polity that this engendered would soon drive the British Empire's irreversible dissipation.

This issue of Studies in Arts and Humanities (SAH) Journal is the journal's third iteration. SAH was conceived as, and will continue to be, an avowedly international academic digest. Like most everything else, though, SAH has a root and it happens to be in Ireland. This year in Ireland the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising has been dominating the intellectual, and informing the popular, discourse. Many of the people who have thus far contributed to the SAH initiative have been engaged, both as scholars and as citizens, in what has been a grand conversation about Irish history. Consequently, had SAH - simply because it is an international journal and, as such, keen to distance itself from anything parochial - closed its eyes to the centennial discourse, this, ironically, would have been very isolationist. Moreover, it would have been intellectually specious. Indeed, this special issue of SAH, which has as its general theme the 1916 Easter Rising, does not so much clip the wings of SAH just as it is getting off the ground but, rather, affords it an early opportunity to test the span of its interdisciplinary reach. In Ireland, the retrospective on the Rising has not been monochrome but it has, somewhat inevitably, been quite stratified. In this special issue of SAH we have, by contrast, woven together several disparate responses to the Rising, recognising – consistent with our focus and scope – that to do so is to enhance our understanding of the Rising in exactly the same way as dissonance only distorts it.

A background to the Rising

Ireland first came under the jurisdiction of the English Crown in the twelfth century. However, it would be the 1500s before most of Ireland would succumb to conquest. Resistance to this was based in Ulster, the northern province, where the native, Catholic lords had remained powerful. During the 1600s, though, they were defeated and the native, Catholic population subjugated. From 1695, the Penal Laws institutionalised this oppression

and, by the late eighteenth century, only five per cent of Irish land was owned by Irish Catholics. In the face of this the Society of United Irishmen staged an abortive uprising in 1798. It sought to establish Ireland as a sovereign republic defined by a commitment to equality. Instead, the rebellion's failure led to a full political union between Britain and Ireland, in which Ireland would come under the direct control of the British parliament. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Daniel O'Connell pursued constitutional campaigns against both the Penal Laws – successfully – and the union – unsuccessfully. Later, the brutal effects of the Great Famine (1845-9) laid bare, as far as many Irish nationalists were concerned, British misgovernment of Ireland. Nonetheless, in the second half of the nineteenth century the emphasis remained on constitutional nationalism. Charles Stewart Parnell pursued a constitutional campaign for home rule, in which limited authority would devolve to an Irish parliament within the context of the union. He did not succeed but his successor, John Redmond, did and in 1914 home rule was enacted. On the outbreak of the Great War, however, it was suspended.

While the emphasis was on constitutional nationalism from 1798, radical Irish nationalism would re-emerge, particularly following the Famine. In 1858, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was founded as a secret fraternity to agitate for an Irish republic. Despite the failure of its militancy in the late 1800s it continued to organise and evangelise. From the late nineteenth century, there was a flowering of cultural nationalism and the IRB attracted many cultural nationalists. One cohort that no strand of Irish nationalism generally appealed to, though, was the planter community in Ulster. After Ulster's resistance to the Crown had been broken in the 1600s it had been settled with British, Protestant colonists who, it was determined, would be loyal to the Crown. Although this had not always been the case – it was enlightened and disenfranchised members of the community that had spearheaded the United Irishmen – by the late 1800s the community was confirmed as anti-nationalist. Consequently, it opposed home rule. In advance of the introduction of home rule in 1912, 237,368 men signed the Ulster Covenant, vowing to use 'all means which may be found necessary' to defeat it, and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was subsequently created. Some elements of the British political establishment were reluctant to take on Ulster unionism and some were supportive of it. The exclusion of Ulster from home rule began to be discussed but the occurrence of the Great War allowed the issue to be sidestepped.

In response to the creation of the UVF, the Irish Volunteers were established in 1913 to defend home rule. Upon the outbreak of the Great War, the Irish Volunteers split. A majority, for various reasons, resolved to support the British war effort. A minority, which retained the name of the Irish Volunteers, resolved that it was not in Ireland's interest to support Britain. Meanwhile, the IRB saw in the war an opportunity to attack British rule in Ireland. An IRB military council was convened to plan an insurrection. It would eventually have seven members: Thomas Clarke, Seán Mac Diarmada, Patrick Pearse, James Connolly, Thomas MacDonagh, Éamonn Ceannt and Joseph Plunkett. Initially, it envisaged a national revolt, using the Irish Volunteers and a workers' militia called the Irish Citizen Army, which would be armed with guns from Imperial Germany. The commander-in-chief of the Irish Volunteers, Eoin MacNeill, was not part of the council and after the arms shipment was intercepted he countermanded the rising, which was to begin in Dublin on the Easter Sunday. The military council, nevertheless, decided to push ahead and on Easter Monday approximately 1,400 men and women occupied buildings in and around Dublin. Outside the rebels' headquarters, the General Post Office, Patrick Pearse proclaimed the Irish Republic. The Rising lasted for a week. By the Saturday, when the rebels surrendered, approximately 16,000 British troops had been deployed and martial law had been declared. On the rebel

side, 58 had been killed and on the British side 107, while 184 civilians had also died. During and after the Rising, the rebels did not, generally, receive the support of nationalist Ireland. However, as the British began to execute participants in the Rising, attitudes began to change and the rebels were transformed into martyrs. At the time, there was a small radical nationalist party called Sinn Féin. It became associated with the Rising, and, having adopted a republican manifesto, it swept the boards at the 1918 general election in Ireland. The Irish nationalist electorate had retrospectively endorsed the Irish Republic proclaimed in 1916. The Rising had set in chain a sequence of events that would lead to Irish independence in 1922. Ulster unionist opposition to this would, though, be facilitated by the partition of six counties in Ulster, which would therefore remain part of the United Kingdom as Northern Ireland.

The discourse on the Rising: an issue

In as much as there can be any veracity to such a generalisation, Irish people are fascinated with Irish history. Its interrogation is, in fact, something of a national pastime. Thus, unsurprisingly, the 1916 Rising is subjected to scrutiny in Ireland. What might, perhaps, surprise an outsider is that what is often contested is the legitimacy of the Rising. The need for the Rising is questioned; how representative the rebels were is questioned; the rebels' tactics are questioned; the rebels' morality is questioned; and the legacy of the Rising in the context of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland is questioned. The need for the Rising is questioned on the basis that home rule had been enacted. How representative the rebels were is questioned on the basis that their number was so small. The rebels' tactics are questioned on the basis that they knew that the Rising could not succeed and yet were prepared to see civilians killed and Dublin destroyed. The rebels' morality is questioned on the basis that in view of the above they were surely wanton murderers; even terrorists. Finally, the legacy of the Rising in the context of the Northern Ireland Troubles is questioned on the basis that the Provisional IRA drew legitimacy for its campaign from the Rising. Such a critique of the Rising is valid. However, it must not challenge historical fact. The fact is that the Rising led to Irish autonomy far in excess of home rule. The fact is that the rebels were subsequently, democratically, endorsed by a large proportion of Irish people. The fact is that the rebels surrendered to prevent further loss of life and their artillery was not responsible for the destruction of Dublin. The fact is that the two leaders of the Rising, Pearse and Connolly, who drafted the proclamation, had dedicated their lives to emancipating human dignity. Finally, the fact is that the Troubles in Northern Ireland had begun before the Provisional IRA was established and were the corollary of discrimination against the Northern nationalist community. It is also an historical fact that British rule in Ireland had little legitimacy. Once historical fact is not suppressed then the 1916 Easter Rising must be critiqued. So, too, must all other historical events, particularly those more significant, international events, which are all too often remembered in black and white terms.

Contents of this special edition

This special edition of SAH contains five original articles, an interview with a trailblazing Irish historian and three original poems. Anthony McIntyre's article 'Marginalizing memory' confronts the ahistorically inclined agenda favoured by many in the Irish establishment in commemorating the 1916 Rising. In advance of the commemoration, the Irish academy, which had vigorously contested the Rising for decades, closed ranks in the face of what it perceived as an attempt to deliberately misrepresent the Rising in order to attune it to contemporary political considerations. McIntyre offers an individualistic perspective on this. In 'Forgetting and remembering' Mary McAuliffe, Liz Gillis, Éadaoin Ní Chléirigh and

Marja Almqvist reinstate, cogently, women into the narrative surrounding the 1916 Rising. They do this against the backdrop of Richmond Barracks, where, following the Rising, seventy-seven female rebels were detained alongside their male counterparts and the refurbishment of which coincides with this special edition of SAH. The proclivities of Patrick Pearse's personality have long been debated by historians but, in the third article, psychologist Patricia Meredith Orr and a group of psychology students reflect on his personality development and character as practitioners in the field of psychoanalysis. As a senior Irish-language lecturer, Regina Uí Chollatáin brings to bear a similar authority in examining the cultural and political interplay within Irish nationalism in the context of the Rising in the fourth article. Finally, Wei H. Kao deconstructs the Rising through the prism of three dramatic responses to it, all of which revisited the Rising at different points over the last 100 years. In his wide-ranging interview with professor emeritus R.V. Comerford, David Doolin elicits from this doyen of modern Irish history a series of verbal vignettes of staggering acuity. Concluding this special edition are three poems, which, despite their positioning, actually offer the kind of entrée to the Rising and the discourse on it that the prolixity of prose simply cannot convey.