TWINSOME MINDS: RECOVERING 1916

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Fifty years ago today, in Christian Brothers Cork, I made this scrap book. Like most other school children in the Republic I was celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of 1916. I presented the book to my teacher and received a silver coin of Padraig Pearse in return. Half a century on, much has changed and my goal is different: not, this time, to recount Grand Narratives of the Great Martyrs but to look at some ‘micro-narratives’ largely neglected by history. Our hope, in short, is to brush official memory against the grain so as to retell some forgotten or unfinished stories of the moment.

1916 was, amongst other things, a time of great sundering - between Ireland and Britain, North and South, Nationalist and Unionist - and there are two ways of reliving that split: either as recurring division, or as a chance to create something new. One way of creating anew means, I believe, retrieving tales of opposite sides – two nations, two places, two persons, two parts of ourselves – and transforming the tensions into novel modes of imagining. And living.

1916 was a revolution of mind as well as might. It was as much about cultural imagination as it was about military insurrection. In this centenary of the Rising we’ve witnessed great reenactments of funerals and memorials. But in all the militarist remembering, we sometimes forget that half the 1916 leaders were poets and that the revolutionary generation that gave birth to the Rising teemed with artists and intellectuals, painters and playwrights, writers and storytellers. Perhaps it’s time to go beyond boring gun salutes and recover, in Yeats’s words,
“the Ireland the poets have imagined” (The Municipal Gallery Revisited, 1937).

Militarist memory easily ignores just how complex 1916 was for those who lived it. And, as scholars are pointing out, one of the most vexed issues for us still today is that the same year that saw 485 die in the Dublin Rising saw 3,500 Irish die at the battle of the Somme. This was a time of massive questioning and confusion. And it’s not really right to remember one part of Ireland’s family without remembering the other - especially if we recall that the 1916 signatories themselves proclaimed an Ireland where ‘all the children be cherished equally’. This means, today, remembering both the Irish Volunteers in Dublin and the Royal Irish Fusiliers in France. It means rescuing the Easter lily and Flanders poppy from sectarian exclusion. It means addressing what Sean O’Faoláin called the “Siamese duality of mind” endemic to British-Irish history - a duality resulting in “the oversimplified story of the victor and the oversimplified memories of the defeated, both of them unfaithful to the always confused and troubled split-mindedness of the time” (O’Faoláin, An Irish Journey, 1941). New stories are called for. Or at least new ways of retelling the old.

Irish imagination is at its best, said Joyce, when moving between two ‘twin-some’ minds - that is, when it has ‘two thinks at a time’ opening onto a third (Finnegans Wake, 1939). The Irish have always been most creative when following a logic of both/and, acknowledging a mix of double fidelities - religious, national, psychological, cultural - doublings which call for new mediations. Ireland is an island beside an island, part of an archipelago connected by waterways which make us all ‘mongrel islanders’. “We are what we are, ... mongrel pure” (Kinsella, Butcher’s Dogen, 1972). Seamus Heaney puts it well, regarding his own dual upbringing - “two buckets were easier carried than one, I grew up in between” (Heaney, Terminus, 1987). The key is this between which summons what Heaney called a “symbolic reordering of Ireland” open to new possibilities of “Irishness, Britishness, Europeaness, planitariness, creatureliness, whatever...” (Heaney, The Redress of Poetry, 2011, 275).

The philosophy of ‘twin-some’ minds seeks to turn polar opposites into fertile openings. It’s a way of thinking which, I believe, prompted the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 to take the gun out of Irish politics by allowing people to be ‘Irish or British or both’. That Peace Agreement, like the 1916 proclamation itself, is still a promissory note – and we need to make good on such promises rather than settle for stop-gap solutions. (There are still, shockingly, over eighty so-called “Peace Walls” separating communities in Northern Ireland along purely sectarian lines – and almost 80% of education remains religiously segregated. War wounds fester south of the border too).

As a gesture beyond such divides, we’d like to share with you today some stories of people who ‘grew up in between’ - tales of crossed identity often eclipsed by Monumental History. The true enemies of commemoration are not complexity and confusion but purity and certitude. As Brian Friel reminds us in his play, Translations (1980), ‘confusion is not an ignoble condition’. Genuine catharsis comes - we believe - from a crossing of narratives, transforming binaries into multiple belongings. We need to complicate and pluralise the memory of 1916... which does not mean relativising the huge ‘power’ imbalance of British-Irish relations. It is a matter of imaginative empathy, not political equivalence.

In West Cork there’s a saying: if you want to know what happened, ask your father; if you want to know what people say happened, ask your mother. Today we hope to ask both questions by revisiting ‘sites of memory’ where history and story overlap. Histories tell things that happened; stories, things that might have happened. Where history stops, stories start. For, as novelist Roddy Doyle says, we need stories to fill the hole inside us. In what follows we’ll be trying to fill in some gaps of history by supplementing memory with imagination, by telling it both as it happened and as if it happened this way or that. For it’s often in mixing history and story that we may give a future to the past.

II

Let’s begin with stories of split siblings - stories I came across while preparing this talk as various friends offered tales of ancestors caught on opposite sides in 1916. Hearing these I realised just how common splits were within Irish families at the time – and since. Here are just some examples.
i) Cyril and William Stevens were born within fourteen months of each other in Fermanagh and ended up in opposing armies in 1916. Cyril joined the rebels while William, a soldier in the British Army, found himself guarding his own brother in Richmond Barracks. One week after the Rising, they stared at each other across barbed wire. The uniforms they wore - Irish and British - were made by the same Dublin tailors. Same wool, same stripes, same buttons, same braid. Only the colour was different. Olive green for Cyril. Dun brown for William. There's a photograph of their reunion with their sister in 1946, two months before Cyril died - last time they met.

ii) Another example involved siblings from Ulster. Fervently Protestant, George and William Irving became lovers of Gaelic and all things Irish. One day they saw two posters on a wall, one promising a Republic, the other recruiting for King and Country. Both called for the defense of 'small nations'. William read the former, George the latter. They shook hands, wished each other well and went their separate ways. On May 11, 1916, a Unionist paper, The Impartial Reporter, ran the headline 'An Enniskillen Traitor', denouncing George Irvine as a 'rebel' in the Rising. But they'd got the wrong brother. It was in fact William who fought in the Rebellion, while George was serving in France, protecting his unit from German artillery. George loved his brother to the end - and his passion for the teaching of Gaelic, according to his sister, never "impaired his usefulness, either as a teacher or a soldier."

iii) A third story concerns blood brothers who switched uniforms during the Rising. On Easter Monday, Eoin Cruiss Callaghan returned from England to his native Dublin. A twenty year old Catholic serving in the British Air Corps, he'd been granted leave to visit his dying mother. He was wearing a British uniform and got caught in the crossfire. As it happened, a rebel sniper rescued him, took him to safety in the Four Courts and exchanged uniforms. Next day, Eoin crossed the Liffey and visited his mother for the last time. The sniper who rescued him was, the story goes, a school friend he'd sat beside for years. Just days after his return to England, Eoin Callaghan's plane was shot down by the Germans. Ar Dheis Dé go raibh a anam dilis. Three generations later, his granddaughter, Louise Callaghan, wrote a poem called School Yearbook about a tale untold for almost a century:

I keep turning to his photo... A boy soldiers
Home on leave. His last look.
The story goes of him arrested,
Held over Easter in the Four Courts.
Ice winds ploughing up the Liffey.
Insurgents as young as himself,
Among ruins, crouched in a door.
Any one of them could be
From his class in school.
The contradictory clatter of war
Sounding off the cobbled quays

These are just random stories I heard recently - samples of forgotten incidents recovered by descendants generations later. There are thousands of such examples all over Ireland - families split between dual loyalties - including members of my own nationalist family whose education was paid for by a British Navy pension! In fact, I believe that most people in Ireland who scratch their ancestral skin will uncover similar tales - as many schoolchildren are doing north and south of the border.

This work of trans-generational recovery remains a critical therapeutic task today. It matters for the health of the nation. Why? Because repressed wounds scar the psyche and return to haunt us again and again. Such wounds need to be constantly reworked in images and words. Revisiting micro-stories of 1916 I am very struck by the contingency of events. The Rising took many by surprise and most were at the mercy of the moment. The majority of participants, on both sides, had no real clue what would result from their actions. So much depended on chance - what street poster you read, what uniform you chose, what message you believed: the Irish Volunteers, under Pearse, promising independence, or the National Volunteers, under Redmond, urging solidarity with Flanders. And one must not forget that both armies - rebel and British - were committed to freeing 'small nations' and providing for soldiers' families. (One cannot underestimate the importance of British Army salaries for the families of the 200,000 Irishmen who fought in France. And the Irish Volunteers also cared for their own, with assistance from labour unions at home and abroad, including the mining unions of Pennsylvania and New England.)
It is also ironic to recall that both Northern Volunteers and Southern Volunteers claimed the same mythic hero - Cúchuláin - as their patron. A double claim witnessed to this day in the gable murals of divided Ulster ghettos.

The fact is that, in the hierarchical days of 1916, ordinary Irish and British soldiers were told little enough by their leaders - and even the leaders were frequently at odds: think of the conflicting commands by Pearse and McNeill at the outbreak of the Rising - not to mention the muddling in British High Command. No wonder half the troops were bemused. Nothing confounds like war. There's even the tale of Dublin Fusiliers who shot members of their own British unit who were firing at women stealing bread from Boland's Mill. The British authorities accused rebels of the shooting rather than admit to mutiny in their own ranks.

But if there was confusion in the streets of Dublin it was worse in the trenches of Flanders. Private Willie Dunne, in Sebastian Barry's novel *A Long Long Way* (2005), captures this in an exchange with fellow Fusilier, Captain O'Hara. They've just received news of the Dublin executions and realise that their compatriots were not only firing at British uniforms like theirs, but worse - they were shipping arms from Germany!

'The queer thing is', said O'Hara. 'They were hoping the fucking Germans would help them...'

'Who Pete?' said Willie.

'The fucking rebels, Willie'.

'Oh yeh, I know', said Willie. 'I know. Sure it was written on their piece of paper. Gallant allies in Europe, it said, wasn't it?'

'So that means, like it or lump it, we're the fucking enemy. I mean, we're the fucking enemy of the fucking rebels?'

'That's it, more or less. That's how I understand it anyhow', said Willie.

'You see, I think that's very queer indeed', said Pete.

'It is, very', said Willie.

'I mean, whatever way you turn it, I would like to believe... that what we've done out here has a reason, to push the Hun back and all that, even if it doesn't have a reason'.

'I know', said Willie, But he didn't completely know.

'So what can we call that?'

'I don't know Pete'.

'So where does it leave us?'....

'Sitting here, Pete, is where', he said.

'Like ecstas'. And then Peter O'Hara said nothing for a little while.

'But I wish they hadn't shot those fellas all the same'. It was almost a whisper.

'I wish they hadn't too, Pete', said Willie (Barry, 2005, 139).

Shortly after, Willie writes to his father back in Ireland recalling a rebel his own age shot in a Dublin doorway. The ruins of Ypres surrounding him become one with the ruins of Dublin, renamed the New Ypres in the postcard he holds in his hands - both towns mere dots on a vast international map of battles and alliances, treaties and betrayals. Irish, British, German, French. One big mist of global confusion, as mustard gas rolled through the trenches. 1916 was not just local politics, it was geo-politics.

It's in retrospect that we divide historical muddles into Grand Narratives of binary opposition: Irish versus British, northern versus southern, unionist versus nationalist. It was after the events that the makers of memory imposed neat ideologies on what was often a big puzzle at the time. What are now celebrated as deliberate military campaigns were frequently conducted through foggy dew and swirling smoke. In our lust for simplification we forget the mess of history. Militarist memorials hide the perplexity of human action (and passion).

But if we recall with Benedict Anderson that every nation is an 'imagined community', I think we can begin to re-imagine 1916 in new ways. Making history is also a matter of remaking it, giving futures to aborted pasts. We need to recollect not only 'the terrible beauty' which was born, but also the still-births, half-births or almost-births that never saw the light of day.

III

The anecdotes I opened with were oral memories, and before moving on to written ones there's one more tale I'd like to share. It's a story I first heard as a pupil growing up in Glenstal Abbey, County Limerick, and which was never committed to official History. It didn't fit.
In 1916, a young Limerick woman, Winifred Barrington, was serving in the Ambulance corps of the British Army in France. While she was nursing soldiers in the trenches, she was also writing postcards to her rebel friend, Mike Hayes, back in Glenstal. One such card read:

I am looking forward tremendously to returning to Ireland in March. I have been to a few dances and plays, one Irish one was grand. I'll ride up and see you directly I get home, best regards, W. F. Barrington.

Winnie, as she was known, traversed boundaries with abandon, ignoring divisions of class and religion. Growing up in Ireland in conflicted times, she defied convention and daily crossed the road separating her Ascendancy Castle from the Catholic labourers of Murroe village. Mike Hayes was her favorite.

In the mornings, Winnie brought food to poor families in the hills; afternoons, she rode to bound with her Protestant neighbors and dined with Loyalist landlords. Evenings she danced with Mike Hayes and his Fenian friends on the old platform near Abington Bridge.

The Hayes family were well known for their Republican loyalties but that didn't stop the relationship between Mike and Winnie. And it was reported that on one occasion, when Crown Forces captured a tricolour from Mike and were holding it as evidence, Winnie visited the barracks and smuggled the flag out in the folds of her petticoats. But her close relationship with Mike Hayes didn't prevent her also befriending Major Henry Biggs, the District Inspector of the Black and Tan brigade. Biggs captured local IRA men and had them strapped to cars as hostages as he drove through the countryside. But Winifred, we're told, "only saw the good side of the twenty-six year old Biggs", forming what one neighbour described as an "inexplicable friendship between two young people". "She had no enemies, she trusted everyone". She thought she could deal with devils and turn them into friends.

One evening, at the height of hostilities, Winnie, aged twenty-three, left Glenstal Castle on her white horse. As she passed through the gates she met her father, Sir Charles, returning from London. He asked her to be careful and be back in time for supper. She also met Mr. O'Brien, the gate keeper, who warned her not to go. O'Brien, a British Army veteran, particularly loved Winnie who cooked for him in his lodge. He guessed where she was going and tried to stop her: "I am a soldier myself but I would not dare to speak to those soldiers across the way". He was referring to Major Biggs and his British Auxiliaries. But Winnie replied that having served in the Ambulance Corps during the Great War, she "need fear no one"... and rode on.

Later that afternoon Winnie shared tea with British officers at a mansion in Killalicilly. And it was while returning in a car driven by Biggs that they were ambushed by the IRA at Coolboreen Bridge. It was half past seven o'clock. There were Hayes in the ambush party but it was never revealed who fired the fatal shot. All we can suppose is that some of the Republicans Winnie danced with on Abington Bridge were at Coolboreen Bridge when she expired. There was no trial, no evidence, and no one involved in the attack was prepared to tell the full story, but there are many different versions of what happened that evening.

- One account claims that Winnie was dressed in 'mannah manner' - jodhpurs and military cap - and was mistaken for Biggs. Another claims she was having a driving lesson from Biggs and was sitting beside him at the wheel, and got caught in the crossfire. Another again says she flung herself across his body to prevent him being shot. One of the ambushers was said to have apologised to the dying Winifred, as she expired from a bullet through the lung. While another put several shots into the body, swearing "the bitch would have lived if she'd kept better company".

No one knows for sure. No one told. But when Winifred was laid out in her Castle amidst bouquets of rhododendrons from the Glenstal gardens, there wasn't a soul from the townland, Catholic or Protestant, republican or unionist, who did not attend. Passing through Murroe on her way to the cemetery, all houses were closed and blinds drawn. The bell of the church tolled until the end procession passed out of sight. The money and land for the building of the Catholic Church had been given by Winifred's Protestant father, Sir Charles, along with the graves where two of the Rebel ambushers were later buried. Though
the local priest refused to have them interred on church grounds, Sir Charles offered his own grave and had it lined with the rhododendrons that had bedecked Winnie's tomb. Winnie's own epitaph read: 'Here lies buried all that could die of Winifred Barrington'.

When Sir Barrington left Ireland, inconsolable at the loss of his daughter, his castle was passed on to Benedictine monks. Marking this year's centenary, pupils of Glenstal Abbey have recovered a long-buried Garden named after Winifred; and there they've planted seventeen silver birch trees - sixteen for the executed of 1916 and a seventeenth for Winnie herself, who befriended Rebels and Fusiliers alike. The poet, Fanny Howe, wrote this inscription: '*Winifred means Guinevere*/A white phantom/She crossed boundaries without fear*'.

Here, once again, I’m struck by how a genuine working through of trauma happens after the event. For almost a century, the story of Winifred Barrington went unremarked - and when I myself was a pupil at Glenstal in the nineteen-seventies no one spoke of her Lady Garden. Sometimes it takes decades, even centuries, for deep wounds to be worked through. And when such catharsis occurs, it is often, I believe, through the recovery of lost narratives.

A last thought for Winnie Barrington. Were she to return to her garden today how would she remember 1916? Would she wear a poppy for the Fusiliers she saw into their Belgian graves? An Easter lily for her Fenian friends? Or a dark rose for both? I suspect she would wear all three, reminding us that lilies are symbols of rebirth and that the poppy is not the exclusive preserve of British war remembrance, but a symbol first invented by a Canadian poet, John McCrea, for all war-grieving peoples – a practice popularised by French and American women known as the Poppy Ladies. I imagine Winifred wearing a lily on one collar, a poppy on the other, and a red rose in between, reminding us that roses belong to everyone, from the Dark Rosaleen of Fenian poetry to the red rose of England and the mystical rose of the risen one.

Winifred held to a common country which exceeded division into nations. She hoped against hope for a place where enemies might become allies, where hostility might yield to hospitality in a new kind of Ireland – post-nationalist and post-unionist. Winnie paid the price; but her hope remains.

IV

Let me now turn to written testimonies of 'twinsome minds'. This crucial work of recovery has already begun – from Roy Foster’s brilliant revisiting of cultural revolution in Vivid Faces (2014) to Kiberd and Matthews’s Handbook of the Revival (2015) and the timely rehabilitations of women’s role in the Rising by feminist historians like Margaret Ward, Lucy McDiarmid, Mary Jones, and Senia Paseta amongst others.

Sibling stories of 1916 were not all about brothers. There were also many sisters whose identities dramatically clashed and crossed. But when I was a boy, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising, there was no talk, for example, of the Ryan sisters of Tomcoole, of Muriel McCarthy from Cork or Mary and Hannah Sheehy from Rathgar. No stamps or statues, no newspaper tributes or public memorials. Nor much mention - if any - in the mainstream history books. Yet their stories reveal women who ran guns and literary salons, taught in colleges and universities and wrote essays, books and journals. Some ninety women participated in the rebellion of Easter week, sixty of them members of Cumann na mBan with weapons training, proving a handy match for adversaries, as Countess Markievicz and others proved. And many were socially and sexually liberated in ways hushed up by Catholic nationalist hagiography. De Valera resolved to rid Ireland of its last remaining snake – sex. But many women resisted this and other repressions (as Margaret Ward shows in her biography of Hannah Sheehy Skeffington (1997) and Roy Foster in his chapter on ‘Lovers’ in Vivid Faces). These women were called ‘irreconcilables’ - and their irrepressible legacy deserves special mention in this centenary year. Here are some brief examples.

a) Min and Mary Kate Ryan were siblings who played an important if unsung role in the Rising. They grew up in a family farm in Tomcoole, Co. Wexford – a white country house with gothic porch and monkey puzzle tree, surrounded by forests. Both sisters were highly educated - Mary Kate held a professorship at the
National University of Ireland — and they soon dissented from their bourgeois Catholic backgrounds. They were wildly romantic - Min being the passionate admirer of 1916 martyr Sean McDermott, while Mary Kate loved Irish war poet Tom Kettle, who died in Flanders. The sisters were notoriously attractive and loved to hold forth in Dublin cafés surrounded by hosts of suitors. Declaring an early preference for ‘Bohemian life’, Mary Kate advised Min against marital boredom, recommending men ‘with a bit of the devil in them’. The sisters’ politics were equally radical. They attended Gaelic League éistíthe and nationalist plays by Pearse before joining the Volunteers and playing a very active part in the rebellion. They ran messages and guns to the GPO (where their brother, James, served as Chief Medical Officer). And Min spent hours with Sean MacDermott - her adored ‘matrimonial aspirant’ - in his execution cell. She recorded this last moment:

When we left him at 3 o’clock he had two cigarettes still to smoke and he was to be shot at a quarter to four....He sat down at the table and tried to scratch his name and the date on the few coins he had left and on the buttons which he cut from his clothes....I was the last to say goodbye to him and he just said: ‘We never thought it would end like this’. Yes, that’s all he said although he knew himself, long before that, what the end would be.’ (Foster, 2014, 54).

McDermott gave Min his scarf as parting gift. Both Ryans were arrested for their part in the Rising and imprisoned along with other women ‘ireconcilables’ like Maud Gonne and the Countess Markievicz. After their release they continued their work for independence from Britain, hosting a revolutionary salon at their Ranelagh residence. They worked entirely as one - until it came to the Treaty. Then Min and Mary Kate split terribly: Min siding with the Free State, Mary Kate against. And, to compound matters, they each married leaders of the opposite side - Min choosing Richard Mulcahy, Military Commander of the Provisional Government; while Mary Kate chose Seán T. O’Kelly, Mulcahy’s Civil War enemy, and later President of Ireland. Indeed, there were arguably few decisions taken in Irish politics immediately after Independence which one of the Ryan sisters was not party to - though their role is only now being acknowledged. Had they, rather than their spouses, presided over government, one wonders just how different things might have been.

One of the greatest lessons learned from the Ryans is how to work through civil war wounds. Though their politics grew bitterly at odds, the sisters never allowed the divisions bleed into the next generation. The family farm at Tomcool was to remain, under their guidance, a country refuge for their descendents - sons and daughters sharing convivial summers in what one commentator described as ‘enduringly close cousinhood’ (Foster, 2014, 321). Shared country and affection helped save the traumas of a divided nation. Country before nation.

b) Down the road from the Ryans lived the Sheehys. Hannah and Mary Sheehy were also feisty ‘ireconcilables’. They embraced 1916 as a radical revolution of mind and body opening a way beyond both imperialism and provincialism. This showed in their struggle for women’s rights as much as in their choice of their first loves – Hannah choosing the pacifist-socialist Francis Sheffington, Mary the internationalist Tom Kettle. Both choices were to prove tragic: Sheffington was shot during the Rising, while Kettle died in the trenches. But of all their revolutionary causes, the emancipation of women topped the list. Hannah proved to be one of the bravest feminists of her time, both politically and socially; and an emancipated friend, Rosamond Jacob - observing the ‘distinctly unsensual’ bond between Hannah and her husband - opined an inclination towards ‘romantic sisterhood’, a relationship not uncommon in feminist circles of the time.

Hannah and Mary were active during and after 1916 in the editing of intellectual journals. Hannah co-authored the National Democrat which defied both British and Ecclesiastical authorities, and resolved to find an international readership for its mix of socialism and feminism. Mary, for her part, was active with her husband, Tom Kettle, in spreading new cosmopolitan ideas in the Nationist, a review championing Ireland’s place in Europe and the world. These cutting-edge journals were very much in tune with what their friends, John Ingleton and James Joyce, called a “new movement of human mind in Ireland” - one which construed Irish-British relations in more global terms and resolved, in Joyce’s words, “to Europeanise Ireland and Hibernise Europe”. The Sheehys refused the sectarian option of a Catholic parliament for a Catholic people and a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people.
Both sisters remained active in the post-revolutionary period. Mary pursued her feminist struggle at the level of local government, where she was Chair of Rathmines Council ('the only woman to hold such a position in the country'). She wrote to newspapers proposing a simple return to the Proclamation of 1916: "Why not fall back on the classic simplicity of the language of the Proclamation that is unequivocal and will satisfy all women?" Hannah, for her part, continued to share cigarettes and egalitarian views on labour and women's rights with other rebel 'irreconcilables' like Maud Gonne and Jacobs. Though she opposed the Treaty, she quickly grew disillusioned with de Valera, dismissing him as "essentially conservative and church-bound, anti-feminist, bourgeois... enamoured of abstractions" (Ward, 1997, 316).

Independent Ireland, both sisters believed, was betraying the great promise of 1916 by introducing censorship and a new puritanism. De Valera's constitution was relegating women to a permanent "invalidism as the weaker sex" and turning Ireland into a "Catholic statelet under Rome's grip". Hannah remained a radical to the end, founding the Women's Social and Progressive League and presenting her son Owen with a book on contraception on his wedding day! Fifty years before contraceptives were made legal. She died 'an unrepentant pagan' in Dublin in 1946.

Despite their anger at the betrayal of 1916, the Sheehy sisters never abandoned the cause of women in Ireland. Their writings today read like clarion calls to later generations. They would surely have rejoiced to see their struggles vindicated in recent referenda on contraception, divorce and gay marriage - while aware of how far there's still to go. These women remind us that Ireland without its 'irreconcilables' will never be free.

c) If the Sheehys were amongst the most radical women of 1916, the McSwinneys were not far behind - though this time we're talking sisters-in-law rather than blood sisters. And the sisterhood in question was less than sanguine. Mary and Muriel MacSwiney struggled together in war and peace. Mary was the sister of Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork in 1916, who died on hunger strike in London. She went on to become a leading figure in the Republican movement, succeeding de Valera as President of Sinn Féin. Muriel (née Murphy) was born to a Merchant Prince family in Cork, whom she defied by marrying the republican McSwiney whose pale blue eyes and loopy ideals she found irresistible. Though she had doubts about hunger-strikes she stood by her man and, after his death, toured America as a poster girl for the Republican cause. Muriel also led a campaign for Mary who had been imprisoned for militant action, with placards like - "England murdered my husband, Terence MacSwiney. Will Americans permit the English Free State to murder his sister, Mary?" (reported Boston Daily Globe). In 1922, Muriel addressed a meeting in Boston denouncing the Church's hostility to Irish Republicanism. "We never had the Bishops with us", she informed shocked Bostonians. "Remember in Ireland the Catholic faith... has nothing to do with religion" (Boston Daily Globe, Oct 1, 1922).

Then came the split. Mary disapproved of Muriel's cosmopolitan life-style, and especially her "dissolute" liaison with a Russian communist in Berlin with whom she bore a second child, out of wedlock. Indeed the enmity became so bitter that Mary actually abducted Muriel's daughter in Germany in 1934 and brought her back to Ireland to raise her a good Catholic girl. There are few records of the 'kidnap' (as Muriel called it), most reports being hearsay - something not untypical of the blurring of history and story when matters become too intimate to relate. Though both were deeply Republican, when it came to matters of faith and morals, the hostility between Mary and Muriel was implacable.

There is little doubt that Mary was jealous of Muriel, disapproving of her marriage to Terence and vying with her over his legacy - especially when it came to religion. While Mary remained a loyal Catholic, Muriel vehemently rejected the Church - part of a general repudiation of the old 'Irish pieties' of myth and martyrdom. A professed atheist, Muriel had no time for clerical authority or ritual blood sacrifice - a real blow to Mary who revered Terence's martyrdom as a dying 'for Ireland's resurrection'. Muriel and Mary never spoke after the abduction. Muriel continued a liberated life in Paris and London (she never remarried), pursuing radical causes and firing off salvos against Irish conservatism and the 'Holy Roman Capitalist Church'. Her first child, Maire, grew up in Ireland "in the bosom of devout republican nationalism" (Foster, 2014, 318) - under the
vigilant eye of Aunt Mary.

One can only wonder how different things might have been if rebels like Mary and Muriel had not fallen out. How might Ireland look today if Mary’s reverence for tradition had accommodated Muriel’s desire for liberation? If Catholic nationalism had become more hospitable to secular internationalism rather than retreating back into itself? If Sinn Féin - ‘ourselves alone’ - had spelled mature responsibility rather than isolationist fear? What if martyrdom had been honoured more as genuine fraternity than as militarist costume drama and morbid necrophilia? How many more bones have to be dug up and reinterred as we commemorate 1916? Poor O’Donovan Rossa! Poor Thomas Kent! Could we not let them rest in peace?

How unfortunate that the Marys and Muriels of the Irish psyche were made into adversaries rather than allies due to the De Valera-McQuaid Constitution of 1937. But things are shifting again: Irish women today are reclaiming their unfinished histories - culturally, socially, politically. And they know that, one hundred years after the Rising, there’s still huge work to be done.

V

Before concluding, I’d like to remember some Rebel legends whose ‘full’ stories were conveniently eclipsed. Erskine Childers, Roger Casement, Francis Ledwidge. All visionaries who defied orthodoxy and whose revolutionary promise was cut short in its prime. Genuine commemoration, I suggest, means attending not only to what happened, but also to what did not. The past is not just what has passed but what lives on in memory thanks to arrows of futurity which misfired or whose trajectory was interrupted. As Paul Ricoeur reminds us, history is more than what has taken place and cannot be changed; it equally involves potential futures still dormant in the past. It is especially the founding events of a community that require re-imagining, at critical moments, in order to unlock their unfinished possibilities. Genuine remembrance involves a return, not just to moments of military glory, but to dreams forfeited by history. It signals a work of ‘anticipatory memory’ (to quote Marcuse).

So revisiting these final stories we might ask: how do we distinguish between good and bad commemoration? How differentiate between what Freud called the healing work of ‘mourning’ and the pathology of ‘melancholy’? Between remembering backwards (addicted to repetition compulsion) and remembering forward (alert to futures of the past)? In short, how do we tell the difference between memories that incarcerate and memories that emancipate?

i) Let’s recall the ‘twinsome’ pair of Erskine Childers and Robert Barton. Double cousins, they grew up in Glendalough, Co Wicklow, surrounded by oak forests, before serving in the British army and then joining the rebels. How did this happen and what do their stories have to say to us today? Robert Barton was educated in England and became an officer in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers at the outbreak of WWI. Stationed in Dublin during the Rising, he guarded rebels at Richmond Barracks, and was so shocked by the brutal suppression of the Rising that he resigned from the British Army. He joined the Republicans and was elected Sinn Féin member for Wicklow. Arrested by the British for sedition he escaped from Mountjoy on St Patrick’s Day, leaving a note for the Governor in which he explained that, due to the discomfort of his cell, he felt obliged to leave in a hurry and hoped his luggage could be sent after! Barton was part of the Irish delegation that signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, along with Michael Collins.

His cousin, Erskine Childers, also joined the British Forces, fighting in the Boer War in Africa and in WWI, before being converted to Irish Republicanism. Erskine ran German guns to Irish nationalists aboard his yacht Asgard, along with his wife Molly - which didn’t stop fellow republican, Arthur Griffith, from describing him as a “damned Englishman”. Erskine also took part in the Treaty negotiations but broke with Robert in refusing to sign, siding with De Valera over Collins. Though Childers was as much writer as partisan, he was arrested after Collins’s assassination and sentenced to death for carrying a gun. Ironically it was a small pistol given him by Collins when they were on the same side before the Treaty - ‘to keep him safe from enemies’. In his last days in prison Childers was reconciled with Robert, and even asked his own son to find everyone who had signed his death warrant and shake their hands. Childers showed extraordinary forgiveness by shaking the hands of his own firing squad, one by one - his last
words to them being: “Take a step forwards lads. It’s easier that way”.

Robert Barton, as Minister for Agriculture in the first Dáil in 1919, proposed that the 1916 martyrs be commemorated not with triumphal monuments but with birch trees planted in spring ground. Ireland’s first radical ecologist - we might call him - put country before nation, nature before nationalism. His recommendation went unheeded, alas, and he became so disillusioned with civil war bitterness that he left politics for good. He had an ancestral love of trees and the sequoia planted at his birth fell in a storm the year he died. It would take ninety years before his idea inspired the pupils of Glenstal to plant seventeen birches in Winifred’s garden. And the current project of planting gardens of remembrance throughout Ireland is perhaps also in tune with his dream.

Barton and Childers, despite the split over the Treaty, were two immensely original minds, prepared to change armies and uniforms when compassion and justice demanded. They both had exceptional imaginations - Erskine more literary (authoring the best-selling novel, Riddle of the Sands); Robert, more ecological (never forgetting the natural beauty he grew up in). Think how Ireland might have benefitted from their intelligences had Erskine not been egregiously executed and Barton not left politics. One can only imagine - and regret the loss.

Another Irishman who changed uniforms and whose ‘full story was hidden for decades, is Roger Casement. Though a famous martyr of 1916, part of his life was hushed-up for almost a century - namely his love for a man called Millar Gordon. This relationship between nationalist and unionist only came to light in 1998 thanks to historian, Jeffrey Dudgenon, who discovered a secret letter written just days before Casement’s execution. The document, dated May 1916, confirms the existence of a ‘mysterious homosexual lover’ alluded to in Casement’s Diaries. Dudgenon, who sued Britain in the European Court over discrimination against gays in Ulster, points to numerous references by Casement to meetings with Gordon - for example: “Letter from Millar. Good on for Tuesday. Hurrah! Expecting!” And three days later: “Leaving for Belfast. To sleep with Millar. In at once.” There is also a reference to the two men spending the night together when the Titanic sank. It was a lasting affair.

In 1916, Gordon worked as a twenty-six year old bank clerk and lived in south Belfast where he often received Casement. His identity was first revealed by a British agent who tracked down the lovers via a motorbike which Casement purchased for Gordon for £25. The agent sent his memo to Sir Etonal Blackwell, legal adviser to the Home Office, four days before Casement was hanged for enlisting German support in the Rising. The note remained secret until 1998.

By all accounts, Casement was a remarkable crusader for human rights. A seasoned internationalist, he travelled throughout Europe, Africa and Latin America and spent many years - as consular officer - investigating slavery abuses in the Amazon and Congo. He was knighted by the King for his services and was on personal terms with five members of the British War Cabinet. None of which helped when it came to the verdict.

Curiously the 1916 memo was never cited in the campaign against Casement; and I strongly suspect the reason is that it revealed a serious and sustained relationship with “a living person from Belfast”, as Dudgeon puts it, rather than just another incriminating instance of Casement’s affairs in the colonies. It is certainly revealing how both British and Irish Governments responded to Casement’s ‘Black Diaries’ - the British vehemently affirming its ‘degeneracies’, the Irish vehemently denying them. But what neither British nor Irish officials could ever contemplate was that the relationship between Casement and Gordon was real and enduring - what Oscar Wilde called ‘the love that dare not speak its name’. Numerous letters have been recovered, showing deep affection between the lovers. And there is documentation not only of the gift of the Triumph motorbike but also of a precious writing desk and a letter where Casement asks Gordon to purchase two paintings from a persistent female admirer (Ada McNeill).

Yet another indication of the seriousness of the connection was the manner in which Casement engaged Gordon politically. Though Gordon was a committed unionist when they met, Casement writes proudly to his sister of “a Presbyterian Belfast youth I’ve turned into a truculent Home Ruler. Read and burn. He is a decent soul.” Though Gordon began as a loyalist who signed the Ulster Covenant, it did not prevent him having an amorous liaison with some-
one considered a traitor to Britain who sought arms from Germany. Casement himself was, it seems, conflicted about his sexual relations as he was about Anglo-Irish ones; but he did find a moment of calm towards the end. After his failed landing of arms from a German U-boat in Kerry on Good Friday 1916, Casement had a kind of epiphany. Disillusioned with his idealised Germans, unhappy with Pearse's timing of the rebellion, and exhausted from countless betrayals and conspiracies, Casement suddenly let go of anxieties and, awaiting arrest, lay down in the sand. He listened to the birdsong, feeling at peace for the first time in years:

Although I knew that this fate waited on me, I was for one brief spell happy and smiling once more. I cannot tell you what I felt. The sand hills were full of skylarks, rising in the dawn – the first sound I heard through the surf was their song as I waded in through the breakers, and they kept rising all the time up to the old rath at Currahane... and all round were primroses and wild violets and the singing of skylarks in the air, and I was back in Ireland again (cited Foster, 2014, 239).

Casement was a deeply contested figure both before and after the Rising. Originally hailed by the British as a crusader for human rights, he was reviled for treason once he espoused the Republican cause. Likewise, revered as martyr by many republicans, he was slighted by hard core Sinn Féiners like Kathleen Clarke (widow of Tom) who declared he knew “nothing about Ireland... since he was all the time out of it.” Not for the first time an actor of 1916 fell foul of both sides - loyalist and nationalist, British and Irish, Protestant and Catholic (Casement converted to Catholicism at the end). In many ways, Casement - like his compatriot, Shackleton, whose 1916 exploration of the Antarctic went unsung - was considered too Irish when in England and too English when in Ireland. A double outsider. “A permanent contradiction,” He transgressed all boundaries - national, sexual, political, religious - and paid the price.

As for Millar Gordon, we do not know how he reacted to Casement’s transgressions. We have no definitive records. And despite forensic testing in 2002 which appeared to authenticate the Diaries, controversy continues. The story of Gordon’s liaison with Casement remains one of hints and allusions - leaving future writers to fill in the gaps. All we know is that in 1920, four years after Casement’s execution, Millar Gordon crossed the border from Ulster to Dublin - where he died in 1956, three years before the diaries became public. What his last thoughts on his lover were, we can only imagine, but he was surely not unaware of Yeats’s haunting lines:

O what had made that sudden noise?
What on the threshold stands?...
What gave that roar of mockery,
That roar in the sea’s roar?
The Ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door (Yeats, 1938, my italics).

iii) To end, I’d like to recall the story of poet soldier, Francis Ledwidge - another brilliant mind caught in the crossfire of British-Irish relations. A Catholic labourer from Meath, Ledwidge sided with the Irish volunteers before enlisting in the British Army. He was, like many, persuaded by Redmond that fighting with Britain would help achieve Home Rule, declaring that “he could not stand aside while others sought to defend Ireland’s freedom”. Ledwidge was killed at Boesinghe, Flanders in July, 1917. It was the first day of the Third Battle of Ypres and he was serving with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. Aged twenty-nine, he was having a tea break when struck by German artillery. He fell at a place called ‘The Crossroads of the Rose’. A chaplain who knew him, Father Devas, recorded: “Ledwidge killed, blown to bits.”

Today Ledwidge’s grave is inscribed with lines from his own poem Lament for Thomas MacDonagh, a signatory of the 1916 Proclamation whose violent death in Dublin prefigured Ledwidge’s own. Ledwidge and MacDonagh may have worn opposite uniforms, but they were brothers at heart:

He shall not hear
the bittern cry
in the wild sky
where he is lain.
Not the voices
Of the sweeter birds
Above the wailing of the rain.
If nation is construed as a unitary mythic ideal, country is a place of natural elements and multiple living things - birds, flora, rivers, trees, people. In another poem from Flanders, Lament for the Poets of 1916, Ledwidge confessed empathy for the dreams of the Dublin 'martyrs' at a time when Ireland oscillated between being a country and a nation. Assuming the voice of the Poor Old Woman (icon of Ireland mourning her sons), Ledwidge gives her a concrete locale - 'Derry of the little hills'.

At break of day the fooler came
and took my blackbirds from their songs
who loved me well through shame and blame...
But in the lovely hush of eve
Weeping I grieve the silentills.

Ledwidge blends images of his own childhood in Meath with symbols of the martyrs whom the woman mourns as vanished birds she hopes one day will return. Ledwidge sees blackbirds as liminal creatures, half natural and present, half symbolic and absent – double denizens of Ireland as a 'country' that exists and a 'nation' yet to exist.

Sixty years on, Seamus Heaney composed a powerful elegy to Ledwidge. Written in 1980, at the height of the Ulster Troubles, Heaney recognises a mirror-image in this conflicted poet. He re-imagines Ledwidge forlorn in the trenches which Heaney compares to passage graves of the Boyne where Ledwidge grew up. Heaney quotes a letter from Ledwidge lamenting his split between the Britain he serves in Flanders and the Ireland he has left behind with no “place among the nations but the place of Cinderella”. Confessing deep inner division, Ledwidge expresses hope for some post-war reunion. “I am sorry that politics should ever divide our own tents but not without the hope that a new Ireland will arise from her ashes in the ruins of Dublin, like the Phoenix, with one purpose…” Heaney enters the mind of Ledwidge thus:

I think of you in your Tommy's uniform,
A haunted Catholic face, pallid and brave,
Ghosting the trenches with a bloom of hawthorn
Or silence cored from a Boyne passage-grave.

...a big strain puts the candles out in Ypres:
... ‘To be called a British soldier while (your) country
Has no place among nations…’

Heaney locates Ledwidge’s identity crisis in the double culture he grew up in, playing nationalist Gaelic games with locals and cricket with his unionist mentor, Lord Dunsany; writing his best poem for a 1916 martyr while having his first volume introduced by a Loyalist peer. Heaney concludes his elegy by identifying these ‘strains’ of crossed loyalty as both a conflict in Irish-British politics and a cleft in Ledwidge’s own psyche: a double split which tore him to shreds as brutally as the shrapnel from German guns.

You were rent
By shrapnel six weeks later......
In you, our dead enigma, all the strains
Criss-cross in useless equilibrium
And as the wind moves through this vigilant bronze
I hear again the sure confounding drum
You followed from Boyne water to the Balkans
But miss the twirlt note your flute should sound.
You were not keyed or pitched like these true-blue ones
Though all of you consort now underground.

Heaney imagines different soldiers, marching to different tunes, all reconnected through the underground passage-graves joining Boyne to Boesinghe. And, curiously, it is to a similar Boyne connection that Frank McGuinness alludes in his play, Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme (1985) where a troupe of Northern Protestants prepare for battle. Facing the river Somme on the first of July, the day their forefathers waged the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, the Ulstermen re-imagine all the Irish rivers they have left behind:

"Jesus, that's it. The source of that strange smell. The river... the Somme... It smells like home. A river at home... It's bringing us home. We're not in France... This river is ours. This land's ours. We've come home... The Somme, it's not what we think it is. It's the Lagan, the Foyle, the Bann".

Referring to such trans-territorial witness, poet Fanny Howe speaks of a
'criss-crossing of allegiances, birthrights, territories, fates and identities'. For what person even now, she asks, 'can fully understand who was on the side of what, Volunteer, Provisional, Free State, IRA, IRB, Unionist, Fenian, Sinn Féin?' Who indeed?

Conclusion

Trauma, Freud taught us, refers to 'wounds' so deep they cannot be processed at the time and require a later 'working through' in images and words — after the event, nachträglich. Regarding 1916, the metamorphosis of history into story achieves catharsis by turning ghosts into ancestors. The ghosts of 1916 must be laid so that living men and women may return — each with its 'local habitation and a name'. Heaney, McGuinness, Callaghan, Barry, Howe — all these and other contemporary artists have been responding to 1916 with stories that supplement history. Working across generations, they transmute trauma into drama to the extent that intolerable pain calls for conversion into narrative if healing is to occur.

Good commemoration offers a way beyond pathological polarities of either/or towards an open culture of both/and. This centenary offers a chance to transcend the clash of binaries — nationalist or unionist, poppy or lily, Protestant or Catholic — so that Ireland and Britain can escape cycles of enmity and become players on a more transnational stage (regional, European, global). This maturation beyond mimetic rivalry is helped, we've been suggesting, by embracing an Ireland the poets and artists have imagined: a nation more wisely balanced 'between' country and cosmos.

Country, as noted, marks a commons of earth and elements: a shared ecology of lands and waters. Recall Barton's birches, Ledwidge's blackbirds, McGuinness's rivers, Winifred's flowers of remembrance. Think also of Heaney's underground passageways or bottomless bogs that open onto oceans:

That subject people stuff is a cod's game

............ It's time to swim

out on your own and fill the element

with signatures on your own frequency.

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echo soundings, searches, probes, allurements,

clever gleams in the dark of the whole sea (Station Island, XII, 1984)

Country is a place of body and flesh, of brotherhood and sisterhood; it's a place of daring desire and yea-saying life; it is a promise of undying natality which precedes the nation and seeds its reinvention. But if country marks a space before the nation, there's also a space beyond it — and it goes by the name of cosmos. This is a site that transcends all frontiers — a fifth province of mind which exceeds the four provinces of north, south, east and west. It is the finisterre of hope where all pilgrimages lead, going back to the navigations of ancient Irish monks — diasporas of risk allowing for new possibilities of thought. Such a migrant cosmos was, I believe, a catalyst of the great cultural enlightenment which ignited a whole revolution of ideas in the extraordinary generation of 1916. It promised a genuinely pluralist vision witnessed in the proliferation of revivalist writings and journals in the first quarter of the twentieth century — brilliant imaginative work ranging from the radical republicanism of Pearse, Connolly and Griffith (each edited their own journals) to the bold cosmopolitanism of Kettle and the Sheehys — utopian visions vowed to international emancipation and the regeneration of mind announced by Inglトン and Joyce: one where everyone could say mundamns sum: I belong to the world.

So let us end with rivers that never end, and one river in particular, on whose banks the Four Courts and GPO rose up and fell in 1916 and from whose quays and harbors naval ships sailed to Flanders full of Royal Irish Fusiliers. A river which served as a waterways for centuries, opening Ireland to the world and bringing the world to Ireland — visitors and invaders, migrants and planters, aliens and refugees. The same river crossed by link canals where Paddy Kavanagh composed his memorial to the quotidien and the banal: “O Commemorate me with no hero courageous tomb, but a canal bank seat for the passerby”. The river which Joyce turned into Anna Livia, bringer of plurabilities, whose music "rendered all animated greatbritish and Irish" things visible in its “glistery gleam darkling adown affluvial flowandflow:” “Mememormme, mememormme”, the Joycean washerwomen chimed until, retelling history and forgiving the past, they could say: “lave it so” (Joyce, 1939).
“Lave it so”. Yes. As in laver, to wash and heal the wounds of the past. And also as in let be. We’ll leave it so. For “too much remembrance”, as Friel reminds us, “is a form of madness”. There are times to reclaim and times to let go. 1916 is a time for both. Remembering and forgetting in wise balance is a way of salving the scars of the past. Forgetting what’s been too remembered - the triumphal myths - and remembering what’s too forgotten - the promissory notes. History is in between. Ireland needs a healing of history through a catharsis of story. That’s what we’ve been trying to hint at today in our fleeting crossings of word and image. May the work of recovery continue!

TALK ABOUT A REVOLUTION

NIGEL MULLIGAN, GERRY MOORE

In the period of colonisation when it is not contested by armed resistance, when the sum total of nervous stimuli overstep a certain threshold, the defensive attitudes of the natives give way and they find themselves crowding the mental hospitals (Fanon, 1961, 201).

Introduction

This year is the one hundredth anniversary of the 1916 rebellion, a revolutionary event that changed the course of Irish history. Ireland has transitioned from a colonised, rural-religious society to somewhere in a post-modern era where it has struggled to fully separate from England. This has arguably created an anxious search for identity. In this paper, discourses from Irish revolutionaries, writers, poets and playwrights around the 1916 rebellion and significant aftermath events will be explored through Lacanian Discourse Analysis (LDA) (Parker, 2005; 2010; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2012; Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar, 2013). Lacan applied his theory to working analytically with patients but it is applicable through LDA to “penetrate into the symbolic system of culture” (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2013, 325). LDA attends to the emergence of discourses and ideologies and considers to what extent the subject is established in the symbolic structures that create the conditions of possible identities. This paper will also entail a micro-narrative account through the imaginary eyes of “Dazzler Mulligan”, a soldier and relative of one of the authors, who played a significant role in printing of the Proclamation. Through this, the paper will consider the temporal logic and retroactive effects of master signifiers in the Proclamation that continue to anchor but also shape Irish identities. But let us begin where the symbolic centres of gravity around the cultural and historical trauma circulate, at the ‘Rising’.