

Seán Crosson and Werner Huber (eds.)

TOWARDS 2016:  
1916 AND IRISH LITERATURE, CULTURE & SOCIETY

# Irish Studies in Europe

Volume

6

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Galway/Vienna  
Easter Monday 2015

Seán Crosson  
Werner Huber

*We are grateful for support from the Trauma and Irish Culture Project at the  
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# 1916 AND IRISH LITERATURE, CULTURE & SOCIETY: AN INTRODUCTION

Seán Crosson

*Historians in tanks. Historians with contradictory State birth certs. Relatives in conflict. Taoisigh at loggerheads. Royals invited then uninvited. Poets aflame. The prospect of Proclamation as junk mail. And it is only 2015. Were he here to witness it, Flann O'Brien would have a field day.*

– Diarmaid Ferriter, *Irish Times* 27 Feb 2015.

1916 was an important year in the development of modern Ireland. However, as historian Diarmaid Ferriter's remarks above suggest, as we approach the centenary, events during that year, in particular the Republican Easter Rising, continue to provoke contrasting and often strongly contested perspectives. The continuing resonance of the Rising to contemporary Ireland was evident in the now much quoted editorial of *The Irish Times* (18 Nov 2010) the day after it was announced Ireland was to receive a financial bailout from the EU and IMF. "Was it for this?" the editorial asked, "the men of 1916 died," thus also highlighting the gendering of the commemoration of that event. However, the Rising was but one of a range of significant events in 1916. Beyond the political sphere, 1916 marked the publication of James Joyce's first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and also saw the foundation of Ireland's first indigenous film production company, The Film Company of Ireland, whose co-founder James Mark Sullivan was arrested after the Rising and charged with complicity. 1916 was also the year in which Ireland was aligned to Greenwich Mean Time for the first time, supplanting Dublin Mean Time, bringing the island temporally closer to the rest of the United Kingdom in the same year that would mark an important point in the changing political relationship between the UK and Ireland.

As the varied subjects of our contributions indicate, this collection is cognisant of the multiple perspectives and events that are associated with 1916 in Ireland and their continuing relevance to Irish literature, culture and society. The collection begins by reflecting on the immediate aftermath of the Rising and the legacy of one of its leaders – James Connolly – before moving to consider a range of cultural forms and societal issues, including theatre, traditional music, poetry, Joyce, greyhound sports, graphic novels, contemporary fiction, documentary, language, political representation, and the Irish economy. The multidisciplinary range evident throughout this collection reflects not just the relevance of 1916 to a broad range of disciplines but also the evolution of Irish Studies itself as a focus of academic enquiry. Facilitated through organisations such as the European Federations of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS), which hosted the conference at which initial versions of the contributions here were first presented, Irish Studies today has expanded well beyond its

initial home in historical and literary studies to encompass a varied and expanding range of disciplines, many of which are represented in this collection.

Our volume begins with Nils Beese's chapter which considers the complex and sometimes challenging figure of James Connolly, particularly for those who have attempted to incorporate him within nationalist-conservative readings of Irish history. For Beese the failure of poet, dramatist, and Nobel laureate William Butler Yeats and others to find an appropriate position for Connolly within their nationalist configurations "arises from Connolly's explosion of conventional national and cultural categories." Connolly, in Beese's analysis, was centrally a transnational writer who pioneered a "politics of cultural alternatives," a politics informed by his experiences in the Edinburgh and Dublin slums. While Connolly's execution denied Irish Labour of one of its most articulate intellectuals, Michael C. Connolly nonetheless views the Labour Movement in his contribution as continuing to play a crucial role in Irish affairs in the immediate aftermath of the 1916 Rising. Indeed, for Connolly the movement was prominent in all of the major issues of the time "strongly promoting the programmes and agendas set by its membership in annual meetings and special conferences."

The 1916 Rising has been described by Declan Kiberd as one of the "most theatrical insurrections in the history of western Europe"<sup>1</sup> and certainly the events of that week and some of the actions of leaders of the Rising would lend credence to such an assertion. Patrick Pearse famously wore an ancient sword during the entirety of the Rising and eventually insisted on its formal handing over during his surrender to the leader of the British forces, General Lowe. For Yeats, a play may well have inspired some of those who took part in the Rising itself; as he asked some years later, "Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?" The play Yeats refers to is *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, the first performance of which on 2 April 1902 was produced by the Irish Literary Theatre, founded by Yeats and his long-time patron and collaborator Lady Gregory and a precursor to Ireland's National Theatre, the Abbey. The relationship between Irish culture, nationalism, and rebellion and the emergence of the Abbey is examined in this volume by Hannah Wood, who contends that the theatre was not only "national," in its origins but "nationalist," growing out of resistance to Britain and engaged in a project of "nation-building." For Wood, in highlighting distinctive features of Irish culture in the plays it hosted, "the Abbey and its founders created a defined sense of singular Irish identity that they thought was previously absent." In this focus, Wood finds parallels between the concerns and hopes of the founders of the Abbey and the leaders of the 1916 Rising, "except with performance in the place of violence."

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1 "The Easter Rebellion: Poetry or Drama?" (2006). *The 1916 Rising: Then and Now*. Papers from a conference held at Trinity College Dublin, 21-22 April 2006, organised by The Ireland Institute and Dublin University History Society. <[http://www.theirelandinstitute.com/institute/p01-kiberd\\_drama\\_page.html](http://www.theirelandinstitute.com/institute/p01-kiberd_drama_page.html)> (10 Feb 2015).