

Easter 1916 in Poetry and Prose (Dublin)

Christine Cozzens
Charles A. Dana Professor of English
Agnes Scott College

Please read and think about William Butler Yeats's famous poem, "Easter, 1916" on page 3, which will be the focal point of our study of the events and literature of Easter 1916 during our visit to Dublin. I have included in this handout some more poems by Yeats and others (Frances Ledwidge, Patrick Pearse, Cecil Day-Lewis) about the Easter Rising, as well as a funeral oration Patrick Pearse gave ten months before the Rising that is considered to be "the spark that lit the fire," the proclamation of Ireland's independence that Pearse wrote and read in front of the General Post Office in Dublin to launch the Rising, and a timeline of the Irish independence movement.

You may also wish to read Sean O'Casey's Easter Rising play, *The Plough and the Stars*. For most of the twentieth century, a single, heroic vision of the Easter Rising and the events it inspired was sacrosanct Ireland; even today, heated arguments break out about how to interpret the events and evaluate the participants. O'Casey (1880-1964) dared to take a critical view of the independence movement in his three plays (also *Juno and the Paycock* and *Shadow of a Gunman*). These great works were controversial from the beginning and were banned from Dublin stages during the fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1966. It is a measure of the more open-minded intellectual climate of today that all three plays are in production at Dublin's major theatres, the Gate and the Abbey, in this centenary year.

The Easter Rising only lasted a week, but it made an indelible mark on Ireland's people, history, and literature. The centenary of this event this year is a good time to reflect on what happened, why the "failed" rebellion became so important immediately afterwards and in the century that has passed since then, and why debates about the Rising continue to this day.

This handout also includes my own very brief timeline of the events leading up to the Rising and the successful independence movement in the twentieth century. This is just a starting point—please use it as such for further investigation.

Some of you, I know will want to go further into these subjects. I have already sent you a copy of James Stephens's "The Insurrection in Dublin," an eyewitness account written by a literary figure of the times—invaluable in its own way, but of course limited by its immediacy. If you want to read more, there are many good accounts of the Rising online, but do be aware that some of these can be highly politicized. The BBC and The Irish Times both have good information available. Below is a list of recommended reading relevant of the Rising, but there are many more excellent books, as well. I have included a few books on Ireland's involvement in World War 1, under way at the time of the Rising. As you will see, these parallel historical events were closely related.

I have put asterisks beside my favorite books.

Easter 1916 Recommended Reading

General

Bartlett, Tom, (2010), *Ireland: A History*

*Ferriter, Diarmaid, (2004), *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000*

Jackson, Alvin, (1999), *Ireland 1798-1998*

Laffan, Michael, (1999), *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923*, Cambridge

Lee, J.J., (1989), *Ireland 1912-85; Politics and Society*

*Lyons, F.S.L. (1971) *Ireland since the Famine*

MacDonagh, Oliver, (1977) *Ireland: the Union and its Aftermath*

Ireland and the First World War

Fitzpatrick, David, (1986), *Ireland and the First World War*

Gregory, Adrian and Paseta, Senia (eds), (2002), *Ireland and the Great War*

Horne, John (ed.), (2008), *Our War: Ireland and the Great War*

Jeffery, Keith, (2000), *Ireland and the Great War*

Easter Rising

Doherty, Gabriel and Keogh, Dermot (eds), (2007), *1916: the Long Revolution*

*Dudley Edwards, Ruth, (1977) *Patrick Pearse: the Triumph of Failure*

*Foster, Roy. *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890-1923* (2014)

Irwin Thompson, William, (1967), *The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin 1916*

Martin, F.X., (ed.), *Eoin MacNeill on the Easter Rising*

*McGarry, Fearghal, (2010), *The Rising, Ireland: Easter 1916*

Nowlan, Kevin B., (1969) *The Making of 1916*

*Stephens, James, *The Insurrection in Dublin (1916)* (first-person account)

*Townshend, Charles, (2005), *Easter 1916: the Irish Rebellion*

Williams, T.D., (ed.), (1966) *The Irish Struggle, 1916-1926*

Britain and the Easter Rising

*Fanning, Ronan. *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution*, 2013.

Remembering the Rising

A critical view of the Rising and of its impact on Irish history can be found in Francis Shaw, *The Canon of Irish History: a Challenge*(1972).

On historiography and attitudes see Theo Dorgan and Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha (eds), *Revising the Rising* (1991).

*For the commemoration of the Easter Rising see Mary E. Daly and Margaret O'Callaghan (eds.), *1916 in 1966, Commemorating the Easter Rising* (2007)

Easter 1916

By W. B. Yeats

I have met them at close of day
 Coming with vivid faces
 From counter or desk among grey
 Eighteenth-century houses.
 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:
 All changed, changed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.

That woman's days were spent
 In ignorant good will,
 Her nights in argument
 Until her voice grew shrill.
 What voice more sweet than hers
 When young and beautiful,
 She rode to harriers?
 This man had kept a school
 And rode our winged horse.
 This other his helper and friend
 Was coming into his force;
 He might have won fame in the end,
 So sensitive his nature seemed,
 So daring and sweet his thought.
 This other man I had dreamed
 A drunken, vain-glorious lout.
 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.

Hearts with one purpose alone
 Through summer and winter, seem
 Enchanted to a stone
 To trouble the living stream.
 The horse that comes from the road,
 The rider, the birds that range
 From cloud to tumbling cloud,
 Minute by minute 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
 Where long-legged moor-hens dive
 And hens to moor-cocks call.
 Minute by minute they live:
 The stone's in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice
 Can make a stone of the heart.
 O when may it suffice?
 That is heaven's part, our part
 To murmur name upon name,
 As a mother names her child
 When sleep at last has come
 On limbs that had run wild.
 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?
 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.

(1916, 1921)

A Brief Summary of Ireland's Long Revolution, 1798-1949



- ♣ **1798 Rebellion or Revolution**, Protestants and Catholics together (including many aristocrats) form the United Irishmen and attempt to liberate Ireland (all of it) from British control. Wolfe Tone is one of the heroes. Rebellion fails.
- ♣ 1801, following 1798 Rebellion, **Act of Union** makes Ireland a British province (payback for 1798); Dublin parliament abolished. The London Parliament now rules Ireland from afar, and many Irish MPs and their families and other members of the upper classes move to London.
- ♣ 1803, Robert Emmet stages "**Emmet's Rebellion**, a short-lived but symbolically resonant effort to liberate Ireland. Upon failure of his rebellion, Emmet is tried and publically executed and becomes another hero for those who seek independence.



- ♣ 1823. **Daniel O'Connell, The Great Liberator**, founds the Catholic Association and holds mass meetings to organize against the Penal Laws that perpetuate restrictions against Catholics.
- ♣ 1829, **Catholic Emancipation** achieved through efforts of O'Connell and others. O'Connell turns his attention to the Home Rule movement.



and

- ♣ 1845-52, **The Great Potato Famine** devastates Ireland, dramatically reducing population by death and emigration. "Remember Skibbereen" (a town hit particularly hard by famine and depicted in international newspapers; see image at right) becomes a rallying cry for future revolutionaries.
- ♣ 1800s, A series of minor incidents and uprisings led by radical groups (**Young Irelanders, Fenians, Irish Republican Brotherhood**) keep independence movement alive but mostly underground.

- ❖ Late 1800s, **Home Rule movement** led by **Charles Stewart Parnell**; isolated acts of rebellion. From Parnell's death in 1891 to 1916, a variety of groups seeking some degree of independence from Britain form: Sinn Féin, Irish Republican Brotherhood, Anglo-Irish literary revival (sometimes called the Celtic Revival); The Gaelic League; The Gaelic Athletic Association, the labour movement. This atmosphere of resistance to British rule and revival of Gaelic culture sets the stage for 1916 and after.



Clockwise, from top: The seven signatories of the Irish Proclamation: Padraig Pearse, James Connolly, Thomas Clarke, Thomas MacDonagh, Sean MacDermott, Joseph Plunkett and Eamonn Ceannt. All of the above men were executed by the British Government for their part in the Easter 1916 Rebellion. Central Dublin; members of the Irish Citizen Army; British troops sheltering behind a barricade; an Irish Volunteers meeting poster

- ❖ 1916, **Easter Rising**: skirmish in Dublin lasts only a few days; swift execution of the leaders by the British without due process creates martyrs and convinces many Irish people that it is time to seek independence by any means.

1916 Proclamation

POBLACHT NA H ÉIREANN THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom . . . Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government. Thomas J. Clarke, Sean Mac Diarmada, Thomas MacDonagh, P. H. Pearse, Eamonn Ceannt, James Connolly, Joseph Plunkett

- ❖ 1920, the **British divide Ireland** into two regions for governance (Government of Ireland Act): the 26 counties in the South that will eventually become the Irish Free State and finally the Republic of Ireland in 1949; and the 6 counties in the North that become Northern Ireland, a province of Great Britain.
- ❖ 1920-1922, inspired by the events of Easter 1916 and the aftermath, Irish rebels organize to carry out the **War of Independence** or Anglo-Irish War, resulting in treaty with Britain (negotiated by Michael Collins) that establishes the **Irish Free State** for the 26 counties (but Irish must swear loyalty to crown). Gradual process of complete independence begins.



- ❖ 1922-23, **Civil War** follows the signing of the treaty; Free-Staters (led by Collins, left in uniform) fight with Republicans (led by De Valera, right with glasses) over results of treaty, i.e. soldiers who had fought together against the British now fight each other. Free-staters believe full independence can eventually be achieved by peaceful means; Republicans want Republic status now for all 32 counties. Collins assassinated in 1922. Ireland is deeply divided over issues raised. This period (1920-1923) called "The Troubles" (c. 1968 to 1998 also called "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland).

- ♣ 1923, The **Free-Staters win the Civil War** and begin the long process of founding the state; **Republicans eventually return to power** (now as the political party Fianna Fail) with De Valera as Taoiseach (prime minister). Civil war divisions to mark Ireland for the rest of the century.
- ♣ During World War II, Ireland (Eire) is officially neutral; Northern Ireland, as part of the UK, is a target for German bombs (Belfast) and hosts the US fleet awaiting the D-Day invasion.
- ♣ 1948, **Republic of Ireland** declared (26 counties), ending ties to UK. Britain votes to accept this change in 1949. Northern Ireland remains part of United Kingdom.

POBLAChT NA H EIREANN
 THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
 OF THE
IRISH REPUBLIC
 TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the last three hundred years they have asserted it to arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God. Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, in humanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government.

Thomas J. Clarke,
 Sean Mac Diarmada, Thomas MacDonagh,
 P. H. Pearse, Eamonn Ceannt,
 James Connolly, Joseph Plunkett



The seven signatories of the Irish Proclamation (from left):
 Padraig Pearse, James Connolly, Thomas Clarke, Thomas MacDonagh, Sean MacDermott, Joseph Plunkett and Eamonn Ceannt

Sixteen Dead Men

By W. B. Yeats

O but we talked at large before
 The sixteen men were shot,
 But who can talk of give and take,
 What should be and what not
 While those dead men are loitering there
 To stir the boiling pot?

You say that we should still the land
 Till Germany's overcome;
 But who is there to argue that
 Now Pearse is deaf and dumb?
 And is their logic to outweigh
 MacDonagh's bony thumb?

How could you dream they'd listen
 That have an ear alone
 For those new comrades they have found,
 Lord Edward and Wolfe Tone,
 Or meddle with our give and take
 That converse bone to bone?

The Rose Tree

By W. B. Yeats

'O words are lightly spoken,'
 Said Pearse to Connolly,
 'Maybe a breath of politic words
 Has withered our Rose Tree;
 Or maybe but a wind that blows
 Across the bitter sea.'

"It needs to be but watered,'
 James Connolly replied,
 "To make the green come out again
 And spread on every side,
 And shake the blossom from the bud
 To be the garden's pride.'

"But where can we draw water,'
 Said Pearse to Connolly,
 "When all the wells are parched away?
 O plain as plain can be

There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree.'

On a Political Prisoner

By W. B. Yeats

She that but little patience knew,
From childhood on, had now so much
A grey gull lost its fear and flew
Down to her cell and there alit,
And there endured her fingers' touch
And from her fingers ate its bit.

Did she in touching that lone wing
Recall the years before her mind
Became a bitter, an abstract thing,
Her thought some popular enmity:
Blind and leader of the blind
Drinking the foul ditch where they lie?

When long ago I saw her ride
Under Ben Bulbin to the meet,
The beauty of her country-side
With all youth's lonely wildness stirred,
She seemed to have grown clean and sweet
Like any rock-bred, sea-borne bird:

Sea-borne, or balanced in the air
When first it sprang out of the nest
Upon some lofty rock to stare
Upon the cloudy canopy,
While under its storm-beaten breast
Cried out the hollows of the sea.
(1921)

In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz

By W. B. Yeats

The light of evening, Lissadell,
Great windows open to the south,
Two girls in silk kimonos, both

Beautiful, one a gazelle.
 But a raving autumn shears
 Blossom from the summer's wreath;
 The older is condemned to death,
 Pardoned, drags out lonely years
 Conspiring among the ignorant.
 I know not what the younger dreams --
 Some vague Utopia -- and she seems,
 When withered old and skeleton-gaunt,
 An image of such politics.
 Many a time I think to seek
 One or the other out and speak
 Of that old Georgian mansion, mix
 pictures of the mind, recall
 That table and the talk of youth,
 Two girls in silk kimonos, both
 Beautiful, one a gazelle.



Dear shadows, now you know it all,
 All the folly of a fight
 With a common wrong or right.
 The innocent and the beautiful.
 Have no enemy but time;
 Arise and bid me strike a match
 And strike another till time catch;
 Should the conflagration climb,
 Run till all the sages know.
 We the great gazebo built,
 They convicted us of guilt;
 Bid me strike a match and blow.
 (1933)



Remembering Con Markievicz

By Cecil Day-Lewis

Child running wild in woods of Lissadell:
 Young lady from the Big House, seen
 In a flowered dress, gathering wild flowers: Ascendancy queen
 Of hunts, house-parties, practical jokes -- who could foretell
 (Oh fiery shade, impetuous bone)
 Where all was regular, self-sufficient, gay
 Their lovely hoyden lost in a nation's heroine?
 Laughterless now the sweet demesne,
 And the gaunt house looks blank on Sligo Bay
 A nest decayed, an eagle flown.

The Paris studio, your playboy Count
 Were not enough, nor Castle splendour
 And fame of horsemanship. You were the tinder
 Waiting a match, a runner tuned for the pistol's sound,
 Impatient shade, long-suffering bone.
 In a Balally cottage you found a store
 Of Sinn Fein papers. You read -- maybe the old sheets can while
 The time. The flash lights up a whole
 Ireland which you have never known before,
 A nest betrayed, its eagles gone.

The road to Connolly and Stephen's Green
 Showed clear. The great heart which defied
 Irish prejudice, English snipers, died
 A little not have shared a grave with the fourteen.
 Oh fiery shade, intransigent bone!
 And when the Treaty emptied the British jails,
 A haggard woman returned and Dublin went wild to greet her.
 But still it was not enough: an iota
 Of compromise, she cried, and the Cause fails.
 Nest disarrayed, eagles undone.

Fanatic, bad actress, figure of fun --
 She was called each. Ever she dreamed,
 Fought, suffered for a losing side, it seemed
 (The side which always at last is seen to have won),
 Oh fiery shade and unvexed bone.
 Remember a heart impulsive, gay and tender,
 Still to an ideal Ireland and its real poor alive.
 When she died in a pauper bed, in love
 All the poor of Dublin rose to lament her.
 A nest is made, an eagle flown.
 (1966)

The Statues
 By W. B. Yeats

Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?
 His numbers, though they moved or seemed to move
 In marble or in bronze, lacked character.
 But boys and girls, pale from the imagined love
 Of solitary beds, knew what they were,
 That passion could bring character enough,
 And pressed at midnight in some public place

Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.

No! Greater than Pythagoras, for the men
 That with a mallet or a chisel" modelled these
 Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
 All Asiatic vague immensities,
 And not the banks of oars that swam upon
 The many-headed foam at Salamis.
 Europe put off that foam when Phidias
 Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.

One image crossed the many-headed, sat
 Under the tropic shade, grew round and slow,
 No Hamlet thin from eating flies, a fat
 Dreamer of the Middle Ages. Empty eyeballs knew
 That knowledge increases unreality, that
 Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.
 When gong and conch declare the hour to bless
 Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness.

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side.
 What stalked through the post Office? What intellect,
 What calculation, number, measurement, replied?
 We Irish, born into that ancient sect
 But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
 And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
 Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
 The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

Man and the Echo

By W. B. Yeats

Man. In a cleft that's christened Alt
 Under broken stone I halt
 At the bottom of a pit
 That broad noon has never lit,
 And shout a secret to the stone.
 All that I have said and done,
 Now that I am old and ill,
 Turns into a question till
 I lie awake night after night
 And never get the answers right.
 Did that play of mine send out
 Certain men the English shot?
 Did words of mine put too great strain

On that woman's reeling brain?
 Could my spoken words have checked
 That whereby a house lay wrecked?
 And all seems evil until I
 Sleepless would lie down and die.

Echo. Lie down and die.

Man. That were to shirk
 The spiritual intellect's great work,
 And shirk it in vain. There is no release
 In a bodkin or disease,
 Nor can there be work so great
 As that which cleans man's dirty slate.
 While man can still his body keep
 Wine or love drug him to sleep,
 Waking he thanks the Lord that he
 Has body and its stupidity,
 But body gone he sleeps no more,
 And till his intellect grows sure
 That all's arranged in one clear view,
 pursues the thoughts that I pursue,
 Then stands in judgment on his soul,
 And, all work done, dismisses all
 Out of intellect and sight
 And sinks at last into the night.

Echo. Into the night.

Man. O Rocky Voice,
 Shall we in that great night rejoice?
 What do we know but that we face
 One another in this place?
 But hush, for I have lost the theme,
 Its joy or night-seem but a dream;
 Up there some hawk or owl has struck,
 Dropping out of sky or rock,
 A stricken rabbit is crying out,
 And its cry distracts my thought.
 (1939)

**Patrick Pearse's Oration at the Graveside of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa
August 1, 1915**

It has seemed right, before we turn away from this place in which we have laid the mortal remains of O'Donovan Rossa, that one among us should, in the name of all, speak the praise of that valiant man, and endeavor to formulate the thought and the hope that are in us as we stand around his grave. And if there is anything that makes it fitting that I, rather than some other, rather than one of the grey-haired men who were young with him and shared in his labour and in his suffering, should speak here, it is perhaps that I may be taken as speaking on behalf of a new generation that has been re-baptised in the Fenian faith, and that has accepted the responsibility of carrying out the Fenian programme. I propose to you then that, here by the grave of this unrepentant Fenian, we renew our baptismal vows; that, here by the grave of this unconquered and unconquerable man, we ask of God, each one for himself, such unshakable purpose, such high and gallant courage, such unbreakable strength of soul as belonged to O'Donovan Rossa.

Deliberately here we avow ourselves, as he avowed himself in the dock, Irishmen of one allegiance only. We of the Irish Volunteers, and you others who are associated with us in to-day's task and duty, are bound together and must stand together henceforth in brotherly union for the achievement of the freedom of Ireland. And we know only one definition of freedom: it is Tone's definition, it is Mitchel's definition, it is Rossa's definition. Let no man blaspheme the cause that the dead generations of Ireland served by giving it any other name and definition than their name and their definition.

We stand at Rossa's grave not in sadness but rather in exaltation of spirit that it has been given to us to come thus into so close a communion with that brave and splendid Gael. Splendid and holy causes are served by men who are themselves splendid and holy. O'Donovan Rossa was splendid in the proud manhood of him, splendid in the heroic grace of him, splendid in the Gaelic strength and clarity and truth of him. And all that splendour and pride and strength was compatible with a humility and a simplicity of devotion to Ireland, to all that was olden and beautiful and Gaelic in Ireland, the holiness and simplicity of patriotism of a Michael O'Clery or of an Eoghan O'Growney. The clear true eyes of this man almost alone in his day visioned Ireland as we of to-day would surely have her: not free merely, but Gaelic as well; not Gaelic merely, but free as well.

In a closer spiritual communion with him now than ever before or perhaps ever again, in a spiritual communion with those of his day, living and dead, who suffered with him in English prisons, in communion of spirit too with our own dear comrades who suffer in English prisons to-day, and speaking on their behalf as well as our own, we pledge to Ireland our love, and we pledge to English rule in Ireland our hate. This is a place of peace, sacred to the dead, where men should speak with all charity and with all restraint; but I hold it a Christian thing, as O'Donovan Rossa held it, to hate evil, to hate untruth, to hate oppression, and, hating them, to strive to overthrow them. Our foes are strong and wise and wary; but, strong and wise and wary as they are, they cannot undo the miracles of God who ripens in the hearts of young men the seeds sown by the young men of a former generation. And the seeds sown by the young men of '65 and '67 are coming to their miraculous ripening to-day. Rulers and Defenders of

Realms had need to be wary if they would guard against such processes. Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations. The Defenders of this Realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think that they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have purchased half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have foreseen everything, think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! — they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.

Christmas 1915

By Patrick Pearse

Oh King that was born
To set bondsmen free
In the coming battle
Help the Gael!

The Rebel

By Patrick Pearse

I am come of the seed of the people, the people that sorrow;
Who have no treasure but hope,
No riches laid up but a memory of an ancient glory
My mother bore me in bondage, in bondage my mother was born,
I am of the blood of serfs;
The children with whom I have played, the men and women with whom I have eaten
Have had masters over them, have been under the lash of masters,
and though gentle, have served churls.
The hands that have touched mine,
the dear hands whose touch is familiar to me
Have worn shameful manacles, have been bitten at the wrist by manacles,
have grown hard with the manacles and the task-work of strangers.
I am flesh of the flesh of these lowly, I am bone of their bone I that have never submitted;
I that have a soul greater than the souls of my people's masters,
I that have vision and prophecy, and the gift of fiery speech,
I that have spoken with God on the top of his holy hill.
And because I am of the people, I understand the people,
I am sorrowful with their sorrow, I am hungry with their desire;
My heart is heavy with the grief of mothers,
My eyes have been wet with the tears of children,
I have yearned with old wistful men,
And laughed and cursed with young men;
Their shame is my shame, and I have reddened for it
Reddened for that they have served, they who should be free

Reddened for that they have gone in want, while others have been full,
 Reddened for that they have walked in fear of lawyers and their jailors.
 With their Writs of Summons and their handcuffs,
 Men mean and cruel.
 I could have borne stripes on my body
 Rather than this shame of my people.
 And now I speak, being full of vision:
 I speak to my people, and I speak in my people's name to
 The masters of my people:
 I say to my people that they are holy,
 That they are august despite their chains.
 That they are greater than those that hold them
 And stronger and purer,
 That they have but need of courage, and to call on the name of their God,
 God the unforgetting, the dear God who loves the people
 For whom he died naked, suffering shame.
 And I say to my people's masters: Beware
 Beware of the thing that is coming, beware of the risen people
 Who shall take what ye would not give.
 Did ye think to conquer the people, or that law is stronger than life,
 And than men's desire to be free?
 We will try it out with you ye that have harried and held,
 Ye that have bullied and bribed.
 Tyrants... hypocrites... liars!

The Blackbirds
(or, Lament for the Poets)
 By Francis Ledwidge

I heard the Poor Old Woman say:
 'At break of day the fowler came,
 And took my blackbirds from their songs
 Who loved me well thro' shame and blame.
 No more from lovely distances
 Their songs shall bless me mile by mile,
 Nor to white Ashbourne call me down
 To wear my crown another while.

With bended flowers the angels mark
 For the skylark the place they lie,
 From there its little family
 Shall dip their wings first in the sky.
 And when the first surprise of flight
 Sweet songs excite, from the far dawn
 Shall there come blackbirds loud with love,

Sweet echoes of the singers gone.
 But in the lonely hush of eve
 Weeping I grieve the silent bills.
 I heard the Poor Old Woman say
 In Derry of the little hills.

Lament for Thomas MacDonagh

By Francis Ledwidge

He shall not hear the bittern cry
 In the wild sky where he is lain
 Nor voices of the sweeter birds
 Above the wailing of the rain.

Nor shall he know when loud March blows
 Thru' slanted snows and fanfare shrill
 Blowing to flame the golden cup
 Of many an upset daffodil.

But when the dark cow* leaves the moor
 And pastures poor with greedy weeds
 Perhaps he'll hear her low at morn
 Lifting her head in pleasant meads.

*Allegorical name for Ireland

Kilmainham Gaol: Easter Sunday, 1966

By Cecil Day-Lewis

Sunbursts over this execution yard
 Mitigate high, harsh walls. A lowly
 Black cross marks the deaths we are here to honour,
 Relieved by an Easter lily.
 Wearing the nineteen-sixteen medal, a few
 Veterans and white-haired women recall
 The Post Office, Clanwilliam House, the College of Surgeons,
 Jacob's factory -- all
 Those desperate strongholds caught in a crossfire
 Between the English guns
 And Dublin's withering incredulity.
 Against the wall where once
 Connolly, strapped to a chair, was shot, a platform
 Holds movie cameras. They sight
 On the guard of honour beneath the tricolor,

An officer with a horseman's light
 And quiet hands, and now the old President
 Who, soldierly still in bearing,
 Steps out to lay a wreath under the plaque.
 As then, no grandiose words, no cheering --
 Only a pause in the splatter of Dublin talk,
 A whisper of phantom volleys.

How could they know, those men in the sunless cells,
 What would flower from their blood and England's follies?
 Their dreams, coming full circle, had punctured upon
 The violence that gave them breath and cut them loose.
 They bargained on death: death came to keep the bargain.
 Pious postcards of men dying in spruce
 Green uniforms, angels beckoning them aloft,
 Only cheapen their cause. Today they are hailed
 As Martyrs; but then they bore the ridiculed shame of
 Mountebanks in a tragedy which has failed.
 And they were neither the one nor the other -- simply
 Devoted men who, though the odds were stacked
 Against them, believed their country's age-old plight
 And the moment gave no option but to act.
 Now the leaders, each in his sweating cell,
 The future a blind wall and the unwinking
 Eyes of firing-squad rifles, pass their time
 In letters home, in prayer. Maybe they are thinking
 Of Mount Street, the blazing rooftops, the Post Office,
 Wrapping that glory round them against the cold
 Shadow of death. Who knows the pull and recoil of
 A doomed heart?

They are gone as a tale that is told,
 The fourteen men. Let them be more than a legend:
 Ghost-voices of Kilmainham, claim your due --
 This is not yet the Ireland we fought for.
 You living, make our Easter dreams come true.



The Wild Swans at Coole
By W. B. Yeats (February 1917)

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine and fifty swans.

The nineteenth Autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trode with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold,
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes, when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

Some Questions to Consider

1. Yeats started "Easter 1916" as events were still unfolding in Dublin and finished the poem a few months later. How does the poem reflect the tumult and uncertainty of history that is still in the making?
2. Compare "Easter 1916" with Yeats's other poems about the Rising, "Sixteen Dead Men," "On a Political Prisoner," "The Rose Tree," and "The Statues," all written later. How have his views of the Rising and its key figures changed over time?
3. Yeats and Cecil Day-Lewis both wrote poems about Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz, a heroine of Easter 1916 and a major figure in the independence movement throughout her life. (We will visit the Gore-Booth home where she grew up, Lissadell House, in Sligo.) Read about this formidable woman online and compare the poems and the historical facts.
4. Many of these poems mention one or more of the "Sixteen Dead Men," the men executed by the British government following the end of the Easter Rising. If you peruse information about any of these men online or in books, you'll see the degree to which they are viewed as not only heroes but also as martyrs, even saints. What are the pros and cons of this approach to those who die in battle?
5. Shortly after Yeats completed "Easter 1916" at Coole Park in Galway, Lady Augusta Gregory's home, in September of 1916 he wrote another important poem, "The Wild Swans at Coole." Yeats's biographers suggest that 1916-17 was a period of dramatic change for the poet in both his personal and professional life, with the transformation beginning in the writing of "Easter 1916." During the year following the Rising, he recommitted to living in Ireland and bought property near Coole Park; he moved on from his unrequited love for the actress Maud Gonne and married Georgie Hyde-Lee; he rekindled the ardent nationalism of his younger days; and he turned a corner in his poetry in terms of subject matter and poetics. How does "The Wild Swans at Coole" reflect or augur this change? To what extent is this poem about Yeats's own life and work? Can you see any political meaning to this poem that is ostensibly about nature?
6. Patrick Pearse wrote "Christmas 1915" several months before the fateful Rising, of which he was one of the leaders and the first to be executed. His writings and the comments from those who knew him confirm that he wanted to die for his country. How is that sentiment reflected in this short poem and the other writings included here?
7. The "Proclamation of the Irish Republic" is a seminal document in modern Irish history, as important to the national psyche as our Declaration of Independence is to ours. What goals are set for Ireland in this brief broadside? How might those as yet unfilled continue to spark unrest?