

REVIEW ARTICLE

A LONG WAY TO TIPPERARY: THE IRISH IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

1916: a global history. By Keith Jeffery. London: Bloomsbury, 2015. Pp. 436. ISBN 978-1-4088-3430-5. £25.00.

Heroes or traitors? Experiences of Southern Irish soldiers returning from the Great War, 1919–1939. By Paul Taylor. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015. Pp. xviii + 273. ISBN 978-1-78138-161-8. £80.00.

Harry Clarke's war: illustrations for Ireland's memorial records, 1914–1918. By Marguerite Helmers. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2016. Pp. viii + 263. ISBN 978-07165-3308-5. €29.99.

Fighting Irish: the Irish regiments in the First World War. By Gavin Hughes. Dublin: Merrion Press, 2015. Pp. 268. ISBN 976-1-78537-022-9. €19.99.

According to their lights: stories of Irishmen in the British army, Easter 1916. By Neil Richardson. Dublin: The Collins Press, 2015. Pp. 436 + xii. ISBN 978-1-84889-214-9. €19.99.

I

‘The Irish are out in force’: it was a rainy summer day on the fields of the Somme, and they were very young, in their early teens, in fact.¹ However, this was not 1916, but 2016, when the centenary of one of the bloodiest battles in history attracted an international crowd, including large contingents of school children from the Republic. In contrast to the 50th anniversary, which, in 1966, had been a ‘Unionist’ commemoration – claimed by the Northern Irish loyalists as their own, while the survivors of the Southern veterans kept their heads down and suppressed this part of their past – in 2016, the conflict was widely construed as an inclusive experience, which saw men and women giving their lives ‘for Ireland’ even when fighting ‘for King and Empire’. A generation ago this would have shocked traditional nationalists, who regarded the Great War as an ‘English’ one, in contrast to the Easter Rising and the subsequent War of Independence. However, European integration and the Peace Process gradually brought about a different mindset. Among historians, it was the late Keith Jeffery who spearheaded the revision of our

¹ R. McGreevy, ‘A century on, the Irish are out in force for this commemoration’, *Irish Times*, 1 July 2016, p. 9.

perception of Ireland's standing in the war.² This reassessment was further developed in 2008, with John Horne's editing *Our war*, a volume jointly published by RTÉ (the Irish broadcasting company) and the Royal Irish Academy, in which ten of the leading historians of the period – including Keith Jeffery, Paul Bew, David Fitzpatrick, and Catriona Pennell – presented Ireland as a protagonist, rather than merely a victim of British imperialism.³ By 2016, this new understanding had largely reshaped both government and public perceptions, with 'the emergence of a more tolerant and flexible sense of Irish identity'.⁴ This has been confirmed by the largely consensual nature of the war centenary commemorations. While Dublin took the initiative, Northern Ireland's Sinn Féin leaders were ready to follow suit with the then deputy first minister of Northern Ireland, Martin McGuinness, visiting the battlefield of the Western Front to honour the memory of the Irish dead, and the Speaker of the Belfast Assembly, Mitchel McLaughlin, and his party colleague, Elisha McCullion, the mayor of Derry and Strabane, laying wreaths at the local war memorials.

What they did was not simply consistent with a new political strategy, but also reflected grass-root support for a new appraisal of what the conflict meant for people and communities 'on the ground', as commemoration by-passed national government and was appropriated at the local level. The First World War was no longer a 'British' war, nor even an 'Irish' one in any simple sense of the word. Instead, it was now also a war which had been fought by Galway, South Dublin, or any other county and city.⁵ This shift from national structures to local initiative seems to have affected even the ecclesiastical liturgy, as the Church of Ireland issued *A commemoration of the battle of the Somme for local use*, with prayers, bible readings, etc., for community members wishing to conduct their own DIY services.

The books reviewed here offer a fascinating exploration of the Irish contribution to the war effort. One of them – Jeffery – adopts a global perspective with a strong comparative dimension. However, all convey a clear image of the profound difference between the Ireland of 1914 – un-partitioned, militarist, imperial, warlike – and the one that commemorated the war a century later, with its commitment to peace, multi-lateralism, the EU, and the UN. This is also a kind of comparative, trans-temporal, approach.

II

During the first six or seven months of 1914, the Irish were absorbed with internal issues which appeared existential to many of them – such as the

² K. Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge, 2000).

³ John Horne, ed., *Our war: Ireland and the Great War* (Dublin, 2008).

⁴ Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising: Ireland, Easter 1916* (Oxford, 2016), p. x.

⁵ William Henry, *Galway and the Great War* (Dublin, 2006); Ken Kinsella, *Out of the dark, 1914–1918: South Dubliners who fell in the Great War* (Dublin, 2014).

demand for parliamentary devolution and Ulster's right to oppose it by force, if necessary. Europe was on the brink of the greatest war since 1815, but many Nationalists and Unionists looked at the continent primarily as the place from which they could outsource weapons to fight their own civil war. However, even gun-runners such as Sir Roger Casement were not 'insular', quite the opposite, while intellectuals such as Tom Kettle, James Connolly, and Arthur Griffith were deeply interested in conceptualizing Ireland's future within a European historical and cultural framework – including the 'Hungarian' idea of a dual monarchy.⁶ They were affected by the same passions and problems which moved politics and society elsewhere. In particular, in Ireland the campaign to secure self-government had coincided with the extension of the franchise, the shift of power from the landed elite to 'the people', and land reform. Like radicals in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, Irish nationalists had frequently expressed criticism not only of British rule in Ireland, but of the whole imperial project, linking it to oppression at home.⁷ In 1899–1902, the Second Boer War was particularly controversial, and resulted in some of the more advanced nationalists organizing an 'Irish Brigade', which fought on the side of the Boers on the Veld.⁸ However, the war marked also the apex of pre-First World War Irish involvement in the British army. Irish troops accounted for a substantial proportion of the South African expeditionary force, which was under the overall control of Lord Roberts, himself proud of his family connection with Co. Waterford. At the end of the war, as the regiments returned to Ireland, people came out in large numbers to cheer them: these included many of those who had voted for pro-Boer Nationalist MPs at the 1900 election.⁹

Part of the explanation for this apparent inconsistency is that the military had long been an established aspect of popular culture and operated in a sphere that was at least mentally separated from that of politics. Both army and navy were major sources of employment, not only because Irishmen from all social classes had traditionally flocked to the colours, but also because of the local economic importance of military bases. Each of them required a support network involving a wide range of manufacturers, merchants, shopkeepers, artisans, clergymen, and publicans. All of this stimulated the local economy and provided a much-needed cash injection for provincial garrison towns such as Fermoy and

⁶ John Horne, 'James Connolly and the Great Divide: Ireland, Europe and the First World War', *Saothar*, 31 (2006), pp. 75–83; Daniel Mulhall, 'George Russell, D. P. Moran and Tom Kettle', in E. F. Biagini and Daniel Mulhall, eds., *The shaping of modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2016), pp. 124–38; Thomas Kabdebo, *Ireland and Hungary: a study in parallels* (Bodmin, 2001).

⁷ Michael Davitt, *The Boer fight for freedom* (London and New York, NY, 1902); idem, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland, or the story of the Land League Revolution* (London and New York, NY, 1904); Eduard Bernstein, 'Kolonialfrage und der Klassenkampf', *Sozialistische Monatshefte* (Nov. 1907), pp. 988–96. For a recent work on British anti-imperialism, see Mira Matikkala, *Empire and imperial ambition: liberty, Englishness and anti-imperialism in late-Victorian Britain* (London, 2011).

⁸ D. P. McCracken, *MacBride's Brigade* (Dublin, 1999); idem, *The Irish pro-Boers, 1877–1902* (Johannesburg, 1989); S. Monick, *Shamrock and Springbok* (Johannesburg, 1989).

⁹ Michael Silvestri, *Ireland and India: nationalism, empire and memory* (Basingstoke, 2009).

Athlone, and helps to explain, as Hughes argues (p. 6), why in pre-1914 Ireland relations between civil society and the army ‘were...the same as those in other parts of the United Kingdom with attitudes ranging from cordiality to frustration or resentment’.

Thus, while there were sectarian incidents and outburst of agrarian violence, these were localized and could be easily contained. Consequently, Ireland was a desirable home posting for Irish regiments, and was not necessarily associated with unrest. The latter was nevertheless a concern. The army was regularly engaged in responding to ‘outrages’ associated with the land agitation, quelling sectarian riots, and – less frequently – containing industrial conflict. Of the three, controlling the land agitation was the easiest task. By contrast, policing crowds in urban settings was far more complex and politically dangerous: perhaps for this reason during the 1913 Dublin lock-out the army was reluctant to deploy soldiers against the workers on strike.¹⁰ The challenge of sectarian disturbances escalated with the organization of the exclusively Protestant Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), which was set up to resist – if necessary by force – the implementation of the 1912 Home Rule Bill. The country seemed to be heading for civil war in the spring of 1914, when the officers of a cavalry brigade in the Curragh army base threatened to resign their commissions if the government ordered them to dragoon Ulster into submission. The issue was very complex and involved a populist backlash against parliamentary democracy.¹¹ One important dimension to bear in mind is that the ‘mutineers’ were predominantly Irish and upper class and felt that their primary loyalty went to a certain idea of Ireland, rather than the British government. So did the 120 army reserve officers who helped to organize and train the UVF itself.¹²

Meanwhile, the explosive potential of the crisis was further increased by the Nationalists organizing their own pro-Home Rule volunteer army importing weapons from abroad, just as the Ulster Unionists had done. One of the rare serious incidents between the army and civilians took place in Dublin in July 1914, when a contingent of the King’s Own Scottish Borderers, deployed to stop a delivery of German guns to the Irish Volunteers, having failed to do so, opened fire on an unarmed crowd, killing four people, including the mother of a British soldier. The Bachelor Walk Massacre (as the shooting became known) was a panic response to an urban riot, but the army found itself in the difficult position of having to act as peacekeepers between apparently irreconcilable factions.

However, all changed utterly on 4 August 1914. Faced by the German threat, Unionists and Nationalists seemed to forget their animosities and develop an

¹⁰ Lydia Readman, ‘Industrial conflict, social reform, and competition for power under the Liberal governments, 1906–1914’ (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 2013).

¹¹ Eugenio F. Biagini, ‘The Third Home Rule Bill in British history’, in Gabriel Doherty, ed., *The Home Rule crisis, 1912–1914* (Cork, 2014), pp. 412–42.

¹² Timothy Bowman, *Carson’s army: the Ulster Volunteer Force, 1910–1922* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 57–8.

inclusive Irish patriotism.¹³ Over the next four years, some 210,000 Irishmen joined the colours. Of these, according to Richardson, who revises previous estimates by David Fitzpatrick, nearly 63,000 were from Ulster and over 145,000 from the South. Even more remarkable is that Irishmen ‘continued [to join the forces] long after the brutally long lists of casualties became common in the newspapers after the battles of 1914 and 1915, so they were well aware of what they were letting themselves in for’ (p. 7). Only a minority of these were former Volunteers, including some 35,000 UVF and nearly 40,000 Irish Volunteers. The rest of the Irish contingent consisted of both reservists who were called up and of new recruits, motivated by different ideas and considerations – ranging from a desire to escape poverty at home to patriotism, spirit of adventure, and peer pressure. It is a different question whether this shows a substantial level of popular support for the war effort. For example, as a proportion of the eligible population, rural Ireland lagged well behind comparable areas in England and Scotland, not exceeding a maximum of 1.9 per cent of the eligible male population (while across the channel equally agricultural areas such as Cornwall and Devon yielded 7.7 per cent and 12.7 per cent respectively).¹⁴ However, other figures tell a different story: industrial areas in Ulster, Dublin, Wicklow, and Kildare produced a similar percentage to industrial areas in Yorkshire, Northumberland, and Durham.¹⁵ Irish recruitment went well in 1915, and, after stagnating in the middle years of the war, it rose again in August to November 1918, when there was concern that the Allies were losing the war. Whatever sense we may wish to make of these trends and figures, it is not clear that there was any direct correlation between recruitment and domestic politics.¹⁶

Hughes’s discussion of the formation of the three Irish divisions illustrates the increasing politicization of the army. The first to be raised was the 10th, which was completely mixed (‘all the political and religious creeds and none’, p. 24). Raising the Ulster Division (the 36th) was also straightforward, partly because the UVF, on which the division relied, had already been structured on the model of the territorial army. By contrast, the 16th Division – whose organizers had a strong nationalist agenda – proved more difficult to raise. John Redmond campaigned for it to be given a distinctively ‘national’ military identity, and Sir Laurence Parsons, divisional commander, wished to have a high-quality unit

¹³ Catriona Pennell, *A kingdom united: popular responses to the outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012); Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War*.

¹⁴ Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: provincial Ireland, 1910–1916* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 220, 222–3.

¹⁵ Peter Simkins, *Kitchener’s army: the raising of the new armies, 1914–1916* (Manchester, 1988), p. 112; Keith Jeffery, ‘The Irish military tradition and the British empire’, in idem, ed., *An Irish empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British empire* (Manchester, 1996), p. 98; Pennell, *A kingdom united*, p. 192.

¹⁶ Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War*, p. xiv.

entirely officered by Irishmen.¹⁷ Not only was this combination of military and political requirements difficult to satisfy, but also the nationalist desire to be granted a distinctly Irish national military identity found little sympathy with the secretary of state for war, Lord Kitchener (who was himself Irish, though a Unionist, like so many other high-ranking officers in the Imperial army).¹⁸

Hughes offers a captivating introduction to the military history of the Irish war. *Fighting Irish* is meticulously researched and engaging, full of anecdotes that bring many aspects of the military side of the story to life. For example, we learn that it was an Irish soldier who fired the first shot on 22 August 1914, and an Irish officer who drew the first blood, when he led a squadron of the Royal Irish Dragoon Guards in a sabre charge against German cavalry. Four years later, the fighting spirit of the Irish was still in evidence when, in November 1918, it was an Irish unit which fired the last shots in anger. Throughout the book, Hughes provides ample evidence that the army continued to operate, even after 1916, with high morale and a relentless commitment to military standards. However, the subject would have deserved a more elaborate analysis. One problem with Hughes's approach is that he relies heavily on one type of primary source, the battalion war diaries. These are accounts of where units were deployed and their record in engagements. Other sources – for example, the letters and personal diaries of both soldiers, chaplains, and officers, the memoirs of generals and commanders – are largely neglected. The result is that *Fighting Irish* is often one-dimensional and dominated by official narratives of heroic gestures. Another problem is that the author does not pay sufficient attention to the social and cultural potential of the topic. In particular, there is no engagement with the way the militarization of a generation affected Irish ideas of masculinity, an important dimension of the war, as Jane McGaughey has shown in her work on Ulster.¹⁹ Likewise, Hughes neglects the wider question of the relationship between army and society, such as how the numerical expansion of the forces affected the officer class or attitudes to the Union and the empire, recently examined by Loughlin Sweeney.²⁰

¹⁷ For the experience of one of the English officers assigned to this unit, see Richard S. Grayson, ed., *At war with the 16th Irish Division, 1914–1918: the Saniforth letters* (Barnsley, 2012).

¹⁸ C. Bradd Faught, *Kitchener: hero and anti-hero* (London, 2016).

¹⁹ Jane G. V. McGaughey, *Ulster's men: Protestant Unionist masculinities and militarization in the North of Ireland, 1912–1923* (Montreal and Kingston, 2012). See also Stephen Walker, *Ireland's call: Irish sporting heroes who fell in the Great War* (Dublin, 2015).

²⁰ Loughlin Sweeney, 'The British Army Officer Corps in Irish society, 1870–1920s' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 2016).

III

Granted that the army was an integral part of popular culture, it is nevertheless remarkable that a country of such a nationalist and democratic tradition did not give rise to any anti-war agitation similar to that elsewhere in Europe at the time, including Spain and Italy. In the latter, as Fulvio Cammarano has shown, the demand for the country to remain neutral mobilized a large cross-section of society, resulting in the country being bitterly divided in May 1915, when the Italian government decided to enter the war.²¹ By contrast, in the late summer 1914, Ireland was supporting mobilization while disaffection was limited to a small minority of the nationalist volunteers. Moreover, as Niamh Gallagher has shown, even the Easter Rising and its aftermath had limited impact on the ‘home front’, where commitment to the Allied cause helped to sustain the morale and loyalty of the troops. Sinn Féin’s victories in by-elections and eventual success in the 1918 general election must be placed alongside the substantial and continuous displays of popular support for the soldiers, a phenomenon that Gallagher explains by disassociating the war effort from the political future of the Union, and linking it to the wider cause of the Allies.²² The parallels with popular attitudes to the Boer War in 1899–1902 (see above), are evident.

In any case, in April 1916 the outbreak of the revolution in Dublin itself was repressed by *Irish* troops. In fact, the first unit to engage the rebels was the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment, which fought its way from the South Circular Road to Sackville Street (now O’Connell Street) and the GPO. It was men from this regiment who took down the flag of the ‘Irish Republic’ after the GPO garrison surrendered. These details are little known and their significance has never been studied before: for, though the Rising has inspired a huge number of publications, almost all of them examine the event exclusively from the point of view of the revolutionaries. Richardson takes a bold step by giving a voice to ‘the other side’. He has much to write about. In fact, during the first days of the rebellion in Dublin there were more Irishmen fighting under the Union flag than in the ranks of the revolutionaries. Making a systematic use of previously unpublished personal accounts, diaries, and letters by soldiers and officers of the many Irish units deployed to fight the Rising, Richardson stresses that Irishmen in the army ‘were ordinary men the same as the rebels against whom they found themselves fighting’ (p. xi).

This reminds us of a feature that all revolutions – however ‘glorious’ – share: though their supporters perceive them as struggles for political or social liberation from foreign oppression, they are also *civil wars*. The year 1916 is no exception, as Iris Murdoch argued in *The red and the green*, published one year

²¹ Fulvio Cammarano, ed., *Abbasso la guerra! Neutralisti in piazza alla vigilia della Prima Guerra mondiale in Italia* (Milan, 2015).

²² Niamh Gallagher, ‘Irish society and the Great War, 1914–1918’ (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 2015).

before the 50th anniversary of the Rising. At that time, her view fell predominantly on deaf ears. Yet, of all people, the then serving Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, knew out of personal experience that her account of families divided by the Rising was not purely fictional. He was a veteran of the GPO, but had two cousins, Herbert and Edwin Lemass, who during the Rising were serving as officers in Irish regiments on the Western Front (one was killed in action, the other returned briefly, before the IRA forced him to leave again; he became a judge in British North Africa). In April 1916, Irish soldiers fighting on the Liffey were fully aware of the fratricidal nature of the Rising. Two defected to the rebels. At least one officer declined to fight other Irishmen and was transferred (Captain George McEnroy, later a high-scoring air ace). By contrast, others felt ‘betrayed’ and ‘stabbed in the back’ by the republicans and became very aggressive. When discipline broke down, it was because of Irish military summarily ‘executing’ innocent people, whom they believed to be rebels (the most infamous case concerned the deranged Corkman Captain Bowen-Colthurst, who murdered four men: the pacifist Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, two Irish Unionist newspaper editors, and a youth who happened to abuse the army in his presence).

However, most soldiers fought professionally and bravely. Neither class nor religion provide much of a clue for understanding their behaviour in fighting the Rising. Catholic soldiers from the slums and students on the Officers Training Corps (including one Italian, Demetrio Sarsfield Salazar, the son of the Italian consul) fought shoulder-to-shoulder with Southern Protestants and UVF veterans. Richardson’s chapter on Trinity College is revealing of the improvised and chaotic nature of the events surrounding the Rising.²³ Contrary to what the College authorities feared, the republicans did not attack Trinity, though it held a strategic position in the midst of the city and contained a depot of arms and ammunitions which would have been valuable to the insurgents. Defenceless at the beginning of the Rising, the College saw a motley group of academics, students, porters, and stray soldiers manning its gates and ramparts until reinforcements arrived on the Wednesday. Meanwhile, a group of third-year students, a majority of whom were women, stubbornly insisted on sitting an exam on Tuesday 25 April. The role of women in the revolution has now become a major aspect of the literature on the Rising, and it is good to see that there is a parallel move to their contribution to the Unionist side.²⁴ Again,

²³ The role of Trinity in the revolution is also the theme of a whole book by Tomás Irish, with a preface by the provost, Patrick Prendergast: Tomás Irish, *Trinity in war and revolution, 1912–1923* (Dublin, 2015). See also [n.a.], *Trinity and the Rising* (Dublin, 2016).

²⁴ Roy F. Foster, *Vivid faces: the revolutionary generation in Ireland, 1890–1923* (London, 2014); Senia Paseta, *Irish nationalist women, 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 2013). Women of all political persuasions are discussed in Lucy McDiamid, *At home in the revolution: what women said and did in 1916* (Dublin, 2015); and Clara Cullen, ed., *The world upturning: Elsie Henry’s Irish wartime diaries, 1913–1919* (Dublin, 2013), presents the view of a Unionist upper-middle-class woman. Striking evidence has been generated by the Marsh’s Library, Dublin, exhibition on

the Rising brought out a full range of emotions from both the politically engaged to those who made up their mind only in response to an altogether unexpected crisis.

All of this remains a contested and difficult area.²⁵ The centenary of the Easter Rising has inspired the publication of a number of path-breaking new works on the factors and the mentalities behind the revolution.²⁶ However, the analysis of the revolution and that of the Irish involvement in the First World War have not been sufficiently integrated.²⁷ This is one of the reasons why Keith Jeffery's book – which examines the Rising in the context of 'global' 1916 – is so important. His superbly researched, gripping analysis sheds new light on a pivotal year in the war and offers an inclusive history of the many theatres where fighting took place in that year. It starts with Gallipoli, followed by chapters on the Isonzo, Jutland, the Eastern Front, Asia, Africa, the Somme, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans the USA, and Russia. The Easter Rising is covered in chapter 4, which is entitled 'Ypres on the Liffey'. As Jeffery notes, '[r]ather than seeing the Rising as a uniquely Irish event, *sui generis* and only peripherally part of the wider conflagration, it can *only* be properly understood in the context of the Great War, which provided both the moment...and the mode...for its planning and execution' (pp. 103–4). The factors that provided the Dublin revolutionaries with their opportunity affected also rebellions and uprisings elsewhere, in a world that consisted largely of multi-national empires comparable to the British empire. Already in 1914–15, there had been an Afrikaner rebellion in South Africa ('a warm weather' version of the Easter Rising, as historian Bill Nasson has put it), followed by the Ottoman massacre of the Armenians – in itself motivated by fear of a nationalist rebellion. While there is no evidence that the Armenians would have revolted, the Arabs and Bedouin in the southern provinces of the empire were actually up in arms against their Ottoman overlords from the summer of 1916, with the help of T. E. Lawrence (himself of Anglo-Irish extraction).²⁸

the 1916 Easter Rising (see the catalogue, curated by Elaine Doyle, *1916 tales from the other side* (Dublin, 2016).

²⁵ John Horne, 'Ireland at the Somme: a tale of two divisions', *History Today*, 57 (2007), pp. 12–19.

²⁶ Foster, *Vivid faces*; Diarmaid Ferriter, *A nation and not a rabble: the Irish revolution, 1913–1923* (London, 2015); Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: the Irish rebellion* (new edn, London, 2016); Ronan Fanning, *Fatal path: British government and Irish revolution, 1910–1922* (London, 2013). For a survey of the recent debate, see Eugenio F. Biagini, 'The Irish revolution, 1916–1923', *English Historical Review*, 131 (2016), pp. 122–32, at p. 131.

²⁷ Richard S. Grayson and Fearghal McGarry, eds., *Remembering 1916: the Easter Rising, the Somme and the politics of memory in Ireland* (Cambridge, 2016); Maurice Walsh, *Bitter freedom: Ireland in a revolutionary world, 1918–1923* (London, 2015), contextualizes the later stages of the revolution, but does not discuss 1916 or indeed the war.

²⁸ Dick Benson-Gyles, *The boy in the mask: the hidden world of Lawrence of Arabia* (Dublin, 2016).

Muslim nomads also rebelled in Central Asia (Uzbekistan), this time against the Russian empire. '[L]ocal religious leaders proclaimed a holy war not only to stop...conscription [in the Tsarist army] but also seeking independence from Russia, with aid (if possible) from Afghanistan and Germany' (p. 185). In all cases, the pattern was similar, with revolts affecting 'terror[ies] with a fairly relaxed pre-war relationship to a greater power...which, with the onset of war, in order to secure the territory or to extract the resources for the war effort endeavoured to exert greater control than before. This, in turn, could stimulate opposition in the subject territory. A pattern...of challenge and response might be established which could easily escalate into violent conflict' (p. 232). As the war went on, this revolutionary ferment spread from the periphery to the metropole, with the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution being 'just one...of the violent and opportunistic responses which occurred nearly everywhere to the challenges and demands of the wider conflict' (p. 363).

In Ireland in 1916, the situation was apparently more stable than in the regions mentioned above. In fact, the country had in some ways profited from the war, which stimulated external demand on both farming and manufacturing, while the government improved the old-age pension and other social benefits, thus contributing to supporting domestic demand. Extreme poverty remained the lot of the unskilled worker in the inner cities, but in the countryside the reforms of 1882–1903 had dealt with the issue of land hunger – probably the single most revolutionary question elsewhere in wartime Europe – so that, while in Russia and Italy agitators demanded the end of large estates, in Ireland 'recruiters in 1915 could...appeal to farmers to defend what they had already secured'.²⁹ Irrespective of political or religious creed, the Irish made dependable and loyal soldiers. As it is well known, Roger Casement tried in vain to recruit an 'Irish Brigade' among prisoners in German camps. As he dependently noted in his diary,

I very soon saw from the manner of the men that all hope for an Irish Brigade from such a contemptible crew as these must be entirely abandoned. Some of them insulted me...[and] were full of ill will to Germany and in many cases 'more English than the English themselves'.³⁰

Apart from the casualties at the front, the main drawback of the war in Ireland was stopping the traditional social safety valve: because of restrictions on emigration, the latter dropped by 90 per cent, resulting in the rapid build up of frustration and anxiety among young men and women who in previous and later

²⁹ John Horne, 'Our war, our history', in Horne, ed., *Our war*, p. 9. However, violence against civilians in the Anglo-Irish and civil war, 1919–23, was motivated by unresolved disputes about land in areas where the implementation of land purchase was held back by reluctant landlords: Fergus Campbell, *Land and revolution: nationalist politics in the west of Ireland, 1891–1921* (Oxford, 2005).

³⁰ Angus Mitchell, ed., *One bold deed of open treason: the Berlin diary of Roger Casement, 1914–1916* (Dublin, 2016), p. 135.

periods would have been heading for Liverpool and New York. This was compounded by the return from Britain of Irishmen eager to avoid conscription (introduced there in January 1916), including the future IRA leader Michael Collins. The threat of conscription being extended to Ireland soon became a major cause of disaffection. Yet, as already noted, the situation was not revolutionary, and what changed it 'utterly' was not the Rising, but the government's harsh repression of the insurgents and internment of suspected sympathizers. This also changed the posthumous reputation of the rebels, as W. B. Yeats noted.

IV

By the time the war ended, the mood in Ireland was mixed. On the one hand, Sinn Féin's victory in the 1918 general election indicated a massive shift of opinion away from Home Rule and towards demands for de facto independence. On the other hand, the studies reviewed here show that for the returning British army veterans there was widespread respect. *Harry Clarke's war* is all about the way this was expressed in one particular artefact, mediated primarily through the artistic genius of the man who illustrated *Ireland's memorial records* (1919). Commissioned by General John French – then lord lieutenant of Ireland – this eight-volume work listed the names of the Irishmen who lost their lives in the First World War. While other memorials of this kind were limited to one city (as in the case of the *King's book of heroes* deposited in York Minster), the *Memorial records* was unique because it listed the military casualties of a whole nation – 49,000 in all, as it was believed at the time. Harry Clarke's contribution consisted of illustrative marginalia and decorative borders inspired by medieval illuminated manuscripts.

Marguerite Helmers has written an insightful analysis of the *Memorials* and the contexts in which they were produced, and the Irish Academic Press must be congratulated on producing an exquisitely illustrated and beautifully presented volume. The book reproduces many of the original illustrations and its very layout, from the frontispiece onwards, is inspired by Clarke's artistry. As Helmers notes (p. 25), '[t]his book is designed to tell the story of how and why *Ireland's Memorial Records* were published, how they were conceived from the beginning as part of a physical national memorial, and how Harry Clarke infused the decorative borders with his own distinctive vision'. Though he was a Catholic, in his decorative strategy he adopted also Protestant themes, to make his work truly 'Irish' and inclusive. Influences behind the project included William Orpen (Clarke's teacher and the Irish painter of the British army) and Sean Keating (another disciple of Orpen's and future artist of the IRA and the Irish Free State), Edwin Lutyens (the 'architect of the empire', his name famously associated with the planning of New Delhi), and many others. Both Clarke and Keating, like their art-school contemporary Wilhelmina Geddes, were Modernists, but were also heavily influenced by the

Arts and Crafts Movement: indeed, Clarke designed the cover for the catalogue of the 1917 5th Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland.³¹ However, in his exploration and representation of the human figure, he was also influenced by the development of the then novel artistic genre, the cinema, and in particular by Charlie Chaplin. The latter's emphasis on the pliability of the body and what were – in his performance – almost its bodily extensions (his cane and hat) are mirrored in Clarke's representation of soldiers, rifles, helmets and caps. In this way,

Harry Clarke creates his own visual narrative of war that encircles the 49,435 names of the dead. Influenced by lantern-slide entertainment and the cinema, he is able to piece together a bold story of combined military effort and singular sacrifice. The effect is to see the names as actors within the great landscapes and ongoing tragedies of war. To locate a name on a page is also to refer to the margins, where readers can visualise what the soldiers may have experienced in battle. In other words, the images are not purely decorative. Harry Clarke astutely creates a graphic narrative of war and its aftermath that emotionally affects the reader.

(p. 127)

With their ecumenical imagery, the *Irish memorials* embodied the last magic moment of Irish unity, when unionist and nationalist leaders worked together to create a joint memorial for the country's dead. The mood changed very rapidly between the end of the year and the winter of 1919. Indeed, when the *Irish memorials* were published, they already looked like 'an artefact from a distant age', and failed to become part of the wider remembrance of the war because the new, ascendant forces in Ireland – Sinn Féin – refused to be in any way associated with what they regarded as the 'English' war, and claimed instead the memory of the Irish War of Independence, starting with the Easter Rising.

This created an awkward situation for the returning veterans. The debate about their experience has resulted in historians reaching divergent conclusions – some arguing with Peter Hart that such returnees were targeted by IRA violence and often killed or forced to emigrate, others, like John Borgonovo, concluding that there was no antagonism between the veterans and the IRA.³² One interesting feature of the debate about the returning soldiers is uncertainty about their numbers: we are not sure about how many died, and even less about how many came back. Government figures released in 1920 listed over 100,000 servicemen discharged in Ireland, but the British Legion's figures were much higher: about 158,000. The Irish Free State (IFS)

³¹ On Geddes, see the splendid volume by Nicola Gordon Bowe, *Wilhelmina Geddes: life and work* (Dublin, 2015).

³² Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. and its enemies: violence and community in Cork, 1916–1923* (Oxford, 1998); Jane Leonard, 'Getting them at last: the I.R.A. and ex-servicemen', in David Fitzpatrick, ed., *Revolution? Ireland 1917–1923* (Dublin, 1990); John Borgonovo, *Spies, informers and the 'Anti-Sinn Féin Society': the intelligence war in Cork City, 1920–1921* (Dublin, 1996).

1927 report concluded that there were about 150,000, a huge number in proportion to the population of the Twenty-Six Counties, then amounting to less than three million. William Redmond, son of the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, argued that – when families were included – altogether there were about half a million Irish people with direct army connections. The uncertainty reflects the difficulty of agreeing on who should be listed as ‘Irish’ servicemen, the effect of partition with its creation of ‘two Irelands’, and the level of emigration after 1921. Even before then, so many Britons served in Irish regiments and so many Irishmen served in non-Irish units (including British and Imperial battalions) and various other specialized branches of the armed forces, such as the Royal Engineers, and in the navy, that it has proved difficult to settle on some agreed figure. Paul Taylor endorses the 1920 British government estimates and argues that the number must have been around 100,000.

Politically, the veterans did not represent a homogeneous group: before the war, most of those from Southern Ireland would have been supporters of constitutional nationalism, but later some of them joined advance nationalist groups, or even the IRA, while others, after the disbanding of the army, served with the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Auxiliaries. Inevitably, from 1919 onwards, the IRA targeted veterans who operated with the security forces, and many of them were killed in uniform. By contrast, the number of those who were killed as civilians (cases in which one could claim there was a deliberate IRA strategy of targeting servicemen *qua* servicemen) is rather low and curiously similar to the number of former servicemen who served in the IRA: in each instance, about 100.

In general, the level of hostility, or lack thereof, shown towards returning soldiers varied regionally and between town and countryside (with the latter providing the larger number of incidents). Sectarian motivation was not absent, though Protestants were not targeted primarily for their religion, but for a variety of related reasons. These included retaliation for Orange attacks on the Catholic community in the North and class antagonism to landowners or large farmers. Religion was, however, *a* factor, marking out some farmers or loyalists from the rest, and explaining why Protestants accounted for a disproportionate number of the loyalists killed or persecuted in the early 1920s: as a solicitor wrote about a client who applied for compensation after he had been beaten up and his crops destroyed in 1922, ‘a Protestant in Southern Ireland remains more or less in anxiety, because only a Protestant will admit themselves [sic] to be loyalist’ (cit. p. 56).³³ In most cases, army service was at best a contributory factor, but the victims were attacked for something they did *after* being disbanded, such as spying or joining the security forces.

³³ For a different interpretation, see, besides the works cited in n. 32, above, the recent book by Robin Bury, *Buried lives: the Protestants of Southern Ireland* (Dublin, 2017).

It is also striking that, despite claims that army service resulted in persecution, in 1919–21, the number of Southern Irishmen enlisting in the British army remained high, with Dublin recruiting more than Belfast, and with ‘[r]ecruitment rates in the south for 17-year olds...twice the pre-war rate’ (p. 88). Pension and health benefits – including the establishment of special hospitals – provided by the British state for its veterans may have been part of the incentive for those who enlisted from the IFS, where such services were long to remain a luxury.

Meanwhile, those Southern Irish veterans who were fit and ready to serve also benefited from the IFS’s build up of the National army: the latter rapidly expanded during the civil war, and by 1923 was nearly 60,000 strong, a number twice that of the British army in Ireland before 1914. About 20 per cent of the officers and 50 per cent of the rank-and-file were British army veterans, whose professionalism was much in demand in times of trouble. Meanwhile, former British officers – both Catholic and Protestant – entered the Dail, were appointed to the Senate, and remained over-represented in the higher echelons of the judiciary and professions.

Taylor’s evidence about returning ex-servicemen not being systematically targeted is compelling, and is also consistent with the data emerging from other studies about the nature of violence between 1919 and 1923. This does not mean that there were no individual or local cases of sectarian attacks against Protestant or Catholic loyalists. However, the ex-servicemen were too many and too well organized for the IRA to take them on systematically without risking a backlash, one which could well have undermined their own campaign. For the same reasons, the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies were undisturbed and remained imposing events throughout the 1920s – more imposing, in fact, than the commemoration of the Easter Rising (whose importance increased from the mid-1930s). Taylor concludes that ‘War service brought no privilege from the state or community, but nor did it result in discrimination. Following the creation of the Free State there is little to indicate that ex-servicemen were marginalized either through the state apparatus or in the local community’ (p. 245).

Two final considerations emerge from this survey. The first is that, despite the damaging effects of government repression, 1916 was less of a turning point than 1914 (when the two rival Volunteer armies had aimed their guns away from each other and against a new-found common enemy overseas), or 1918 (when at the general election the Irish Parliamentary Party was almost completely wiped out and Sinn Féin won most seats in the Twenty-Six Counties). The second is that 1919, with the beginning of guerrilla warfare, was crucial in destabilizing the country, and again mainly because of the way the government responded to the insurgents. It was as if the lessons that the army had learned when policing Ireland in the nineteenth century – that overwhelming force was essential and should be accompanied by minimal violence – were forgotten. The irony is that the old link between army and the people was

rescinded at the very moment when the former represented a larger cross-section of society than ever before. Yet, the overall picture that emerges from these studies is that of a complex society, within which all players – including the veterans, the British government, and the IRA – were more pragmatic and realistic than they have been given credit for. The rapid termination of both the Anglo-Irish and the civil war, and the comparatively smooth return to democratic law and order from 1922–3, would otherwise be inexplicable.

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