

Irish literature and the Great War

In 1979, ten years after the modern Irish ‘troubles’ broke out, Seamus Heaney included in his volume *Field Work* a poem entitled ‘In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge’. In so doing he was invoking an iconic figure, almost the only Irish poet who might be included among the soldier poets who died in the First World War and who made that conflict seem in cultural memory, a poet’s war. In his poem Heaney ponders how it can seem an enigma in the late twentieth century, in the midst of a conflict between loyalism and Irish republicanism, that a nationalist Irishman should have been among the British soldiery who perished in the Great War, among whom, we remember, were such renowned war poets as Julian Grenfell, Isaac Rosenberg and Wilfred Owen. Heaney designates Ledwidge ‘our dead enigma’¹ and recalls his County Meath origins, the tender Georgian pastoralism of his verses, and quotes from a letter written by Ledwidge shortly before his death in action in France at the Battle of Passchendale, on 31 July 1917. In that letter the poet, serving in the King’s uniform in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, had regretted that ‘party politics should ever divide our tents’ and hoped for a time when a new Ireland would ‘arise from her ashes in the ruins of Dublin, like the Phoenix, with one purpose, one aim and one ambition. I tell you this in order that you may know what it is to me to be called a British soldier while my own country has no place amongst the nations but the place of Cinderella.’² In so writing, Ledwidge was responding to the events of April and May 1916 when the Easter Rising had been crushed by other soldiers wearing the King’s uniform, an outcome that had affected him profoundly. Indeed the figure of the soldier poet that shadows Ledwidge’s wartime verses was no victim of the Dardanelles or the Western Front. Rather it is the martyrs for Ireland who had paid the ultimate sacrifice when cut down by the executioners’ bullets in Dublin, Thomas McDonagh, Patrick Pearse and Joseph Plunkett, who preoccupy him. It is they who

are honoured in his poem 'The Blackbirds', written in July 1916, with its nationalist iconography and tones of lament:

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.
 ...
 And when the first surprise of flight
 Sweet songs excite, from that far dawn
 Shall there come blackbirds loud with love,
 Sweet echoes of the singers gone.
 But in the lonely hush of ever
 Weeping I grieve the silent bills.'
 I heard the Poor Old Woman say
 In Derry of the little hills.³

And perhaps Ledwidge's best-known poem is 'Thomas McDonagh' with its plangent, sorrowing cadences:

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.⁴

The actual experience of war is not directly represented in Ledwidge's poetry (he makes graphic reference to it in some of the letters he sent back from the war zone), but the intensifying homesickness it registers may be taken as a symptom of the increasing alienation he felt both as an Irishman in British uniform after 1916 and as a 'unit in the Great War, doing and suffering' while facing the prospect of likely violent death. That homesickness expressed itself in poems like 'In France' where 'Wherever way I turn... / The hills of home are in my mind / And there I wander where I will.'⁵ In poem after poem, rural County Meath is evoked in idyllic terms, as a pastoral place of fairy lore and sweet birdsong. One senses that Ledwidge as poet, in so concentrating on the pastoral antithesis to his life as a soldier, was in fact unwittingly aligning his work with other war poets who did admit the conditions of industrial warfare to their work (where Ledwidge does refer to the war itself, it is in rather conventionally poetic terms, without the realism that was to mark some of the most compelling of Great War poetry). For a good deal of the poetry of the Great War did in fact highlight the gulf between the pastoral landscapes close to the front and the horrors of trench life and the desolate, shell-ruined zone of no-man's-land. One thinks of Rosenberg's 'Returning, We hear

the Larks', with its 'heights of night ringing with unseen larks, / Music showering on our upturned list'ning faces' of soldiers returning to camp and 'a little safe sleep'.⁶ It is as if Ledwidge, sick with longing for his native place, fixed his being on the pastoral mode that fellow poets of the Great War in their poems set in apposition to the realities of trench warfare and the ruined towns amid the poppy fields in Picardy and Flanders.

In Heaney's Ledwidge poem, the pastoral quality of the Meathman's verse is sensitively acknowledged in its invocation of 'the leafy road from Slane / Where you belonged';⁷ but it is the enigma of Ledwidge that most engages the Derry poet who is stimulated to his reflections by a war memorial in the northern seaside resort of Portstewart, with its 'loyal fallen names on the embossed plaque',⁸ that he remembers first encountering as an uncomprehending child. Not that adulthood has brought much greater understanding, for the poem concludes by reckoning that Ledwidge followed 'a sure confusing drum', and that he was not 'keyed or pitched like these true-blue ones',⁹ commemorated in Portstewart, who perhaps knew what they were dying for. It is as if the varying motives that took men to their deaths earlier in the century epitomise for Heaney an island still riven by divided loyalties – party politics still divide the tents. The only certainty in the muffled pain of this memorial is 'all of you consort now underground'.¹⁰

Heaney's invocation of an 'underground' at the conclusion of this poem mysteriously enters it as a Great War poem in more than its subject matter. It reminds, of course, of Wilfred Owen's great poem 'Strange Meeting', in which mortal enemies encounter one another after death in a 'sullen hall' that is accessed 'down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped / Through granites which titanic wars had groined'.¹¹ In that poem the soldier's experience of the trenches, in which life became a matter of beneath ground-level survival is made the basis of a mythic perspective. And the imagery of mining that Owen's lines encapsulate also reminds us that much of the war was fought underground by the sappers who sought to undermine the enemy's front-line defences. Sebastian Faulk's well-known novel of 1993, *Birdsong*, was powerfully alert to this aspect of Great War strategy and the mole-like burrowing 'underground' it involved. He was accurately reflecting the fact that as the historian Eric J. Leed has observed, the Great War was 'in general ... a war of engineers' and was, as Paul Fussell has termed it, 'a troglodyte war'.¹² Leed comments: 'the silence, darkness, disorientation, and almost unbelievable tension suffered by the mining soldiers was an intensification of the experience of trench warfare'.¹³ So powerful indeed was the sense of the war as a conflict being

fought beneath the surface of the earth that, as Leed argues, the concept of ‘underground’ achieved a near-mythic explanatory force in the minds of many soldiers, who felt themselves trapped in a terrible cave (in Owen’s poem the only escape from the trenches is through death and the ultimate sleep with which that poem concludes).

A couple of prose works by the Irish writer Patrick MacGill (known as ‘the navy poet’), who served with the London Irish and was injured in France, powerfully evoke the subterranean world of the common soldier. *The Red Horizon* (1916) describes, for example, a shell bombardment in the following terms:

The suspense wore us down; we breathed the suffocating fumes of one explosion and waited, our senses tensely strung for the coming of the next shell. The sang-froid which carried us through many a tight corner with credit utterly deserted us, we were washed-out things; with our noses to the cold earth, like rats in a trap, we waited for the next moment which might land us in eternity. The excitement of a bayonet charge, the mad tussle with death of the blood-stained field, which for some reason is called the field of honour, was denied; we had to wait and lie in the trench, which looked so like a grave, and sink slowly into the depths of depression.¹⁴

One notes here the suggestion of entrapment and underground death-in-life. In *The Great Push: An Episode of the Great War* (an account of the battle of Loos, also published in 1916), MacGill also captured the periods of awful anxiety involved in such warfare, in which the earth itself is no protection: “The shells were loosened again; there was no escape from their frightful vitality; they crushed, burrowed, exterminated, obstacles were broken down, and men’s lives were flicked out like flies off a window-pane. A dug-out flew skywards, and the roof-beams fell in the trench at our feet. We crouched under the bomb-shelter, mute, pale, hesitating.”¹⁵

There was a more general sense in which the experience of fighting men in the Great War was open to metaphoric representation as an underground world. It was underground in the sense that many on the Home Front did not wish to be told of its true nature. There is accordingly a powerful sense of taboos being broken in the English war poetry of the period, of the suppressed being provocatively exhumed. One thinks of Owen’s ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ with its graphic images of intolerable suffering, that give the lie to conventional patriotic pieties and of his admonitory preface to his poems, which restricts the poet to the role of one who must issue warning, eschewing poetry. If an Owen felt driven to such aesthetic asceticism, the Irishmen who might have wished to register in literature experience of the Great War’s front lines would have

laboured under a double disadvantage. For not only were those at home disinclined to have their noses rubbed in the mud and blood of Flanders or elsewhere, but after 1916 and the events that led to partition and the establishment of the Irish Free State, there were obvious ideological and political reasons that made literary treatment of the Great War highly problematic. A poem by the nationalist intellectual and university teacher Thomas Kettle, who had enlisted in the British Army in passionate support of ‘gallant little Belgium’ and who would lose his life in September 1916 at the Somme, anticipated how one such as he could be disavowed ‘in time to come’ (that phrase is from Yeats’s poem ‘Easter 1916, completed in its first form in the same month as Kettle met his death). In ‘The Gift of God’, Kettle addresses a daughter whom he imagines asking ‘in wiser’ days why he abandoned her for the dangers of the soldier’s calling (‘to dice with death’). His answer movingly, if unconvincingly, makes his action seem an anti-imperialist Christian solidarity with the wretched of the earth, as if he knows his sacrifice will be misunderstood:

So here, while the mad guns curse overhead,
And tired men sigh, with mud for couch and floor,
Know that we fools, now with the foolish dead,
Died not for Flag, nor King, nor Emperor,
But for a dream, born in a herdsman’s shed,
And for the Secret Scripture of the poor.¹⁶

The attitude of the poet W. B. Yeats to the Great War was that it should be buried and stay buried as a poetic and artistic subject, especially in the case of non-combatants. In February 1916 he composed a poem which on its first publication was titled ‘A Reason for Keeping Silent’, and subsequently ‘On Being Asked for a War Poem’. In this he wrote:

I think it better that in times like these
A poet’s mouth be silent, for in truth
We have no gift to set a statesman right;
He has had enough of meddling who can please
A young girl in the indolence of her youth,
Or an old man upon a winter’s night.¹⁷

It might have been observed when this poem first appeared in 1916 that Yeats had not hitherto felt inhibited about commenting on political matters, as the first edition of his volume *Responsibilities* strenuously indicated. Published in 1914, that volume had made no bones about his elitist disdain for Irish political mediocrity. And those familiar with the Yeats circle might have been tempted to read in the poem’s invocations of an

indolent young girl and an old man some hint of the amatory confusions that were in fact assailing Yeats in 1916. For upon the execution of John MacBride following the Easter Rising, he would feel obliged once again to propose marriage to MacBride's estranged widow, his own great love of youthful years, Maud Gonne, and when she one more refused him, he would turn his attention to her daughter, the fitful and often indolent Iseult Gonne. Yeats would have known of Iseult's moody laziness from concerned letters he had been receiving from Maud during the war, which also told him how terrible were the battles unfolding in France. In this context, Yeats in his poem can be seen as repressing this knowledge in preference for the cultivation as poetic subject of amatory feeling within a circle of intimates. Gonne's letters, however, would have alerted him to the personal costs of the war. For she had reported the deaths-in-action of a nephew and of her first lover's son, mourned the death of Hugh Lane, Lady Gregory's nephew, in the sinking of the *Lusitania* and worried for Lady Gregory, when her son Robert chose to enlist in the British forces. And she wrote passionately of the suffering of the French army, whose wounded she and Iseult helped to nurse:

I am nursing the wounded from 6 in the morning till 8 at night & trying in my material work to drown the sorrow & disappointment of it all – & my heart is growing up in wild hatred of the war machine which is grinding the life out of these great natures & reducing their population to helpless slavery & ruin, among all the wounded I have nursed only one man who spoke with real enthusiasm of returning to the front.¹⁸

Gonne's experience as a nurse brought her, as she wrote, 'in contact with awful suffering & heroic courage & a great deal of the waste & squalor of war'.¹⁹ One death amid all that waste Yeats could not suppress or disregard for it involved his own immediate circle in the most brutal way. On 23 January 1918, Major Robert Gregory was killed on the Italian Front when, returning from a mission, his plane was brought down by 'friendly fire' in a dreadful accident. So Yeats's patron, close friend and collaborator lost her only son, father of her three grandchildren, the man upon whom her hopes for the future of a family, house and estate at Coole, County Galway rested. It was a most terrible blow that Yeats as poet could not ignore. Silence was not an option. Yeats wrote four poems in Gregory's memory all of which involved complex negotiations of a central unpalatable fact about the Major: he was an unabashed imperialist who had enlisted as Roy Foster has it 'with alacrity early in the war'.²⁰ The best-known of the four poems Yeats composed in his memory, 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death', exhibits the poet engaged in the avoidance,

if not quite suppression, of this uncomfortable facet of Gregory's character, which was at odds with his mother's and Yeats's Irish Nationalism.

Yeats's ploy in the poem is to disregard Gregory's known patriotism and to attribute his participation in the conflict to parochial loyalties and affections ('My country is Kiltartan Cross / My countrymen Kiltartan's poor') and to a 'A lonely impulse of delight' which 'drove' him to a 'tumult in the clouds'.²¹ In other words, the Irish airman risked the death of which he had prescience, in loyalty to the home ground and in an act of radical self-definition. And in so doing, it was as if he had not died in the war at all, but in some private, chivalric wager of his own, bred of regard for a native place and of high adventure. Yet in writing in this way, as Foster has commented, Yeats had composed the 'war poem' which he had earlier claimed he would not provide.

'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death' is a 'war poem' in two special senses, beyond the fact that it immediately addresses the death of a combatant. Firstly, in imagining Gregory at a great height 'Somewhere among the clouds above',²² Yeats was, whether he knew it or not, giving expression in his war poem to a general mode of consciousness that had emerged in the terrible conditions of trench warfare. To quote Leed once more:

The aerial perspective – assumed to belong to the flyer – was one of the most significant myths of the war. The necessity for this myth lay precisely in those constrictions that so fragmented the perceptions and purpose of the frontsoldier. The myth of the flyer, of adventure in the air as the last home of chivalric endeavor, is clearly a compensatory notion. It serves to keep open the realm of purpose and meaning with which many entered the war.²³

So Yeats's airman was able to assess and welcome his own version of fate far above the random slaughter of earth-bound engagements. And in imaging this zone of near metaphysical elevation, Yeats was occupying as poet the same almost mythic dimension as is envisaged in what are indisputably war poems by an Irish survivor of the Great War, Thomas MacGreevy. In his 'Nocturne', dedicated to a soldier who 'died of wounds', MacGreevy sets earth and starry universe in absolute apposition: 'I labour in a barren place / Alone, self-conscious, frightened, blundering; / Far away stars wheeling in space'.²⁴ In 'De Civitate Hominum', an 'airman' 'high over' the battlefield is shot down, 'a stroke of orange in the morning's dress' to the awestruck horror of an observer: 'My sergeant says, very low, "Holy God! / 'Tis a fearful death"'.²⁵

Secondly, the final lines of Yeats's poem, in their carefully managed rhythmic equilibrium, suggest, as an historian of Irish aviation observed

to me, the actual experience of piloted flight in a small plane, its controlled exhilaration:

I balanced all, brought all to mind,
 The years to come seemed waste of breath,
 A waste of breath the years behind
 In balance with this life, this death.²⁶

The poem floats on its fixed, phrasal wings in one of the very few moments in Yeats's poetic oeuvre when the technology of modernity impacts on the poet's imagination.

The Great War was, of course, a conflict marked by the deployment of innovative technology in an imbroglio that saw the triumph of the machine at the expense of the human. This was something the dramatist Sean O'Casey fully understood as is evidenced not only by his Great War play *The Silver Tassie* (1928) but by his drama of the 1916 Rising, *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). The latter had made significant reference in its dialogue to the Great War context in which the Easter Rising took place, but as theatrical spectacle one of its most striking effects is to dramatise how the Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army with their showy uniforms and flags are overcome and decimated by the overwhelming force of modern munitions. And there is, too, an awareness of how in the twentieth century war had become 'total', with civilians being caught up and even targeted in generalised assaults on towns and cities. The final image of British Tommies brewing tea and singing 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' (a popular song at Great War fronts) in a Dublin tenement amid the flames of destruction is a powerful symbol of the domestic invaded by the overwhelming violence of modern warfare.

The insight shown by O'Casey into Great War realities in *The Plough and the Stars*, a play Yeats admired, makes Yeats's notorious decision to reject *The Silver Tassie* when the dramatist sought to have it produced on the Abbey Theatre's stage, all the more troubling. And in light of *The Plough and the Stars*'s sense of how the Easter Rising like the Great War saw romantic chivalry pitted against ruthless dehumanising force, Yeats's assertion, in a letter to the dramatist, that O'Casey was 'not interested in the great war' because he had 'never stood on its battlefields or walked its hospitals'²⁷ seems uncharacteristically obtuse.

The Silver Tassie takes Dublin football hero Harry Heegan from sporting success by way of the collective slaughter of the Western Front, to injury and a convalescence that does nothing for his permanent disablement. The horror of industrial warfare is powerfully represented in its

experimental, expressionist second act. In central position on stage is howitzer gun, which points directly at the audience as if to threaten them with the fate that awaits the cannon fodder in the cast. As Nuala Johnson has remarked of this *coup de théâtre*, 'this piece of military hardware is one of the most enduring symbols of the machinery of the war',²⁸ and in the play it demands that audiences become fully aware of the terrible attrition wrought by mechanized carnage and of the suffering it left in its wake, knowledge, the play insists, that must not be suppressed or kept 'underground'.

O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* had found some of its inspiration in a poem by Wilfred Owen entitled 'Disabled' (and echoes Robert Burns's tender lyric 'My Bonnie Mary'). The play's final images of a former athlete in a wheelchair as the dance of heterosexuality is joined without him clearly derives from Owen's lines (also about a cruelly wounded former football star and soldier): 'To-night he noticed how the women's eyes / Passed from him to the strong men that were whole'.²⁹ *The Silver Tassie* caught, indeed, some of the poem's bitterness about the Home Front as a world of women who would offer pity to the war's surviving sacrificial victims, but little more, as the vital possibilities of peace beckoned. Perhaps Yeats in damning O'Casey's play in 1928 detected something in it of the slightly maudlin atmospherics of its source. Certainly in the letter in which he gave his views on the play, he seemed to regret that O'Casey had not struck the appropriate tragic note, in a play governed by 'opinions' worthy only of a newspaper. Be that as it may, by 1936 when his own view of the necessity for tragedy in art had hardened into the near-doctrine encompassed in his phrase 'tragic joy', it would be Owen himself who would bear the brunt of Yeats's denigration. In what seemed to many an act of wilful suppression, Yeats excluded Owen from the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, edited by him and published that year. In the Introduction to this volume, he justified his decision by stating that 'passive suffering' was not a proper theme for poetry, and he extolled the masculinity of John Synge's verse, as if in exemplary contrast. In a letter he was unabashedly dismissive of Owen: 'When I excluded Wilfred Owen, whom I consider unworthy of the poet's corner of a country newspaper, I did not know I was excluding a revered sandwich-board man of the revolution ... He is all blood, dirt and sucked sugar-stick ... There is every excuse for him, but none for those who like him'.³⁰

By that act of exclusion, Yeats appeared to compound the impression given in 1928 that somehow the Great War should be off-limits as an artistic subject for most writers, and especially for the Irish writer (though

The Silver Tassie did get an Abbey production in 1935). For the Oxford book not only dispatched Owen to oblivion and excluded other English war poets but included swathes of verse by Irish poets who did not advert to the Great War at all. It was as if that catastrophe had only tangentially registered in the aesthetic sphere, while it had completely passed the Irish poetic imagination by (apart from Yeats's own poem "An Irish Airman" and a cursory reference to 'bombs and mud and gas' in a poem by Louis MacNeice). In this way, Yeats could be seen as giving a kind of imprimatur to what the historian Keith Jeffery has identified as the 'amnesiac tendency of southern Ireland to the war'.³¹ And indeed there has been a sense in those works by Irish writers who have directly broached the subject of the war in their works of the breaking of the Yeatsian interdiction and of a cognate infringement of cultural and social conventions involved in the unearthing of Great War experience. In Jennifer Johnston's novel of 1974, *How Many Miles to Babylon*, for example, a sense of recovering buried experience makes the Great War front a site of complex sexual and class alliances that cement mysterious male solidarities. Frank McGuinness's play *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) takes up as it were, where O'Casey left off in *The Silver Tassie* in exploring the homoerotic implications of military comradeship, which had been explicit in O'Casey's poetic source and hinted at at moments in his play. Sebastian Barry's novel *A Long Long Way* (2005) combines a gruesome realism of blood and mud with a sensuous lyricism as if to endorse and extend Wilfred Owen's aesthetic that Yeats had so excoriated, even as it revives the subject of conflicting loyalties of the kind Ledwidge had suffered in relation to the events of 1916 in Dublin. And the poet Michael Longley, who has made the Great War and the image of the 'war poet' a central poetic preoccupation, in his poem 'In Memoriam' (composed for a father who survived Great War service) introduced this theme in tones that suggested he was deliberately resurrecting familial memories that must be given their full due if his poetry is to avoid mere poeticism:

My father, let no similes eclipse
Where crosses like some forest simplified
Sink into my mind, the slow sands
Of your history delay till through your eyes
I read you like a book.³²

The irony of all this vis-à-vis Yeats, it must be said, was that despite his words and actions, his own poetry was certainly affected by the Great War. Notably, after 1918 his work takes on a marked internationalist

aspect. Where formerly Yeats's verse had its eye fixed on the personal life of the poet, on Ireland and on eternity, after the Great War it is the current condition of the world that begins to alarm him. In his protracted spiritualist experiments with his wife George that began in the autumn of 1917, history and the meaning of the historical moment in the scheme of things become a dominant concern of that strange activity. So much so that when Yeats reacted in verse to Black-and-Tan atrocities in Lady Gregory's district (the events took place in 1920), he did so in a poem that on its first publication bore the title 'Thoughts Upon The Present State of the World'. And that poem, with its historical perspectives on how a long Victorian and Edwardian peace had given way to 'dragon-ridden' days, can be read as a Yeatsian commentary on the break-up of empire that the Great War set in motion. Epochal historical changes in this poem come home to roost in the local world with a particular viciousness, revealing 'the weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth'.

Furthermore, a poem that was to acquire some of its imagery from George's automatic writing seems to have had its inception in the poet's alarm in the summer of 1918 at events in distant Russia. For Jon Stallworthy has shown how an early draft of Yeats's famous poem of world historical crisis and apocalypse, 'The Second Coming' (begun in the late summer of 1918), contains the phrase 'the Germans are () now to Russia come', and he argues that the poem went through a process of composition whereby what were probably allusions to revolutionary events in Russia and to German territorial acquisitions became buried in a panoramic vision of violent transformation. Stallworthy can assert accordingly that this poem stems 'from a mood of depression brought on by the First World War'.³³

The internationalism of mind that found expression in Yeats's great post-war poetry was of course something he shared with his fellow-writer James Joyce, who had spent some of the war years at work on his experimental, encyclopedic novel *Ulysses* (published in 1922). Set in Dublin in 1904, it could of course make no direct reference to the events of 1914–18 that had compelled Joyce to take refuge in neutral Switzerland. Arguably, however, in its various references to battles ancient and modern and in its profound sense of history as a nightmare from which it is necessary to awake, it too can be read as a work upon which the Great War had significant literary impact. The fact, therefore, that its ultimate response to the spectacle of human history, which so appalled even as it excited Yeats in 'The Second Coming', can perhaps be discerned in Leopold Bloom's pacifism, makes that text, finally, a salutary point at which to conclude

this survey: 'But it's no use, says he. Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not a life for men and women, insult and hatred.'³⁴

NOTES

- 1 S. Heaney, *Field Work* (Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 60.
- 2 This letter is quoted in H. Dunn, *Francis, Ledwidge and the Literature of His Time* (Ireland [sic]; Booklink, 2006), p. 254. I am indebted to this work and to A. Curtayne's *Francis Ledwidge: A Life of the Poet* (London: Martin Brian & O'Keefe, 1972).
- 3 Quotations from Ledwidge's poetry are taken from *The Complete Poems of Francis Ledwidge* (New York: Bretano's, 1919), pp. 209–10.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 206.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 265.
- 6 I. M. Parsons (ed.), *Men Who March Away: Poems of the First World War* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 53.
- 7 Heaney, *Field Work*, p. 59.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Parsons (ed.), *Men Who March Away*, p. 169.
- 12 E. J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 138; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford University Press), pp. 36–74.
- 13 Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 138.
- 14 P. MacGill, *The Red Horizon* (Dingle: Brandon, 1984) p. 196.
- 15 P. MacGill, *The Great Push* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000), p. 13.
- 16 Gerald Dawe, *Earth Voices Whispering: An Anthology of Irish War Poetry, 1914–1945* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2008), p. 55.
- 17 D. Albright (ed.), *W. B. Yeats: The Poems* (London: Everyman's Library, 1992), p. 205.
- 18 A. MacBride White and A. N. Jeffares (eds.), *The Donne–Yeats Letters, 1893–1938* (London: Hutchinson), p. 151.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- 20 R. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, Vol. II: *The Arch-Poet 1915–1939* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 118.
- 21 Albright (ed.), *W. B. Yeats: The Poems*, p. 184.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Leed, *No Man's Land*, p. 134.
- 24 T. Dillon Redshaw (ed.), *Collected Poems of Thomas MacGreevy* (Dublin: New Writers' Press, 1971), p. 15. MacGreevy, born Tarbert, County Kerry, was twice wounded in the war. He became Director of the National Gallery of Ireland in 1950.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 26 Albright (ed.), *W. B. Yeats: The Poems*, pp. 184–5.

- 27 Allan Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W. B. Yeats* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 741.
- 28 Cited N. C. Johnson, *Ireland, The Great War and the Geography of Remembrance* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 133.
- 29 Parsons, *Men Who March Away*, p. 143.
- 30 Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, p. 874. Saros Cowasjee first linked O'Casey's play with Owen when he suggested the latter's poem 'Disabled' as a source for *The Silver Tassie*. See S. Cowasjee, *Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), pp. 114–15.
- 31 Keith Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 57.
- 32 M. Longley, *Collected Poems* (London: Cape Poetry, 2006), p. 30.
- 33 Jon Stallworthy, *Between the Lines: Yeats's Poetry in the Making* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 24.
- 34 J. Joyce, *Ulysses* (World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 319. James Fairhill, in his *James Joyce and the Question of History* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), considers *Ulysses* as a Great War text.