

Irish Rebellion - May 1916.
Sackville Street, Dublin, held against a rebel charge.
Picture taken under fire.

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.*

*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 they 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;
The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call;
Minute by minute they live;
The stone's in the midst of all.*

*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, vainglorious 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.*

*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.*

25 September 1916

AN ASSESSMENT DR LUCY COLLINS

YEATS was absent from Dublin for the Rising but his response to it was intense: "I had no idea that any public event could so deeply move me," he wrote to Lady Gregory, "and I am very despondent about the future". This iconic poem, which disappointed Maud Gonne when she read it, is a formal masterpiece, as well as a work that charts Yeats's uncertain feelings towards the events of 1916.

It begins with an image of the revolutionaries going about their everyday lives; only their "vivid faces" indicate the power of their inner feeling and their potential for heroic action. Yeats's disengagement from these men is highlighted by the repetition of the phrase "polite meaningless words" and by the fact that his most vigorous response in language is to make fun of them to his friends.

His contemplation of these figures as individuals begins with Constance Markievicz, whom Yeats had known for more than 20 years. His view of her is nostalgic; he contrasts her youthful beauty and gentleness to her 'shrill' revolutionary persona. Of the men, first Patrick Pearse and then Thomas MacDonagh, Yeats is more tolerant: as poets, educators and leaders, their potential for greatness is acknowledged. Even Gonne's husband, John MacBride, immortalised here as a "drunken vainglorious lout", deserves a measure of praise.

Sweetness is set against bitterness in this poem, as pure idealism is contrasted with violence and political struggle. Yet the transformation

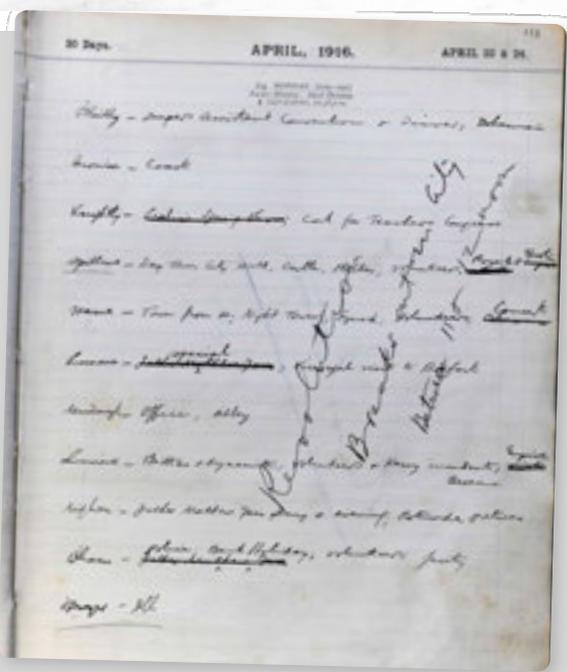


that the rebels — and ultimately Ireland — will undergo is seen as both redemptive and destructive. Here are the seeds of the "terrible beauty" that has remained so resonant for modern readers.

Tragedy and comedy are interwoven in the poem. Twice — in the reference to motley and to the "casual comedy" — Yeats allows the ideals of the rebels to be viewed lightly, before their full implications may be recognised. Likewise, the flux of the world is set against the determination of the revolutionaries, their steadfast commitment to independence: these "hearts with one purpose alone" defy the endless fluctuations of the natural world, where animal life pursues its own unthinking goals.

Yeats distinguishes between the larger philosophical questions that are raised by the actions of the rebels and our need to honour their idealism. This focus on the good faith of these men and women ensures their immortality, both in Yeats's own poem and in Irish cultural and political history.

Dr Lucy Collins is a lecturer in English at University College Dublin (UCD). She is the curator of 'Reading 1916', a forthcoming exhibition at UCD Special Collections



roster, 24/04/1916

familiarity. A reporter called Knightly was down for the Teachers' Congress, in Cork, which we would know today as the INTO annual conference. Among the motions for discussion was one condemning 'the Irish Government and the British Treasury for the callous indifference shown to the conditions of the Irish teachers'.

Another reporter was assigned to the drapers' assistants' annual convention and dinner. Mandate, the union representing retail trade workers, still holds its delegate conference at this time of year.

They were among the markings — but then there was also the dramatic, breaking news, carefully recorded and writ large across the diary page: 'Revolution breaks out in city between 11 and 12 noon'.

Katherine Donnelly

Hostility from working-class women was something the Jacob's garrison in particular had to contend with in the early stages of the Rising. 'Separation women', as they were known, were often dependent on the income of family members fighting in the trenches of the First World War. Almost 400 Jacob's employees enlisted in the British Army during the conflict, and their relations were sometimes more than willing to make their feelings clear.

For some civilians, the outbreak of the rebellion created an opportunity to loot, in particular on Sackville Street. One newspaper would write that "half the shops in Sackville Street were sacked. Children who have never possessed two pence of their own were imitating Charlie

Chaplin with stolen silk hats in the middle of the turmoil and murder." Yet the first two shops looted were shoe shops, indicative of the intense poverty of inner-city Dublin.

On the first day of the rebellion, the looters proved a headache for the Dublin Fire Brigade. Lawrence's toyshop was predictably emptied and burned, and two people taken down by fire escape proved to be looters.

Mere hours into events, Sackville Street was already burning.

Donal Fallon is an author and historian, currently researching republican commemoration and memory at UCD School of History