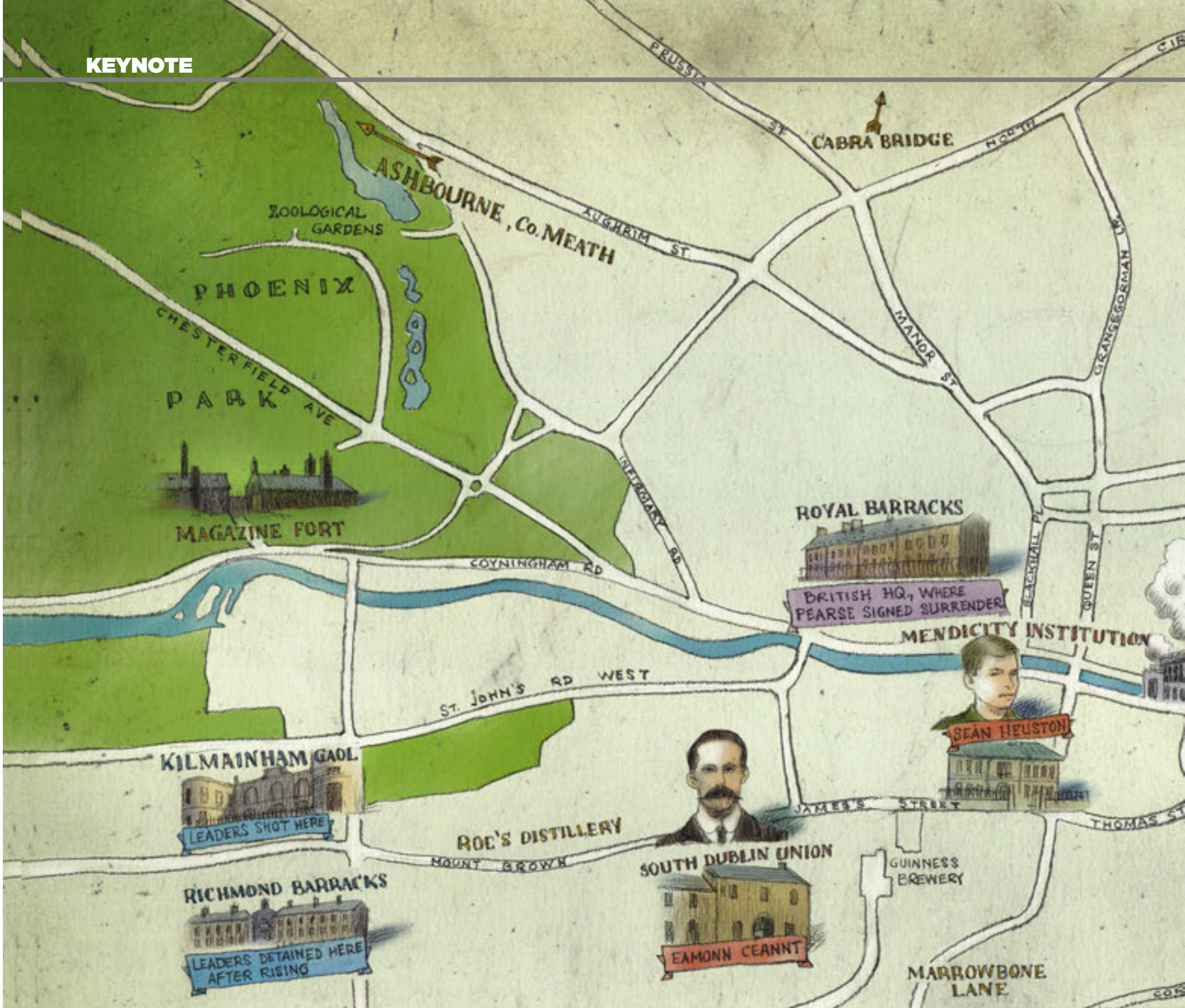




The Rising erupts

On Easter Monday morning, the rebels began to gather at Liberty Hall, St Stephen's Green and other parts of the city. As shots began to ring out, Patrick Pearse stood outside the GPO and began to read the Proclamation, writes **Donal Fallon**

THE planning of rebellion, by its very nature, is a clandestine affair. Still, James Stephens began his diary *The Insurrection in Dublin* by noting that "this has taken everyone by surprise. It is possible, that with the exception of their Staff, it has taken the Volunteers themselves by surprise".

In the confusion of orders and countermanding orders issued in the days and hours before the rebellion, Easter Monday began on a downbeat note for

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The Rising erupts

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the rebel forces. At mobilisation points across the city, the painful effects of Eoin MacNeill's countermanding order of the previous day quickly became apparent.

Poor turnouts at certain gathering points meant that the plans of the insurrection were altered dramatically in places. Thomas Slater of the Second Battalion of the Irish Volunteers, who served under Thomas MacDonagh, remembered that as men began to mobilise at St Stephen's Green, it was clear they would not be able to carry out their duties in full. In addition to seizing Jacob's, a large imposing factory on Bishop Street, it was also hoped men from this Battalion would seize Trinity College Dublin, but "the numbers which could be spared from the main body at Stephen's Green were so small, MacDonagh decided to call off the taking of Trinity College".

Some stumbled on the insurrection by chance. Major John MacBride, a veteran of the Second Boer War who was employed by Dublin Corporation at the time of the rebellion, was innocently in the city to meet his brother for lunch. On seeing men mobilising at St Stephen's Green, he recalled that, "I considered it my duty to join them."

The largest body of participants was mobilised at Liberty Hall, the home of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, which had become central to the planning of the insurrection. Patrick Stephenson remembered that by 8am, hours before the rebellion, there was a "fair amount of bustle and coming and going", as Volunteers, Irish Citizen Army members and others arrived there.

The ICA had been unaffected by MacNeill's countermanding order, yet by comparison with the Volunteers it was a small force, and about 200 of its members participated in the rebellion. Willie Oman was one member of the workers' militia, and as bugler, the teenager would sound the fall-in at Liberty Hall for the assembled forces. He remembered that in the weeks beforehand, "each member of the Citizen Army had been called in before Commandant Connolly and Commandant Mallin and asked if he was prepared to act without assistance of the Volunteers. Commandant Connolly explained... that he was anxious to know the position and how many men he could rely on."

At Liberty Hall, barely more than 150 of the Headquarters Battalion destined to seize the General Post Office had mobilised. Still, the strength of the GPO garrison would rise drastically during the week. While the strength of the garrison is often listed in histories of the Rising at about 400, the most comprehensive study to date, Jimmy Wren's recent *The GPO Garrison Easter Week 1916 - A Biographical Dictionary*, illustrates clearly that it rose to over 500.

Liam Tannam of the Irish Volunteers remembered two very unusual outsiders in the mix, in the form of a Swede and a Finn, both seamen, who happened to be in Dublin at the time and wished to fight. When Tannam asked why, he was told that "Russia with the British, therefore, we against."

While not quite as exotic as the Nordic rebels, the Irish Diaspora was represented in the form of the Kimmage Garrison, a body of men from Liverpool, Glasgow and other Irish centres of migration in Britain who had been preparing for the Rising at the Larkfield Mill in Kimmage, staying on the property of George Plunkett. Arthur Agnew recalled: "We marched to Harold's Cross, where we boarded a tram. Plunkett insisted on paying the conductor for our tickets."

The signal that the rebellion had begun was to be the destruction of the Magazine Fort in the Phoenix Park, a task that was left primarily to members of Na Fianna Éireann, the youth movement established in 1909. Fianna Commandant Eamon Martin recalled that, "we arrived at the outside of the Fort, pretending to be a football team, and by passing the ball from one to the other got near enough to the outside sentry to rush and disarm him". While the Fianna activists succeeded in gaining access to the Fort, the blast that followed was not sufficient to announce the rebellion in the spectacular fashion which they had hoped.

The first fatalities on both sides occurred in the vicinity of Dublin Castle, the symbolic home of British rule in the city. Unbeknownst to the Citizen Army, the Castle was poorly defended on Easter Monday, yet they still failed to breach its main gates. Constable James O'Brien of the Dublin Metropolitan Police was shot dead at the gates.

Having failed to penetrate the Castle beyond its guardroom, the Citizen Army occupied the neighbouring City Hall, and it was there that Seán Connolly became the first rebel casualty of the fighting. Connolly, a civil servant and a talented actor in the Abbey Theatre, worked in the motor tax department of Dublin Corporation, housed in City Hall. Connolly was joined in City Hall by a number of his siblings, all committed Citizen Army members, while his brother Joseph fought at the College of Surgeons, having walked out of Tara Street fire station to partake in the Rising.

The failure of the rebels to seize the Castle was disastrous, and as Fearghal McGarry has noted, "not only would its seizure have represented a tremendous propaganda coup, it would have netted leading members of the Irish administration and provided the rebels with a strategically important stronghold."

Outside of Dublin, news that events had gone ahead forced men into action. Volunteers in Maynooth marched into the city. In their midst was Thomas Byrne, who had earlier fought in the Boer War. He recalled that the men slept in Glasnevin Cemetery, before making their way onto the city. He remembered telling the men that "the grave-diggers will be here early in the morning and you must all scatter".

Patrick Colgan, who had also spent the night in the cemetery, remembered that when the men finally got to the GPO and met James Connolly there, "we must have appeared as a motley group of warriors to him, yet the welcoming smile which he gave us made us feel very full of ourselves."



“Outside of Dublin, news that events had gone ahead forced men into action. Volunteers in Maynooth marched into the city. ‘We must have appeared as a motley group of warriors to him (Connolly)’ recalled one



Above: British troops under fire in Talbot Street during the 1916 rebellion.

GETTY IMAGES

Below: Author and historian Donal Fallon.



For many civilians on the streets, the first indication that a rebellion was underway was the sight of the rebel Proclamation. Read by Pearse at the General Post Office, it was distributed by young Volunteers, including Seán T O'Kelly. O'Kelly had not mobilised at Liberty Hall, but arrived on Sackville Street as the occupation of the GPO was beginning. He watched Volunteers smash out the glass of the windows of the building, and remembered "the strange impression this smashing of the windows left on me. It was one of the first things that made one realise."

A copy of the Proclamation was placed at the base of the Nelson Pillar, and the young medical student Ernie O'Malley

The Irish Independent

THE day-to-day operation of a newsroom is underpinned by the diary, and its list of 'markings', the known events for which a reporter and/or a photographer is assigned.

So it was in the *Irish Independent* in 1916, when the news diary for April 24, Easter Monday, was drawn up.

One reporter was marked for the Viceregal visit to Belfast, but simmering national unrest was obvious. A reporter called Linnane was required to check out 'Brittas and dynamite' and 'volunteers and Kerry incident'. Two others were also marked for 'volunteers', one of them to take in 'strikes' as well.

Most were not to finish their shift without a theatre assignment, at venues including the Abbey, Queen's, Tivoli, Royal and the Empire (today's Olympia).

Some of those theatres have long gone but, 100 years on, the diary has a certain

would recall that "some looked at it with serious faces, others laughed and sniggered." When a party of Lancers arrived onto Sackville Street in the very early stages of the rebellion to investigate events, a volley of shots rang out from the GPO as they approached the Pillar, with devastating consequences.

From the beginning, it was clear the civilian population were going to cause problems for the Volunteers. Curious, they milled around rebel positions, and in some cases were openly hostile. A member of the Jacob's garrison remembered that, "the women around the Coombe were in a terrible state; they were like French revolutionaries and were throwing their arms round the police".



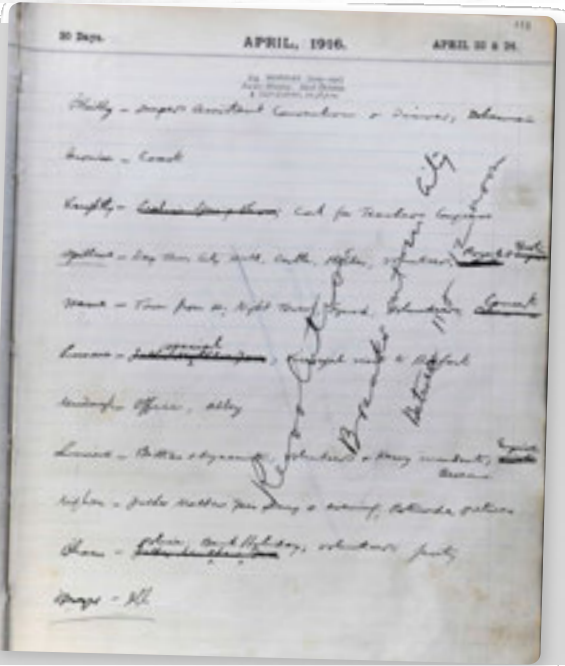
roster, 24/04/1916

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

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 wingèd 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.*

*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.*

*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