

Irish  
Writers  
Centre

Áras  
Scribhneoirí  
na hÉireann

25 YEARS 1991-2016

# A POET'S RISING

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25 YEARS 1991-2016



A Poet's Rising is an ART:2016 Open Call National Project. ART:2016 is the Arts Council's programme as part of Ireland 2016.

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## A POET'S RISING

In 2015 the Irish Writers Centre answered the Arts Council's Open Call for 2016 and A Poet's Rising was born. Our idea was this: to commission six of Ireland's most eminent poets to respond through poetry focusing on a key historical figure and a particular location associated with the Rising. The poets would then be filmed in each discreet location and made permanent by way of an app, freely available for download.

The resulting poems are beautiful, important works that deserve to be at the forefront of the wealth of artistic responses generated during this significant year in Ireland's history. We are particularly proud to be producing this exceptional oeuvre in the year of our own 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the opening of the Irish Writers Centre.

- James Connolly at Liberty Hall poem by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin
- Pádraig Pearse in the GPO poem by Paul Muldoon
- Kathleen Lynn in City Hall poem by Jessica Traynor
- The Ó Rathaille at O'Rahilly Parade poem by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill
- Elizabeth O'Farrell in Moore Lane poem by Theo Dorgan
- The Fallen at the Garden of Remembrance poem by Thomas McCarthy

We wish to thank Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Paul Muldoon, Jessica Traynor, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Theo Dorgan and Thomas McCarthy for agreeing to take part and for their resonant contributions, and to Conor Kostick for writing the historical context links between each poem featured on the app. A special thanks goes to Colm Mac Con Iomaire, who has composed a beautiful and emotive score, entitled 'Solasta', featured throughout the app. Finally, thanks to the Arts Council for recognising the potency of a poetic reflection as part of the 1916 centenary commemorations, and for their continuing support and encouragement of the work we do here at 19 Parnell Square.

A Poet's Rising app will be available following the broadcast of the poems which will take place on the actual anniversary of the Rising, 22–29 April 2016. The poems will also be printed in the *Irish Times* during this period.

# A POET'S RISING

MUSICAL SCORE  
Colm Mac Con Iomaire





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## Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

### FOR JAMES CONNOLLY

i

When I think of all the false beginnings ...  
The man was a pair of hands,  
the woman another pair, to be had more cheaply,  
the wind blew, the children were thirsty –

when he passed by the factory door he saw them,  
they were moving and then waiting, as many  
as the souls that crowded by Dante's boat

that never settled in the water –  
what weight to ballast that ferry?  
They are there now, as many

as the souls blown by the winds of their desire,  
the airs of love, not one of them weighing  
one ounce against the tornado

that lifts the lids of houses, that spies  
where they crouch together inside  
until the wind sucks them out.

It is only the wind, but what braced muscle, what earthed foot  
can stand against it, what voice so loud  
as to be heard shouting *Enough?*

ii

He had driven the horse in the rubbish cart, he knew  
the strength in the neck under the swishing mane,  
he knew how to tell her to turn, to back or stand

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He knew where the wind hailed from, he studied  
its language, it blew in spite of him.

He got tired waiting for the wind to change,

as we are exhausted waiting for that change,  
for the voices to shout *Enough*, for the hands  
that can swing the big lever and send the engine rolling

away to the place we saw through the gap in the bone  
where there was a painted room, music and the young people  
dancing on the shore, and the Old Man of the Sea

had been sunk in the wide calm sea.

iii

The sea moves under the wind and shows nothing  
– not where to begin. But look for the moment  
just before the wave of change crashes and

goes into reverse. Remember the daft beginnings  
of a fatal century and their sad endings, but let's not  
hold back our hand from the lever. Remember James Connolly,

who put his hand to the work, who saw suddenly  
how his life would end, and was content because  
men and women would succeed him, and his testament

was there, he trusted them. It was not a bargain:  
in 1916 the printer locked the forme,  
he set it in print, the scribes can't alter an iota

– then the reader comes, and it flowers again, like a painted room.





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## Paul Muldoon

### PATRICK PEARSE: A MANIFESTO

It's good to see a number of St Enda's boys  
willing to volunteer,  
displaying something like defiance  
when we've too often been content to deploy  
ourselves in Turkey, to philander  
as sappers and sepoy

on the battlefields of France.  
His ankle shattered, Connolly  
has commandeered  
two girls from Cumann na mBan to dance  
attendance on him. No less ungainly,  
I look askance

at a young man whose mouth is smeared  
with fresh strawberries.  
His lifeblood itself sapped  
while British soldiers jeered.  
Another's arm is as obstreperous,  
having just veered

off the stretcher to which he's strapped  
as if to mock the verities.  
One by one they've heard their names  
called and snapped  
to attention, Ferdia after Ferdia  
falling rapt

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before Cuchulainn at a ford. The frame  
of a butcher's bicycle  
is listing so  
badly one of its legs is surely as game  
as Connolly's. It's all but Paschal,  
this orange-black flame

that hastens still through the GPO.  
Even if the British artillery  
have been inclined to greet  
my earlier manifestos  
with a salvo of their own, The O'Rahilly  
is determined to show

that if we don't share the sweet  
taste of victory,  
at least for now we may find joy  
in our retreat  
to the Williams and Woods jam factory  
in Parnell Street.





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## Jessica Traynor

### A DEMONSTRATION

Letter by this morning's post to say I may go home for Xmas if  
I won't have a demonstration (do they picture bands?)

– Dr Kathleen Lynn

What might drive me, a doctor,  
to jump out of reason and into the fire  
of rebellion? Haunted by skulls  
that boast through the thin skin of children  
who ghost the alleyways, dying  
young in silent demonstration,

I raise my own demonstration  
against my limits as woman and doctor.  
I remember those I've watched dying  
of gulping coughs, praise the mercy of gunfire  
that scythes through women and children.  
I number those dead, count their skulls.

Outside city hall, a policeman's skull,  
shattered by a bullet. This is less a demonstration,  
more a bewilderment of poets and children,  
watched over by one errant doctor.  
My convictions temper in the fire  
and quicklime of what follows, the dying

man brought out and shot at dawn, the everdying  
Cuchulainn with his necklace of skulls –  
all that spitting, revolutionary fire.  
And my part in that demonstration  
won't be forgotten, but as a woman doctor  
put down to hysteria, or a lack of children –



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for what are women really but children  
themselves, living and dying  
without reason? They say a real doctor  
might cure me, could measure my skull  
and tell its emptiness, demonstrate  
my zeal was nothing but a mindless fire.

A rebel dying stokes the nation's fire,  
but starving children? Ask this doctor  
to number our gains in skulls. Expect a demonstration.





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## Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill

### ÍOTA AN BHÁIS

Can amach ainm an Raithilligh.  
B'fhíor gach ní adúirt Yeats;  
Munar thaoiseach é ó thús ó dhúchas,  
Do bhaist sé é féin le fuil.

Ba gheall é leis an Samhildánach  
Ag teacht go doras an dúna.  
An raibh bua ar bith de bhuanna an domhain  
Nach raibh aige in aonacht?

Má bhí ceol uathu, ba cheoltóir é  
Do sheinn an pianó is do chanadh.  
Má ba ealaíon, ba ealaíontóir,  
Do línigh sé armas is craobha ginealaigh.

Bhí sé ina fheidhmeannach, ina iriseoir.  
Bhí Fraincís ar a thoil aige.  
Do thiomnaigh sé a bhuanna go léir  
Do Cháit Ní Dhuibhir, don chúis náisiúnta.

Chaith sé deireadh seachtaine iomlán na Cásca  
Ag taisteal bóithre na Mumhan  
Ag cur ordú cealaithe Mhic Néill i bhfeidhm  
Ó Chiarraí go Tiobraid Árann

Mar sin féin, nuair a tháinig an Luan  
Is gur thuig sé go raibh an cath coiteann,  
Do thiomáin sé go hArdOifig an Phoist.  
Ina ghluaisteán De Dion-Bouton.

Má fhiafraíonn éinne cad í an chúis  
Leis an athrú, tá's againn a chuid focal;  
'Nó gur chabhraíos chun an clog a thochras  
Tá sé chomh maith agam é a chlos ag bualadh'.

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Ach má tá rud ar bith go bhfuil a chlú  
Is a cháil ag brath air, tá sé mar thoradh  
Ar an bhfogha a tugadh síos Sráid Uí Mhórdha  
Is é féin i gceannas an ruathair.

Bhí daoine níos ciallmhaire ná é,  
A thuig gur ruathar é in aisce,  
Go raibh meaisínghunna ag arm Shasana  
A dhéanfadh ciota fogha dos na fearaibh.

Ach do sheas sé sa bhearna baoil.  
Ni hamháin gur sheas ach do shiúil ann.  
Thuig gur gníomh buile ab ea an t-Éirí Amach  
Ach má b'ea, ba bhuile ghlórmhar.

An lá a chuas ar thuras siúlóide  
Ag leanúint lorg an Rathailigh  
Bhí léirsiú ar siúl ar fuaid an bhaill  
Agus agóid i Sráid an Mhórdhaigh.

Is é a dúirt muintir na sráide  
Is iad ag caint go líofa ón ardán  
Gur deineadh faillí ar an áit d'aonghnó  
Is gurb é an Stát a bhí ciontach san éagóir.

'Céad biain ó shoin, le linn an Éirí Amach  
Do throideamair in aghaidh na Sasanach.  
Anois táimid i gcoinne ár muintire féin.'  
An náire dhamanta, an foróin.

Mar do chuimhníos láithreach ar an bhfear  
A luafar go deo mar ghaiscíoch.  
A ruathar mire fan na sráide céanna  
Is claíomh ina láimh aige á bheartú.

Nuair a thángas go dtí an leac comórtha  
Mar a bhfuil fáil ar a scríbhinn dheireanach,  
Ní fhéadfainn na focail a dhéanamh amach  
Tré bheith geamhchaoch ó ghol agus le déistin.

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Ag cuimhneamh ar an bhfear a scrígh  
Ag fáil bháis go mall is go hanacrach.  
Naoi nuair an chloig déag ag céiliúr  
Gan gearán ná éagoin, is fós gan cabhair.

Is sa deireadh nuair a rug fóta an bháis  
Ar a scórnach is gur lorg sé uisce  
Níor scaoileadar chuige oiread is deor  
Le teann díoltais agus mioscaise.

Mar sin can amach ainm an Rathailigh  
Can amach go deo a ghlóir.  
An taon duine de cheannairí na Cásca  
A cailleadh ar pháirc an Áir.





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## Theo Dorgan

### WE CARRIED IT TO HERE AS BEST WE COULD

‘Miss, did you hear that, Miss, what Commandant Connolly said?’  
A boy, oblivious to the leg wound I am binding.  
‘When we were coming down Abbey Street only yesterday,  
William O’Brien said, where are we going Jim and, and  
the Commandant’s answer, we are going to be slaughtered.  
What do you think, Miss, is that the right of it, would you say?’  
His eyes are away, caught by the crash of rifles, of glass  
sparkling inward from the explosion — he would not hear me  
if I answered, having just discovered that all of this  
is actually happening, and to him, here and now.

The women bring tea in a bucket, brisk and efficient,  
smokebothered, filthy and cheerful. Dead men piled to the side,  
we try not to look at them, or to breathe when we go near;  
the wounded we draw deeper inside, we do what we can  
to ease their pain. Beside me, an old volunteer reloads  
— perhaps with bullets I smuggled in. He stands, takes aim, fires —  
a figure drops outside Clerys, spasms and flattens out.  
The flames are struggling to take hold upstairs. The noise, the roar,  
I had not expected the noise, the stink, the filth of it —  
blood, cordite, the toilets blocked, black plaster dust everywhere.

Connolly beckoning to Pearse, their bare heads together.  
A smouldering beam thuds down behind them, flames lick the air.  
Break out. Through Moore Street. Send out the women under a flag.  
Crowbar and pickaxe work, save what we can... We won’t save you,  
I think. Keep my counsel. The long retreat inside ourselves  
has begun. Thunder outside as another building falls,  
the guns walking their hell steadily towards us. Fire is their  
answer to our stubborn persistence; they could starve us out  
if they wished, but some demon drives them, they want we should burn  
for the sin of pride, rebels against their divine order.

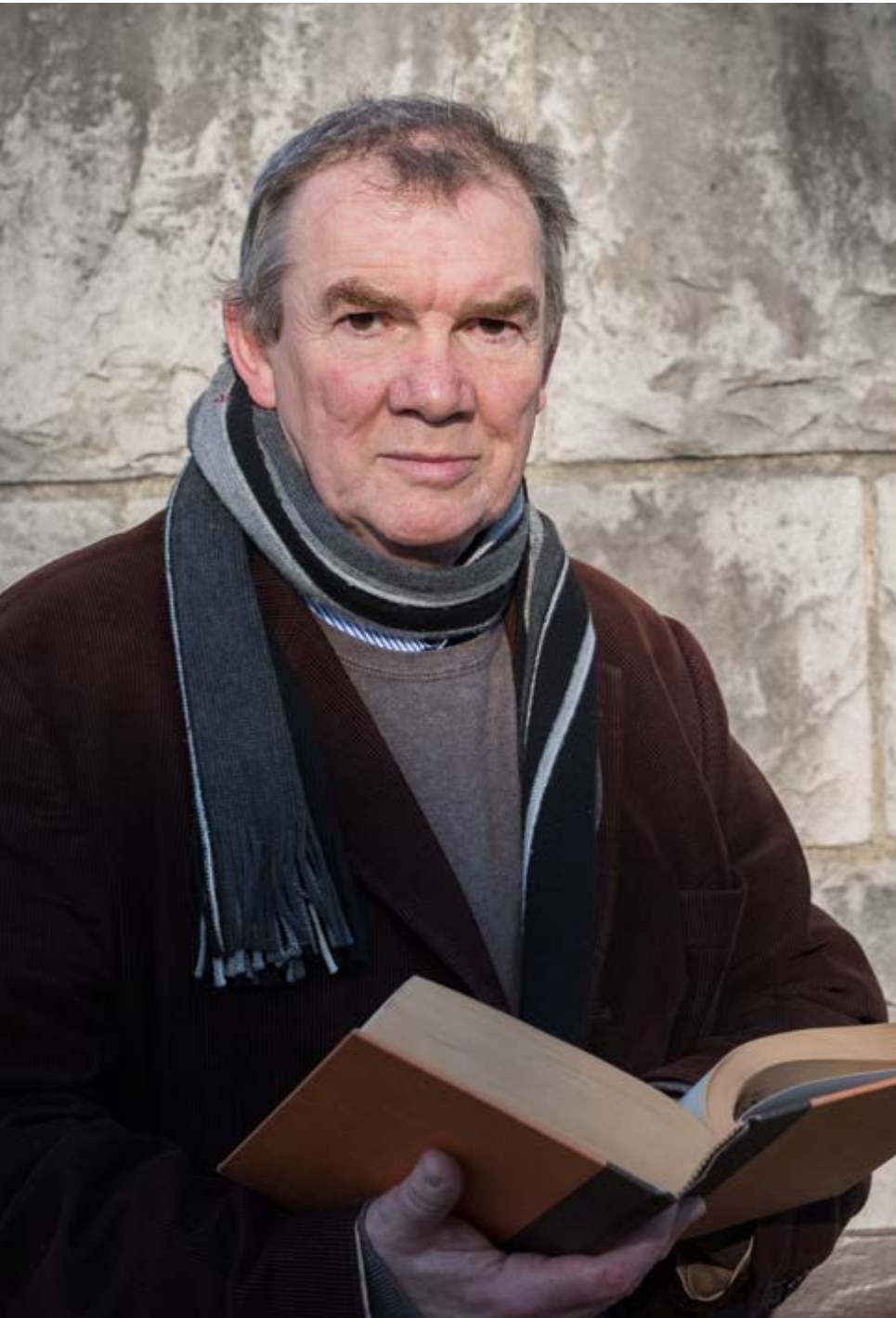
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'...to prevent further slaughter...' The words are agreed, scrawled out by lamplight. This morning we watched a father and his child, waving a soiled bedsheet, gunned down as they ran from shelter. 'They will not fire on a woman' — I mean to remember the man who said that, one of the few poor innocents left. Gathered all that I had been until now, my time on earth, stood, smoothed my skirts, pinned up my hair. Pearse, by the stretcher, sought my eyes: 'Now, Liz, be of good heart. This is not defeat, we've made a good beginning now, we've carried it to here.' I bowed my head, I would not weep. The walls, the roof, crashed in.

Dead bodies in doorways, on the streets, this I remember, the stench, quick swarming flies... and not just soldiers — volunteers, yes, but ordinary men and women, and children too, my god, the children! I was too horrified to feel fear but I walked on, a cold prickling like electricity on my skin, walked under the guns, seeing madness in some eyes. I felt strange to myself, pushed out onto a nightmare stage, but rage steadied me when some aide threatened to shoot me. His superior grim, unbending, severe in his terms. I drew on my own cold reserves, I made him give his word.

I caught the flash of sunlight on lens, saw the camera raised — and time slowed. I made quick calculation: the General facing Pearse crisp and commanding, our own man upright but wearied by cares, flanked by a nurse, saw what would come of this, to what purpose it could be put... I stepped to one side, stood out of the record —for the dignity of our cause, yes, and for a second reason, one that came suddenly clear: I knew we would fight on, would rise from this burning carnage, I saw no reason the enemy should have my image: I held myself out of their history, to make my own.





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## Thomas McCarthy

### GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE

These stones report for duty in story after story,  
The garden a cistern of unsweetened water;  
Time's patina burnished by an effort to remember,  
Such effort renewed at each national anniversary  
Where seagulls glide over the field of slaughter  
To uncover another trail of poems. Time is a hoarder  
That gathers us together behind the box hedge  
To remember glory, to define a lost cause  
Or a cause renewed at the hour of remembrance.  
We remember our prayers and the seagull's rage,  
So careful now – now so conscious of the past –  
That we may not create more victims. What lasts  
In a Republic is the living, and so in this age  
I remember the living on this cold, grassy ledge.

Our remembrance is a form of theatre, as each  
Remembrance is, in every nation. An eternal flame  
Burns elsewhere and cenotaphs hold heroic names;  
Remnants of us pepper each Normandy beach  
And Poppies grow up out of our bones. But here  
I think of the one nation the poets imagined  
And think again of the two states we're in,  
A state of mystical borders and broken spears  
Left by a silent procession of things left unsaid.  
It's not that our cowardice has deepened; or not  
Cowardice, not that, but an indifference yet  
Unchallenged, an indifference to the innocent dead  
That creeps along the wall of memory, as moss  
Or ivy muffle traffic noise or mask all heroic loss.

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A shuffle of wet tiles, history's lovely aquamarine –  
All the weapons lie abandoned after battle  
Like the leaves of Sessile Oak, Dair Ghaelach,  
Which scatter in a sudden burst of wind. We seem  
Drawn to history, fatally, the way troubled  
Families want to pace across the same old ground  
In the hope of comfort from what comes round.  
I find an empty bench where history doubled  
Back and came to life in a fantasia of warm metal;  
Oisín Kelly's mythic swan children now seem  
Like children abandoned in refugeecamp or great famine,  
Arms hanging loosely in great bronze petals –  
After all the Troubles, politics wants to make peace  
With art. Our memory is immovable in a stiff breeze.

James Connolly's beautiful life, the high aesthetic  
Of Pearse, the gift of three buttons from Con Colbert's  
Volunteer uniform, Thomas MacDonagh's verse –  
Listen, in this remembering place I pick  
Strange names to add to the forgotten dead:  
Willie Redmond explaining how at the Ulster line  
In front of Ploegstreet the Southerners arrived  
And words of love between two Irelands were said  
Before slaughter swallowed the young. And Harold  
Mooney of the RAMC, his shattered left thigh,  
Should remind us of how the unsung are left to die  
In a free state of dying slowly. All their untold  
Stories haunt me still. Permit me to remember the dead  
On the wrong side of revolution, the part they played.

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Mothers from another continent come here to rest.  
Memory is a kind of cradle. Memory is a giant beech  
In a sunlit meadow. I watch a new migrant child reach  
Into this restored reflectingpool, his outline traced  
In a cruciform pool of disturbed shadows. What can he know,  
This child of worldly exile, of the purpose  
Of our centenary city park? How can you or I propose  
A better Ireland, a safer shelter in the quiet meadow?  
Here in this Irish world, in the last place where God  
Found us useful, we have a duty to make a firm nest –  
Not an illadvised pageant or a national barricade.  
When the midday sun breaks through, my eyes rest  
On harp and acorn, on trumpet and bronze hands,  
On things a family without our history understands.





Irish Writers Centre Staff, Board and Patron. From back left Paul Moore, Christopher Pressler, Kevin Barry, Hilary Fennell, Arnold Fanning, Amy Herron, Helen Mulvany, Rossa Ó Snodaigh, Mary O'Donnell, Martina Devlin, Laurence O'Bryan. Front row from left Bernie Greenan, Liz McManus (Chair), President Michael D Higgins (Patron), Valerie Bistany (Director), Pádraig Burke.

The Irish Writers Centre is the national resource centre for Irish literature and 2016 marks the Centre's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. It supports and promotes writers at all stages of their development, and also welcomes all those interested in literature. The Centre runs a diverse programme of writing courses and workshops led by established writers across a range of forms and genres, including screenwriting, memoir, poetry, playwriting, shortstories and the novel. In addition, the Centre offers a variety of seminars, lectures, events and readings all related to the art of writing and has welcomed many award winning writers through its doors, including Nobel, Costa, Man Booker & IMPAC winners.



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