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Chapter 1

Introduction

"A story retold is always a different story: hindsight throws different shadows, creates a play of light and shade that didn't exist the first time."

Henrietta McKervey, *What Becomes of Us* 132

Research Rationale

Ireland is a country in which the past looms large. One of the most formative events for the Republic of Ireland[1] was the Easter Rising of 1916 (Daly and O'Callaghan 3; see Chapter 4). The small-scale rebellion was planned and carried out by a minority of Irish republican nationalists who wanted to establish an independent Irish republic and were willing to take up arms for their independence from English rule. The Rising was a military failure, the British troops easily regained control, yet the hold this moment has over Irish culture is almost impossible to overstate:

> The Rising has been embraced, repudiated, analysed, retold, contested, investigated, dismissed and lauded. There is endless fascination with its history, its ephemera, its traces and residues. But more importantly, and often regardless of its history in the narrow sense of what occurred, 1916 has been a ground of contestation and a battle site for representation. (Daly and O'Callaghan 3)

The Rising has been commemorated and remembered in a wide variety of ways in the past one hundred years and even today is a source of conflicting emotions and memories. The years between 2012 and 2022, dubbed the Decade of Centenaries, mark the commemoration of various important historical events in Ireland's past (*Decade of Centenaries*). The commemorative actions, which encompassed the centenary commemoration of the Rising, aimed to provide a more complex, nuanced

[1] Throughout this work, Ireland is taken to be synonymous with the Republic of Ireland and "Irish" is used to refer to characteristic of the South of Ireland. This is not to negate the relevance of the Rising on Northern Ireland, but including Northern Irish culture and politics would go beyond the scope of this paper.

version of the past, representing previously marginalised groups in Irish culture (*Clár Comórtha Céad Bliain* 62).

One such group is Irish women; Ireland's women's stories have long been excluded from cultural memory by the specific (post-)colonial and nationalist discourses that long dominated Irish society and politics. It is only in the last few decades that Irish historians and cultural theorists have begun to reclaim historical women's experiences and return them to the forefront of Irish culture (Murphy, "Women's History" 21). As academic research has begun restoring women to the narrative of Ireland, so has literature, especially women's literature (see Moloney; St. Peter). It is to Irish women's reclamatory literature that my research turns. Historical novels, especially those written by marginalised groups, have an important role to play in influencing contemporary culture (see Chapter 3; Heilmann and Llewellyn 142; see Wallace). My central aim is to examine the ways in which Irish women have represented the Rising in historical novels in the last ten years.

Research Questions

My research is divided into two interconnected questions, namely how contemporary Irish women's historical novels contribute to the larger cultural project of re-membering women's experiences of the Rising and in which specific ways these novels re-tell the stories of women surrounding that moment. I will answer these questions by examining work done in cultural memory studies, and the influence of the historical novel on cultural change, placing this in the Irish context and then illustrating these relationships in four contemporary Irish historical novels. The four novels I will be analysing are *Rebel Sisters* by Marita Conlon-McKenna (2015), *Fallen* by Lia Mills (2014), *The Rising of Bella Casey* by Mary Morrissy (2013) and *What Becomes of Us* by Henrietta McKervey (2015). All four novels are set in Dublin and feature female protagonists, whom they return to the forefront of the narrative. The first three novels are set around 1916 and include the events of the Rising in some form in the main narrative. The final novel is set primarily in 1966, during the fifty-year commemoration of the Rising.

In my research, I will discuss how fictional representations, from the perspective of women authors and female characters, can influence how and what contemporary

Irish culture remembers about its past. I will argue that these novels are a valuable contribution to the work done by historians and cultural theorists and that they widen the scope of Irish identities possible in contemporary Ireland (see Pine).

Outline

In Chapter 2, I will provide a review of the literature written to date on Irish women's historical fiction set in the early twentieth century. This will serve to highlight the strands of criticism most salient in the study of novels such as those I will be analysing. I will be paying particular attention to those elements which relate to gender and the female perspective of history, as these will be most vital to my own research.

Chapter 3 will be concerned with providing the theoretical background of my research and with outlining my methodology. Drawing on the concept of cultural memory, that is, the shared memories of a community (see Erll, "Introduction"), I will examine the relationship between literature and memory. Based on research done by Ann Rigney, Birgit Neumann, Renate Lachmann and others, I will outline the important functions historical fiction in particular can have on a culture's sense of self, especially when marginalised groups are concerned. Moreover, the specific characteristics of women's historical novels, according to Ansgar Nünning and Diana Wallace, will be described, in order to outline the approach I will take in my analysis. In addition, I will draw on work done in feminist (auto-)biography studies which can be applied to the fictional accounts I will be examining.

The focus of Chapter 4 is the Easter Rising itself. Beginning with a brief description of the events, I will then outline the legacy of the Rising in the Irish state. This chapter will illustrate the traditional ways in which the Rising has been used to create a sense of Irishness, but also the new tendency in contemporary Ireland to view the country's history in a more nuanced way. I will introduce the concept of "ethical memory" (Pine 14) which will play a significant role in my analysis. The chapter will conclude with an examination of the way women have been excluded from the narrative of the Rising after the fact, and how they have been reintroduced in recent scholarly work. Additionally, an outline of the development of women's rights in Ireland since the rebellion will be given, in order to provide the context for the writing of the novels I will analyse.

Chapters 5 through 8 will each be dedicated to one of the novels. I will be examining the ways in which each of the narratives re-tells women's stories of the Rising, focusing on the portrayal of women, the protagonists' agency, the relationships between characters, and women's issues. Furthermore, I will elucidate how they deal with issues of history, memory, and identity, particularly in relation to gender and nation. These thematic focuses will be supported by careful attention to the stylistic and structural features used and the way these relate to the subgenre of women's historical novels. In each chapter, explicit links between the books and the tendencies of contemporary Irish commemoration and female/feminist community and identity will be made.

I will begin with *Rebel Sisters*, by Marita Conlon-McKenna, as it provides the most detailed and conventional account of the Rising. It follows the life of the Gifford sisters, real historical figures, whose lives were intertwined with the lives of some of the Rising leaders. Moving on from this work of biographical fiction, I shall continue in Chapter 6 with the novel *Fallen*, by Lia Mills. *Fallen* provides an account of a fictional young woman during the rebellion and the year preceding it. Unlike the protagonists of *Rebel Sisters*, the main character in this novel is not an active participant in the Rising; her loyalty to her brother, who died in World War One, complicates her perspective on the events. The main character in the third novel, *The Rising of Bella Casey* by Mary Morrissy, has a less ambiguous and even more disparaging view of Irish nationalist politics. Chapter 7 will be spent analysing the ways in which this novel restores the sister of famous Irish playwright Seán O'Casey to Irish memory by reimagining her life. In Chapter 8, the final analytic chapter, I will be analysing *What Becomes of Us,* a novel set in the 1960s, at the midway point between the Rising and contemporary Ireland. The novel includes a subplot set in the early twentieth century, and the layering of these timelines will present a unique perspective on the issues of memory and forgetting in the Irish context. As the fiftieth commemoration features centrally, this novel offers many fruitful moments of critical reflection on how the past is represented, which make it invaluable for my analysis.

The final chapter of my thesis will bring together the various points made in the analytic chapters and will explicitly link my analyses of the four novels to contemporary Irish remembrance culture. Chapter 9 should serve as both a summary

of my findings and as an appeal for continued work in literature, culture, and academia focused on marginalised identities in the Irish context.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Overview

This literature review will provide an overview of the research done to date on Irish women's historical novels concerned with the period of Irish history between 1916 and 1923. This serves to contextualise my own work in light of previous research and contemporary academic discourse.

There has been a surprising scarcity of work done on the Irish historical novel in general and on women's contribution to the genre in particular. This is notable because, as James Cahalan, the only author to write a monograph on Irish historical novels, puts it: "if every Irish novel with history in it were to be included, just about every Irish novel ever written would have to be examined" (xiii). History, memory, and the past play a major role in Irish literature and contemporary analyses of Irish literature are likely to include these themes even when their explicit focus is not on these areas (see Ingman, *Irish Women*). Conversely, many of the novels mentioned below have been analysed without being regarded as historical novels (see Cahalan 167). Secondary works focused on Irish women's novels set outside of the rebellion or set in another country were not included in this review.

In the following, I will discuss the premises and major strands of inquiry discernible in research on Irish women's historical fiction under separate headings. I will begin with the definition of the historical novel and how the issue of genre is dealt with in work on Irish historical fiction. Then I shall describe the ways in which the authors of Irish women's historical fiction have been of interest to scholars of the field. In the third section, I will examine how critics have engaged with the themes of sex and sexuality in Irish women's historical fiction. The largest chapter will be concerned with the central theme of history and the female perspective. Furthermore, I will give an overview of work done on temporal structures, narrative perspective, and irony in Irish women's historical fiction.

Definition of Historical Novels

One area of much discussion in this field is the definition of historical novels themselves. Cahalan follows a traditional definition based on Scottian conventions, as set prior to the author's lifetime and including but not focused on an historical figure (xiv). His research demonstrates how Irish authors engaged with and adapted these conventions (xiii-xiv). However, his definition has been criticised as exclusionary and reductionist (Watson 64); he includes only two women writers in his study.

Leah Watson, whose dissertation is focused explicitly on Irish women's historical novels, chose the following selection criterion for her novels: they needed to be "*about* Irish history, Irish history from a female perspective" (65; emphasis in original). Her definition allows works to be included that were written by authors who had experienced the period in question, as well as works that are set in multiple periods, including the present (64). It should be noted that her approach opens the field of historical fiction in a manner that leads to the inclusion of many novels that are elsewhere called trauma novels (see Garratt). The definition I will be following for my subsequent work is a synthesis of Watson and Cahalan's positions. I follow Cahalan's definition as far as none of the authors in this research project were alive during the historical period they wrote about. However, the spirit of my approach is similar to Watson's, since the novels I will examine focus on history from a decidedly female perspective, as will be demonstrated in later chapters.

Considering the Authors

For many scholars, ideological positions and biographical features of women who write Irish historical fiction are of great concern. The labels placed upon writers can influence how one reads their writing, and therefore one must be careful with simplifying labels such as "Irish," "woman," "feminist," or "nationalist" (see Alexander; Watson; Moloney). While it can be valuable to know where the authors position themselves, researchers such as Watson argue that authorial intent should not limit the possible readings of a text (93). Watson and Christine St. Peter are both careful to give balanced readings of Irish women's historical fiction, highlighting its subversive potential while noting the ideological standpoints distinguishable in the

texts (St. Peter 75-77). Locating Irish women's historical novels within the context of their writing is important, as these novels often engage with contemporary ideas of violence, politics, historiography, and gender within a historical setting (see Watson; Garratt; Bebiano).

Another factor that is mentioned frequently in the research is the position of Irish women authors as outsiders: when an author writes from an outsider's perspective, there is "an element of double vision that adds complexity" (Alexander 106). A number of female Irish authors, such as Iris Murdoch (Cahalan 165), Julia O'Faolain (St. Peter 84) or Lia Mills ("About"), spent time in the United States or in England, often during their formative years. The "insider-outsider" perspective that is seen to result from this biographical fact recurs in the analysis of their work, especially when researchers turn to the question of nationhood (St. Peter 84).

I will take the authors' ideological positions and personal backgrounds into consideration when I engage in my research, as this can add a valuable facet to my analysis. However, I will be allotting most space to the analysis of the context of publication of the novels I have chosen and the ways in which the texts examine contemporary positions on subjects such as violence, gender, and nation-building. Like Watson, I will argue that the works I have chosen to analyse share "similarities, harmonies, and congruences [sic] in the fictions that are, perhaps, a manifestation of shared gender" (58), dissimilar as they may be otherwise.

Sex and Sexuality

Sex and sexuality are themes in Irish women's historical fiction which are highlighted by scholars in various ways. For Cahalan, the prevalence of sexual themes in Murdoch's *The Red and The Green*, a prominent forerunner of contemporary novels about women and the Easter Rising, is linked to the author's position as a female and "half-foreign" author (167) but is not explained any further (Watson 92). Watson regards sex and sexuality in broader terms, linking them to general female oppression (156), martial themes (120-121), religion (166), and empowerment (166-167). Flora Alexander interprets *The Red and the Green* as critical of the devaluation of Ireland and women, and claims that Murdoch uses the novel to portray issues of gender and nationality (104). Laura Vandale, in her analysis of Jennifer Johnston's

No Country for Young Men, an acclaimed novel concerned with the revolutionary period in Ireland, asserts that it is impossible to separate politics, sex, and war in the novel (19). All three elements are found throughout the novels I have chosen to analyse, and each will be dealt with in my interpretation.

History and the Female Perspective

A number of scholars have analysed the way both early and contemporary Irish women's historical fiction engages critically with history, historiography, and feminist re-visionary ambitions[2]. In the following paragraphs, I will examine the critical strands concerned with the use of historical facts, the dichotomy between public and private, and the goals of Irish women's historical fiction.

One concern in the study of historical fiction is its use of historical fact. Both Cahalan and Watson comment on false historical facts in early women's novels about the rebellion. For Cahalan, historical research and accuracy is still of great importance (168-169), whereas for Watson historical inaccuracies are noteworthy as an indication of the authors' views (132). More recent scholars, such as Marisol Morales-Ladrón, have offered readings that focus on the increasingly blurred boundaries between fact and fiction in contemporary and postmodern historical novels ("How Women" 32). In my research, I will examine to what extent the authors are concerned with historical facts and accuracy in their novels and how their usage of historical details affects possible interpretations of the texts.

Cahalan and Watson disagree on the significance of the dichotomy between public and private life in Irish women's historical fiction. Cahalan writes that while being a worthwhile addition, the female perspective on history, centred in the home, lacks reach (195). However, novels that alternate between love plots and political plots, thereby combining the public and private, lack cohesion for Cahalan (194). Watson is critical of Cahalan's use of the phrase "love story" (194) and the implied idea that private stories are not part of "real" history (Watson 144). Watson takes a different approach to this juxtaposition; she argues that this structural feature serves as a valuable critique of traditional views of history by complicating the idea of history

[2] Revision, or re-vision is a term defined by Adrienne Rich as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (Rich 90).

(144). Watson's position indicates how a gendered perspective on history can be present implicitly in a literary text.

Another concern in the critical research in the Irish women's context is what historical fiction's goal is. Such goals identified by critics clearly betray a gendered view of history. Cahalan claims that Irish historical novels serve to portray "the story of the struggle to overcome British domination" (19). For Watson, this is not what Irish *women* writers have been doing (196). Rather, they have centralised the conflict of Irish women with history, literature, and critical discourse (196). Watson traces in Irish women's historical fiction the deconstruction of myths that "throughout history have characterised and constrained women and those that promote the glory of the nationalist cause – often one and the same" (153). She argues that in early novels this deconstruction occurs implicitly and then becomes an explicit concern of later novels (153). For her, Irish women writers are "rewrit[ing] Irish history to expose the realities of female experience" (158).

Regarding the "purpose" of Irish women's historical fiction specifically, there are two main interlinking strands of thought in contemporary criticism. First, Irish women's historical novels can be read as a critique of traditional historiography. Caitriona Moloney asserts that "[n]ew Irish women writers' historical fiction uses literature to demonstrate how *history* omits women" (1; emphasis added). This omission is connected invariably to the specific ideological contexts in which Irish history was written. St. Peter argues that Irish women's historical novels are concerned with precisely this "woman-blindness of the old ideologies" (70), referring here both to the colonist and nationalist legacies. Historical fiction has the ability to demonstrate "the destructive use of certain reconstructions of the past" (Garratt 48), and in the Irish context, there seem to be many layers of old injustices to work through. These injustices are often linked with violence so it is unsurprising that scholars of Irish historical novels such as Robert Garratt and Kathleen Costello-Sullivan concentrate on how Irish historical novels, including those by women writers, engage with trauma and recovery. Garratt maintains that fiction is especially valuable in (re)writing the past when this past includes violence (142). Morales-Ladrón picks up this thread and adds a gendered perspective; she highlights the disruptive potential of novels that focus on female subjectivity in the context of the male-inscribed violence of the Easter Rising ("Feminisation" 41). The critique of historiography and its ideological

underpinnings from a female perspective will be one of the central focuses of my analysis.

The second main strand of contemporary criticism is the ability of Irish women's historical fiction to reclaim women's experiences. Historical fiction has the potential to highlight "the silences, gaps and intersices [sic] of history through which marginal or subaltern subjects were conspicuously ignored" (Morales-Ladrón, "How Women" 27). Fiction has the unique ability to not only highlight but also fill those gaps left by traditional history (Bebiano 256). Reclamatory work in women's historical fiction can focus on great or noteworthy women of the past, though the concepts of greatness and noteworthiness are defined along gendered lines and so remain problematic (Ní Dhúill 202). In reaction to these contested categories, young female protagonists who do not change the course of political history are often at the centre of Irish women's historical novels (Ingman, *Irish Women* 178). Telling the stories of ordinary lives, whether real or fictional is seen as the "unearth[ing] [of] forgotten figures from the past" (Morales-Ladrón, "Feminisation" 49) and is a means of redressing the "woman-blindness" (St. Peter 70) mentioned above. The feminist historical novel which rewrites the stories of ordinary women as tales of heroism is one way in which to restore silent/silenced voices to history (Peach 72). Adriana Bebiano proposes a further way of undermining traditional ideas of greatness. She focuses on Irish women's historical fiction that does not replace one idealised female figure with a redefined yet still idealised female figure but rather reclaims female figures which give "the mad, the bad and the dangerous their place in our common heritage" (258-259). In the context of my work on contemporary women's historical fiction on the Easter Rising, these approaches have led me to examine the wide range of women's experiences with equal consideration and to not limit my research to so-called noteworthy women's stories.

Temporality, Narrative Perspective, and Irony

In the secondary literature, certain key features used to interrogate gender, nationality, and history are pervasive. These include temporal structures, narrative perspective, and the use of irony. Giovanna Tallone comments on the multiple temporal perspectives used to interrogate relationships with time, on the level of plot as well as on a structural level (176-178). Similarly, Garratt's trauma-focused

approach pays close attention to temporal structures in the novels he analyses (44). Like many other critics, Garratt considers narrative perspective as a marker of a text's engagement with history. He examines the exploration of story-telling and meaning-making that becomes possible through a traumatised narrative voice, unlike the coherence provided by third-person omniscient narrators (69). The narrators' perspectives can create ironic tensions within the novels (Watson 84) and can express ideological positions (Watson 125). The significance of temporal structures and narrative perspectives will be treated in more detail in the theory chapter.

Doubling and irony are two strategies that are closely linked to re-vision in feminist terms (Watson 100). They provide a version of history with more "complexity, diversity, and ambiguity" (Watson 112). In addition to explicit ironic contrasting, irony can appear on a structural level and serve as a form of implicit critique (Watson 144-145). Another way in which irony is expressed is through intertextuality. Intertextuality is a way of locating Irish women's writing within the larger frame of Irish literary culture (Cahalan 165-166) though intertextuality can also be read as a powerful tool of engaging with Irish literary tradition (Watson 196). In my analysis, I will investigate the ways in which the female authors of the novels have engaged with other Irish cultural material and texts.

Summary

The female perspective in Irish historical fiction is generally agreed to be part of a critique of traditional history writing and an attempt to reclaim women's experiences from ideologically motivated obscurity. This perspective is represented in each of the critical strands detailed above. They all investigate different facets of the female perspective and will therefore inform my own inquiry into how the four novels I have chosen re-imagine the stories of women during the Easter Rising.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Background

This chapter will provide the theoretical underpinnings of my thesis. The premises I set out to explain here are that memory is a vital part of a community's sense of self, that how we remember the past affects the way we live in the present, and that literature, and in particular historical novels, are a valuable part of a culture's memory of the past. I will outline the ways in which historical novels function within cultural memory and I will give an overview of the features of historical novels that will be relevant for my analyses.

Defining "Cultural Memory"

In order to make the value of historical novels for society explicit, it is vital to first define the concept of "cultural memory," often also referred to as "collective" or "social" memory. I follow Astrid Erll's broad definition of cultural memory as "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts" ("Introduction" 2). While cultural memory studies incorporate numerous strands of research, we shall be most concerned with the relationship between literature and cultural memory. Erll defines two levels on which culture and memory intersect, the individual and the collective:

1) The first level [...] is concerned with biological memory. It draws attention to the fact that no memory is ever purely individual, but always inherently shaped by collective contexts.
2) The second level [...] refers to the symbolic order, the media, institutions, and practices by which social groups construct a shared past [...] Societies do not remember literally; but much of what is done to reconstruct a shared past bears some resemblance to the processes of individual memory, such as the selectivity and perspectivity [sic] inherent in the creation of versions of the past according to present knowledge and needs. ("Introduction" 5)

These two levels are always influencing each other: "Just as socio-cultural contexts shape individual memories, a 'memory' which is represented by media and institutions must be actualised by individuals" (Erll, "Introduction" 5). It is not the aim of this thesis to examine how the novels influence actual individual memories; rather, I wish to show how the novels are both products of individuals within a culture as well

as media that influence culture and the individuals therein.

Defining "The Past"

For the purposes of my research, it is vital to realise that cultural memory does not refer to an uncontested, universally accepted memory of the past. Rather, cultural memory should always be understood as a plural concept that contains various versions of memory, even within a single community. The plurality of cultural or collective memory is related to our understanding of the past. According to Erll,

> the past is not given, but must instead continually be re-constructed and re-presented. Thus, our memories (individual and collective) of past events can vary to a great degree. This holds true not only for *what* is remembered (facts, data), but also for *how* it is remembered, that is, for the quality and meaning the past assumes. ("Introduction" 7)

What we remember and how we remember is defined to a significant degree by remediation, which is the reinterpretation and representation of events over time in various media (Erll, "Literature, Film, and Mediality" 392). My research is concerned with the remediation and revising of the events of 1916 in Irish culture, particularly in historical fiction of the last decade.

The work of scholars over the past decades has strengthened the insight that the past is multifarious and not a singular, monolithic entity (Fortunati and Lamberti 128). There has been vocal critique of traditional historiography for upholding the idea of a unified and knowable past, especially by scholars of women's, gender, and postcolonial studies (Fortunati and Lamberti 129). Both what a society remembers and how it is remembered are linked with power structures within that society, which make memory of the past contentious and problematic (Erll, "Introduction" 7; Hirsch and Smith 6; Ollick 159). In order to differentiate the hegemonic narratives of cultural memory from other forms, critics often speak of "counter-memories," which are held or promoted by marginalised groups (Fortunati and Lamberti 129). Counter-memories often function to uncover the hidden elements of the past, commenting on the ways in which history has been presented, and engaging with the conflicts and discussions of the present (Fortunati and Lamberti 129). In women's history, counter-memory projects have often been subsumed into "herstory". "Herstory" is defined as a version of the past that tries to compensate the undervaluing and

exclusion of women from traditional male-centric *his*tory writing (Humm 94; Looser 1). "Herstory" should best be thought of as "herstories" in order to resist the oversimplification of women's experiences of history (see Looser 205)[3]. In much feminist literature, individual stories are seen as a prime way of revising official history and its generalising tendencies, because they pay attention to the individual experience in its specific context (Hirsch and Smith 7). My primary interest in this thesis is the female counter-memories, or fictional accounts of "herstories", expressed through the individual stories in the novels I have chosen.

Memory and Identity

From as early as the 1880s, scholars have recognised the link between remembering/forgetting and group – or national – identity (Rigney, "Portable Monuments*"* 382). John Gillis describes the reciprocal relationship between memory and identity as follows:

> The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness of time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity (3)

In their interdependence, identity and memory are both changeable, they are "representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena" (Gillis 3). When the identity of a group changes, so do its memories (Gillis 3). As more subgroups claim a right to their identity, and national identities become complicated by globalisation (Gillis 4), we must realise that "identity and memory are political and social constructs [and we] must take responsibility for their uses and abuses" (Gillis 5; see also Weedon and Jordan). In Chapter 4, we will see how Ireland has engaged with the constructed nature of memory and identity regarding the events of 1916, and which "new" Irish female identities are asserting their right to remembrance and to a place within official discourse.

[3] Some critics claim that "herstory" is unduly restrictive and binary (Mack) and more limiting than the term "women's history" (Looser 205); "herstory" has been commodified and critiqued as ignoring early female historians' contributions to history (Looser 1). Others argue that while a laudable approach, it is unetymological (Miller and Swift qtd. in A. Hill 114). While the term "women's history" is not uncontroversial, especially as regards gender history (see Corfield 340; Murphy "Women's History"; Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 96-101), it has proven most suitable to my enquiry and will therefore be used throughout this paper.

Historical Fiction and Cultural Memory

As stated above, individuals do not create memories in a vacuum but the creation of memories is shaped by the contexts in which the individuals live (Erll, “Introduction” 5). Literature is one of the factors that influences individuals’ experiences and memories (Neumann 341). While fiction does not make the same truth claims as historiographic writing, scholars have come to recognise the role of fiction in shaping individual and cultural memory. Birgit Neumann asserts that novels can influence readers’ perceptions of the past “because [novels] select and edit elements of culturally given discourse: They combine the real and the imaginary, the remembered and the forgotten, and, by means of narrative devices, imaginatively explore workings of memory” (Neumann 341). By opening up new perspectives in cultural discourse, novels can affect cultural change (Neumann 335). Another way in which novels can evoke cultural change is by influencing how people tell their own life story (Neumann 341; see Straub). Novels do this by providing us with “conventionalized plot lines, [...] highly suggestive myths, [and other] narrative patterns” (Neumann 341). When the stories that are told by individuals and groups, and the ways in which they are told, change, cultural change becomes possible (Neumann 341).

In addition to literature’s function for the individual, it can also be seen as a “culture’s memory” (Lachmann 301), in which all the knowledge of a culture is contained. This does not mean that literature is a static or unreflective space: “[creative] writing is both an act of memory and a new interpretation, by which every new text is etched into memory space” (Lachmann 301). As a medium of cultural memory, every text is influenced by and (potentially) influences the culture in which it was created. This places fiction in a position to “empower the culturally marginalized or forgotten and thus figure as an imaginative counter-discourse [by] bringing together multiple, even incompatible versions of the past [which] keep alive conflict about what exactly the collective past stands for and how it should be remembered” (Neumann 341).

The genre most obviously engaged in fictional representations of the past is historical fiction. Historical fiction has a number of qualities that enable it to fulfil purposes that cannot be fulfilled by the discipline of history. Historical fiction is a prime location to engage with and criticise historical narratives, as well as foreground the experiences of those relegated to the margins of society and history (de Groot 148), because it has the creative license to mix fact and fiction, to go beyond what is

scientifically verifiable, and "to explore […] alternative possibilities" (Slotkin 231). These opportunities can be playful, as in much of postmodern historical fiction, but for marginalised groups, rewriting history can have a different kind of political significance (Heilmann and Llyewellyn 141-142). By imagining what might have been possible, historical fiction can produce counter-myths (Slotkin 231), which are vital because, according to Richard Slotkin, "nothing can take the place of a myth but another myth, another story with the same historical resonance and moral authority" (230). This means that a group, such as the Irish nation, in the act of redefining itself, needs more than facts to base its collective identity on, it also needs myths, which can be provided by historical fiction. Often historical fiction is the only place for such counter-myths to be developed, especially in the case of trauma, because non-fictional remembrance is too difficult (Rigney, "Dynamics" 348). Historical fiction is particularly fruitful for new interpretations of the past because historical fiction is relatively unregulated, memorable, and portable. (Rigney, "Portable Monuments"). The portability of literary texts refers to the ease with which books are disseminated across a wide readership (Rigney, "Portable Monuments" 383). It additionally refers to the ease with which such texts can be transferred to new situations and reinterpreted in new contexts (Rigney, "Portable Monuments" 383), because literary texts themselves are remembered as cultural artefacts, which can instigate new conversations and developments (Rigney, "Portable Monuments" 383; Rigney, "Dynamics" 350).

Fiction's liberties concerning content and form allow for a large variety of stories to be told (Rigney, "Portable Monuments" 375). Historical novelists are not limited by "principles of truthfulness, verifiability or objectivity" (Novak 85)[4]. Historical novels are not limited to those stories about which there is a surviving record, nor must they adhere to known historical "facts" (Rigney, "Portable Monuments" 379; Ní Dhúill 202). Indeed, what the novelist does goes beyond merely recording (Rigney, "Portable Monuments" 381); the novelist, as an artist, is able to take the content of the historical archive and reframe it in a meaningful way (Assmann 103). Historical novels are frequently deemed more memorable than historiographic writing because the authors can make use of the freedoms and features of fiction. Unlike historiographic writing, historical fiction is free to attribute thoughts to characters

[4] One could argue that historical novels *do* adhere to a certain type of truthfulness, namely to "poetic" truth (Slotkin 225).

based on historical figures, to use unconventional perspectives, and play with genre conventions within fiction (Novak 101). Furthermore, historical novels tell stories in specific ways, using certain narrative techniques that make their stories memorable (Rigney, “Portable Monuments” 380-381). Fictional narratives can have compelling characters and satisfying conclusions not available in factual accounts (Rigney, *Imperfect Histories* 13-58). The aesthetic value of historical fiction often captivates audiences in a way that purely factual accounts of historical events may fail to (Rigney, “Dynamics” 347-348). When historical fiction takes real-life people as its subject matter, memorability becomes even more culturally significant, as these historical novels attribute importance to certain historical figures rather than others, by centralising their stories (Rigney, “Portable Monuments” 381). In that way, historical novels can help determine which memories will be relevant for the future (Rigney, “Portable Monuments” 383).

Functions of Historical Novels

Historical novels can fulfil various functions, some of which will be useful in my analysis. One of these is the didactic function of a historical novel, in which the fictional story acts as an educational and informative medium (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 1 255). Historical novels can also move beyond the informative and entertaining, into the realm of the critical, as outlined above. Historical novels can function as a medium of cultural memory, of historical meaning-making, and as a medium of collective and individual identity construction (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 1 255). Furthermore, Rigney’s work on the roles literary texts play in cultural memory will be relevant to my analysis. In particular, I will be interested in how the novels function as catalysts. Catalysts bring “attention to ‘new’ topics or ones hitherto neglected in cultural remembrance [and] may be actually instrumental in establish a topic as a socially relevant topic and in setting off multiple acts of recollection relating to it” (Rigney, “Dynamics” 350). Additionally, I will examine how the novels individually and collectively (de)stabilise (Rigney, “Dynamics” 350) the Easter Rising as a moment of cultural importance in contemporary Irish culture.

Women and the Historical Novel

As my work is concerned with Irish *women's* historical fiction, I shall be drawing on research done by Nünning on what he calls the "historischer Frauenroman" (*Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 93), Wallace's work on the woman's historical novel as well as on work done in feminist (auto-)biography studies and biographical fiction. Taken together with that which was previously stated in the literature review and what follows in the Irish cultural context chapter, the theoretical points outlined here provide the basis for my analysis.

For Nünning, the most salient features of women's historical novels since the 1950s are that many of them portray historical processes from the perspective of female figures, investigate problems in the realm of female experience and life context, and in some instances engage in metahistoriographic reflections that are critical of history writing to date (*Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 93-94). Nünning excludes cross-writing – female authors writing about or as men – from his corpus, a feature Wallace rightly highlights in her work (23). While I have also excluded works with cross-writing in my selection of novels, this is primarily due to the need for a small corpus, though the distinction between narrators is not arbitrary: the female point of view frequently uncovers the "phallocentric nature of mainstream history" (Wallace 206) and is therefore particularly fruitful in my research. For Nünning, the critique of gender inequality in society and history writing is central to the woman's revisionist historical novel (*Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 94), which can be seen as continuing the work of women's history (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 93). Another important element of women's revisionist historical novels is that they do not portray women exclusively as victims (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 94). This is related to the tension in feminist studies between calling out oppressive systems of male power in history and attempting to describe female agency[5] despite/within those systems (Fraser 16-17). I will examine whether the novels I have chosen illuminate this difficulty, and if so, how they engage with gender inequality.

Many women's historical novels focus on a female figure or on multiple female figures, as is the case in all four novels I have selected. As discussed in this chapter as well as in Chapter 2, choosing which lives to foreground in a work of fiction is an

[5] For the purposes of my research, I follow the feminist definition of women's agency as women's "capacity for individualized choice and action" (Meyers par. 5).

ideologically weighted choice. In my analysis, I will examine how the choice of main character or main characters relates to feminist aims of reclaiming lost lives (Ní Dhúill 214; see Chapter 2). The choice of female protagonists often affects the choice of narrator and narrative perspective as well, aspects which I shall address in my analyses.

Women's Lives

In women's historical fiction, as defined by Nünning, women's lives and experiences are the central concerns. This means that there is often a detailed portrayal of women's circumstances (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 94) and that the factual events of history take a background position to the subjective experiences of the individuals (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 116-117). Indeed, according to Wallace, much of women's historical fiction from the 1990s onwards expresses an "engagement with the ways in which representations of history change over time and their relation to structures of power, not least those of gender" (204), rather than a concern for the chronological order of historical events. Additionally, history often loses its position as "liberating discourse" in light of women's oppression (de Groot 158).

According to Nünning, women's historical fiction devalues "Ereignisgeschichte" (history of events) by containing less action than is common in traditional historical novels (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 127). By privileging subjective experiences over the traditionally important historical events, women's historical novels question assumptions about what is noteworthy (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 126). This is also accomplished by investigating the intersection of public and private life, and raising the value of private life and relationships (Garrison 77).

Life writing scholars have shed light on gender-specific modes of writing women's lives, arguing that personal relationships are attributed greater significance in feminist auto/biography. I would argue that this applies to women's historical fiction as well. In feminist biography, there is a strong tendency to reject the 'spotlight approach,' which "emphasises the uniqueness of a particular subject, seen in individualised terms rather than as a social self lodged within a network of others" (Stanley 214). Many

feminist writers of (auto-)biography, such as Liz Stanley, choose to approach their subjects from an anti-spotlight perspective, highlighting their subject's relationships and the influence of social networks on the individual (Stanley 216). Caitríona Ní Dhúill calls the opposite of the spotlight approach the "relational" approach, which foregrounds relationships and dependencies and decentralises the subject (206). Ní Dhúill is careful to clarify that both approaches must be viewed critically; the spotlight approach obscures the importance of relationships, while the relational approach can place women back into their subordinate position by reverting to defining them through their relationships (213-214). Keeping these complexities in mind, I will use these approaches from biography studies as a guideline in my analysis of how the authors have approached the individuals in the historical novels I have chosen.

Looking beyond the content-based aspects of typical women's historical novels, it is key to note that the thematic concerns of women's novels frequently affect their structural makeup. Narrative and structural features within women's historical novels are used to demonstrate the ways in which women experience history differently from men (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 114-115). Some features found in women's historical novels, especially from the 1990s onwards, include "multiple or divided narrators, fragmentary or contradictory narratives and disruptions of linear chronology" (Wallace 204). Nünning adds the dominance of oral history, the high percentage of dialogues, the focus on the consciousness of female figures, anachronistic time structures, and the high amount of cyclical elements to this list of features (*Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 114-115). Both theorists remark on the breaking of linear chronology and linear interpretations of history in more contemporary women's historical fiction (Wallace 204; Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 129-130). I will explore which structural elements occur in my novels, how these make stories memorable, and whether they are potentially subversive of traditional stories of 1916 within Irish memory culture.

Chapter 4

Irish Women and the Legacy of the Rising

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Easter Rising is one of the foundational moments in the history of the Republic of Ireland (Grayson and McGarry 1). It is beyond the scope of this project to delve deeply into the events of Easter week 1916 and the factors that shaped the rebellion, and it is not necessary for my purposes[6]. However, in this chapter I will provide a brief outline of the events of the Rising and the changing legacy thereof. I will investigate the way the Rising functions as the myth of foundation[7] for the Irish nation and how commemoration of Irish history is carried out today, with particular emphasis on the concept of "ethical memory". Then I will explore the relationship between women and the myth of 1916, followed by an overview of Irish women's movements in politics and culture so as to provide the context of the novels I will be analysing in the subsequent chapters.

The Events of the Rising

The Easter Rising of 1916 was a weeklong rebellion, beginning on Monday, April 24th and ending with the rebels' surrender on Sunday April 29th. The aim was to establish an Irish Republic independent of British control. The rebellion was carried out by a small group (roughly 1000 people), consisting of members of the nationalist Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army (an army created to protect labourers and to fight for a socialist Ireland, which included men and women), and Cumann na mBan (the female auxiliary of the Irish Volunteers). The rebellion was primarily located in Dublin, though other communities took part in smaller actions. The British army quickly regained control of the rebel-held positions in Dublin, and the Rising was considered a military failure. However, due to the harsh British reaction to the Rising, support for the rebels and an independent republic, which had been minimal during the event

[6] For excellent non-fiction accounts of the Easter Rising, see McGarry or Townshend.

[7] Sarah Benton classifies a myth of foundation as a myth that provides the origin of a nation, based on human action (129). She says that "[t]he myth of foundation tells us who are the founding fathers of the 'authors' of the nation, and thus defines what acts and styles are 'authentic' and whose voices have authority. It is in this telling of national myth that the political authority of women has so often been expunged" (149). Roland Barthes's concept of myth as a naturalizing force comes into play in Benton's definition and in my work as well (Barthes 278).

itself, grew dramatically. The Rising was followed by the War of Independence against British forces, and the subsequent Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921/1922), the fallout of which led to the Civil War, in which pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty forces fought against one another ("What was the Easter Rising?"; Kirkpatrick 139-141).

The Legacy of the Rising

Despite the small-scale nature of the Rising, it is a key moment in Irish history, a moment that "provided legitimacy [...] for the independent Irish state that emerged out of the Irish revolution" (Grayson and McGarry 1). The ways in which the Rising has been remembered have changed significantly in the past one hundred years, shaped by the political and social forces of the day (see Ferriter; McCarthy; McGarry). Until its fiftieth anniversary, the story of 1916 was one dominated by a "socially conservative Catholic nationalist vision" (McGarry 288) that side-lined women and socialists and made the Rising into a "pious re-enactment, dull and unappealing [...] as a sterile political catechism" (McGarry 288). The 1960s saw the beginning of "Irish revisionism," which criticised the ways in which the Rising and its leaders were commemorated and idealised (Kao 164-165). Revisionist historians focused more on the effects of the Rising on ordinary people and tried to complicate the images of the key figures (Kao 158-159; 165). The fiftieth anniversary commemoration was an attempt to create "a more constructive patriotism" (McGarry 288); it was the most "elaborate commemoration" (Higgins 2) of the Rising and was marked by "unrestrained triumphalism" (Higgins 1). The increasing violence in Northern Ireland disrupted the patriotic narrative of 1916 considerably and made commemoration in subsequent decades difficult and subdued (McGarry 288-289). The peace in the North and the rise of the Celtic Tiger paved the way for a more celebratory, opulent commemoration of the ninetieth anniversary (McGarry 289). Additionally, the rise of postmodern approaches to history, which argue that narrativity endows facts with their significance, shifted the focus from revisionism to an overall questioning of historical objectivity (Kao 159). There was an increasing realisation that by including certain facts and not others, or by foregrounding a perceived importance of some event, historians can express a variety of different versions of history (Kao 159)[8]. The

[8] In the context of the Rising this was seen clearly in the nationalist narrative that made the leaders into heroes, while non-nationalist narratives could portray them as disruptive rebels (Kao 159-160).

time leading up to the 2016 commemoration will be described in detail below, as it is the period during which the novels I examine were published.

The Rising as an Irish Myth

From its conception, the Rising was rooted in myths and memories from the Irish past, and the event itself can in turn be seen as a cultural trigger moment, which is "an event or series of events that triggers a radicalisation in identity, a sense of injustice and perceptions of agency" (Githens-Mazer 110-111). The positive response to the Rising was coloured by two themes that are central to Irish national myths, namely a "sense of the organic distinctiveness of the Irish nation [and] the memories of historical injustices perpetrated against the moral Irish Catholic nation" (Githens-Mazer 212). The Rising thus functioned as a foundational myth for the Irish state, which was concerned with strengthening the idea of a fully Irish (as opposed to English) and Catholic (as opposed to Protestant) Ireland. The role of the Church in Ireland has always been significant, and it had a prominent place in the Irish constitution; its special status was seen as problematic and potentially discriminatory to other religious groups and was removed by amendment in 1973 (Hogan 66-67). Particularly with regard to women's issues, the Church and its influence on Irish politics have been a decisive factor in the past century, especially regarding sexuality and motherhood (M. Hill 5).

The Rising has maintained a mythological role in the Irish nation's identity for the past century (McCarthy 4), though its precise import has been heatedly debated especially around anniversary commemorations (McGarry vii). The Rising has been remediated, that is, reinterpreted in various media, in countless ways in the past hundred years and many groups have placed a claim on the story (McGarry ix). As Kao observes, the way in which "history is perceived [...] does not necessarily lie in events *per* se, but in the ways in which writers, including historians, approach them" (12). Therefore, the remediations of 1916 are as important as a faithful chronology of facts. Additionally, as already discussed in the Chapter 3, myths can only be replaced by other myths (Slotkin 230). My interest is in how Irish women have recently endeavoured to stake their claim on this prominent historical moment and change the focus of its myth-imbued story in light of the developments of the past century.

Contemporary Commemoration

Ireland of the twenty-first century is increasingly willing to engage with its past in more complex ways, including the way it explores the story of the Rising. "[P]eace, secularisation and multiculturalism had huge repercussions for the way in which the Irish began to view the 1916 metanarrative from the 2000s onwards" (McCarthy 420). There was a call in the lead-up to the Decade of Centenaries for commemorative activities that recognise "the complexity of historical events and their legacy, of the multiple readings of history, and of the multiple identities and traditions which are part of the Irish historical experience" (*Clár Comórtha Céad Bliain* 62). One can see the results of this desire for pluralist storytelling about the Rising in events around its centenary, such as the commemoration of Irish police officers who died serving the Crown in the Rising (McGarry v), the multitude of historical accounts interested in women and families (see McCoole; Hayes-McCoy; McDiarmid; McAuliffe and Gillis), as well as art projects such as the 1916 Sackville Street Art Project, which aimed at commemorating the civilians who died ("1916 Sackville Street") or the quilt commemorating the seventy-seven women imprisoned in the Richmond Barracks (McAuliffe et al.). The novels I study are another way in which a broader range of stories about 1916 are being told in – or around – 2016.

The ways in which the Irish past is being revisited influence, and are influenced by the changing concept of Irish identity in twenty-first century, post Celtic-Tiger Ireland. A distinctly Catholic, ethnically Irish identity is no longer tenable in the face of globalisation, multiculturalism, and the diminishing importance of religion. The shift in contemporary identity affects how the Irish are looking to their history.

> We are not who we thought we were, or put another way, we remember ourselves differently now. The consequence of this revisiting of the past is that it creates new narratives – alternate and more complex narratives – taking account of memories that were too long 'forgotten', or sidelined, by Irish history and culture. These new narratives expand the traditionally narrow definition of Irish historical identity and reconfigure this identity through the framework of remembrance and trauma. (Pine 3)

The creation of new narratives is particularly important for cultural change, as already explained in Chapter 3. The development of cultural memory studies, with its focus on the multiplicity of the past, has led to a new understanding of the Irish past "not as an etched-stone memorial without change, but as a shifting subject that depends on present positioning and, to a large degree, on the revelation of and subsequent

lightening of trauma" (Frawley xv*).* It is my goal to examine how contemporary culture in Ireland, and the four novels in particular, demonstrate this new understanding of Irish history.

Ethical Memory

Emilie Pine's work on trauma resolution, ethical memory, and (anti-)nostalgia in Irish culture is important for providing a framework for analysis of contemporary Irish cultural production. The resolution of trauma is intimately linked to the idea of 'ethical remembering' (Pine 4). Ethical memory means realising that what is remembered and what is forgotten are determined by the present (Pine 14). Ethical memory is a form of memory which remembers the victims as well as the victors and seeks to provide justice as well as to prevent such events in the future (Pine 14). The concept of ethical memory in cultural production is a counterpart to the common tendency in Irish culture to remember the past through acts of nostalgia or anti-nostalgia (Pine 7). Nostalgia shows the past in a way that "does not make demands of the present" (Pine 8). Anti-nostalgia represents the past as traumatic, while simultaneously idealising the present/future (Pine 8). Anti-nostalgia is more common than nostalgia in Irish remembrance culture nowadays (Pine 8), though both forms are problematic because they separate the past from the present (Pine 11). For ethical memory, it is vital to draw connections and implications from past trauma to present or future trauma resolution (Pine 14). Ethical memory is closely related to the complication of national identities mentioned in the previous chapter. In my analysis, I will pay close attention to the forces of nostalgia, anti-nostalgia, and ethical memory in the novels I have chosen. I will do this by investigating the ways the novels draw connections between the past they describe and the period they were written in, with an emphasis on women's issues.

Women and the Rising

Now we shall turn to women during the Rising, and to how they have been represented in historical research. An outspoken minority of Irish women were particularly active in public during the early twentieth century. Women played a sizable role in the military action during the rebellion particularly as members of

Cumann na mBan and the Irish Citizen Army (McAuliffe and Gillis 9), and yet were marginalised in accounts thereof until the 1980s (Ferriter 28). Unsurprisingly, it was nationalist women, such as Constance Markievicz, who first received attention from historians (Murphy, "Women's History" 22; Ferriter 28; McDiarmid 10). The next group of women to receive academic attention were female activists involved in other movements of the time, such as suffrage, socialist or healthcare movements (Ferriter 53-54). Only recently has historical interest been paid to unionist women and other women who lived through the Rising but were not directly connected to it (McDiarmid 11; Ferriter 14). This new tendency in historiography is a result of feminist historians' criticism that women's history should be concerned with researching ordinary women as well as notable women (Murphy, "Women's History" 22). The increasing amount of archival material available has been vital to uncovering marginalised accounts of life during the Rising (Ferriter 14-15; McAuliffe and Gillis 260). The process of considering marginalised voices causes many elements of traditional history to come into question and brings new issues into the focus (Murphy, "Women's History" 22; see Chapter 3).

As stated in the previous paragraph, nationalist women were active agents in the 1916 Rising. One would expect there to be a large body of work celebrating at least the most central figures, yet this is not the case. Their stories were long suppressed because they did not fit into the narrative asserted by the Irish state, namely that of the domestic, biddable woman who has her "special place" in the home (Weihmann 228). This consigning of the Irish woman to the home was written into the constitution, along with the focus on women as mothers:

> 1° In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
>
> 2° The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (*Bunreacht na hÉireann* 1937, Article 41.2.1° and 41.2.2°).

The temporary improvement of women's status in the context of the revolution and as expressed in the Proclamation of the Republic (Ferriter 53; Weihmann 229) was quickly done away with after the Free State was established, and women faced harsh criticism for their activism (Weihmann 242). During the fight for independence, "the image of woman as warrior was borrowed from the Celtic mythology" (Bacik 100) and many women subverted gender norms for political purposes – subversions that were

subsequently deemed unacceptable by society (Weihmann 228-229). Once independence was gained, women were once more forced into the roles of wife/mother or virgin/nun (Bacik 101). It is typical for anti-colonial nationalist movements to re-establish clearly defined, conventional gender roles once independence has been reached (Ryan and Ward 2; White et al. 203). The role of the woman in post-independence nationalism was that of idealised mother and wife, and served to restrict women's participation in public life (Ryan and Ward 2). Motherhood was "endowed with saint-like qualities" (M. Hill 22), though the real hardships thereof were not spoken of. One must, however, be careful not to equate these prescriptive ideas with lived reality (Ryan and Ward 3). In fact, women's experiences of life in Ireland differed greatly, depending on various factors (M. Hill 11). Below we shall see some of the legal and social factors that affected women in Ireland in the twentieth century.

Women's Rights in Ireland

An overview of the development of women's rights in Ireland is helpful in order to understand the cultural background of the novels I will examine. Women and women's rights groups were active in Ireland from the late nineteenth century onwards, though there was a period between 1922 and 1969 in which restrictions on women's rights were established, rather than abolished (Connolly 65). That period saw a ban on information about contraception, the writing of the constitution, which had narrow conceptions of women's roles and prohibited divorce (Connolly 237), and the marriage bar which banned married women from working in civil service (Duncan). While the Church "was a source of power and affirmation for many women" (M. Hill 5), its influence, especially concerning sexuality, began to wane in the 1960s (M. Hill 5). In the 1970s, second wave feminism reached Ireland and set to work removing discriminatory policies (Connolly 94). The marriage bar was dissolved in the seventies (Connolly 240) and the following two decades were marked by heated debates and activism around contraception and abortion (Connolly 95). In 1983, the equal right to life of the unborn was enshrined in the constitution as the 8th amendment, which made abortion practically illegal (Kelly). The 1990s saw the first female president of the Republic of Ireland, the decriminalisation of homosexuality and the legalising of divorce, albeit within strict limits (Connolly 241). In 2015, the

Irish people voted to legalise gay marriage by popular vote (McDonald). In May of 2018, a referendum was held to repeal the 8th amendment (Whitfield) and legislation allowing relatively free abortions passed in December of 2018 (”Irish Parliament”). While the novels I analyse predate the referendum by a few years, the referendum is indicative of a more liberal social attitude in Ireland that has been palpable in the years prior to the vote. Overall, the past century has seen a gradual improvement in the equal treatment of women, and increased women’s rights and freedom.

In addition to the issue-focused feminist concerns described above, there has also been a trend since the 1980s for a form of “cultural feminism” (Mullin 37). Irish feminism has reclaimed images from the past, in art as well as in history, in order to “forge a connection in the present between the adjectives ‘Irish’ and ‘feminist’” (Mullin 39). As mentioned in the previous chapter, a sense of continuity over time is important for a group’s sense of identity. In connecting women and images of femininity from Ireland’s past and reinterpreting them in ways that are useful for Irish women today, Irish feminist art has contributed to Irish women’s sense of identity as a group. Artists have worked hand in hand with feminist historians to create a tradition of feminist resistance (Mullin 41). The past is not merely represented in academic historiography, and so feminist reinterpretations that deconstruct the Catholic, patriarchal Ireland must occur in other forms as well (Mullin 45-46). Irish women’s writing has been one of the central forms in which traditional notions of Irish womanhood have been deconstructed and where the women writers have interrogated the relationship between women and the Irish nation (Ingman, *Irish Women* 224; Ingman, *Twentieth Century* 1). In the context of 1916/2016, there was a feminist movement that criticised the male-centred nature of the commemoration programmes of Irish theatres; the movement, called “Waking the Feminists” returned the focus to female playwrights (Meany). One of my central aims is to contribute to the critical work on Irish women’s writing by investigating the connections between contemporary Irish women’s literature, feminism, and the nation.

Chapter 5

Rebel Sisters

Context and Author

The novel with which I will start my analysis is *Rebel Sisters* by Marita Conlon-McKenna. The novel was published in 2015 and is based on the true story of the Gifford family's involvement with the Easter Rising.

Conlon-McKenna has written a large number of books for children and adult readers, and her most popular book, *Under the Hawthorne Tree*, set during the Famine, has become a widely read book in Irish schools (Conlon-McKenna, *Rebel Sisters* 2). She is a prolific writer of historical fiction (Conlon-McKenna, "Interview") and many of her novels are set in Ireland (Conlon-McKenna, "Home"). *Rebel Sisters* was the first historical novel Conlon-McKenna wrote featuring fictionalised versions of real figures, and she describes the process as more challenging than her other historical novels:

> This is the first time I have written about real people which makes it far more difficult as there is not the same freedom in terms of writing as everything has to be checked. [...] However I soon realised that Muriel, Grace and Nellie were far better subjects for a book than any character I could have created, for they were involved at the very heart of the Rising. (Conlon-McKenna "Interview")

In my subsequent analysis, I will elucidate the choice of these subjects, as well as the heavy focus on historical accuracy and research apparent in Conlon-McKenna's writing. This novel presents a departure from the other novels featured in my work, as will be illustrated below.

Summary

Rebel Sisters follows the lives of the Protestant, upper-class Gifford[9] family, paying particular attention to three of the sisters – Nellie, Muriel, Grace – and to their mother, Isabella. The main story begins 1901 and ends on the day of Joe Plunkett's execution in May 1916. The Gifford's family life is described in detail from the girls' childhood onwards. In alternating chapters, the previously mentioned family

[9] Throughout this analysis I will refer to the Gifford sisters as such, though each of them married and took on either their husband's last name or hyphenated the two names.

members' lives are described. The novel follows the education, careers, politicisation, and romantic experiences of the three girls. Additionally, Isabella's perspective is given on her daughters' lives and on the difficulties she faces after her son's death and her husband's stroke. Nellie, Muriel, Grace, and their sister Sidney are all politically active and the novel outlines their endeavours as part of the suffrage, nationalist, and labour movements. Muriel meets and falls in love with the Catholic author, teacher, and nationalist Thomas MacDonagh. Grace works as an artist for Joe Plunkett and eventually develops feelings for him, later converting to his faith. Nellie works for a time as a cooking instructor, and is politicised because of her outrage at the poverty experienced by many Irish families. She becomes part of the Citizen Army under James Connolly and Constance Markievicz. During the Easter Rising, Nellie is stationed in St. Stephen's Green, while Muriel and Grace only then become aware of what is going on and have limited interactions with the rebellion. After the surrender, Nellie is arrested and brought to Kilmainham Goal with the other rebels. Thomas MacDonagh and Joe Plunkett, along with the other Rising leaders, are condemned to death. Muriel is unable to visit her husband prior to his execution, while Grace is able to visit her fiancé, whom she marries in jail the night before his death.

Rebel Sisters: Biographical Historical Fiction

Rebel Sisters can be classified easily as a work of biographical fiction. As mentioned above, Conlon-McKenna chose to write about a real family in this novel, due to the Gifford sisters' direct involvement with the rebellion. Conlon-McKenna relies heavily on research and biographical details, which she is capable of doing due to the wealth of archival material available about the Gifford family. The Gifford family entered public record for various reasons, primarily because Grace and Muriel were married to two of the Rising leaders, and because all six of the sisters were active in political and literary circles. Both Sidney and Nellie wrote extensively about their family[10], and various researchers during the twentieth century asked the women to talk about their experiences (eg. Fox's *Rebel Irishwomen*, published in 1935).

[10] In her biography of the sisters, Ann Clare cites Nellie Gifford-Donnelly's papers and *The Years Flew By* by Sidney Gifford-Czira (10).

Conlon-McKenna's novel is not the first work to reframe the archival material on the Gifford sisters, indeed, she bases her novel on the biography *Unlikely Rebels* by Ann Clare. The reinterpretations of archival material by the historian and the artist are both valuable contributions to cultural memory (Assmann 103), and these two texts accomplish different, if related, aims. The liberties of fiction allow Conlon-McKenna to attribute thoughts and feelings freely to the characters, thereby allowing the reader to sympathise with them. For example, in *Unlikely Rebels* Muriel's decision to give up her nursing position is given the space of a sentence: "Muriel had tried nursing but found the actuality far more demanding than her idealised concept of it had been" (Clare 35). In *Rebel Sisters*, her disillusionment with the profession and her physical problems with the work are described at length, and the reader is led to have compassion for her choice: "she knew somewhere deep inside that she didn't fit in. She cared deeply for her patients and for nursing them, but she suspected that she wasn't strong enough or tough enough for the day-to-day routine of nursing" (135). The novel also explores the romances between Muriel and Thomas and Grace and Joe in more intimate detail than the biography does (see below). While reading the two texts consecutively may feel somewhat repetitive, especially since the novel uses many anecdotes found in the biography, the two can be understood as two sides of the same coin.

The Gifford Women: Perspectives on Gender and Nation

Conlon-McKenna chose four of the Gifford women to serve as narrative focal points in her novel: Nellie, the second oldest of all six sisters, Muriel, the third youngest, Grace, the second youngest sister, and Isabella, their mother. The other three sisters were politically active as well, but were either not in the country at the time of the Rising (Ada and Sidney) or were active after the Rising (Kate). The choice of Nellie, Muriel, and Grace as point-of-view characters is unsurprising, as their activism is historically recorded. Isabella, unionist and loyal to the Crown, is a more unlikely narrator. In the following sections, I will examine which forms of Irish womanhood the four protagonists exemplify, and how they relate to the Irish nation.

Muriel: Proud Wife and Mother

Muriel fills traditional gender roles more than her sisters, as she is primarily seen in the later section of the book as a wife and mother. In this way, Muriel is perhaps the most "ordinary" of the sisters as her involvement in politics (before and after the Rising), is comparatively limited. While one might argue that her inclusion in this novel is merely due to her relationship with Thomas MacDonagh, or because of her family name, one can also interpret her inclusion as a protagonist and point-of-view character as an attempt to disturb gendered ideas of greatness (Ní Dhúill 202). Her contribution to mainstream historical accounts is minor, yet in this novel, she is given the same importance as her sisters. Furthermore, Muriel's narrative highlights gendered topics such as discrimination in the workplace (101, 133), the challenges of running a household (188-198), and the physical challenges of motherhood (194-197; 268), all topics which recur frequently in women's revisionist historical novels (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 123). By making Muriel as central as Nellie or Grace, Conlon-McKenna gives equal value and significance to the more gender-conforming experiences of this sister.

As far as the Rising is concerned, Muriel provides a perspective that is primarily one of pride. Even though Muriel is nervous in the period leading up to the Rising, aware that her husband is hiding something dangerous from her (357), when the events begin to unfold and Muriel enters the General Post Office (GPO), it is the nobleness of the Rising that is highlighted by her reaction to the Proclamation of the Republic (413).

> As Muriel read the words of the Proclamation, her heart leapt when she saw MacDonagh's name printed on the bottom alongside those of his friends. She felt suddenly achingly proud of her husband and these men, his friends, who had stood up beside him for this new Irish Republic. All the secrecy, the meetings and planning – this is what it was all about: her husband's long-cherished dream of an Irish Republic. (414)

Muriel's reaction to the Proclamation, parts of which are cited in the text, stands in stark contrast to the document's negligible mentions in the other novels set in 1916 (Morrissy, *The Rising of Bella Casey* 8; Mills does not reference it at all). It is interesting to analyse which parts of the original text are not included in the novel, namely the anti-British sentiments, the claim for allegiance from the people, and the religious and sacrificial aspects (The Proclamation qtd. in Townshend xxii). Given Muriel's Protestant, upper-class background, and her love for her husband, it is

hardly surprising that martyrdom, the call for violence, and Catholic sentiments are not emphasised. Furthermore, the second passage quoted in the novel, which claims that "[t]he Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens ... cherishing all the children of the nation equally..." (414) is highly relevant in modern commemoration. The ideals proclaimed by the Rising leaders were powerful and would have resonated with educated women such as Muriel, but the contemporary reader knows how severely the Irish State failed to implement equality regarding women (see Chapter 4), and how the abuse of children by Church-run institutions (M. Hill 216) mock the claim of "cherishing all the children" (414). Thankfully, the Irish State has recognised its own failings in these cases, and as part of the 2016 commemorations, children were asked to rewrite the Proclamation from a contemporary perspective (McGarry v).

Another aspect of Muriel's reaction to the Proclamation I would like to mention is that she refers to the Irish Republic as "her husband's long-cherished dream" (414); the new republic does not truly belong to her; a sentiment which is poignant in light of the Irish State's relation to women from the 1930s to 1990s. Additionally, Muriel did not live long enough to see an Irish Republic, as she died in 1917 (Conlon-McKenna, *Rebel Sisters* 470). However, this is not to say that Muriel is inactive or unconcerned with the rebellion, she is "determined that she too would play her part" (414), even if that is "only" to take care of her children. Her role during the Rising may be centred in the home, but it is nonetheless valued. Muriel does not retreat to her home and ignore the political upheaval; rather, her home becomes a place of knowledge, community, and support for the other women whose husbands, brothers, and sons were fighting in the rebellion (439). "Muriel made pot after pot of tea [...] as they compared the messages and information that they had received" (439). Like the other novels, *Rebel Sisters* imbues the domestic sphere with political importance, and demonstrates the immutable link between public and private events.

Grace: Artist and Muse

The portrayal of Grace is particularly interesting in connection with the age-old equation of Ireland with a woman (Stevens, Brown, Maclaran 405). Ireland has been identified as feminine by both colonial and post-colonial discourses (Stevens, Brown, Maclaran 409), and this was often demonstrated in art. In *Rebel Sisters*, Grace

stands in for Ireland in her mentor's painting, titled "The Spirit of Young Ireland" (72). The painter even says to her "Miss Gifford, you embody the hope of a new generation ready to take on the world" (72). In *Unlikely Rebels*, the caption underneath a photograph taken of Grace Gifford in her wedding attire reads "The saddest eyes in Irish history?" (Clare 2). Grace's hopes and losses are made to stand in for an entire nation, reiterating the harmful nation-equals-woman myth. However, in *Rebel Sisters*, Grace is not merely the passive muse of male artists; she is a successful artist in her own right. Her artistic endeavours are illustrated in the book and are the main part of her storyline until Joe begins to court her. She contributes her work to the Irish theatre, and even playfully deconstructs notions of Irishness in her conversation with Joe (288-289). Through her art, she expresses her agency: her ability to choose her own path and to define Irishness as she sees fit. Grace is part of the Irish story not merely as a symbol of Ireland but as a female artist with her own ideas about what it means to be Irish.

The Romantic Plot

By focusing on the romantic relationships between Muriel and Thomas and Grace and Joe, the historical account is turned into a romantic account, which "allows the reinsertion of women's concerns" (Wallace 20). Muriel worries what will happen to her if her husband is transported (438), Grace's concerns over her wedding are juxtaposed with the preparations for the Rising (364-365). Muriel and Grace do not encourage their men to partake in the fight for Irish freedom, in the tradition of Cathleen Ní Houlihan[11], nor do they seek to keep them home or safe; they recognise a need for change and are willing to bear the burden of the fight, even if they are not active combatants. Additionally, by choosing a narrative perspective that focuses on the subjective experiences of the sisters, Conlon-McKenna is able to uncover new modes of masculinity for the Rising leaders, thereby demonstrating that both gender

[11] Cathleen Ní Houlihan is the personification of Ireland, popularised in W. B Yeat's eponymous play. Set in 1798, the year of the failed Irish rebellion, Cathleen arrives at the house of a poor family in rural Ireland in the guise of an old woman and appeals to the men's patriotism through imagery of the blood sacrifice. One of the sons, who is supposed to be married the following day, is taken by the woman's words and leaves his bride to fight for Ireland. A young boy outside is the only one to see Cathleen's true visage, that of a young queen. The image of Cathleen Ní Houlihan was evoked often in Irish nationalism (Yeats 765-769).

roles and historical "heroes" are constructed by society[12]. Thomas and Joe are portrayed as romantic leads over political leaders; their nationalist ambitions are important, but what makes them come alive are their love letters and care for the sisters.

Nellie: A Conventional Rebel?

From early on in the novel, Nellie is designated as the domestic sister; she is an avid cook and helps manage her family's household (20). Once she realises that her interest has been taken to mean that she will remain in her family's home throughout her parents' lives, she rebels at the notion and pursues a career in cooking (50-54)[13]. This activity, as gender conforming as it may seem, is the beginning of her social and political activism. She allows the participants of her courses to take home the leftover food, which is her attempt to ease the suffering of the poor (58). This act of charity is seen as a subversive act, as is her involvement with Larkin's labour movement; these two factors cause the loss of her job (218-219). Nellie continues to cook for the underprivileged during the Lock Out, in Liberty Hall, which in turn strengthens her connection to Jim Larkin and James Connolly. She joins the Citizen Army, and it is her membership therein that ultimately leads her to be stationed in the garrison at St Stephen's Green during the Rising. Nellie is the single protagonist without a romantic plot; the closest she comes to having romantic interest in another is her hope of dinner with Harry, once he returns from the war (260-263).

Nellie's engagement in the Rising is very different from that of her sisters. She is the only sibling aware of what is to come, and wonders over what her sisters know, though she does not betray the secrecy of the rebellion (381-382). The act of returning Nellie, a female soldier, to the story of 1916 disrupts the tendency of nationalist discourse to minimise women's roles in the rebellion, which was done to "assert a dominant, masculine" (Weihmann 241-242) image of Irish freedom fighters. Women were supposed to represent the nation, not fight for its freedom as individuals and citizens (Weihman 241). Like Grace, Nellie resists being reduced to

[12] Diana Wallace remarks that women's historical fiction does not only deal with femininity, but also with masculinity and the (de-)construction of gender roles (8).
[13] It is interesting to note that Nellie is not paid for cooking at home, but once that activity is undertaken outside the home it becomes worthy of payment.

a symbol and succeeds in asserting her own agency within the confines of male-dominated structures.

Nellie does not challenge gender roles in the same way that the famous Constance Markievicz[14] or the lesser known Margaret Skinneder[15] do. She does not dress in masculine clothes (392), nor is she comfortable with violence (402; 416). During the events of the Rising, Nellie is frequently concerned with provisions and cooking (10; 401-403; 417). While this relegates Nellie and the other women to a supportive role, I would argue in light of Nellie's abilities, this "relegation" takes on a different meaning. Nellie and the other women of the garrison are valuable members of the group, using their knowledge and capabilities to ensure their survival. When called upon, Nellie is able to relieve her male comrades-in-arms (9; 426) though she does not relish the thought of the enemy soldiers being killed (394; 427). Through the events of the Rising, there is an enhanced sense of camaraderie among the garrison, which is illustrated by this scene after the surrender.

> 'If any of the good ladies present wishes to flee to safety, now is the time,' Mallin [their commander] advised. Nellie could see that, after all they had been through, the women were not prepared to be separated from the rest of their garrison. They were as much a part of the rebellion as the group of over a hundred men and they had no intention of changing their loyalties now. (432)

Nellie and the other women incarcerated after the Rising are returned to the story of 1916 in this novel. The novel critiques, implicitly in the text and explicitly in the discussion questions in the back of the novel[16], the exclusion of the women of the Rising (477). Nellie stands in for all the women rebels, loyal to the cause, imprisoned for their commitment and subsequently left locked out of public memory in the nation they fought for.

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[14] Constance Markievicz was a member of the Irish ascendency, who became involved in Irish nationalism in 1908. She was a member of the Irish Citizen Army. She is well known for wearing a uniform, being second-in-command at St. Stephen's Green during the Rising and being court-martialed afterwards. She was also the first woman elected to British Parliament, though she abstained from taking her seat (Matthews 27-32; McAuliffe and Gillis 215-218)

[15] Margaret Skinneder was a Scottish-born suffragette who was also a member of Cumann na mBan and traveled to Ireland to participate in the Rising. She was known for dressing up as a man during the Rising in order to pass messages and scout locations (Weihmann 231-236).

[16] I was unable to ascertain whether the discussion questions were written by the author, or whether they were added by the publisher, Transworld Ireland. Depending on the authorship of the questions, their relationship to the overall message of the novel would shift.

Isabella: An Alternative Perspective

Conlon-McKenna's choice to include Isabella, the girls' mother, as a further point of view in the novel is significant. Isabella is not given as many chapters as her daughters[17] and seems to function primarily as a foil for her daughters. She embodies the emotionally and physically distant Victorian mother (Clare 12; Conlon-McKenna 33; 40), in contrast to Muriel's warm motherly feelings (228; 268). Isabella's disapproval of her husband's religion (17) is very different from Grace's enthusiastic conversion to Catholicism (327; 342). Her political alignment is with the Crown (19). When it comes to the question of suffrage, her opinions are less opposed to that of her daughters (193). In the afterword, Isabella's disapproval manifests itself in her refusal to let Nellie return home after the Rising (468). In the novel, Isabella represents the forces against which her daughters are striving.

However, Isabella could have functioned as a foil without being a point-of-view character. Including Isabella as such allows Conlon-McKenna to give voice to the feelings of the Protestant upper class, a majority of whom were unsympathetic to the nationalist cause. Isabella's political and philanthropic focus is on the war effort (330); Isabella's concern over the soldiers fighting in the war is juxtaposed with her daughters' concerns over the rebels. The inclusion of Isabella's perspective allows room for gentle criticism of the "single unitary and linear history" (Wallace 204), which would have been represented by the sisters' stories in isolation. Isabella's storyline encourages the reader to think in terms of "herstories", rather than "herstory" being told.

Feminist Sense of Community

A further strength of this novel is that it fosters a sense of feminist community, by making not only the names, but also the stories of Irish women more popular. It fulfils a didactic function (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 1 255) by providing a wealth of details about women's lives, and in particular women's politics in early twentieth-century Ireland. By connecting this didactic impulse with the desire to broaden the contents of cultural memory, it serves to bring to life part of the history of

[17] The chapters vary greatly in length, but for our purposes the number of chapters suffice. Nellie: 28 chapters + the prologue; Grace: 23 chapters; Muriel: 25 chapters; Isabella: 11 chapters.

Irish feminism. The link to Irish feminism of the past is given by the three main protagonists, as well as by various other elements in the book. Nellie fights alongside many women, including Constance Markievicz and Margaret Skinneder (393; 402) and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington – a suffragette and pacifist – brings the soldiers food (417). The sisters are involved with the Daughters of Ireland, their youngest sister Sidney helps establish a women's journal, Bean na hEireann (112-113)[18], the sisters are friends with Nora Dryhurst (113) and Maud Gonne and Helena Moloney, founders of the Daughters of Ireland (111). Nellie is a witness to the raising of the Irish flag by the young Molly O'Reilly, another point of feminist interest (348-349). During the Rising, Muriel hosts a variety of women in her home, who all "should" be more well-known. Conlon-McKenna remediates the Rising in a way that privileges the women of the time, and seeks to balance out the male-driven narratives. As Nellie herself says: "It makes a difference to see women instead of the usual male heroes" (235).

The approach to history in *Rebel Sisters* favours an early form women's history over a more feminist approach to history (see Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 96-99). This type of women's history primarily *adds* women's stories to historiographic accounts and focuses on women's involvement in society, politics and culture (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 98). This is a necessary part of a critical engagement with gender and history, but not the full extent of a feminist historical project. Similarly, Conlon-McKenna's novel contributes an important additional perspective on the Rising, but is not overtly critical of the patriarchal, nationalist ideology and narratives that have sidelined women for so long. The novel fleshes out the dominant narrative of the Rising by centralising the experiences of the Gifford women, but it does not offer a radical counter-memory.

The ending of the novel is particularly interesting concerning ethical memory (Pine). The final scene of the story occurs when Grace stands outside Kilmainham Goal and her husband is executed (464-465).

> It was over. Finally over. [...] The rebellion crushed. His life taken from him because he dared to dream, dared to fight for a new republic, an independent, free Ireland. [...] He had told her to be brave, but she was not like him... [...]

[18] The Daughters of Ireland and their journal, Bean na hEireann expressed the desire of female activists to participate in both the nationalist and suffragette movements (Valiulis 571). They believed that an independent Ireland would bring with it equality for women, which was not the case due to the conservative beliefs of the nationalist politicians (Valiulis 571).

> Then she saw it – a bird, flapping its wings, its long neck and head and beak stretched forwards, rising upwards and upwards across the new morning sky. She watched it, looking up at the sky, dizzy, the bird flying free above her, soaring high over the city. It wasn't over. Joe was right. It wasn't over at all. This was just the beginning. (465)

One could read this passage as nostalgic; in the past, trauma was encountered with hope, whereas today we realise that this hope was misplaced. The Rising failed to produce a 36 county republic, the Irish State did not establish equal rights for all its citizens, women's freedom, and participation in society and politics regressed, and the Gifford sisters were unhappy with the Ireland that was created. As valid as this interpretation is, I would argue that one could also read the last line of the novel as a call to action that connects that particular moment of history with the present. This interpretation is strengthened by the discussion questions at the end of the novel, which encourage readers to examine how women's role in the Rising was portrayed around the 100 anniversary (477). Grace's hope can be read as a call to young Irish women of today to face the trauma of Irish history with courage and to continue the fight begun over a hundred years ago by their feminist foremothers.

Chapter 6

Fallen

Context and Author

Lia Mill's novel *Fallen* was published in 2014. This novel was selected as the "One City One Book" novel for Dublin in 2016, and was also the title chosen for the joint Two Cities One Book festival between Dublin and Belfast (Mills, "About"). Furthermore, the novel was part of Dublin City Council's centenary programme ("Fallen by Lia Mills"). The novel's inclusion in these two cultural phenomena demonstrate the significance attributed to it by Irish literary circles, especially in light of the Decade of Centenaries. *Fallen* is Mill's third novel.

Mills was born in Dublin and lived in London and the United States for ten years prior to her return to Ireland in 1990 (Mills, "About"; Mills "Interview" 181). Significantly, she has a master's degree in women's studies and wrote her dissertation on feminist fiction (Mills, "Interview" 181-182). She is now a full-time author after having realised that "the things [she] had to take out in writing academic papers were the things that interested [her] most" (Mills, "Interview" 183). She experienced the need to stick to provable historical facts as limiting her writing endeavour, turning instead to the freedom of fiction (Mills, "Interview" 183). While she considers herself a feminist and sees that as having a profound influence on her whole life, she does not try to write feminist fiction (Mills, "Interview" 184). She goes further, stating that "[i]f you have an ax to grid [sic], I don't think that fiction is the place to do it; the fiction itself suffers as a result. The story doesn't come to life" (Mills, "Interview" 184). The interview this quote is taken from was written prior to the publication of *Fallen*, and I would argue that *Fallen* can be interpreted as having distinct feminist messages, as will be illustrated below.

Summary

Fallen tells the story of a young Irish woman, Katie Crilly, living in Dublin with her family. The plot spans the time between August 1914 and April 1916, with most attention given to Easter week 1916. Katie comes from a Catholic family with multiple

siblings, including her twin brother Liam, who enlists in the First World War, much to Katie's disappointment. Katie is unsure of what to do with her life, as her mother forbids her to continue studying at university and she is unsure if marriage will fulfil her. She begins working as a research assistant to an older female historian, Dote, and spends much of her time with Dote and her companion, May, in the comfort of their home. Katie's life is interrupted by the death of her brother in the line of duty, and much of the novel deals with her coming to terms with his death and trying to decide what to do with the rest of her life. Various conflicts with other characters in the novel are connected to Katie's relationship to her brother. During Easter week, she meets Hubie, May's nephew, who served with Liam on the front, but has returned due to his injuries. Katie traverses the city for various reasons during the Rising, including taking care of two young girls, Alanna and Trishy, and ends up taking refuge with Hubie in his aunt's house, without a chaperone. Amid the turmoil of Dublin in crisis, the two young adults become closer, they eventually have sex, and Katie loses her virginity. Her sexual awakening, in combination with her personal development during the events of the Rising, encourages her to take control of her life. The novel ends with the return of the older women to their house, and Katie and Hubie stepping out to meet them.

Katie: An Ordinary Protagonist?

Katie Crilly is the protagonist and first-person narrator of *Fallen*. She is entirely fictional; she is not based on any historic individual. Katie is a particularly rewarding character to analyse in the context of cultural memory and counter memories because she is an example of a number of identities marginalised in Irish nationalist discourse. Katie is "ordinary", in the sense that it is unlikely she would have left many traces in historic archives (Ní Dhúill 202). Yet Mills can write her story because historical fiction is not limited by the availability of archival material (Ní Dhúill 202). While Katie is not based on any one person, she is nonetheless a realistic representation of young educated Irish women in the early twentieth century; many elements of Katie's story can be found in historical accounts of women's lives at the time (see M. Hill). In Katie, conflicting ideas and principles collide, leading to a narrative that resists simplification and overgeneralisation because it pays attention to the specific context of Katie's experience, which is common in the context of

feminist challenges to dominant narratives (Hirsch and Smith 7). Mills herself describes Katie as

> something of a hybrid. She has an undergraduate education but is still limited by the expectations of her family's class and politics. She is clued-in enough to know who the various factions are but not enough to expect the Rising when it begins. [...] Like her brother Liam [...] she is a constitutional nationalist but unlike [him] she does not agree with the war, or that Liam should join the British army to fight in it. She is the kind of character who, in other circumstances, might well have found her way inside a garrison to stand with the rebels but Liam's death entangles her loyalties and makes that impossible. (Mills, "Writing the Rising" 153)

Katie represents, in a myriad of ways, marginalised voices in Irish culture. She represents all those "who believed in a free Ireland but not in the armed struggle" (Morales-Ladrón, "Feminisation" 48). She is an example of the grief experienced by so many families during the Great War (M. Hill 71) that was swept aside in Irish cultural memory (Mills, "Writing the Rising" 153). Grief over Irish soldiers in the British army was a blight on a unified national identity, because the new Irish State had defined itself in opposition to Englishness. Mills' choice of protagonist highlights the silenced voices in Irish culture, rather than those deemed "noteworthy" by traditional historical narratives.

Katie's youth is another important factor in her role as the protagonist of the novel. *Fallen* is a coming-of-age novel that follows Katie's development through pivotal moments in her life: the end of her education, the enlistment and death of her twin, her first sexual encounters, as well as her search for independence and a fulfilling future. Throughout the novel, Katie repeatedly expresses insecurity about her beliefs and her purpose in life. She knows what is expected of her (13), but does not know if that is what she wants: "Could I give my life over to Con, as Eva had to Bartley? I wasn't sure I wanted to marry anyone. But, if I didn't what would I do with my life? The truth of it was that I didn't know what a person like me was *for*" (45). Like many women's historical novels, *Fallen* centralises the problem of intelligent young women who express doubt about preconceived norms of womanhood and struggle to find sustainable ways of identity construction (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 149).

Katie's journey of self-discovery is influenced by the relationships she has, in particularly her relationship with her brother and with the other women in the novel,

who represent various constructions of Irish womanhood. These relationships will be analysed below.

Katie and Liam: Haunting, Grief, Closure

Katie's journey of self-discovery is a journey of emancipation from her dead brother. From their birth, Katie and Liam's lives had been intertwined, with Katie often experiencing herself as an afterthought to her brother's life: "Liam brought me along in his wake. My claim to existence was predicated on his" (57). She is highly possessive of her brother, as can be seen in her claiming of her brother's belongings (62), and in her jealous response to Liam and his fiancée Isabel's relationship (61; 79). After Liam's death, Katie clings to Liam and her memories of him, they intersperse the narration. However, Liam's presence is not entirely benign; he haunts her and she haunts him (270). While Liam does not appear in the novel as a typical ghost, he can nonetheless be read in the same way; he "embod[ies] the tension between forgetting and remembering that runs through Irish remembrance culture" (Pine 154). Liam and his death are problematic for Irish remembrance in the same way that Hubie is: both men fought in a war that was erased from public discourse (Mills, "Writing the Rising" 153). Similarly, Katie's grief has/had no space in Irish cultural memory, because her brother did not die for the "right" cause. By choosing Katie as the centre of consciousness, Mills allows the inner turmoil of her grief to come to the foreground and returns it to public memory. By centralising Katie's grief, and by making her into a sympathetic character, Mills opens up the possibility of an identity for Irish women that recognises their historic grief.

Katie's budding relationship with Hubie allows her to come to terms with her own grief, and she realises that she must learn to live with the fact of Liam's death (272). In this way, Katie accomplishes what Pine observes in other Irish cultural products: "[The heroine] has much to teach Irish culture of how to deal with ghosts; she uncovers the repressed memories of the past, narrates them, and brings closure. This is not, however, a closure which involves forgetting or further repression, but an acknowledgement of the scars and ghosts" (169). The narrative of Katie's grief asks the reader to reflect on contemporary Irish memory practices regarding the trauma of the World War One dead. At the end of the novel, the readers are given hope that

Katie will be able to lead her life in a way that acknowledges the death of her brother, and the trauma of the war, without it hindering a contented life.

Female Characters: Diverse Experiences

The large amount of women Katie is surrounded by in the novel is significant in her development, and as a medium of remembrance, this novel functions as a catalyst (Rigney, "Dynamics" 350) by placing women's issues at the forefront. The women the protagonist interacts with illustrate the variety of ways women led their lives during a restricted time in Irish history. By including these diverse figures, *Fallen* can help illuminate the differences between the variety of women's experiences and the formulaic depictions of women "in national histories and cultural and symbolic repertoires" (Ryan and Ward 3). In this section, I will examine what roles these women exemplify and how they follow or challenge traditional Irish gender roles. I will also analyse how these relationships and interactions affect Katie as a young woman coming into her own in the tumultuous Dublin of the early twentieth century.

Katie's mother, who is not named in the novel, represents and enforces the traditional role of the Irish woman in early twentieth-century Ireland. A woman's place was in the home, and marriage and motherhood would provide her with a purpose and a good standing in society (M. Hill 21). Katie's mother continually opposes her daughter's attempts to find fulfilment outside the home (8-10; 28) and attempts to instil in her daughter an appreciation of "feminine" pursuits (28) and propriety (4, 28-29; 32), all for the sake of a good marriage. Katie resists her mother's machinations, and their entire relationship is marked by tension and disagreements, a relationship template that is common in Irish women's writing (Ingman, *Twentieth Century* 77). Katie's mother is an example of the many mothers who were encouraged to convince their sons to enlist in the British Army (M. Hill 66-67). She is most outspoken about her support for her son when his fiancée, Isabel, wonders whether Liam could be recalled from the Front: "'I forbid it, absolutely.' Mother said. 'My Liam knows his duty; he'll perform it to the utmost. Our duty may seem a lesser one, less clear to some [...] But it's perfectly plain to me. *Our* duty is to honour his courage with our own'" (82; emphasis in original). While her loyalist attitude discounts her from the ranks of idealised Irish *nationalist* mothers, she shares the same sense of duty, sacrifice, and bereavement common in that discourse (Benton 161). She is the least progressive

female figure in the novel and serves as a foil for many of the other female characters.

One such character is Professor Hayden, a fictionalised version of Mary Hayden, who campaigned for women's access to higher education (M. Hill 27). Early in the novel, Katie must tell Prof. Hayden that she will not be able to continue her education because of her mother's objections, an experience which illustrates the deep gulf between women of the time: "She and my mother were of an age, but they might as well have lived in different centuries, on different continents. I could hardly tell the professor that my mother despised women like her, who campaigned for the franchise" (10). While there were women such as Mary Hayden who were key figures in the Irish women's rights movement, it is important to remember that they were a minority and did not receive support from the entire female population (M. Hill 51;58).

Another female activist in *Fallen* is Dote Colclough, the academic Katie works for as a research assistant throughout most of the novel. Dote offers Katie a chance to spend time outside her family home, and to continue learning (31). She demonstrates another way to live one's life as a woman: She never marries, but lives with May, another older woman, and the two women offer their home as a safe haven for Katie during her brother's absence and quite literally during the Rising itself. While not stated explicitly in the text, it is possible to read Dote and May's relationship as a lesbian one, which adds another layer of untold stories to *Fallen*'s fabric. Dote and May are examples of Irish women finding happiness and fulfilment outside the institution of marriage or religion, as are Vivienne Dockery, a nurse headed to France (249-259), and Frieda Leamy, a nurse and school friend of Katie's (96-97). Vivienne provides Katie with a purpose during the events of the Rising and she directly questions Katie's dependence on her parents' approval (257).

Even the characters of Katie's sisters, Eva and Florrie, who appear to be "good Irish wives," also contain subversive elements. Eva's initial desire was to go to art school, but this was hindered by her mother (29). She succeeds in creating her own path against her mother's wishes when she marries a Protestant (28). Florrie follows the traditional path of matrimony, which her mother intends for her, but one can intimate from Katie's narration that she is interested in opening a business with her husband, making soaps and scents, an occupation which would bother her mother (67; 13). Despite the reality of women in the workforce, exemplified by Frieda and Vivienne,

Irish society, as personified by Katie's mother, preferred women to remain in the home (M. Hill 48; 100).

I would argue that as vital as it is to recognise the positive feminist elements of this novel, it is equally important to uncover its silences and exclusions. Despite its portrayal of a diverse range of female characters, one might argue that *Fallen* does not go quite far enough in including lower-class women in the story. Critics have noted that some characters remain one-dimensional, like "Nan and Lockie, the affectionate, plain and dutiful housekeepers who know (and seem to relish) their place in society" (Rahill). The women we encounter who work outside the home tend to be from middle class families and work exclusively as nurses. The class power structure still has an influence on how working class Irish women are portrayed, an issue we shall return to in the analysis of *The Rising of Bella Casey*.

To conclude this section, we can see that in the female relationships in the novel, Katie experiences both opposition and support, conflict and guidance. The women around her demonstrate the alternative paths for women that were becoming available at the beginning of the twentieth century in Dublin, even though women's freedom was undermined after independence was achieved (Ryan and Ward 2; White et al. 203). The novel helps complicate the idea that female empowerment was a linear progression in Ireland (Connolly 65); despite Katie's hopefulness for the future, the mid-twentieth century was very restrictive for Irish women (see Chapter 4).

The Female Experience and the Rising

The novel focuses on female experiences, as is made clear by the female protagonist/narrator and the abundance of female characters. Like many revisionist women's historical novels, the aim of this book is to centralise women's daily lives and to illustrate the material and ideological difficulties of women in history (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 95). However, the domestic sphere, ostensibly the place of the Irish woman, is by no means the only area in which Katie and the other women of this novel are active. As previously discussed, many of the women work – in hospitals, in shops, at universities – and even those who spend a majority of their time in the home (such as the maids Lockie and Nan), are also out in public. This observation may seem superfluous, but as we move to the portrayal of 1916 in the

novel, it will become clear that it is hardly trivial that women were out in Dublin during the Rising.

The second part of *Fallen* takes place during Easter week 1916 and each chapter's title is the date of a new day. The dates' significance is only indirectly connected to the historic events; the story being told is that of ordinary Dubliners' lives, interrupted and disrupted by the chaos of war. In particular, it is the story of women, primarily Katie, whose lives are affected and influenced by the events of "history." This novel imagines the subjective female experiences of the Rising rather than focusing on a chronology of historical events (see Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 116; Wallace 204). Therefore, Easter Monday is important because it is the anniversary of Liam's death (87); the occupation of Stephen's Green is mentioned because Katie and Alanna are going for a walk in the park and are sent away (102). Meaning is imbued through the characters, not through wide-reaching political relevance. The novel functions as a medium of historical meaning-making (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 1 255), by illustrating the other meanings the Rising can have.

The role of the Rising in this novel must be parsed carefully. The events of the rebellion are not the focus of the story, and the main characters are not involved in combat. But neither is the Rising a mere backdrop to the story; the characters' lives are heavily impacted by the fact of the rebellion and their interactions are shaped by the situation in which they find themselves. Like many revisionist historical novels, *Fallen* questions which aspects of history are noteworthy. Only one Rising participant, Sean Connolly, is named in the entire narrative, and he is known to the family as an actor rather than as a political figure (131). Constance Markievicz is obliquely referenced (103), and the proclamation that is mentioned is that of martial law, rather than that of the Republic (195). The narrative pays no attention to the "great" men of history, instead it shows how ordinary people responded to the rebellion (Morales-Ladrón, "Feminisation" 50), thereby claiming "that history belongs to the people who were part of it and not to the construction of extraordinary events" (Morales-Ladrón, "Feminisation" 48).

The main way in which the Rising is portrayed in *Fallen* is as a destructive force. As Morales-Ladrón describes, *Fallen* provides a "detailed description of the chaos, confusion and fear that governed the ordinary lives of those who witnessed the uprising" ("Feminisation" 44). Katie, a born-and-bred Dubliner, whose work as Dote's

assistant gives her even more insight into Dublin as a city as she learns about the stories behind its statues, presents us with an intimate perspective on the city during that week. She describes the looting of the city on the first day of the Rising as follows:

> It was like entering a fairground. [...] People thronged in all directions, pushing carts, wheelbarrows, prams piled high with goods. Children staggered past, their mouths stained with confectioners' sugar [...] A wrecked tram was skewed across the tracks, where the remnants of a fire smouldered. [...] Feathered women sat astride a dead horse, drinking whiskey by the neck and jeering. (122)

The looting and destruction affected many Dubliners (M. Hill 74), and that chaos is shown clearly in the novel. It is a spectacle, something that hardly feels real to Katie. The city that she knows and loves has been turned into something wild and unfamiliar:

> The further I went towards the river, the more my steps faltered. I'd a sense of being lost, familiar streets made strange by a fear that clogged my ears and beat in my throat [...] I saw myself stranded in an empty street, caught between two advancing armies and all doors shut against me, lost in my own town. (196)

As the rebellion continues, Katie's discomfort grows, to the point that she is unwilling to walk to Dote's home on her own (216). The damage around the GPO, which is at the centre of the fighting, is particularly devastating to Katie, as can be seen in her conversation with Hubie about the British military plans. "'They'll pulverize it.' 'The building?' 'The street.' Sackville Street. An extension of my own street. The heart of my city" (224). This becomes a reality: Sackville Street is almost completely destroyed in the Rising, only a few façades remain of former illustrious buildings like the GPO, and when they are rebuilt the street is renamed O'Connell Street, and Sackville Street ceases to exist (Unger and Kane).

The reaction of the people to the Rising is given a significant amount of attention in the novel. The overarching reaction is confusion and anger, at lives interrupted (M. Hill 74). Most people were unaware of what was happening, there was the feeling that "[s]omething enormous was happening, and we were trapped inside it" (Mills, *Fallen* 193-194). The people Katie speaks to offer various interpretations of the situation, expressing disdain or support for the various factions (Mills, *Fallen* 197-198; 154; see M. Hill 75; McGarry 252). Katie emphasises the lack of information in her report to the sick Eva, during which she spouts ridiculous interpretations of the

fighting, because “there was no knowing which version of events was true” (150). Katie tries to make meaning out of the events by discussing them with Hubie, but he is harsh – and ultimately, as the readers know – correct in his claim that Dublin will not be immune from British wrath, from destruction and death (167), and that the Rising will have dire consequences (220-221). Katie’s hope that the British retaliation will be measured, due to the intimate relations between Ireland and Britain (194-195) stands in stark contrast to the violence of the aftermath of the Rising (McGarry 264; M. Hill 82).

An additional way in which *Fallen* gives a voice to the unheard stories of women, is in the strong emphasis on hospitals and care work. This illustrates the participation of women in the field of war, albeit not as combatants. Frieda, Vivienne, Katie, and even Dote, all are involved in the care of wounded men and women, soldiers and civilians alike. Of the 426 people who died during the Rising, 230 were civilians, and over 3,000 people were injured (M. Hill 74); or, as Morales-Ladrón succinctly puts it: “a majority of the people did not die for Ireland, but were killed as a result of it” (49). *Fallen* shifts the focus to the women working to prevent death and ease suffering, and implicitly critiques the “Republican myth of the blood sacrifice” (Morales-Ladrón, “Feminisation” 49).

The last facet of the novel’s portrayal of the Rising on which I will focus is a positive one in terms of gender relations, namely the way in which the unusual situation creates opportunities for Katie to embrace her agency and self-determination. Katie comes into her own during the Rising, caring for Alanna and Trishy, helping in the hospital (252-259), and taking control of her future. Such freedoms were indeed supported by the Rising, because “[t]he Rising unsettled and disturbed habits of deference altogether, including deference to patriarchies. It unleashed behaviours in women as well as men” (McDiarmid 102). Thus, Katie no longer defers to the internal pressures placed upon her by her mother and society; she openly rebels against her brother’s friend Con’s attempts to influence her decisions. Her rebellion against Con is linked to her sexual awakening with Hubie: When Con, the first man she experienced sexual feelings for, reproaches her for her “wanton” behaviour in staying in a home alone with a man, she rages at his double standards and at his presumption that he has any right to tell her what to do (241-248). Morales-Ladrón notes that Katie’s sexuality empowers her and enables her to rebel against male

power (“Feminisation” 46). In this story, sexuality is liberating, rather than shameful, which belies the nationalist ideal of the chaste woman who only engages in sexual activity within marriage, and only for the sake of bearing children (M. Hill 27). The Rising provides an interruption from daily life that is not only damaging, it also becomes Katie’s opportunity to learn something vital, something she is unwilling to unlearn: she is a woman with sexual desires who is able to take control of her future (271). Hubie and the Rising force Katie to think long and hard about what *she* wants in life (223). The novel concludes with Katie taking control and stepping into her life:

> A breeze sounded in my ear, *choose.* Somewhere, someone wept, as well someone should. I wished for rain, to wash away the smoke and murderous grime of the coming day. Going down the steps after him, I breasted the smutty fog as swans breast water. There was the full span of my foot, there my weight and there the solid ground. (276; emphasis in original)

Chapter 7

The Rising of Bella Casey

Context and Author

The Rising of Bella Casey by Mary Morrissy was published in 2013. It is Morrissy's third novel and was long-listed for the 2015 IMPAC literary award (Morales-Ladrón, "How Women" 28), which is a Dublin-based literary award. Her novels have been well received (Weekes 240); this reception clearly shows that Morrissy's writing speaks to contemporary Irish culture.

Morrissy was born in 1957 in Dublin, where she attended school (Weekes 234). She pursued a degree in journalism, but broke it off to work in civil service (Weekes 235). However, she did not find the civil service position fulfilling and she returned to writing short stories and later in a small newspaper (Weekes 235). She lived in Australia before returning to Ireland to continue work as a journalist, and eventually published a collection of short stories (Weekes 235). In much of her work, Morrissy employs female protagonists who may be ordinary, but find themselves in very difficult situations (Weekes 237). This tendency is indicative of the wider trend in Irish women's writing to focus on "ordinary" women (Ingman, *Irish Women* 178), and *The Rising of Bella Casey* provides a very different example of this, in comparison to the other novels in this research, as will be illuminated below.

Summary

The Rising of Bella Casey is a fictional reimagining of the life of Bella Casey, sister of famous Irish playwright Seán O'Casey (Morrissy, *The Rising of Bella Casey* 352). In Seán O'Casey's autobiography[19], the author has his sister's death occur ten years before her actual death; *The Rising of Bella Casey* is Morrissy's attempt to address this (Morrissy, "Interview" 314). The novel begins when Bella is middle-aged, on Easter Monday 1916. It then reverts to her childhood and follows her tragic life through to its conclusion. Interrupting the narrative are two sections set in the mid-

[19] O'Casey took an experimental approach to his autobiographic work (Harte 188).

twentieth century, detailing Jack's writing of his autobiography[20].

Bella comes from a lower-middle-class Protestant family that resides in Dublin. She has four brothers, but is particularly fond of Jack and their relationship is central to the story. Bella works as an infant teacher and is content with her profession until she is faced with unwanted advances by the school's reverend, Reverend Leeper. After months of sexual harassment, Leeper rapes Bella, and she becomes pregnant. She seduces her older brother's friend, Nick Beaver, with whom she had had a casual flirtation, and convinces him to marry her when she reveals she is pregnant. She is dismissed from the school, and becomes a housewife, bearing many children to her husband. Nick and Bella have a difficult relationship, and he becomes physically and sexually abusive towards her. He is unable to keep a job due to his declining mental health, brought on by syphilis, which kills their son, and to which Nick eventually succumbs. Bella is devastated to realise that it was not Nick's countless affairs during his time as a soldier that brought the illness into their home, but rather that Leeper had infected her. The family descends further into poverty as Nick's meagre earnings fall away, and Bella struggles to keep her family afloat and her pride intact, which is impossible in her circumstances. Jack supports his sister and her family begrudgingly, but Bella resorts to begging for money from her brothers and eventually taking on harsh menial work herself. Towards the end of the novel, there is a glimmer of hope for the aging protagonist, in the form of a piano she steals during the Rising, which reminds of her youthful aspirations. However, this hope is in vain, it is too late to find a way out of destitution, and Bella dies in 1918 during the Spanish influenza epidemic.

Biographical Historical Fiction

As previously mentioned, *The Rising of Bella Casey* is a fictional reinterpretation of Seán O'Casey's sister's life (Morrissy, *The Rising of Bella Casey* 352). Morrissy describes her writing as "inhabiting the grey area between biography and fiction. So though I write about real people, there are inevitably gaps in the narrative, and in those gaps, the fiction happens" (Morrissy, "Interview" 314-315). In the case of Bella

[20] Seán O'Casey's given name was John Casey ("Sean O'Casey"). In the novel, his sister refers to him as Jack; in his narration, he is referred to as Seán. For the sake of simplicity, the name "Jack" will be used throughout this analysis to refer to the fictional character, and "Seán" exclusively to refer to the historical figure.

Casey, these gaps are manifold: the widespread silence in Irish nationalist discourse about Irish Protestants' experience of the early twentieth century, the marginalisation of women's experience on the borders of "history", especially working class women, and the particular personal gap stemming from Seán O'Casey's "literary sororicide [sic]" in his autobiographic works (Morrissy, "Interview" 314). Bella is both a unique individual as well as an example of a voice left out of public discourse, or, as Morrissy describes her, a woman "caught in the shadow of history" (Morrissy, "Interview" 315).

Morrissy's novel attempts to raise Bella's life from obscurity and give significance and meaning to her experiences. "The trouble with a lot of historical characters – like Bella Casey [...] – is that they often appear unknowable. We have external evidence of them, of course, but sometimes it's hard to imagine their interior lives" (315). The novel is true to the facts of Bella's life, as they are known (Morrissy, "Interview" 315), but research is secondary to Morrissy's writing process (Morrissy, "Interview" 315). Morrissy offers an in depth insight into Bella's consciousness, a feature common in women's historical fiction (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 115). By combining factual elements and fictional interpretations, the novel succeeds in creating a realistic, emotionally engaging version of Bella Casey.

Entangled Narrative Perspectives

There are two narrative perspectives in the novel, which function together in a highly evocative way. The majority of the story is told in third person limited narration, primarily from Bella's point of view, in the past tense. This narration is cyclic; the novel begins in 1916, then jumps back to Bella's youth, and returns to 1916 and then 1918 in the last two chapters of the novel. The use of cyclical elements is common in women's historical revisionist novels, as are anachronistic time structures (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 115; Wallace 204). The anachronistic time structure in *The Rising of Bella Casey* is emphasised by the second narrative technique. For two shorter sections of the novel, the narrative perspective is given to Jack, during his process of writing his autobiographies, in 1935 and 1943 (129-170; 267-301). These chapters are set apart by their titles, which name place and date of Jack's writing – notably, both are set in England – by their different font, and by the tense (present tense is the main tense). The chapters describe Jack's authorial struggles, and narrate some of Bella's life events. The conflicting interpretations of events in the two

narrative perspectives highlight the unreliability and bias of memory, which will be discussed below. The juxtaposition of these two conflicting yet connected narrative positions is mirrored in the siblings' intense and difficult relationship, which will be explored in the next section.

Jack's Bella: A Failure of Imagination

Jack and Bella's relationship is central to the novel and their stories are inextricably linked. When Bella begins to tell her life's story, she "let[s] her creaking fingers lead her blindly back, back to the beginning of *their* story" (22; emphasis added). Her story begins with Jack's birth (24), and she is closer to Jack than to any of her other siblings, describing how they are connected "by love and pain, in equal measures" (28). After her marriage, Jack continues to appear at important moments of her life, such as her husband's diagnosis or his death (243-249; 287-289) and Jack is instrumental in providing her and her family with a place to live (296). While Bella often disapproves of her brother, especially in his political and social views (7; 334; 342), she is not as harsh in her judgments as he is.

Indeed, untangling Jack's complex relationship to his sister is highly rewarding in this research, as it uncovers layers of idealisation, fictionalisation, and problematic forgetting through the character of Jack[21]. First, we shall turn to Jack's recollections of Bella as a young woman. In doing so, we must remember that his narration is set in the mid-twentieth century, decades after his sister's death. His recollections of his childhood with Bella are already clouded by her later life, something he notes himself: "*That* Bella [the idealistic teacher] cannot be resurrected. When he tries to call her up, it is the wretched Mrs Beaver who appears" (131; emphasis in original). He cannot bring this Bella to paper, though he is able to remember his teacher and second mother in his thoughts (130-132). Significantly, Bella's downfall, in Jack's mind, begins with her marriage to Nick, and Jack's bitterness seems to have more to do with jealousy than with sorrow. When Bella flirts with Nick, "[s]omething childish within him curdles" (141); when Bella dresses for her wedding and asks his opinion, he thinks that "[n]one of this was for him" (147). During an outing to Bray with the newlyweds, his rage and jealousy take over and he crushes a crab with a rock,

[21] It is key to note here that until the last part of this section, I will be concerned with the fictional character Jack.

cursing Nick all the while (153). It seems that the Bella who exists as a sexual woman, with desires and a life of her own, is inconceivable to Jack, and a threat to his idealised version of her, in which she is solely devoted to him.

As previously mentioned, Jack finds it hard to come to terms with the figure of Mrs Beaver, and his sister's decline in life is too painful for him to commit to paper, even as he narrates it for the reader: "Now, as then, he cannot bear Bella's life, or her living of it. It has made a coward of him. He has hurried her towards her end. He has played the magisterial god and chopped a decade from her sentence. With one stroke of his gavel, he has rendered Bella dead – again" (268). Jack cannot stand Bella's dignity in the tenements (273), nor can he come to terms with her final abandonment of that attitude when she lives with him (298).

Furthermore, Jack feels confined by the restrictions of the autobiographical genre: "[H]e wasn't writing for the stage now. There was no wand of drama, no costume of disguise to depend on. Now he was reduced to the facts of life and feet of clay" (126). The struggle Morrissy attributes to Jack during the writing of the passages about his sister suggests that Jack has not been able to come to terms with his sister's final years, and that her suffering must be erased from his story. I would argue that one can read Jack's problem with his sister's final years as a representation of Irish culture's inability to come to terms with the difficult elements of its past. The trauma of Bella's later years is locked away, like so many other elements of the Irish nation's past, "so that the present-day is safeguarded from the implications of the past" (Pine 4). Unlike Katie in *Fallen*, there is no resolution of the haunting presence of the dead sibling.

Despite Jack's unethical erasure of his sister from his autobiographies, she does live on in his plays: "He'd put magpie variations of her in his plays. Dressed her up as flighty Nora Clitheroe [...], dressed her down for earnest Mary Boyle [...] He had used her prim righteousness – and those challenging breasts – for Susie Monican [...] Her unaccountable heart he'd given to Minnie Powell" (135). Jack is able to use his sister – or rather, parts of his sister – for his art, but when faced with the challenge of writing about the person, he is unable to do so. He reflects on the odd nature of his memories, his fiction, and his autobiographic work when recalling a situation in the tenements: "The tableau stalled. He could see that scene to this very day; he'd used it on the stage, after all, but no amount of artful scripting could remove the original

from his memory. Or was the opposite true? Had he killed the real people off by turning them into characters?" (281). This reflective passage expresses the occasionally uncomfortable link between story and memory: in turning something into a story, elements are always lost (see White).

To conclude this section, I would like to turn briefly to the real figure of Seán O'Casey. Morrissy says that she

> felt his was a failure of the imagination; he couldn't understand what had prompted her downfall and he hadn't the capacity to see beyond appearances. [...] O'Casey was also writing out of disappointment – the disappointment of his very elevated and unrealistic expectations of his bright, clever sister. He'd placed her on a pedestal and couldn't bear witness to her fall, so he opted for silence. ("Interview" 314)

This silence is particularly interesting given O'Casey's ability to include women like his sister in his dramas, most notably in *The Plough and the Stars.* In this play, O'Casey takes an anti-heroic stance towards the Rising, and foregrounds the experiences of women living in the tenements (Clapp; O'Higgins qtd. in Ayling). At the time his play was produced, it caused riots for criticising the theme of blood sacrifice and for treating Pearse irreverently (Clapp; Harte 188). Even favourable reviews noted that O'Casey "missed the soul of the insurrection [...] There was a courage and a quality about it, which left him untouched" (O'Higgins qtd. in Ayling 143). However, he was repeatedly praised for being "the defender of the rights of the poor, the weak and the unheroic" (O'Higgins qtd. in Ayling 143), and even now is praised for his portrayal of complex women (Clapp). Given this praise, Morrissy's novel, with its criticism of Jack, asks the reader to take a more critical view of O'Casey and his writing.

Bella's Relationships: Power and Pride

This section will focus on two aspects of Bella's relationships with other characters in the story. I will show how Bella is able to express her agency through her sexuality, despite the violent patriarchal systems that affected her. Furthermore, I will examine how Bella's relationships with women are characterised by opposition and a lack of female community, due to societal restrictions and her own sense of pride.

Bella is an unconventional female figure in Irish cultural production not only because

of her class and religion, but also because of her sexuality. She falls victim to acts of masculine violence, in the form of the harassment and rape perpetrated by Reverend Leeper (97). Significantly, Leeper's behaviour is reported by a later victim, and he is removed from the school (212); one cannot help but wonder how Bella's life would have unfolded had she felt able to speak about his behaviour. However, despite this act of sexual disempowerment, Bella is able to use her sexuality as a source of power in the courtship between herself and Beaver (117; Morales-Ladrón, "How Women" 31). She embraces her agency, in the form of seduction, and ultimately achieves her goal of having Nick marry her and provide for her (116-119). Bella recognises the limited possibilities available to her and makes use of the power she has.

Beyond her ability to use sex as a method of attaining a desired result, Bella finds sex with Nick enjoyable, at least at the beginning (117-118). However, her enjoyment of sex and her submission to Nick's desire are later linked to the death of her son, transforming the marriage bed into a place of death and violence (214). Nick and Bella's relationship never recovers, and Nick's sexual assaults become the norm (219). The abuse Bella faces from her husband is representative of the domestic violence that was common in Irish households for much of the twentieth century (M. Hill 30). Domestic abuse was widely ignored at the time because it contradicted the myth of the Irish man who treated women with care and gentlemanly manners (Steiner-Scott 125-143). The domestic abuse is one of the ways in which Morrissy interrogates the home as a safe space, which will be discussed below.

Bella's most defining characteristic is her dignity, or pride. She is able to maintain a healthy sense of self-worth despite the treatment at the hands of her family, Reverend Leeper, and Nick, and does not internalise their comments on her (sexual) behaviour (78, 118). It is only her final encounter with Leeper that robs her of her self-worth, when she realises she brought illness and death into her home through her initial lie to Nick: "She was a fallen woman, not just in the world's estimation, but in her own too" (266).

Bella's pride is beneficial to her in many situations, but it is one of the main factors that contribute to the lack of positive female community in her life. Bella's mother, even more so than Katie's mother in *Fallen* and Isabella in *Rebel Sisters*, is an adversary, a controlling and judgmental figure in Bella's life. While her mother's

wishes for her – financial stability and a good husband (29-30) – are not unlike what Bella wants for her own daughters later on, Bella's mother is opposed to Bella's sense of independence and her pride (65). At school, she is marked as unworthy early on (31), and only has one friend in her time at the college (35). Working as a teacher, we see a handful of other women in Bella's orbit, but she is concerned only with their usefulness. It is noteworthy that Bella uses Mrs. Lecky, a fellow parishioner, to avoid unwanted male attention (90) and Clarrie, a former schoolmate, to help attract male attention (107). Even the friendship offered by Mrs Quill, a colleague of Bella's, is refused because Bella worries that the other woman is aware of her pregnancy (124-125). Bella's life and relationships, even with other women, are restricted by patriarchal systems.

Bella's pride and religious bias keep her from becoming a part of the tenement neighbourhood into which she moves after Nick's death (272; 280). She finds herself at odds with her Catholic neighbours as she tries to preserve her dignity (280), once again set apart for "putting on airs". Jack remarks that there is no difference in situation between Bella and the other women, merely that she had not grown up in poverty; they thought that she thought she was something better (283). In O'Casey's autobiographies he details the "courage and community spirit of Dubliners in coping with their harsh environment" (Henchy 41-42), which Morrissy picks up in her fictionalised version of Jack: "if [Bella] could have unbent a little, she might have made something honourable of her life on Fitzgibbon Street, mean and all as it appeared. She could have suckled from the solidarity of the working poor" (283). While Jack judges his sister for her pride – precisely what he admired about her as a teacher – the readers know how important pride has been to Bella's survival, and cannot help understanding her motivations and choices.

The Unsafe Home

This novel, like many women's historical novels, directs a significant amount of its focus to the lived experiences of women in the home, in this case, lower working class women. The harsh elements of Bella's life can be found in descriptions of life for poor women in late nineteenth to early twentieth-century Dublin, such as the censure of unwed mothers (M. Hill 29), the high birth rate leading to poverty (M. Hill 22), the physical demands of motherhood (M. Hill 22), irregular employment (M. Hill

18), the pawning of belongings to survive (M. Hill 19), the frequent illnesses (M. Hill 19), and the abysmal tenement housing (M. Hill 18). As a novel, this narrative is able to make these features of historical women's experience emotionally available to the reader. It does not shy away from evocative descriptions of the harsh realities of Bella's life. For instance, childbirth is described in visceral language: "Mother yelling and Aunt Izzie shouting until their voices bled into one and then slowly, inch by bloodied inch – the head emerged, not like a child at all but like some… some *thing*, angry and inflamed" (25-26; emphasis in original). This passage, with its emphasis on blood and rawness disrupts the cultural image of the idealised, revered Irish mother (Meaney 10). Another element of early twentieth-century working class life, the tenement housing, is described in detail as well: "The walls were peeling [...] the plaster had come right away showing the pitiful skeleton of the house. Laths like fragile bones, innards of crumbling shale. The only clue to the room's former grandeur was in the ceiling rose. Centre-stage in the high-browed room. The floorboards creaked, the windows shivered" (272). Morrissy creates an image of the former illustrious Georgian houses as bare-boned, barely habitable places, in which recollections of former glory (the ceiling rose) are disturbing because of their incongruence. The novel illustrates the social injustices and desperate situations many people found themselves in, without making Bella or the other characters into objects of mere pity or admiration.

Bella and the Rising

As with other women's historical novels, the subjective experiences of the protagonists take precedence over the portrayal of a historical chronology (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 116-117; Morales-Ladrón, "How Women" 35). In *The Rising of Bella Casey*, the events that are foregrounded are those that immediately affect Bella's family. Bella notes the intrusion of so-called history on private life at the turn of the century: "What she hadn't bargained for was that the door flung open on a new century, also allowed the world, *out there* as she had always thought it, to infect her little household" (198; emphasis in original). This begins with the Boer war, in which her brothers must fight (198), to the break between Nick and Jack over loyalty to the Crown (201). The Casey's are "a microcosm for all the political divisions of the country at the time" (Morrissy, "Interview" 316).

The Easter Rising has a more significant impact in the novel than any of the other historic events mentioned. Although it features less prominently in this novel than it does in any of the other novels analysed, the position the rebellion has within the novel is considerable. Its importance is signalled by the title itself: “The Rising of Bella Casey.” The word “rising” can refer to multiple acts: the raising of the figure of Bella Casey from historical obscurity and an early grave by the author as well as Bella’s rising in rebellion against fate throughout the novel, but particularly during Easter week 1916. “Rising”, a word now synonymous with the Easter Rising, is taken back from the nation and returned to an individual at the margins of society. These manifold acts of elevation and reclamation stand in juxtaposition to Bella’s fate as a “fallen” woman; both *The Rising of Bella Casey* and *Fallen* investigate the idea of the fallen-yet-risen woman and seek to complicate the relationship between cultural standards and individual self-fulfilment. Furthermore, the plot of the novel begins with the Easter Rising, which marks a turning point in Bella's life. In my subsequent analysis, I will examine which elements of the Rising narrative occur in the text, then I will investigate the symbolic meaning of the Rising for Bella.

The novel begins with an argument over the name the incident should be given. “'A skirmish,' Bella Beaver declared with more certitude than she felt. ‘That's all it is.' '*They* said it was a rising,' her daughter, Babsie, shot back” (7; emphasis in original). Those are the starting lines of the novel, and they already demonstrate the divided opinions on the rebellion. Bella, Protestant and loyal to the Crown, will not give it any more importance than a simple “skirmish”, while “they” - Catholic and Irish nationalist – elevate it to the standing of a “rising”. In Bella's household, they do not know what this event is; at first they think it is a performance (8), then they hear the Proclamation of the Republic, to which Babsie says: “The Irish Republic, whatever that is when it's at home” (8). The ignorance and confusion surrounding the event is fostered by the lack of information, all they know comes from “the hiss of rumour” (9), as in *Fallen* (149-150). None of the leaders of the Rising are named, nor are any other specificities mentioned. *The Rising of Bella Casey* highlights the outrage of many people, especially women, at the rebels: “A crowd had gathered. Women mostly, howling like Revolution furies at the pretend soldiers. 'Youse boyos should go off to France and fight, instead of turning guns on your own,' one of them hollered waving her fist as a couple of them appeared on the roof of Jacobs and ran up a strange flag of green, white and gold” (9). Bella's reaction to a rebel's death initially

follows that pattern: “her son was out beyond in a foreign field, fighting for his country – where this boy should be, by all rights, instead of joining himself to this villainous mayhem” (14). But her reaction shifts immediately, and she questions how she could have let her son go off to fight at all, now that she is faced with the reality of military action (15).

The destruction and looting of Dublin are at the foreground of the description of 1916. Neighbours come to Bella and describe in vivid detail the scenes along Sackville Street (9); the use of dialogue demonstrates a female perspective of history that centralises oral accounts of historical action (*Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 114). On Wednesday, Bella takes her son Vincent and ventures out onto the Dublin streets in search of food (10-19); this highlights the necessity for women to leave their homes in the midst of the turmoil in order to care for their families (M. Hilll 74-75). Bella finds herself “mesmerised” (13) by the ruins of the once illustrious buildings (13). She is fascinated by the eerie Dublin, and takes her son further into the ruined city, unwilling to return home (12-13).

Beyond emphasising the female experience of the Rising, the novel gives the Rising a direct, positive impact on Bella’s life. The Rising prompts Bella's own “rising”, at least internally. When Bella sees the piano on the streets of Dublin, untended and majestic, it marks the return of her desire and ambition and sense of agency. The piano represents “the sum of every fine and noble aspiration she had ever nurtured” (19). The discovery and looting of the piano spark Bella’s “rising”; she once again begins to dream of a better life, of a fulfilling career as a teacher (339). Even as her health declines, due to her work and the syphilis, she is filled with renewed pride and a sense of accomplishment, culminating in her hallucination of an engraving on a silver platter “Isabella Casey, it read, Mistress of her Circumstances” (344).

The Return of Bella Casey

This novel has a variety of functions in cultural memory. One of these functions is that of a catalyst; it restores a marginalised figure – as an individual and as an example of a group – to cultural memory. Bella is a loyal supporter of the Crown and she is a Protestant; she is a victim but she is also able to influence those around her. She is a working class woman, and the story follows her through youth to old age

and increasing mental instability. By describing the hardships and devastation of her life and death, Morrissy refuses to idealise Bella; there is no hopefulness at the end of the novel, as there is in *Fallen* or in *Rebel Sisters*. Bella is much closer to the figures of "the mad, the bad and the dangerous" (Bebiano 259), and is thus a character who helps claim "full humanity for women" in Irish women's fiction (Bebiano 259).

The *Rising of Bella Casey* further destabilises received approaches to history by encouraging the readers to question not only what/who we remember, but how we remember. Morrissy's novel asks us to consider the reliability of memory. On the textual level, this is done by the juxtaposition of Jack's account with Bella's account. On an intertextual level, this is done by using passages from O'Casey's autobiographies and subverting their authority. By killing off his sister ten years early, the truth-value of his accounts is called into question. Morrissy is not claiming accuracy, nor is that necessary for the importance of her novel. Morales-Ladrón argues "that it is irrelevant whether the narration of Bella's life is a true account of what really happened, or a fictional refashioning of the past [...] the novel should be read as a form of resistance against forgetting" ("How Women" 30). Morales-Ladrón's reading of the novel takes a position in line with ethical memory: the past, and the victims of the past, must be raised and returned to cultural consciousness, and our memory of them must have implications for the present (Pine 4; 14).

Chapter 8

What Becomes of Us

Context and Author

What Becomes of Us is Henrietta McKervey's first novel, and was published in 2015, the same year as *Rebel Sisters*.

The spark of inspiration for this novel came from a party the author attended, during which she spoke to an Irish Labour activist: "She told me she and her friends used to go into a pub, ask for a pint, be refused, and make a fuss. That stayed with me." (McKervey, "Interview"). In the lead-up to the centenary, McKervey became interested in the role of women during the Rising, but beyond that, in how the women had been erased from historical record: "I wondered what had happened in the 1920s to make their interaction disappear. And I started to focus on the 1960s" (McKervey, "Interview"). McKervey's novel expresses the desire of many Irish artists to engage with the centenary in a productive and culturally aware manner. *What Becomes of Us* is unique in my research as it is the only novel not set in the early twentieth century but in the 1960s. It is concerned with the jubilee commemoration, the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising. I included it in my research because it is concerned explicitly with the remembrance of the Rising in Irish culture and offers a further perspective on women during and after the rebellion. The way it links the early twentieth century with the sixties and the present offers valuable insights, as I will demonstrate below.

Summary

What Becomes of Us begins in 1965 with the protagonist Maria Mills leaving London with her six-year-old daughter Anna. She is fleeing an abusive husband, John, by returning to Ireland and she tells everyone, including her daughter, that her husband died in an oil rig explosion. Maria and Anna move into a flat in Dublin and Maria finds a job working as a copytaker – someone who writes down stories called in by journalists in the field – for Telifís Éireann, the Irish national television broadcaster. Their neighbour, Mrs Halpin, minds Anna after school while Maria is at work. Maria's

old school friend Eve works for the broadcaster as well, and tries to include Maria in her circle of friends by taking her along on an evening out. However, these evenings out are actually political statements aimed at protesting the inequality of women not being allowed to order pints of beer[22]. Maria is shocked by her friend's behaviour and has no interest in Eve's politics. At work, Maria is given a new assignment, taking minutes at the 1916 Programmes Committee, a group tasked with devising programmes for the jubilee commemoration of the Rising. She becomes heavily involved with a radio programme dedicated to women's stories of the Rising, eventually hearing that one of her neighbours, the elderly Tess McDermott, was part of Cumann na mBan. Tess refuses to share her past with Maria, though Maria finds her diary and learns about her suffragette past in England. In the course of the story, Maria becomes more engaged in women's issues and decides to join Eve's campaign. The group of women are arrested for stealing their drinks and are going to be tried, much to Maria's embarrassment. The morning after their arrest, John turns up at their door, and Maria, emotionally distraught, is seduced by the intimacy of their relationship and his promise of change. She is worried that she will lose her job when she is put on trial, she reluctantly agrees to leave Dublin with him, despite knowing he is lying about their future. However, when she goes to say goodbye to Tess, the older woman encourages her to listen to her heart and to not shy away from doing the right thing. Strengthened by the woman's words, Maria tells her friends and Mrs Halpin about John, his abuse and his threats, and they rally around her. Mrs Halpin brings a police officer to Maria's house, who threatens to tell the British authorities about John, who is wanted for criminal activity, and he leaves. Tess agrees to give an interview to the radio programme Maria has been working on, describing her experience of the Rising one final time. The novel ends on that day, a week before Easter, with Maria hopeful that Easter Sunday 1966 will bring a new future.

[22] As previously mentioned, it was this form of activism that sparked McKervey's interest in this period. There are records of women who would enter pubs in the 1970s, order drinks, then one would order a pint and be refused service, at which point the women would drink their drinks and leave without paying. It was not until 2000 with the Equal Status Act that it became illegal to refuse pints to women due to their gender (Buck).

Narration and Structure

This novel shows many typical traits of women's historical novels, in both the narrative technique and the novel's structure. The story is narrated primarily from Maria's perspective in the third person and in present tense. The large amount of interior monologue enables the reader to experience her thoughts and feelings in an immediate way; this psychological narration is common in women's revisionist historical novels (Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion* Vol. 2 115). Maria's story is interspersed with Tess's diary entries, which provide a fragmentary account of periods of her life, a technique common in women's historical novels (Wallace 204). Other features common in women's historical novels include the disruption of linear chronology through flashbacks in Maria's narration and the overall importance of oral history in the form of the radio programme and Tess's account. The manner in which Tess's diary entries disrupt the flow of Maria's story creates a sense of cyclical relations between the two women; there is a sense in which their stories, different as they are, are mirrors of each other, each woman needing to come to terms with the "end" of their respective stories.

What Becomes of Us includes some features of historiographic metafiction, a form of historical novel that "destabilizes received notions of both history and fiction" (Hutcheon 110) and "open[s the past] up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (Hutcheon 110). One way in which it does this is by using fragments of other texts, such as a fictional first-hand account of the Rising (168-172) and a fictional newspaper excerpt (252)[23]. Overall, the inclusion of intertextual elements, fictional as they are, is one way in which this novel demonstrates "the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past" (Hutcheon 127). Additionally, "historiographic metafiction plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record" (Hutcheon 114), often by letting the reader "watch the narrators [...] trying to make sense of the historical facts they have collected. As readers, we see both the collecting and the attempts to make narrative order" (Hutcheon 114). Throughout the novel, Maria reflects on the process of historiography and of creating a cohesive narrative out of the fragments of the past (see below).

[23] The inclusion of the fictional news source may be linked to the author's view that newspapers capture the feeling of a period exceedingly well (McKervey, "Time Travel").

Maria: Representative Anxieties

From the moment she is introduced the protagonist, Maria, is shown to be different from what one might expect of an Irish woman in the 1960s. The novel opens on Maria and Anna on the ferry from Wales to Ireland; McKervey thereby manages to "establish her as someone who was doing the opposite of most people of the time and moving back" (McKervey, "Time Travel"). The Maria we are first introduced to is a woman who is highly anxious about the future; she is especially nervous about what awaits her in the country she has not seen in ten years. "She's been gone from Ireland for too long. What was once familiar has become unfamiliar. The thought frightens her, like a dream in which every movement is nothing more than panting, hard-won steps on marshy ground and nowhere is safe" (7). Despite her anxiety, she has high hopes for Ireland: "Dublin […] is getting closer. No, more than that: life is getting closer […] what she wants is for them to slide seamlessly into a different, fresh life, to slip it on as easily as one might a new coat. Or a disguise" (9). Not only is Maria untypical in her return to Ireland, but McKervey's choice to make Ireland into a safer place for a female protagonist is also unusual. In much of Irish women's writing, departure from repressive Ireland is seen as necessary for a woman's freedom (eg. Katie in *Fallen*).

It is not until further on in the novel that we learn that Maria is not simply returning to Ireland, she is fleeing her abusive husband, who is not dead, as she says (58). The only chance Maria sees of being able to escape her husband, for both her and her daughter's sakes was in fleeing the country and pretending to be a widow. As a widow, she is able to avoid the marriage bar, which banned married women from public service (Binns), and allows her to avoid the stigma of being a single parent. While divorce would have been possible for Maria in England at the time ("Divorce since 1900"), in Ireland divorce was only legalised in 1995 by a small majority (M. Hill 191). Maria's story is ultimately a positive one, but the issues raised by her unhappy marriage demonstrate the novel's focus on women's concerns.

An additional topic that is centralised by Maria's story is the difficulties facing a single parent. Binns says that "Maria's struggles regarding finances, childcare and single parenthood also reflect modern anxieties as mothers head most one-parent families, in which the risk of poverty and deprivation is disproportionately high." Maria finds work through Eve, but it is luck that has Mrs Halpin, their neighbour, offer to care for

Anna in the afternoons (25). Maria is reluctantly grateful for the older woman's support, though she repeatedly feels judged by her (91; 240). One reviewer argued that it is not clear why Maria mistrusts Mrs Halpin (Keating); I would argue that Maria's problems with Mrs Halpin are particularly interesting because they are unfounded. I will devote more attention to Mrs Halpin below. Throughout the novel Maria's main concern is the welfare of her daughter: that is what causes her to leave John (242), it is what makes her accept Mrs Halpin's help (26), it is what initially keeps her from participating in the Campaign for Pints (43) and then encourages her to do so (212).

Maria's Feminist Awakening

Female activism is a central issue in this novel, more so than in any of the other novels I have analysed. Maria experiences what one critic calls a "gradual feminist awakening" (Binns). Maria is initially wary of aligning herself with her politically active friends, even as she notices the interconnected inequalities present in life around her. She sees these injustices in the sexism rampant in the Teilifís Éireann offices (178) and the implied homophobic behaviour towards her colleague Michael (76): "something pinches inside her, a recognition that all of it […] is all connected in some strange, opaque way. As though a similar emptiness rests in all their hearts" (76). Maria's reluctance to engage makes her authentic and relatable; "Maria's ambiguity about feminist politics […] stops the novel from becoming polemical" (Keating). Eventually, her desire to create a better future for Anna and her increasing interest in historical women's activism leads her to participate once again in Eve's Campaign for Pints, which lands them in jail (202). This is a vital moment in Maria's feminist trajectory:

> 'Eve, you also asked me if I wanted my daughter to grow up in a country where she's the equal of men. […] I thought that change just happened, that Anna and her generation would know differently and the world would move on, with or without us. I thought it wasn't about me, that it can't matter what I put my name to, because what can one person do anyway? What was meant to be would just be.' How stupid she was, she decides, to have abdicated responsibility for her daughter's adulthood in that way. To think that providing safety and food and a roof over her head would be enough, that the future would somehow take care of itself.

Maria recognises that while the individual may not seem powerful, doing nothing and simply hoping for change to take place without active engagement is not something she can live with. Maria's monologue can be understood as an appeal to people to take action against inequality – something Irish feminists, especially young women, have been doing very strongly in the past years (Brennan). Maria is a representative of women realising that the fight for (gender) equality is far from over and requires renewed commitment.

As central as Maria's night in jail is to her development, I would argue that her true moment of emancipation comes when she refuses to leave with John, supported by her female friends. When John finds Maria in Dublin, Maria is willing to accept him and his promises of change; she is exhausted by living on her own, struggling day by day: "Who is she to judge another's pain […] And perhaps what he is saying is true, that he has changed. People do, don't they? They can try again. […] Hasn't the way she's lived her life here just proved how much she needs him? Failure is relentless and exhausting. *Save me,* she thinks" (246-247; emphasis in original). But she recognises quickly that his tenderness is a lie: "Despite where his lips had just been, she could not see love on them. No care, or need, or want. His expression was that of a victor over an enemy" (251). John represents the patriarchal system of power that views women's bodies as objects over which dominion is achieved. When John reveals that he knows that Maria was arrested, she realises that there is no option for her to avoid going with him: "Pain and fears and the spill of tears. That is what John is made of. And what he says is true: she has to go with him. With no job, and a court case looming, what choice has she got?" (253). John's control over Maria is strengthened by other patriarchal structures that punish women and other marginalised groups for standing up for their rights. Maria's fear controls her; it is only through Tess's counsel that she realises that she is an active agent in her future and that she has an ability to choose. Tess's words are harsh but necessary: "That's why you're doing wrong if you go back with that man. There'll be no salvation for you if you go into it knowing what these tears tell me you know" (261).

Having reclaimed her agency, Maria confronts her husband a final time: "'No.' It is both the quietest and the loudest word she has ever spoken. […] this minute is everything. Everything she wants for herself, for Anna. Everything she now knows she wants them to be is here, in this minute" (265). Significantly, Maria is not alone

for this confrontation: Eve is there with her friend Alicia, Mrs Halpin comes by with two police officers, ready to detain John (267). Ultimately, it is the women in Maria's life who provide the safety she assumed only a husband could give her (53). Even the court trial, and fear for her job, is dealt with by a female colleague and Maria's male boss (276-279). Maria's boss, Patrick, is a one of the few male characters who is portrayed in a favourable light; he appears interested in Maria but is never anything but courteous in her presence, and the potential romance is never developed. This can be interpreted as a feminist undermining of the need for a romantic plot in women's fiction (Benstock, Ferris, Woods 147). Maria is rewarded in the story for her courage, but not with a new heterosexual relationship. The novel highlights the necessity and strength of community, not only female independence.

The community Maria is a part of is populated primarily by women, which stand in for various forms of Irish feminism. There is a continuity of feminism represented in this novel that reflects recent historical accounts that "have increasingly rejected the notion that Irish feminism was stagnant between the beginning of the First World War and the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s" (M. Hill 151). The early feminist movements are represented by Tess, while the Women's Liberation Movement is foreshadowed in Eve and Alicia's activism. The activism in between these surges is represented in the least overtly feminist character, namely Mrs Halpin. Mrs Halpin is a member of the Irish Housewives Association (IHA) (281), a historic women's organisation, founded in 1941, which advocated for gender equality (M. Hill 120; 151). This is only revealed late in the novel, causing Maria and the reader to question their assumptions about the otherwise almost stereotypical Irish woman (religious, motherly, gossipy). When Maria finally confesses her lies about her past to Mrs Halpin, the older woman is sympathetic to Maria's plight and is instrumental in helping her free herself from John (267-268; 282-284). It is even intimated that she may have caused one of her own husband's deaths (284). While Mrs Halpin's attitudes are not universally feminist – for instance, she is very critical of the gender non-conforming behaviour of the women involved in the Rising (101-102) – she nonetheless represents a form of female, if not radically feminist, support and community. This novel offers contemporary Irish feminists a sense of identity that does not pause in the mid-twentieth century but emphasises the continuity of Irish women's endeavours and gives recognition to the various forms in which Irish women have fought for their rights.

What Becomes of the Rising

As this story is set in 1965-1966, approximately half way between the Easter Rising and the publication of the novel, it does not engage with the Rising in the same way as the other novels I have analysed. McKervey directly addresses the issues of memory and commemoration, primarily through Maria's interest in Tess's story and her involvement with the activities of the 1916 Programmes Committee. In the following section, I will turn to these two features in detail and elucidate their importance for cultural memory in 2016 and beyond.

Tess's Story

Tess McDermott is an elderly woman living on Maria's street, whom the protagonist becomes interested in after beginning her secretarial duties in the 1916 Programmes Committee. Mrs Halpin disparagingly mentions Tess to Maria (101-102), calling her an "odd fish" (102) and mentioning the sanctions the women involved in military action faced from the Church: "And the bishop told us how awful it all was, how we should be at home helping our mothers with their brasses. He was right too. That was our place and I for one was glad to know it" (102).

Maria works up the courage to speak to Tess, spurred on by the ignorance of the Committee members concerning women's role in the rebellion (106-107). Furthermore, Maria's interest is compounded both by a sense of belonging and of outrage over the loss of their stories.

> Maria […] find[s] an uncertain kinship with the women involved [in the Rising]. What were they doing other than trying to shape a different existence? To own their lives and those of their children, both born and unborn. And yet, for all that, history doesn't seem to have recorded them as it has the men. Their ambitions were not made safe for her generation, for Anna's […] for the most part the women disappeared back to their hearths after the rebellion. Did the blood of childbirth thin their conviction? Was it by their own choice or was it a life pushed upon them? (107-108)

This passage critiques various elements of the traditional 1916 narrative. The image of blood sacrifice – linked invariably to Patrick Pearse's rhetoric – is called into question by the female blood of childbirth and its apparent lack of value in the Irish cultural narrative. The book expresses an explicit historiographic critique of the

woman blindness of Irish history (St. Peter 70) and Maria calls into question the assumption that the retreat to the domestic sphere is “natural”.

Tess is initially hostile to Maria, she tries to send her away and claims to know nothing about the Rising (109-110). Tess opens up briefly when the two women share their experiences about London, but as soon as the conversation drifts back to Irish matters Tess retreats (11-113). This trend recurs throughout Tess’s narrative: she becomes willing to talk about her activity as a suffragette in England (144-148) but she refuses to admit she was a member of Cumann na mBan (180) and is critical of Ireland (148). Tess is adamant about not discussing the Rising and her involvement in it: “My past is my business and, for the life of me, I don’t know why *you* want to get hold of it. Fifty years since the Rising, who’s to care? It’s a number, it means nothing. The dead are dead. Grass grows over both sides equally” (180-181).

It is significant that Tess is a suffragette first and that she is willing to speak about that period more readily than her involvement in Irish nationalism. There was an “ideological clash with nationalism” (M. Hill 58) in the Irish suffrage movement; the traditional roles of women in nationalism did not sit easily with feminist ideals of freedom of choice and disruption of gender roles (M. Hill 59; Murphy, “Problematic Relationship” 145-158). Furthermore, many nationalists did not believe that asking for the right to vote from a British parliament was the right course of action (Matthews 26; M. Hill 58-59). Anna Carey criticises McKervey’s glossing over of Tess’s joining of Cumann na mBan as a seemingly natural progression of her activism, though Tess is sure to remark that even her participation in the Rising was connected to her desire for the vote (301). I would argue that placing Tess, foremost a suffragette, rather than a nationalist, at the centre of this narrative is a powerful choice on McKervey’s part. Tess’s disillusionment with Ireland and Irish politics highlights the ways in which the fight for female empowerment was suppressed in the Irish state.

At the end of the novel, Tess agrees to give an interview about her experience of the Rising to Robert Ryan, the radio host for whom Maria works. This scene is the second climax of the novel, and Tess’s story is not only utterly gripping but also important. When the host tells her “to think of the interview as not more than a chat” (286), Tess is outraged: “I will not do any such thing! […] if you think I’m here to talk about my life as if it’s no more than a gas over a fence, then I don’t give a fiddler’s for you or your programme” (286). The silence – enforced and chosen – surrounding the

stories of women is not something to be broken without care or respect and Tess refuses to have her story taken lightly. Tess describes her involvement in the suffrage movement, moving on to describing the active role of women in the Rising:

> It was the women were out on the streets during that week. All the telegraph and telephone wires had been cut so we were like those pigeons you see with notes tied around their necks. One woman had the job to carry another's typewriter. We did everything the men did that week but the only difference was we didn't get executed afterwards. (301)

It is finally revealed why Tess has been so reluctant to share her story; she asks Robert whether he is sure he wants to hear it: "Because when I tell you it's yours too. All of yours. There's no un-owning of it. You're calling up the dead" (303). At his affirmative response, she describes coming upon a soldier assaulting one of her fellow Cumann na mBan members, beating him with a stick, then picking up his gun and shooting the fallen British soldier in the head (302-304). It is this soldier to whom her thoughts return, and whose memory she wishes to commit to the public: "None of this [commemoration] is about people like him. It's all leaders and museums and colour supplements in the newspapers. None of it remembers the ordinary ones" (304). Through Tess's words, the novel explicitly critiques commemorative practices, the jubilee in particular but also commemorations more generally, that exclude the voices of the common people, the "forgotten figures from the past" (Morales-Ladrón, "Feminisation" 49).

The Jubilee

By setting this novel around the jubilee commemorations, McKervey is able to engage with the commemoration of Irish history in a more explicit way than any of the novels previously analysed. As discussed in Chapter 4, the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising was "the most elaborate commemoration of Easter Week" (Higgins 2), and has become controversial itself, for seeming to have "fuelled divisions between unionists and nationalists" (Higgins 1) in light of the subsequent Trouble in Northern Ireland. Some have described the 1966 commemorations as acts of "unrestrained triumphalism" (Higgins 1) or "unthinking nationalism" (Higgins 2). McKervey turns to this moment in history and re-imagines it, and through this reimagining, uncovers the layers of conflicting interpretations of the Rising throughout the past hundred years.

Throughout the novel, it is female perspectives on the commemoration and the Rising that are centralised. The first meeting of the Committee is described from Eve's perspective, before she convinces Maria to take the position (77-85). When the two discuss the Rising, Eve comments on the erasure of Elizabeth O'Farrell[24] from the picture of the official surrender (85); Maria recognises the Cumann na mBan brooch in the book from her aunt's home (87). Both women want to "walk into the photo and hear what they're [Cumann na mBann members] are saying" (88). While Eve hopes to hear advice from the women, Maria is more interested in the domestic concerns the women were likely to have had (88).

One of the first elements I would like to examine is the fictional radio programme Maria is working on, "The Women of 1916". Eve suggests a name for the programme during one of the Committee meetings and is met with shock at her voicing of an opinion; it is highly ironic that her suggestion is ignored despite it being a programme about women voicing their stories (89; 106). Through its focus on women's issues, this novel redresses the absence of Irish feminism in the actual commemorative activities in the 60s (Higgins 82). "Certain women were clearly visible and vocal during the jubilee, but the historical position of women during the Easter Rising was not used as a way of forcing a debate on the position of women in the 1960s" (Higgins 82).

An additional way in which this novel provides a female perspective on history is by giving Maria monologues that emphasise individual stories over the chronology of historical events. This can be seen in her dedication to listening to the oral histories of individuals such as Tess or Peadar O'Brien, an elderly man she meets at the GPO (129-131), or her particular care of the relics the public sends in to the station, which she recognises as having "honest meaning in the lives of men and women just like her" (119-122).

Throughout the novel, Maria and others express concern over the endeavour of commemoration. Roisín Higgins notes that commemorations "represent both a recognition that the past is gone and an attempt to reconstitute that past. By their very nature, commemorations reinvent historical episodes in order to confer respect upon them" (20-21). McKervey's characters repeatedly demonstrate an awareness of

[24] Elizabeth O'Farrell was a nurse in Cumann na mBann who took the white flag of surrender to the British officers (Townshend 246-248); there has been controversy over the airbrushing out of her feet in some of the images portraying the surrender (see Barry).

the artificiality of the commemorative practice. During the first Committee meeting the debate over what the commemorative programming should do becomes heated: one person says that the goal "is to present a uniform approach to the Rising, and our perspective is to be one of nationalism, not socialism" (79), to which another responds "Uniform? [...] Prescriptive more like. Oppressive. The very thing that those men, who should be held aloft as the idols of our nation, were rebelling against" (80). These dialogues express the ongoing discussions over who can claim the rightful legacy of the Rising. Furthermore, it demonstrates a lack of clarity over what should be taught/shown/embraced about the Rising, another ongoing source of contention in Irish culture.

The highly constructed nature of the commemoration is highlighted later as well, when Maria notes that "Patrick told her he was concerned that the true job of the committee was to create an illusion; a charade of kinship with an uncertain past" (121). During the filming of "Insurrection", the television broadcast of the Rising, the artificiality of the commemoration is blatant: people crowd around O'Connell Street to witness the soldier/actors march down the street; Maria sees how this moment may become itself a "historical event":

> What will today become for that boy? An anecdote for his own grandchildren fifty years from now about the day he saw the Rising being filmed for the television? *Oh, for sure,* she imagines him exclaiming, *it was just like 1916 itself. Everyone there said so. Yes indeed. Swear to God.* Except it isn't, in every possible respect. (126-127; emphasis in original)

Maria remarks later on that the "programme could look like it, sound like it and, if it were possible, smell like it, but it would always be an imposter" (131). One would be tempted to argue that these lines devalue McKervey's work; a historical novel is just as much an imposter, it is as unable to capture "reality" as the television programme is. However, Maria continues: "A story retold is always a different story: hindsight throws different shadows, creates a play of light and shade that didn't exist the first time. Yet why do we insist on stories being treated as though they are insects trapped in amber? Caught for all eternity, a fixed curiosity for future generations" (132). Maria reminds us that the past, like every story, should not be conceived of as a fixed, singular entity, it "must instead continually be re-constructed and re-presented" (Erll, "Introduction" 7). McKervey purposefully throws new shadows; she places different aspects of the historical narrative into the foreground in order to comment on them. Memory is fallible, and the past is not set, but nonetheless it is

important to resist the forgetting of marginalised voices, as is so decidedly shown by this novel. The radio programme ends with a speech that is both ironic and hopeful: “Isn’t this the time, fifty years after those tumultuous days, that Ireland needs to listen? To listen to these voices – all of them, men and women – before they fade for ever [sic] and become lost to our nation’s history and from its future generations?” (306). This endeavour was not undertaken in 1966, and so this speech can be read as a call for ethical memory: it is in 2016 that these stories are given voice, even if it is done through fictional accounts.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I would like summarise the findings of my analyses by repeating the most significant features of each of the novels. Then I shall argue that while the individual novels differ in how subversive they are towards mainstream accounts of women in the Rising and of Irish women's stories in general, the most benefit can be derived from considering these works as parts of a whole. I will conclude by reflecting on the contribution they make to Irish cultural memory and ethical remembrance.

Summary

Rebel Sisters is the least radical of the novels. While it does contain revisionist elements, such as its focus on women and women's issues, it does not engage critically with the idea of historical "facts" as given. The novel's focus is on restoring comparatively well documented nationalist women to the story of the Rising. The novel allows the Rising to maintain its fundamental importance in the Irish nation and does not question the legitimacy of the rebellion, but rather reclaims the events for Irish women.

Fallen foregrounds the personal development of its young, educated female protagonist. The events of the Rising are significant in how they relate to Katie's life; the rebellion is a destructive disruption in her life that nonetheless creates room for her to experiment with her sense of independence. Through Katie, *Fallen* expresses the insecurity of ordinary people during the Rising and in the early twentieth century's political upheaval more generally. Besides re-telling the rebellion from a non-combatant, non-radical, female point of view, *Fallen* also reintroduces the important issue of grief into the remembrance of 1916.

Of the four novels, *The Rising of Bella Casey* is concerned least with the events of the Rising; however, it addresses the exclusion of women from masculine narratives explicitly through Jack's erasure of his sister. The novel turns from the story of the famous Irish playwright to Bella, a woman marginalised by her sex, her religion, her political leanings, and her class. Morrissy re-imagines the story of a complex woman

and allows her life to be shaped by the events of the Rising, so central in Irish culture.

What Becomes of Us restores women to the Irish past on two levels: by telling women's stories and by creating a main character who is actively searching for the stories of women of 1916. Through the layered plots, McKervey engages with the legacy of the Rising and the ways in which women were removed from that moment in history once their activism was no longer needed. In *What Becomes of Us*, a sense of feminist continuity and female community are established, with implications for the modern reader.

The main similarities between the novels are that all of them place women's stories, circumstances, and issues into the forefront of the narratives. The diversity of characters in the novels, their struggles, and difficulties exemplify the diversity of the experiences of historical women in Ireland. They all reflect a desire to reintroduce marginalised voices into the stories of the past in order to say something about the present.

The ways the novels engage with the constructs of nation and history differ greatly – *Rebel Sisters* merely reintroduces female nationalists, while *Fallen* and *The Rising of Bella Casey* question the legitimacy of a minority led rebellion as the foundation of a national identity. *What Becomes of Us* accepts the undeniable significance of the Rising while asking how this moment is remembered, by whom, and for which purposes. Significantly, despite the different emphases placed on the Rising, it is always an instance of destruction, disruption, and death as well as of hope and new beginnings. I would argue that these depictions of the Rising are emblematic of contemporary Irish culture which seeks to create an inclusive sense of Irishness that incorporates the silences and traumas of the past while committing to prevent these in the future (Pine 3; 14).

Importance for Cultural Memory

It would be presumptive to claim that any of these novels have had, or will have, a decisive impact on Irish cultural memory. If literature is a "culture's memory" (Lachmann 301), then these novels are but brief moments in Irish culture's long life and it is too soon to measure any lasting effect they might have. The discourses that

have long sidelined women in Irish culture cannot be changed in a day, or in a novel. However, when combined with the work done in other academic and artistic arenas, these four novels have helped expand the kinds of stories incorporated in Irish memory.

These historical novels are representative of the new ways in which the Irish are telling their stories in the face of widening understanding of what it means to be Irish. As Pine said, "[t]hese new narratives expand the traditionally narrow definition of Irish historical identity" (3). While each novel on its own may not demonstrate this trend unequivocally, considered together the novels present "an imaginative counter-discourse bringing together multiple […] versions of the past" (Neumann 341). These four novels do not present a single version of the past; rather, they question the assumption that any single version of the past can remember all forms of Irishness or womanhood. Repeatedly, these novels urge the reader to fight against the exclusion of marginalised women's voices, whether these are nationalist or loyalists, upper or lower class, Catholic or Protestant, from Irish cultural memory. These kinds of novels help assert the rights of "new" Irish female identities to remembrance and to their place within official discourse. These novels follow an ethical imperative to redress the discrimination and exclusion from Irish public life experienced by women since the Rising. Additionally, it is key to note that "the attempt to rewrite or reinterpret the past must be accompanied by a desire to re-read it" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 143). These novels have come into being in a culture that is ready to see new versions of itself and make space for voices previously excluded.

Concluding Remarks

In this research, I have shown the ways in which contemporary Irish female authors have retold the story of women during the 1916 rebellion through historical novels. I have argued that historical fiction in general, and these four novels in particular, are valuable contributions to ethical cultural memory. These novels stand alongside historical research and political agendas that are fighting for the recognition of women's past as well as demanding equal rights and opportunities for Irish women now and in the future. While the legalisation of gay marriage and the repeal of the 8th amendment demonstrate the positive changes in cultural mores in Ireland, there is still a long way to go to ensure the fair and equal treatment of all Irish citizens. The

aim put forth by the Proclamation of “cherishing all the children of the nation equally” (qtd. In Townshend xxii), has not yet been achieved. Irish women and other marginalised groups will continue to defy the silencing of their histories and their identities; in paying attention to the way they re-tell their stories, we can recognise the implications of the past on the present and remember responsibly the quiet voices, the victims of history.

“To listen and to learn, he says. That would be the true legacy of the Easter Rising”

Henrietta McKervey, *What Becomes of Us* 306

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Chapter 10

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Chapter 11

Appendix

Abstract

This paper examines how contemporary historical novels by Irish women authors re-tell the story of the Easter Rising of 1916 from a female perspective. Furthermore, it outlines the value of historical novels in a broader cultural project of responsible remembrance, in an Irish context. This will be done by outlining the major strands of research concerned with historical novels written by Irish women, then linking these to the concepts of cultural memory and ethical memory and the current situation in the Republic of Ireland. In the main section of the paper, four contemporary novels will be analysed: *Rebel Sisters* by Marita Conlon-McKenna (2015), *Fallen* by Lia Mills (2014), *The Rising of Bella Casey* by Mary Morrissy (2013) and *What Becomes of Us* by Henrietta McKervey (2015). These analyses will show that each novel contributes to feminist re-visionary endeavours to foreground women's experiences of the past. Taken together, these four novels are a literary contribution to the larger trend in Irish culture of re-membering the Irish past in a way that is inclusive of a wide range of Irish identities.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit untersucht wie zeitgenössische historische Romane von irischen Autorinnen die Ereignisse des Osteraufstandes von 1916 aus einer weiblichen Perspektive wiedergeben. Dabei handelt es sich um historische Romane der letzten zehn Jahre, in denen die weibliche Geschichtserfahrung im Vordergrund steht. Weiters wird die Bedeutung von historischen Romanen im Kontext der Konzepte des kulturellen Gedächtnisses und der ethischen Erinnerung in der Republik Irland nachgewiesen. In Anlehnung an Konzepte aus den Bereichen Literatur- und Kulturtheorie sowie Irish Studies werden vier historische Romane der Gegenwart analysiert, nämlich *Rebel Sisters* von Marita Conlon-McKenna (2015), *Fallen* von Lia Mills (2014), *The Rising of Bella Casey* von Mary Morrissy (2013) und *What Becomes of Us* von Henrietta McKervey (2015). Durch die Analyse wird gezeigt,

dass diese Romane an der feministischen Rückgewinnung der irischen Geschichte mitwirken. Weiters wird argumentiert, dass diese Werke einen bedeutsamen literarischen Beitrag zur gegenwärtigen irischen Entwicklung einer inklusiveren Erinnerung leisten.