



“As the commemorations loom, the
rhetoric returns”: Lia Mills's *Fallen*
and the Decade of Centenaries

7th December 2023 - *Memory, Melancholy and Nostalgia*

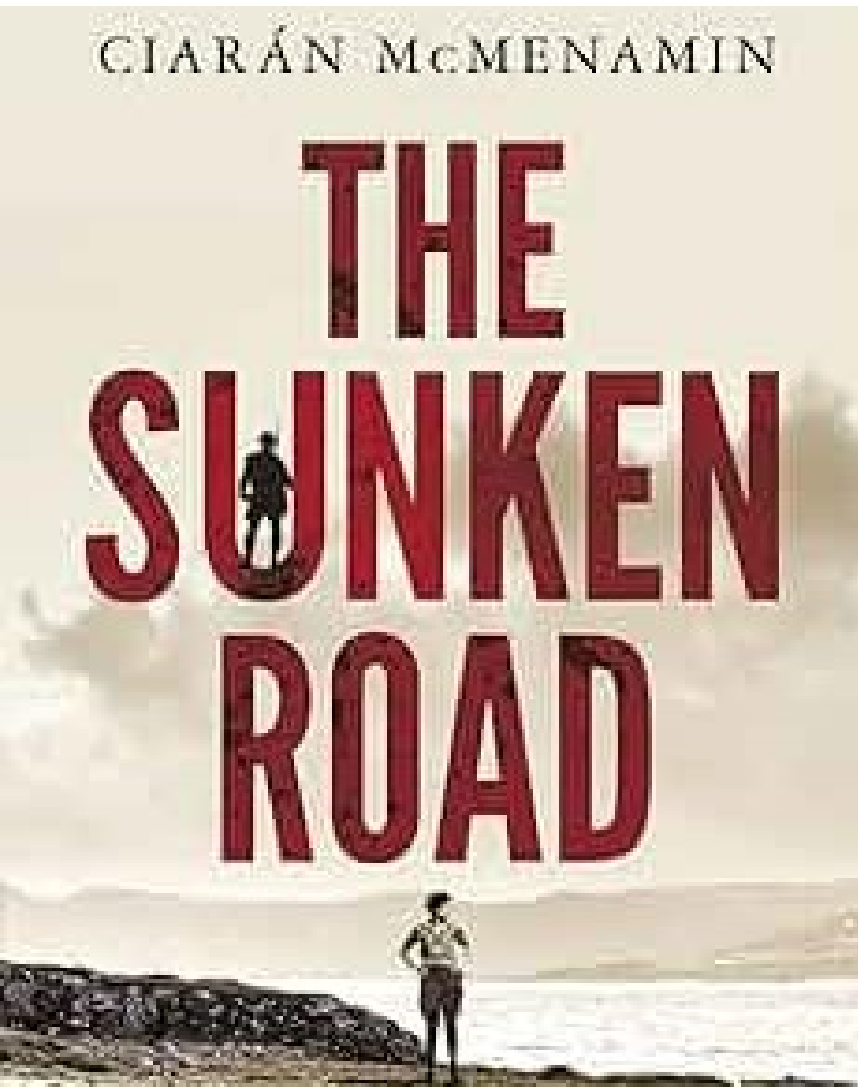
Elena Ogliari



The Decade of Centenaries

- Scheme funded and promoted by the Irish government to commemorate the revolutionary period of a century ago
- **Crucial events**: World War I, the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, and the onset of the Civil War
- To “foster deeper **mutual understanding** among people from different traditions on the island of Ireland”

Creative responses



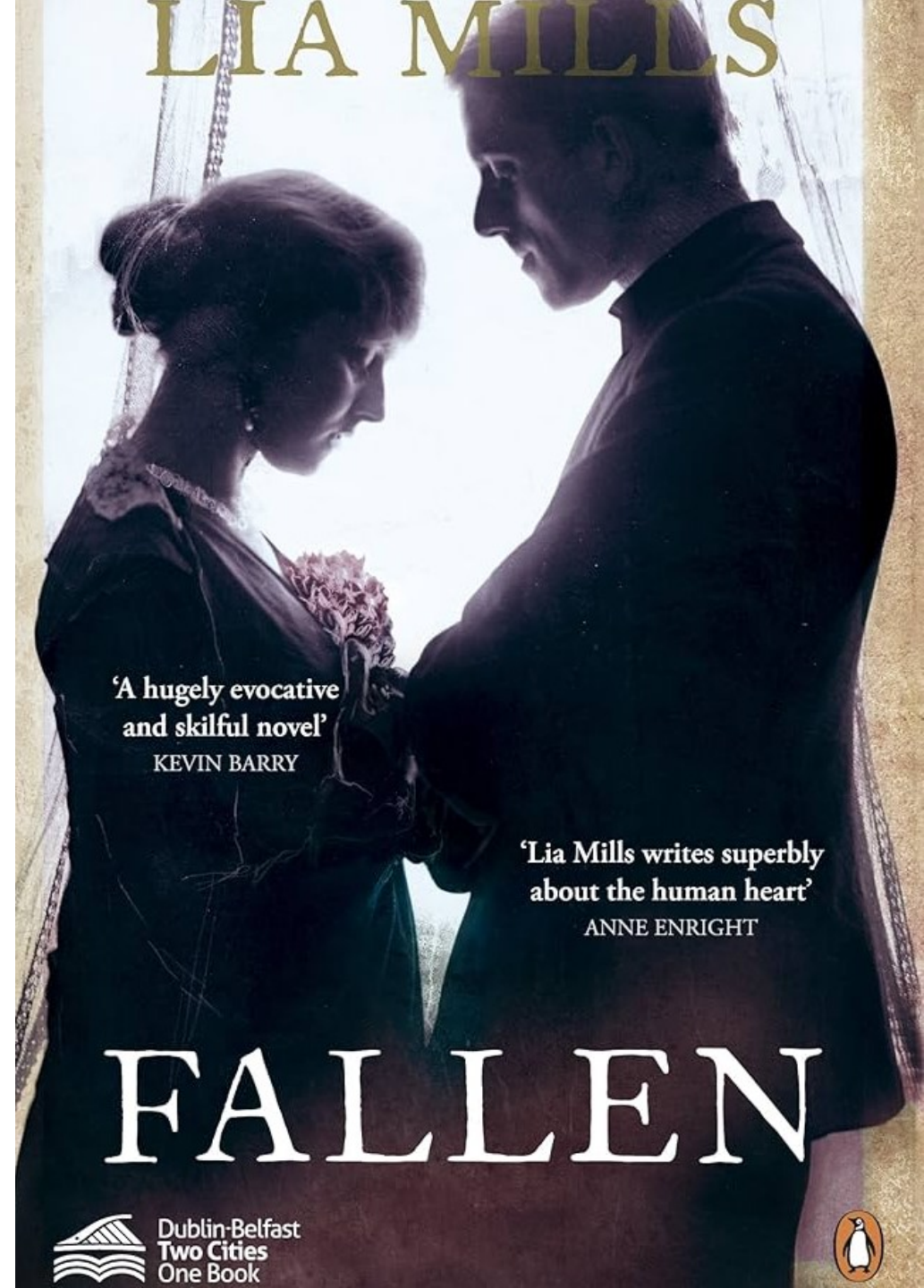
- “valuable opportunity to engage with the past in an open and creative way and to foster a much deeper understanding not only of the decade itself but also of the rest of the 20th century” (Madigan 2013: 1)

As the commemorations loom, the rhetoric returns” (Mills 2017)

- collective reading of *Fallen* = one of the official initiatives of the Decade programme: “Two Cities. One Book”
- novel of avoids perpetuating linear narratives of the rebellion
- **potential** overshadowed by the rhetoric of reconciliation



- novel’s alternative reading of the Easter Rising and reflection on the relationship remembrance-narration
- use of *Fallen* in the Decade initiatives



The novel

- **Katie Crilly** is a bright and ambitious twenty-two-year-old university graduate. Her twin brother, Lieutenant Liam Crilly, has been killed in battle while serving in World War I with the **Royal Dublin Fusiliers**
- the outbreak of the 1916 Rising
- the conflict for an independent Ireland ultimately **divided** those who fought in the Great War from those who fought for Ireland in the Easter Week rebellion



Contents

Part One

August 1914

October 1914

April 1915

June 1915

Part Two

Easter Monday, 24 April 1916

Tuesday, 25 April 1916

Wednesday, 26 April 1916

Thursday, 27 April 1916

Friday, 28 April 1916

Author's Note

Acknowledgements

Follow Penguin

Remembrance of the Great War



- a certain degree of respect and reverence for the fallen soldiers

BUT

- increasingly **contested**, exacerbated by the sectarian divisions
- acts against veterans who sought to publicly commemorate the fallen, ranging from poppy-snatching to the vandalization of memorials and even squad killings

The story we were told



“The story we were told had different starting points, all leading to the moment when a **gallant band** of patriotic men and women set out to wrest their country back from the ancient enemy. The 800 years. **The few against the many. The sacrifice.** The story we were told was heavy on the sacrifice, how close it came to martyrdom. No, wait, it was a kind of martyrdom. **A noble thing, to die for faith or country** – and, sure, in Ireland didn’t they amount to the same thing. Never mind if that’s what **millions of others were doing on the continent** and elsewhere, all for the sake of one ism or another”. (Mills 2018: 7)

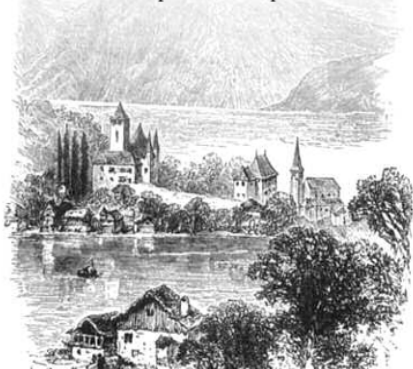
Guy Beiner's "goal-directed forgetting"

To My Daughter Betty, the Gift of God

Thomas M. Kettle

THOMAS KETTLE (1880-1916), an Irish admirer of Chesterton, died on the Western Front during the Great War. His most important work is *The Day's Burden*.

In wiser days, my darling rosebud, blown
To beauty proud as was your mother's prime,
In that desired, delayed, incredible time,
You'll ask why I abandoned you, my own,
And the dear heart that was your baby throne,
To dice with death. And oh! they'll give you rhyme
And reason: some will call the thing sublime,
And some decry it in a knowing tone.
So here, while the mad guns curse overhead,
And tired men sigh with mud for couch and floor,
Know that we fools, now with the foolish dead,
Died not for flag, nor King, nor Emperor –
But for a dream, born in a herdsman's shed,
And for the secret Scripture of the poor.



- Captain Hubie Wilson
- Tom Kettle's "To My Daughter Betty, the Gift of God" (1917)
- "not for a flag, nor King, nor Emperor / But for a dream, born in a herdsman's shed"

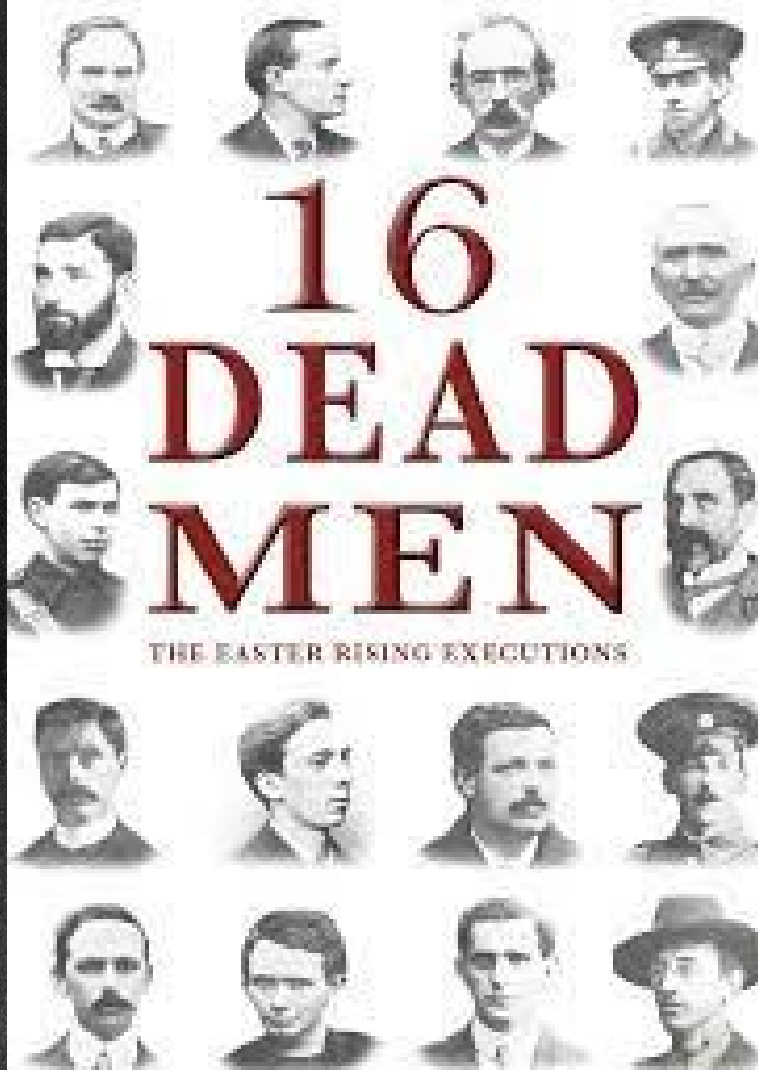


remembrance relies on acts of narration

Remembrance relies on acts of narration



- “What stories are we telling ourselves? Who is doing the telling, and who is included in those stories? Conversely, who is not speaking, and who is excluded? How, in this key period, is the past being narrated to us—and which “us” is being addressed?” (Frawley 2021: 7)
- In *Fallen*: focusing on which narrations have shaped the memory and reception of the Easter Rising and the Irish war experience



- “Easter, 1916” > conflicted emotions regarding the Rising. Not necessarily intended as an official act of national commemoration, it eventually became an integral part of the broader cultural memory and mythology of the Rising
- ballad “Sixteen Dead Men” > influence of the revolutionaries on the renewed political life of Ireland

WB Yeats’ poetry

The two poems

“Easter, 1916”

That woman's days were spent
In ignorant good-will,
Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill.
[...]

I write it out in a verse—

MacDonagh and MacBride

And Connolly and Pearse

Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

“Sixteen Dead Men”

O but we talked at large before
The sixteen men were shot,
But who can talk of give and take,
What should be and what not
While those dead men are loitering there
To stir the boiling pot?

You say that we should still the land
Till Germany's overcome;
But who is there to argue that
Now Pearse is deaf and dumb?
And is their logic to outweigh
MacDonagh's bony thumb?

- A young man came up behind her. Little more than a boy, really. Short and skinny, he wore the dark green coat of the Citizens' Army, with a bandolier slung across his chest. A wide-brimmed hat jammed low on his forehead shadowed his freckled face. **I looked again.** That really was a gun in his hands, muzzle half raised in our direction. 'Yiz have to quit the park.' **'Are you from the theatre?'** I asked him. He cleared his throat and **tried again.** 'We're taking the park. In the name of the Republic. Yiz have to leave.' (p.102)
- **'Is this real?'** I pulled Alanna in behind me and looked around. (p.102)
- I told her there'd been **crowds standing** around watching the goings-on when I came in, and no one troubling them. There was **an air of unreality** to it all. (p.107)
- The wrecked tram was being used as a changing room for girls trying on camisoles and lacy knickers. A gathering of men at the windows roared approval. (p.122)

The "staged" Rising



The City and its people

Mills shifts the focus to a side of the battle often absent in history books—the city and its people

KATIE

- I **endured** Mother's many schemes for my improvement. (p.13)
- She didn't look **convinced**. 'Mind you, don't go bringing any of that **suffrage nonsense** home with you, Katie. I won't have you turning out like those Sheehy girls.' (p.32)
- The truth of it was that I **didn't know** what a person like me was *for*. (p.45).
- Every **second** person on Sackville Street wore **a black armband**, or a cuff. Liam had had his own doubts. We'd both read Mr Darwin's book. Now I knew my doubt had been a game I played on the surface of my mind. Liam's death destroyed a deeper faith. It **cracked the bedrock of my existence**. (p.53).

Challenging the myth



- The foundation myth of Republican Ireland dissolves into the belief that, during that week, many people did not die for Ireland but were killed as a result of it > challenges the Republican myth of blood sacrifice and the romantic rhetoric of nationalism
- History is stretched to encompass the domestic and intimate side of war and battle

Nostalgia?



- *Fallen* challenges the notion that nostalgia for a romanticized past could serve as a supportive bridge into the future
- In “Two Cities. One Book” programmes, places were deliberately managed to minimize the potential for conflict



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