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RTÉ television as an effective vehicle for commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising

Thesis presented by

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Introduction

The Importance of Commemoration

In the late twentieth century, the academic fields of history, sociology, and anthropology experienced a 'memory boom,' in which a multitude of studies were conducted and published examining the effect of memory on culture.[1] This research explored the manner in which historical memory was ingrained in daily life through stories, monuments, and memorial events.[2] The increased attention paid to the role of memory on both national and personal levels reshaped the way that commemorative events were viewed, with a new appreciation for the fact that history is always viewed from a contemporary vantage point.[3] Since the legacy of a historical event is subject to change over time, commemorations can tell us as much, if not more, about the people commemorating as it can about the original event. Conversely, knowing how closely commemorations are linked to current events allows organisers to use historical commemoration as a tool to frame current issues.[4] Arguing for the importance of actively commemorating history, Bandler explained that 'the past, rather than distracting us from the present, gives us a means through which to both understand what is happening in our world today and to actively affect it.'[5] Responding to the question of whether certain events, such as the Holocaust, should be 'laid to rest' and not commemorated, Bandler argues that 'in order to ensure that our history has a continual impact on our actions and

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[1] Winter, Jay, 'The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the "Memory Boom" in Contemporary Historical Studies,' *Archives & Social Studies: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, Vol. 1, No. 0, March 2007

[2] Ibid

[3] Laird, Heather, *Commemoration*, Cork University Press, Cork, 2018, p. 30

[4] Ferriter, Diarmuid, 'Commemorating the Rising 1922-65: "A figurative scramble for the bones of the patriot dead?,' in *1916 in 1966: Commemorating the Easter Rising*, eds. Mary Daly & Margaret O'Callaghan, Royal Irish Academy, 2007, pp. 199-220

[5] Bandler, Suri, 'The importance of active commemoration of history,' *The Tech*, 12 February, 2015

decision-making processes, we can never allow the past to be laid to rest.'[6] The remembrance of history Bandler referred to was particularly evident in Ireland during the Decade of Centenaries, when the anniversaries of a large number of nationally formative events occurred over the period between 2012 and 2023. Addressing Seanad Éireann in 2012, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Jimmy Deenihan stated that 'the important element of commemoration is not that historic events are brought to mind but that we seek to enhance our understanding of what happened and the enduring significance of the events for subsequent generations.'[7] The desire to place the revolutionary period into the larger context of both Irish and global history guided the commemorative events, as will be discussed throughout this work.

In discussing commemoration, it is critical to acknowledge that commemoration differs from history. Horne states 'if history is about reconstructing and interpreting the past for its own sake, commemoration is about drawing meaning and value from the past for the purposes of the present. That difference is what makes the relationship between them so awkward.'[8] While historians may aim to present history in an unbiased, objective manner, Graff-McRae notes 'the impossibility for history, memory, or the event to be objectively known.'[9] Historical records are largely based on a combination of primary sources and previously written histories, and neither of these can be considered an objective truth. Letters, journals, and official writings are certainly valuable, but they provide only one perspective on an event or era. Similarly, written histories are products of both their own time and the prevailing narratives of those in power. The classic adage

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[6] Ibid

[7] Seanad Éireann debate, 22 May 2013, Vol. 223, No. 7

[8] Horne, John 'Conclusion,' *Towards commemoration: Ireland in war and revolution, 1912-1923*, eds. John Horne & Edward Madigan, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2013, p.170

[9] Graff-McRae, Rebecca, 'Forget politics! Theorising the political dynamics of commemoration and conflict,' *1916 in 1966: Commemorating the Easter Rising*, eds. Mary Daly & Margaret O'Callaghan, Royal Irish Academy, 2007, p. 224

says that 'history is written by the victors,' but Laird takes this idea farther. She notes that 'history' consists of events that have been assigned significance in retrospect, and that 'events and actions only considered historically significant if they directly affect the structures of organised politics.'[10] She explains that this view of history excludes people who were not allowed in political spaces, such as women and the rural poor.[11] While these groups are discussed in official histories, much of the information we have about their lives comes from outside sources. While a truly complete view of history may not be attainable, the study of a wide variety of sources can give a more complex view of past events. By comparing multiple recollections and opinions, one can discern the commonalities among them, as well as identifying areas in which they differ and examining the reasons this may be the case. In doing so, one gains a deeper understanding of historical events and their impact across communities.

Additionally, it must be noted that history is presented in a manner fitting the contemporary narrative, a theme that will recur throughout this work. Therefore, it is important to note that all history is curated, and even sources that appear neutral and objective are influenced by the values and beliefs of their creators. Acknowledging this concept challenges the belief that history is objective while commemoration is subjective, and affects the way in which the relationship between the two should be viewed. In reality, commemoration deals with the manner in which history will be presented to the next generation and what values will be assigned to historical events. Opinions on these values and what a legacy 'should' be vary greatly, even within groups that are considered homogenous. Discussing the question of historians' role in commemoration, O'Toole notes that:

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[10] Laird, *Commemoration*, p.14

[11] Ibid

> Politicians, civil-society groups and the media may ask: 'What do the historians think about this?' To which the correct answer will always be 'Many different things.' If the desire to be helpful, to contribute to public understanding, involves the pretence that there is a single, settled historical view of any episode being commemorated, it is better to be unhelpful.[12]

Acknowledging this to be the case is a key factor in discussing the role of history in commemoration. There will always be disagreements on how or why events unfolded in a particular manner, so O'Toole argues that the role of historians is to help general audiences 'deepen their own engagement with the complexity of historical processes.'[13]

Fitzpatrick states that '"good" commemorators use "history" to pursue meritorious political, social or therapeutic objectives.'[14] Of course, what is considered 'meritorious' is highly subjective and shifts over time. During the Golden Jubilee in 1966, the commemoration was 'an opportunity to promote Ireland's image abroad as a modern, successful democracy.'[15] In 2016, it was decided that the 'aim should be to broaden sympathies, without having to abandon loyalties, and in particular recognising the value of ideals and sacrifices, including their cost.'[16] While the central themes may have been different, both commemorations were keenly focused on the link between the Rising and contemporary Ireland. In a discussion of commemoration plans, Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú stated that '[the 2016 commemorations] should help us to understand who we

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[12] O'Toole, Fintan, 'Beyond amnesia and piety,' in *Towards commemoration: Ireland in war and revolution, 1912-1923*, eds. John Horne & Edward Madigan, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2013, p.158

[13] Ibid

[14] Fitzpatrick, David 'Historians and the commemoration of Irish conflicts, 1912-23,' in *Towards commemoration: Ireland in war and revolution, 1912-1923*, eds. John Horne & Edward Madigan, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2013, p. 132

[15] Daly, Mary, 'Less a commemoration of the actual achievements and more a commemoration of the hopes of the men of 1916,' in *1916 in 1966: Commemorating the Easter Rising*, eds. Mary Daly & Margaret O'Callaghan, Royal Irish Academy, 2007, p.23

[16] 'Decade of centenaries,' *Gov.ie*, pub. 10 January 2020, updated 15 July 2024

are as a people, establish our national identity and set out our vision for the future and how we will fit into the world context.'[17] As will be discussed throughout this work, this was a key principle of the 2016 Rising commemorations.

While history is a major element of commemoration, the organisers of the 2016 centenary events were also aware that drawing public interest and engagement with the commemorations was necessary. Senator Eamon Coghlan acknowledged:

> while much valuable historical research will be carried out over the course of the decade, if commemorations are to be truly successful, they must capture the broader imagination of the public. The past is too important to be left solely to the historians, vital though their role may be.[18]

While this work is concerned with the commemorative programming on public broadcaster RTÉ and therefore discusses the 'official' commemorations, it should be noted that these were not the only commemorations occurring in 1966 or 2016. Debate over 'ownership' of the Rising had been ongoing, with unofficial commemorations frequently providing an alternative to those organised by the state. These were organised for a variety of reasons. In 1925, invitations to state-sponsored commemorative events were denied to opposition TDs, who responded by organising their own parade to Glasnevin Cemetery, while the official commemoration took place at Arbour Hill.[19] While this decision was a result of being left out of official commemorations, others sought alternatives by choice. In 1966, an alternative programme of events was announced by the 1916 Golden Jubilee Commemoration Committee, a group of republicans who saw themselves as inheritors of the ideals of 1916.[20] Their events included several parades, a

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[17] Seanad Éireann debate- 22 May 2013, Vol. 223, No. 7

[18] Ibid

[19] Ferriter, 'Commemorating the Rising 1922-65,' p. 201

[20] Daly 'Less a commemoration of the actual achievements,' p. 40

Mass, and a concert.[21] In 2016, the tradition of alternative commemoration was continued. The 'Reclaim the Vision of the Rising' initiative held commemorative events separate from the state's, with artist and organiser Robert Ballagh telling the *Irish Times* that contemporary Ireland did not live up to the ideals of the Easter Rising, and voicing his concern that 'I don't think the State will be giving space to those who feel the vision of the Proclamation hasn't been achieved.'[22] The number of alternative commemorations of the Easter Rising is a reflection of a larger part of Rising discourse: who are the 'heirs' to the leaders of 1916? Referring to the 1966 commemorations, Ferriter notes that 'the issue of commemorating the Rising provided an opportunity to seek to create political capital out of the contested republican legacy.'[23] Most leaders of the Rising did not live to see the War of Independence, Civil War, or ramifications of partition, leaving an opening for those with disparate viewpoints to all claim that the martyrs would have agreed with their opinion. Commemoration, which unites past and present, provides an opportunity for anyone to assign their own meaning to past events. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that RTÉ is the state broadcaster and affiliated with the official commemoration, and their programming must be analysed with this in mind.

The organisers of the official 2016 commemorations were aware that views of the Rising as an event and the manner in which it should be commemorated varied, so attempts were made to create a commemorative programme with broad appeal. In the planning stages of the commemorative programme it was announced that an Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations (hereafter referred to as the Advisory Group) had been established by Taoiseach Enda Kenny and Minister for Arts, Heritage &

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[21] Ibid

[22] 'Alternative planned to State's commemoration of 1916 Rising,' *Irish Times*, 4 May 2015

[23] Ferriter, 'Commemorating the Rising 1922-65,' p. 199

the Gaeltacht Jimmy Deenihan.[24] A complete list of members and their credentials, as published on Gov.ie, can be found in Appendix A. Explaining the Advisory Group's role, Deenihan stated that they were 'to ensure that the State produces a comprehensive, inclusive and authentic programme of commemorations.'[25] To accomplish this, the Advisory Group was tasked with 'consult[ing] widely with scholars, with universities, with educational and cultural bodies, with local historical associations and committees, and with individuals, where appropriate.'[26] The result of these consultations was an 'Initial Statement by Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations' (Appendix B). This document establishes guidelines for the commemorations in the Decade of Centenaries. A key point made in the Initial Statement is that differing traditions and identities should be acknowledged and explored, rather than one view of events being presented as definitive truth.[27] That being said, the Advisory Group acknowledges the need to be 'alert to any serious distortions that may be taking place, beyond reasonable differences in historical interpretation.'[28] Given the Advisory Group's role as advisors to the government and Deenihan's statement that he would 'rely greatly on their academic integrity and advice as I develop the commemorative programme,' their statement on the goals for the commemoration provides significant insight into the organisation and execution of commemorative events.[29] Therefore, the television programming created for the 2016 centenary can be viewed through the lens of their stated goals for the Decade of Centenaries.

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[24] 'Members of Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations announced,' *Public Affairs Ireland*, 6 March 2012

[25] Dáil Éireann debate, 13 March 2013, Vol. 796, No. 2

[26] Dáil Éireann Debate, 1 May 2012, Vol. 763, No. 3

[27] 'Decade of centenaries,' *Gov.ie*, pub. 10 January 2020, updated 15 July 2024

[28] Ibid

[29] Seanad Éireann debate- 7 June 2012, Vol. 215, No. 14

Television as a Historical Source

The role of television in contributing to discourse around historical events has a complicated and difficult history. As early as 1988, Toplin notes that 'academicians often look skeptically on the media's renditions of history and for good reason.'[30] He cites the inability of film or television to provide a comprehensive discussion of a topic as well as inherent bias on the part of those making the piece as evidence that media history was inherently inferior to academic history.[31] Despite his strong criticism, commenting on both film and television having a 'dismal record' of portraying history, Toplin concedes that there was some value in media portrayals introducing topics to the public that could then be further researched.[32] In 2020, Bishop would echo the latter idea, although he frames it in a much more positive light.[33] Bishop acknowledges his own previous belief that television did not 'count' as a way to teach history, but explains that watching some historical fiction programmes reshaped his thinking. While there is no illusion that these type of series are entirely historically accurate or portray all of the nuances of history, Bishop describes them as 'an invitation to learn more about a historical character I admittedly knew nothing about.'[34] While Toplin treats media as an introduction to a historical topic as the one saving grace of a generally disdained idea, Bishop enthusiastically argues that historical television had the potential to foster a love of history in people who might not have otherwise explored it. Edgerton agrees with the latter interpretation, explaining that historical television

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[30] Toplin, Robert Brent, 'The Filmmaker as Historian,' *The American Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 5, 1988, pp. 1210–1227

[31] Ibid

[32] Ibid

[33] Bishop, Steven, 'The positive uses of TV as Public History,' *History Indoors*, 14 September 2020

[34] Ibid

should never be feared as the 'last word' on any given subject, but viewed as a means by which unprecedentedly large audiences can become increasingly aware of and captivated by the stories and figures of the past, spurring some viewers to pursue their newfound historical interests beyond the screen and into other forms of popular and professional history.[35]

Another major factor in television becoming more accepted as a historical source is an increase in scholarship related to television. A guide to academic journals for students of Television Studies published by Dartmouth University lists over fifteen, with the vast majority having been founded in 2000 or later.[36] Before there was scholarship devoted specifically to television, views of the medium were based on individual opinions and assumptions rather than academic analyses of television, its audiences, and its programming. Even when television began to be studied, it was solely in the context of what a programme showed about the culture that wrote, produced, and viewed it; the value for its portrayal of history was not a common topic of exploration. In recent years, however, the volume of academic work on the subject of television has increased significantly. One issue of *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies* contained articles ranging from an examination of cultural diversity in multinationally produced television to a look at the experience of filming in the Arctic.[37] With expanded research into the creation and cultural contexts of television came an increased sense of legitimacy for the medium within the academic world. Additionally, it showed that television could explore all of the same themes as literature and film despite the difference in presentation. Individual programmes, networks, and creators could all be

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[35] Edgerton, Gary, 'Television as historian: a different kind of history altogether,' in *Television histories: shaping collective memory in the media age*, eds. Gary Edgerton & Peter Rollins, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2001, p. 9

[36] 'Television Studies,' *Dartmouth University Library*, updated 26 August 2023

[37] *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*, Vol 18, Issue 2, June 2023

studied to create academic discourse around television. In the case of historically themed works, attention was paid to accuracy, bias, and nuance. This was a significant change from Toplin's insistence that television held little value to historians. Knowledge that their programming would be subjected to this kind of scrutiny, both from audiences and academics, inspired many creators to think more carefully about their portrayals of history. Discussing the American Civil War series *The Good Lord Bird*, which he co-wrote, produced, and starred in, Ethan Hawke explained that it was essential to him to accurately portray abolitionist John Brown. 'I started reading other books about him and tried to figure out what does a guy like John Brown have in his pocket? How does he pray?… I had to ask all these kinds of questions.'[38] A similar view was expressed by Craig Mazin, showrunner and writer of *Chernobyl*. Interviewed for a podcast about the series, Mazin explained 'we try very hard to be accurate because it's a sign of respect. And for me, I wanted people who lived through that, including some people who were in that control room that night who are still alive, to watch this and say, "they cared; they got it right."'[39]

The desire of creators to make their work as accurate as possible while still appealing to audiences illustrates one of the difficulties of historical fiction content creation. Anderson explains that film and television:

> make a unique contribution to historical discourse because they allow viewers to recover the "liveliness" and richness of the past—to see and feel what it must have been like to be a part of history. On the other hand, film and television are criticised because the stories they tell leave no room for critical interpretation and debate by historians.[40]

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[38] Sepinwall, Alan, 'The gospel according to Ethan Hawke,' *Rolling Stone*, 25 September 2020

[39] Sagal, Peter, *The Chernobyl Podcast*, 'Vichnaya Pamyat,' June 2019, Spotify

[40] Anderson, Steve, 'History tv and popular memory,' in *Television histories: shaping collective memory in the media age*, eds. Gary Edgerton & Peter Rollins, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2001, p. 24

The idea of audiences feeling immersed in a historical setting is largely the result of careful attention to mise-en-scène. This term refers to everything the audience sees on screen, encompassing sets, props, costumes, performers, and the angles and lighting in which the image is seen.[41] Woods describes how the mise-en-scène of a historical piece can present a 'lavish, sweeping spectacle' or 'produce an intimate encounter, drawing the past close to inspect the texture of fabric or the touch of a hand.'[42] Onscreen visuals take objects that audiences would typically encounter behind glass in museums and show them being used, worn, and engaged with.[43] This gives viewers the sense that what they are seeing fits into a real historical world. Rosenstone draws attention to the danger of this, however: once an audience is convinced of historicity by the look of a piece, they are more likely to accept ahistorical narratives.[44] This is where the dedication of creators to making historically-informed content becomes key. A purely objective historical retelling is unrealistic, both because of the subjectivity of history and the fact that history unfolds in a manner that is far more complex than a typical plot structure. However, by engaging with the historical literature surrounding a period or event, creators can create narrative arcs that (while less complicated than history) distill the major elements of the historical narrative into a story that has entertainment value and audience appeal without contradicting the known reality of an event.

Commemoration and Television

Just as commemorations reflect both the event being commemorated and those remembering it, television provides insight into the creators as well as the subject of a

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[41] Monaco, James, *How to read a film: movies, media, and beyond (fourth edition)*,' Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, p. 193

[42] Woods, Faye, *Period Drama*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2022, p. 9

[43] Rosenstone, Robert, *Visions of the past: the challenge of film to our idea of history*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 59

[44] Ibid

programme. However, little research has been done on the integration of television into commemoration. The closest was a Dutch study in which participants were split into two groups.[45] One group attended a Remembrance Day event commemorating WWII, while the second was shown video footage of the same commemoration. The study showed that watching the recorded commemoration had an emotional impact on viewers that mirrored the effect on people who had attended in person.[46] Additionally, among the group watching the recording, emotional responses were shown to be higher in people who watched the footage on Remembrance Day, as opposed to those who were shown the video on a randomly selected, culturally insignificant day.[47] With this knowledge, it becomes meaningful to examine the television programming associated with commemorative events, as it can have an emotional impact on viewers and contribute to a sense of cultural identity and belonging.

In the case of the Easter Rising, there were a multitude of commemorative events for the centenary. The official state guide to the events taking place included a flag-raising on the first day of January 1916, multiple wreath-layings, including a synchronised event across counties, and many commemoration ceremonies.[48] The vast majority of these events took place in Dublin, limiting attendance to those who lived locally or could take the time and expense to travel. RTÉ, meanwhile, created centenary-themed television programming that would be shown nationwide. These programmes were specifically produced to be unifying cultural moments that examined the legacy of the Rising and what it meant to be Irish both in 1916 and 2016. By presenting the Rising commemorations through the medium of television, creators were able to engage with

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[45] Mitima-Verloop HB, Mooren TTM, Boelen PA, 'Kindled emotions: Commemoration and the importance of meaning making, support and recognition', *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 18, No. 4

[46] Ibid

[47] Ibid

[48] 'Centenary Programme 2016 - List of State Ceremonial Events,' gov.ie

audiences on a more personal level. Stories of individuals and the human element of the rebellion were more suited to television than a public parade or ceremony. Viewers could see historical figures as people and empathise with their emotions and struggles by watching those stories play out on a television programme. Even within media that has a narrative structure, television allows an advantage over stage plays in that the camera can be zoomed in to make facial expressions more visible and allow the viewer to feel both physically and emotionally closer to the characters on screen. Additionally, the sets, props, and costumes recreate historical events in an immersive, visceral manner that cannot be achieved in pageants and stage plays. The content created by RTÉ for the centenary varied in how well it made use of the unique advantages of television. Some of the programmes simply could not exist in other forms, while others used television as a means to reach a wider audience without customising the content specifically for the medium. However, they all shared the goal of commemorating 1916 in a thoughtful, engaging way that would encourage discussion around the event.

Television as a Commemorative Vehicle

For the Easter Rising commemorations to hold national significance, it was imperative that a national audience could engage with the commemorative content. In 1966, RTÉ was the only broadcaster that could reliably reach all Irish televisions, so it became the source of televised commemorative content by default.[49] At this point in time the content of RTÉ was generally under the control of an appointed body of seven to nine members, who would be selected by the government.[50] However, the Broadcasting Authority Act of 1960 specified that the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs had the right to direct the board to 'refrain from broadcasting any particular matter or matter of any

[49] Bowman, John, *Window and Mirror: RTÉ Television: 1916-2011*, Collins Press, Cork, 2011

[50] 'Broadcasting Authority Act, 1960,' *Electronic Irish Statute Book*

particular class' or 'allocate broadcasting time for any announcements by or on behalf of any Minister of State in connection with the functions of that Minister of State.'[51] These stipulations meant that the state did have a degree of control over what was broadcast, and could veto material deemed objectionable. This level of government involvement had changed by 2016. While RTÉ was still under the authority of a government-appointed board, the updated Broadcasting Act of 2009 had reframed their relationship to the state. Rather than the Minister having the authority to demand or remove content, the broadcaster now had a set of codes to abide by.[52] These included a dedication to impartial reporting of the news, protecting the interests of the audience over those of any organisation affiliated with the broadcaster, and not broadcasting content likely to incite crime.[53] It should be noted, however, that while the legal phrasing may have changed, the board being appointed by the government still gave the broadcaster incentive to appeal to state ideology.

2016 also presented a very different landscape for television audiences. Not only were a greater number of channels available on television, but widespread internet access gave the public access to an even greater number of entertainment options. The 'Statement of Strategy' issued by RTÉ for the period of 2015-2019 acknowledged these challenges, but stated that their creation of uniquely Irish content for an Irish audience would allow them to remain competitive.[54] This attitude is supported by Ellis: 'National television still has a most extraordinary reach and penetration into national cultures, despite all the changes wrought by new forms of delivery of television-like material.'[55] He explained that national broadcasters have the power to 'consolidate different

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[51] Ibid

[52] 'Broadcasting Act, 2009,' *Electronic Irish Statute Book*

[53] Ibid

[54] Doherty, Moya 'RTÉ statement of strategy 2015-2019,' *RTE.ie*

[55] Ellis, John & van den Ever, Annie, 'Storytelling and mainstream television today - a dialogue,' *Stories*, 2018, pp.155-166

demographic groups into a single experience in a way that no other form of television is capable of doing.'[56] In accordance with the 2009 Broadcasting Act, RTÉ aimed to 'best serve the needs of the people of the island of Ireland, bearing in mind their languages and traditions and their religious, ethical and cultural diversity.'[57] While this may seem a lofty goal, it does mean that the creative teams at RTÉ were aware of the diverse backgrounds and identities across Ireland and had at least some experience in making content with a broad appeal. In a commemoration aiming to bring people from a variety of traditions together, this did give RTÉ an advantage. RTÉ management was aware of both the opportunities and responsibilities of being at the centre of commemorative events. Director-General Dee Forbes wrote in the 2016 Annual Report that 'at its best, public-service media ensures that there is a publicly owned space where we can come together, discuss and debate, remember together and celebrate together. During this very special commemorative year that was the unique role of RTÉ.'[58]

One of the factors that contributes to the power of television as a tool for commemoration is the size of the available audience. A speech or parade has a limited audience based on location, available space, length, and ease of travel. A television programme, meanwhile, is delivered to the audience in the comfort of their own homes. The decision to watch can be made in less than a minute. In recent years, the popularity of streaming television has even removed the constraint of scheduling. A programme can be viewed whenever, wherever, and however the viewer wants. Television series also have the advantage of being divided into episodes, so that hours' worth of content can be delivered in a manner that is not overwhelming to audiences. This ultimately means that the number of people a television programme can reach is in the millions.

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[56] Ibid

[57] 'Broadcasting Act, 2009,' *Electronic Irish Statute Book*

[58] 'RTÉ Annual Report: a year in review,' *RTÉ*, 2016

While widespread availability of a programme is a benefit of television as a commemorative medium, its real power lies in the response television inspires in viewers. Examining how collective memories are formed, Doolan noted that 'while academic historical writing often forms the basis upon which popular works are built, it is in fictional literature, film and television that historical representations often profoundly impact public perceptions.'[59] The ability to shape the public memory of an event demonstrates the efficacy of television in terms of influencing audiences. However, it also emphasises the importance of ensuring that programming portrays events in an accurate, meaningful manner. A programme that presents an accurate view of history educates the public and provides a better understanding of the past; content that distorts known history has the potential to mislead audiences. Therefore, both the creator and the viewer have a responsibility to ensure that incorrect information is not being accepted as historical truth. Creators can do this by making an effort to consult the historical accounts of the event being portrayed and ensure that they do not directly contradict known historical understanding in their work.

This is why it is necessary for audiences to have critical media literacy. According to Terri Staton, 'critical media literacy posits that popular media, like all forms of literacy, provides perspectives and ideologies to be accepted or critiqued.'[60] For audiences, this involves engaging with the content that is presented to them. Rather than passively accepting that anything on the television must be true, the viewer 'actively learns by asking probing questions and engaging in a dialogue about the subject matter with the other.'[61] Becoming informed about a topic and hearing a variety of viewpoints allows

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[59] Doolan, Paul M.M., 'Collective memory and unremembering,' Collective memory and the Dutch East Indies: Unremembering Decolonization, Amsterdam University Press, 2021, pp. 15-26

[60] Staton, Torri, 'From the Editorial Board: Free Thought or the Absence of Thought? Critical Media Literacy in the Age of Social Media,' *The High School Journal*, vol 101, no 4, Summer 2018, pp. 213–16

[61] Ibid

audiences to examine content and make their own decisions about its value and meaning. While critical media literacy has value in most media consumption, it is particularly necessary in the case of commemorative television. Advisory Group stated that the centenary content should inspire discussion and thoughtful reflection in the public; therefore, audiences practicing critical media literacy would also be achieving the goals of the commemoration.[62]

For academics wishing to measure the impact of a commemorative event, television presents a unique metric for success. In the case of a one-time event such as a parade, it is possible to count the number of people who attended, but that number is not indicative of whether the audience appreciated the display or would choose to participate again. In the case of television, however, several quantitative metrics could be applied to determine the 'success' of a programme. Television audience research companies collect data not only on how many viewers watch a given programme, but also how long they watch it for.[63] This information is valuable both for gauging initial audience interest in a programme as well as determining how well it held that interest. In the RTÉ Annual Report, viewing data was included as evidence of the success of the commemorative programming. The report stated that over three million viewers had watched commemorative programming over Easter weekend in 2016, representing seventy-five percent of the viewing public.[64] On the digital RTÉ Player, the broadcaster reported a viewership increase of seventy-four percent over Easter weekend of the previous year.[65] This information demonstrates the public interest in the commemorative television programming, providing quantitative support for the claim of historian John A. Murphy in the *Irish Times* that 'the Irish public today, it seems to me, have a much more informed

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[62] 'Decade of centenaries,' *Gov.ie*, pub. 10 January 2020, updated 15 July 2024

[63] 'TAM metrics explained,' *TV Audience Measurement Ireland*, 2020

[64] 'RTÉ Annual Report: a year in review,' *RTÉ*, 2016

[65] Ibid

interest in historical events than they had in 1966. They are more concerned with what happened, with history per se, than with history as nationalist narrative.'[66] For that interest to be satisfied, audiences would require insightful, high-quality programming examining the truth of the Easter Rising.

In the context of the centenary commemorations, a truly effective programme would be required to successfully communicate the message of the commemoration organisers. The 'Initial Statement' from the Decade of Centenaries Advisory Group (hereafter referred to as the 'Advisory Group') described the necessity of events that were 'both broad and inclusive, highlighting the economic and social conditions of the period, the shifts in cultural norms and the experience of the Irish abroad.'[67] To successfully communicate these ideas, the Advisory Group recommended that the commemorations focus on everyday people from a wide variety of traditions to foster constructive dialogue between disparate groups. RTÉ used these guidelines for their programming, taking care to avoid a triumphalist view of either the Rising or the Ireland that it created. Managing Director of RTÉ Glen Killane explained that twenty-first century Ireland was 'confident enough to point to our failings.[68]' By acknowledging that there had been failings over the course of twentieth century Irish history, the centenary commemorations provided an opportunity for thoughtful discussion of the core values of the nation by the general public, as well as historians and politicians. Examining the mistakes that had been made in the past century invited reflection on contemporary issues, and how they might be resolved in a manner consistent with Irish values. Television programming that presented a wide array of perspectives gave viewers a better understanding of people from differing

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[66] Murphy, John A, 'Easter 1916: Psychological milestone marked,' *Irish Times*, 30 March 2016

[67] 'Decade of centenaries,' *Gov.ie*, pub. 10 January 2020, updated 15 July 2024

[68] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

traditions and encouraged focus on similarities rather than differences, a goal stated in the Advisory Committee's Initial Report.[69]

The creation of television programming for the commemoration of the Rising was significantly impacted by the contested legacy of the event. Each decision that was made during Easter Week had been analysed and debated for a century, but there was still not a consensus on certain issues. These included: whether or not the Rising was justified, the manner in which its organisers should be remembered, and how the Rising affected the following century of Irish politics. O'Casey's 1926 play *The Plough and the Stars* portrayed civilian casualties, looting, and the emotional impact of the Rising on Dublin citizens.[70] The criticism of the Rising sparked outrage, with theatregoers physically attacking the actors onstage.[71] In 1966, the influence the Rising would have on violence in Northern Ireland led was a major source of concern for Northern Prime Minister Terence O'Neill, with debate over the effects of the Golden Jubilee on paramilitary activity making headlines.[72] As the centenary approached, organisers were keenly aware of the continuing debates, particularly over the morality of the Rising in light of civilian casualties. Deenihan noted that:

> In commemorating the Easter Rising, we would acknowledge the service, sacrifice and achievement of a remarkable group of volunteers, giving expression anew to the aspiration for national independence. This is not done with disregard for the loss of life and destruction consequent on their actions.[73]

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[69] 'Decade of centenaries,' *Gov.ie*, pub. 10 January 2020, updated 15 July 2024

[70] O'Casey, Seán, *The Plough and the Stars*, MacMillan & Co, London, 1926

[71] Crawley, Peter, '"The Plough and the Stars" is back. Must be time for a riot, so,' *Irish Times*, 18 March 2016

[72] O'Donnell, Catherine, 'Pragmatism vs unity: the Stormont government and the 1966 Easter commemoration,' in Mary E. Daly & Margaret O'Callaghan (eds.) *Commemorating 1916 in 1966: The Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising*, 2016, pp. 8-9

[73] Seanad Éireann debate- 22 May 2013, Vol. 223, No. 7

In light of the controversy, the question of how to mark the centenary of such an event required careful consideration by those organising the commemorations. An outright celebration and unequivocally positive presentation of the Rising would have required the exclusion of significant historical understandings of the event, such as civilian casualties and the unpopularity of the rebellion as it was occurring. A completely negative remembrance of the Rising, however, would have demonstrated an ignorance of the importance of the rebellion in the public consciousness, and the view of it as the beginning of the Irish nation. Great care would need to be taken to commemorate the centenary without deepening divisions and alienating entire groups of people. RTÉ also needed to appeal to a variety of audiences: those who had strong feelings on the Rising and its legacy, viewers with a casual interest in history, and (most elusively) people who had never paid much attention to history previously. While the former two groups were likely to watch the commemorative programming, RTÉ needed to convince the latter that the Easter Rising was important, exciting, and still relevant in contemporary life.

Relevance

In the years between 1913 and 1923, Ireland experienced a number of historically significant events. 2013-2023 marked the centenaries of not only the Easter Rising, but also the First World War, the War of Independence, the Irish Civil War, and the establishment of government bodies such as the Dáil. These major events would all be commemorated during the decade of centenaries. Given the number of commemoration events scheduled to occur over this time period, it was logical that a great deal of attention was paid to the earliest commemorations to gauge public reactions. Methods of commemoration that audiences engaged with could be repeated for other events, while attempts that fell flat would caution against certain forms of remembrance. However, commentary on television was limited to non-academic, journalistic reviews of individual

programmes. There was a notable absence of scholarship on the subject of the original television programming that was created as part of the commemorative events. In *The Revelation of Ireland: 1995*-2020, historian Diarmaid Ferriter devoted a chapter to examining the changes in Irish media over time, with sections devoted to film, theatre, literature, and music. The only mass media outlet that was not included was television. This was a significant oversight, given the importance of television as a medium of commemoration. My dissertation hopes to fill this academic gap, by exploring the efficacy of television as a medium of commemoration.

Objectives & Methodology

This research examines the programming that was produced for the Easter Rising commemorations in 2016, as well as *Insurrection*, which was created for the Golden Jubilee in 1966. The latter is important to discuss because the foundation of RTÉ in 1961 presented a new manner of commemoration, and 1966 was the first major anniversary of the Rising since that had occurred. Therefore, the programme was a landmark event in Irish television. Additionally, the inclusion of an older programme provides a framework for comparison with the more recent content. While there is not extensive scholarship on *Insurrection*, academic material analysing the programme does exist. At the time of the original broadcast, the series was discussed by newspaper reviewers as well as the public in letters to the editor of the *Irish Times*.[74] These conversations included commentary on the quality of the programme from a historical perspective, as well as its value as a source of entertainment. In more recent years, *Insurrection* has been discussed as an artefact of the 1966 commemorations.[75] The values displayed by the creators of *Insurrection* are markedly different from the attitudes surrounding the centenary, and

[74] Irwin, S.P., 'Insurrection,' [letter to the editor] Irish Times, 27 April 1966

[75] Linehan, Hugh, ''Insurrection': Looking at 1916 through the eyes of 1966,' Irish Times, 17 March 2016

those differences were examined in the months before the centenary commemorations.[76] Additionally, *Insurrection* served as a benchmark for Rising-related television in Ireland. By comparing it to the more recent content, a clearer picture of how commemorations of the Rising have changed over time becomes apparent.

O'Toole observed that 'commemoration is as much an act of imaginative sympathy as it is of historical reconstruction.'[77] This is an area in which television is a particularly effective medium for meeting a commemorative goal. Even outside of a historical or commemorative context, it is crucial that the audience is emotionally invested in the events onscreen for a television programme to be considered successful. Professionals in television production are therefore experienced in creating a bond between the viewer and the characters. In the case of commemorative content, where contemporary audiences are being asked to relate to figures from the past and consider their thoughts and emotions, that bond is vital. For this reason, television creators have an experiential advantage when creating commemorative content. Likewise, audiences are accustomed to emotionally responding to television content, while they might have less of a reaction to a historical textbook.[78] In a commemoration, where creating an emotional resonance with the audience is essential, the established audience response patterns of television provide an advantage when the medium is used for commemorative content.

When analysing any source of historical information, it is necessary to identify the person or group responsible for the work, target audience, and the historical context surrounding its creation. Each of these factors can affect the manner in which history is presented. While a series may appear to objectively present historical events, decisions were still made about what material to include or omit, how to frame events in narration,

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[76] Ibid

[77] O'Toole, 'Beyond amnesia and piety,' p. 159

[78] Eder, Jens, Hanich, Julian, & Stadler, Jane, 'Media and emotion: an introduction,' *European Journal of Media Studies*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, Spring 2019, pp. 91-104

and which images to match to audio content. By being aware of the circumstances surrounding the creation of a work and thinking critically about the effect that potential biases may have had on the content, viewers can engage more fully with the programme and gain a better understanding of the subject matter. This is not only true of television. When asked about visual media being the result of editing, and therefore lacking objectivity, documentary filmmaker Ken Burns replied that 'we have to remember that it's *all* selection. Just as the scholar, when he writes *this* sentence, he has not written a hundred million *other* sentences.'[79] For this reason, television cannot be perceived as inherently more or less accurate than traditional print media. Both are the result of editing and decision-making by the creator, and both have the potential to be informative or misleading, depending on the choices made by the creator.

By examining the range of programmes that were created by RTÉ to commemorate the Easter Rising, one can evaluate the degree to which each succeeded in balancing historical accuracy and the emotional involvement of the audience. Additionally, analysis of the specific role that each programme played in the larger commemoration of the Easter Rising provides insight into how RTÉ pursued the goal of 'honour[ing] the Rising; the cultural, political and historical context of the period; and its impact on generations to come.'[80]

To effectively assess the suitability of television as a vehicle for commemorating the 1916 Rising, it was necessary to examine both the programming that was created for the event and the context in which it occurred. While *Insurrection* was groundbreaking in 1966, the programme may not have been considered a commemorative success by the standards of 2016. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the cultural, political, and

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[79] Cripps, Thomas, 'Historical truth: an interview with Ken Burns,' *The American Historical Review*, Volume. 100, No. 3, June 1995, p 741-764

[80] 'RTÉ Annual Report: a year in review,' *RTÉ*, 2016

social conditions in Ireland during each commemoration was required to determine both the message of each programme and the attitudes of the audiences viewing it.

While background research was essential to establishing television as a successful part of the commemorations, examining the effects of each of the programmes was also vital. While reactions from television critics and academics are readily available, it is far more difficult to determine audience reactions, and would require methodology that is beyond the scope of this work. Therefore, discussion will be based on published responses to programming rather than personal reactions from viewers. In the case of *Insurrection*, there was a wealth of both newspaper, online, and academically published material on the programme. Additionally, fifty years of hindsight had allowed more nuanced opinions of the programme to develop. The same could not be said for *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, *Rebellion*, and *Centenary*, the programmes to be discussed from 2016. While critical and audience reactions to these programmes were widely available, there was a dearth of academic content analysing them. Newspaper reviews were not designed to present a sophisticated view of the series' place in the historiography of the Rising. Additionally, these reviews were written immediately after the broadcast of these programmes. The commemorative events were not complete, meaning that the television components could not be considered as part of a larger commemorative whole by journalists or academics. Meanwhile, academic commentary on the commemoration either mentioned the television aspects briefly or not at all. The article 'Public history, invisibility, and women in the Republic of Ireland' focused on the handling of women's history during the centenary, yet only mentioned the female-led drama *Rebellion* twice.[81] Even these brief references did not include any academic commentary on the programme, merely mentioning its poor reception. This reflected the general academic response to the commemorative television of 2016. The essay collection *Women and the*

[81] Casserly, Maeve, and Ciaran O'Neill, 'Public history, invisibility, and women in the Republic of Ireland,' *The Public Historian*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2017, pp. 10–30

Decade of Commemorations explored the ways in which women's history was incorporated into the commemorations, and only mentioned drama *Rebellion*, twice, with one of those instances being a footnote.[82]

The lack of written academic commentary on commemorative television in 2016 increased the importance of the interviews conducted for this research. Historians who had advised on the television content discussed their input and the efforts that were taken to ensure meaningful contributions to the commemorative events. Experts in the field of television explained the precedent for television as a historical source and commemorative vehicle, and how those concepts might be applied to the Easter Rising. These insights, when combined with the existing academic literature on commemoration and television, provided a framework through which the commemorative television of 2016 could be analysed.

From a research perspective, the fact that these programmes were as recent as they were was a benefit. Many of the creators were available for interviews, and the production details were still fairly fresh in their minds. Cilian Fennel, creator of *Centenary*, had pages of notes outlining the production from the conceptual stages to the finished concert.[83] He also provided a great deal of insight on his motivations for making *Centenary*, which will be discussed in the chapter on that programme. *1916: The Irish Rebellion* creator Bríona Nic Dhiarmada explained the influences behind the documentary, as well as her opinions on the commemoration as a whole.[84] Likewise, Mike Cronin (who had served as historical advisor on the documentary while managing the *Century Ireland* project on the RTÉ website) discussed the difference in approach to each of the events in the decade of centenaries and why the decision was made to have the

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[82] O'Connell, Brenda, 'Waking the feminists: gender "counts,"' in *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*, ed. Oona Frawley, Indiana University Press, 2021, p. 377

[83] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

[84] Nic Dhiarmada, Bríona, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 24 May 2022

Easter Rising be the most prominent.[85] The direct insight from people involved in the production of the content clarified their intentions for the programmes, while also explaining the directives and input they had been given from RTÉ during the productions.

Additional information about the centenary programming was available in the form of material that was designed to accompany the content. This includes both full-length material such as programme guides and companion books, as well as the short descriptions in television guides and on streaming websites that summarise the programme in a way that was designed to pique the viewer's interest. It is also noted in this text when multiple versions of a programme exist, what the differences were, and why it had been released in multiple forms. While creator intent and audience response frequently differ, knowing the former can provide a great deal of insight into how a project was intended to fit in to the commemorative events.

This research integrates the fields of commemoration and memory studies, historical research, and television analysis. Therefore, the collection of data as previously outlined provided a wealth of information that was still divided into distinct areas of study. By exploring the intersections between these areas and applying the insights of one field to another, a new framework for analysing the role of television as a vehicle for commemoration was developed. By applying this framework to the programmes under discussion, new insight was gained into their role in the Centenary commemorations of the Easter Rising.

Criteria for Selecting Programmes

While the scholarship on television programming regarding the Easter Rising may be limited, the amount of content that has been created over the years is not. Local stations produced content highlighting their hometown Rising heroes, while Irish

[85] Cronin, Michael, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 21 March 2024

language broadcaster TG4 produced a number of documentaries examining various aspects of the Rising. Notably, the 2010 series *1916: Seachtar na Cásca* and its follow-up, *1916: Seachtar Dearmadta* thoroughly examined the lives of the Rising leaders executed in 1916. As the number of television networks and internet streaming services grows, so does the amount of content on the subject of the Easter Rising. Identifying and examining every piece of television on the subject was not feasible, therefore it was necessary that certain parameters be met by programmes to be included in this research.

The first criterium that was used to select programmes for analysis was the year in which they were made. Since television is being examined here as a means of commemoration, the series that were selected were all produced as part of a major anniversary of the Easter Rising. This limitation ensures that the content being viewed through the lens of commemoration was actually designed with that purpose. There have been series that told the stories of 1916 produced outside of anniversary years. While many of those programmes have commemorative elements, the chosen programmes were explicitly marketed as part of the commemoration and commissioned, written, and performed with that in mind. By ensuring that a connection between the programme and the commemorative event does exist, evaluation of the programme as a vehicle for commemoration is fair and meaningful.

It was also decided to exclusively examine programmes commissioned by RTÉ. As the national broadcaster of Ireland, RTÉ created content with the knowledge that they 'had a central role in our efforts as a nation to remember our history and respond to the lessons to be found there.'[86] Since this programming was created by an Irish broadcaster for predominantly Irish audiences, it would also serve as an indicator of what was considered important about the Rising both by the national broadcaster creating the content and the audiences watching it. Additionally, content that was broadcast on RTÉ

[86] 'RTÉ Annual Report: a year in review,' *RTÉ*, 2016

was available to the entire country (as well as internationally) and created with the knowledge that it would be seen by a wide range of viewers in various regions. As such, it was created to appeal to the whole population of Ireland rather than catering to a specific region or niche viewing audience.

With these criteria in place, four programmes were selected for analysis. *Insurrection* was produced in 1966 as part of the Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising. RTÉ television had existed for less than a decade, and was still developing an identity as the national broadcaster. Additionally, the technical and creative potential of television as a medium was being explored, allowing for a unique presentation of commemorative content. Since *Insurrection* was the first television programme designed to commemorate the Easter Rising, it set audience expectations for Irish historical programming.

1916: The Irish Rebellion was a documentary series created in 2016 by RTÉ in conjunction with Notre Dame University. The series placed the Rising into the larger context of twentieth century history by exploring its causes and effects both domestically and internationally. The 2016 commemorations aimed to explore multiple viewpoints of the Rising and *1916: The Irish Rebellion* sought to explain the conflicting perspectives in a factual and academic manner.

Rebellion, also from 2016, was a historical fiction drama. The five-part series focused on the role of women in the Rising, using a blend of historical figures and fictional characters to depict life in Dublin. The narrative storyline allowed for emphasis on the lived experience and emotional impact of the Rising on both combatants and civilians.

Centenary was the culmination of the 2016 commemorative events. A concert that was designed to be simultaneously broadcast live on RTÉ, the programme used music, dance, and performance art to represent twentieth-century Irish history. A major theme of the programme was the influence of the ideals of the Easter Rising on contemporary Ireland.

Criteria for Evaluating Programmes

Due to the subjective nature of artistic value and questions about what constitutes historical authenticity, it was necessary to determine criteria by which the effectiveness of each programme could be judged. The degree to which each programme met these criteria will be analysed, taking into account the fact that differing formats present information in different ways. In addition to previously discussed scholarly literature, these criteria have been developed based on the stated goals of the decade of centenaries Advisory Group, which laid out the overarching plan for the commemorations as a whole, including the television programming created for the event.[87] By comparing these goals to the programming created by RTÉ, one can analyse how effective the medium of television was in engaging with the overall aims of the centenary year.

While commemorations incorporate emotions and cultural effects that go beyond historical knowledge, the programmes discussed needed to meet a standard of accuracy to be considered effective. The manner in which events are portrayed in a given work was compared to a variety of historical sources to ensure that it did not directly contradict known events of the Rising. When significant inaccuracies did occur, the reason behind portraying them in that manner was explored, as was the effect of the discrepancy on the programme as a whole. Additionally, in cases where creators have discussed a deliberate decision to contradict the historical record, their comments were included to provide insight into the decision-making process.

[87] 'Decade of centenaries,' *Gov.ie*, pub. 10 January 2020, updated 15 July 2024

Literature Review

In order to analyse the effectiveness of television as a vehicle of commemoration, a thorough understanding of the value of commemoration as well as the role of television as a medium for commemoration was necessary. While not specific to television, there has been a great deal of scholarship on the various forms of commemoration that have been used to address historical events. Additionally, the role of commemoration as a tool for learning not only about the event being commemorated, but the time and place in which the commemoration occurred has been widely commented on. One of the foundational articles concerning commemoration, its uses, and the effectiveness of different media was 'Historical traces of the present,' published by Peter Carrier, in 1996. Using the example of commemorations of the Second World War in France, Carrier discussed the ways that the meaning of a historical event can change over time and how commemorations of that event change accordingly.[1] He explained the necessity of examining which groups were initiating a commemoration and how their intentions affected the manner in which history was being portrayed. This remains an important part of historical study surrounding commemoration, as a single event can be repackaged in a number of ways to assign it different roles and make it appear that history supports whatever message the commemorating body is trying to convey.

Commemoration and Public History

Writing in 2014, Ó Tuathaigh asserted that ‘what is incontestable is that “public” commemoration (however modest in scale, makeshift in execution or seemingly spontaneous in inspiration) is always an act of conscious, deliberate, purposeful cultural

[1] Carrier, Peter, 'Historical traces of the present: the uses of commemoration,' *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Berghahn Books, 1996, pp. 431–45

construction.'[2] According to Ó Tuathaigh, it was therefore imperative for the researcher to determine the source of a monument, ceremony, or programme and take their goals into account. Of course, even if bias on the part of commemoration organisers was present, it did not negate the importance of the piece towards understanding the commemoration. In fact, it was a strong indicator of the prevailing social attitudes at the time it was created, which could be helpful in understanding context. It was, however, important to acknowledge that all history is curated, and not take information that is presented as the complete objective truth.

While Carrier explained the importance of understanding different worldviews and agendas in examining commemorations, Roudometof expanded on his ideas. Roudometof wrote about the possibility of a single historical event being assigned such different meanings by opposing groups that their versions became mutually exclusive.[3] He critiqued the manner in which 'most studies tend to draw a sharp distinction between history and commemoration, between the actual historical record and the mythological appropriation of the past.'[4] In reality, he asserted, myth and history sometimes became so entwined that they were indistinguishable. This was not an idea that was addressed by Carrier. In 1996, the Second World War was within living memory for many people and only slightly more than fifty years had passed. While there were absolutely national narratives surrounding the war, they had not had time to solidify into being viewed as indisputable historical fact. Roudometof took a larger number of events over a wider timespan into account, so there was a greater likelihood that myths surrounding some of them had become more widely accepted as fact. Since television programming has the potential to perpetuate historical

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[2] Ó Tuathaigh, Gearóid, 'Commemoration, public history and the professional historian: an Irish perspective,' *Estudios Irlandeses*, No. 9, 2014, pp. 137-145

[3] Roudometof, Victor, 'Beyond commemoration: the politics of collective memory,' *Journal of Political & Military Sociology*, Vol. 31, No. 2, University Press of Florida, 2003, pp. 161–69

[4] Ibid

myths or deconstruct them to reveal a more accurate view of events, Roudometof's findings demonstrate the importance of accuracy in a commemorative context.

Another element of commemoration that was integral to an understanding of the way that the Easter Rising has been portrayed over time was examined in *Irish Television Drama: A Society and its Stories* by Helena Sheehan.[5] Sheehan explained how history becomes mythologised, yet these myths are reconceptualised over time as understanding of historical events changes. She claimed that 'to mature is to recognise both that it is impossible to hold onto the old myths in the old ways and that it is impossible to banish the old myths in the name of new ways.'[6] While new scholarship and changing societal values cause a rejection of some traditional narratives, they are frequently replaced by a new mythology that is more in keeping with the times. This concept is reiterated by O'Toole, who claims that commemoration may not 'escape entirely from the business of collective myth-making, but it is surely possible that it can lead to more complex, subtle and generous myths.'[7] He explains that people will create their own images and ideas about the past, but that 'they can be helped by historians to deepen their own engagement with the complexity of historical processes.'[8]

For the 1916 rebellion to still feel relevant to audiences fifty and one hundred years after the fact, it was necessary to revise the myth of the Rising. In 2016 the leaders were no longer portrayed as infallible heroes, but as human beings acting on personal beliefs. Even the Rising itself was no longer solely portrayed as a grand statement and the beginning of the Irish nation; this view was replaced by a more nuanced examination of the events surrounding the rebellion. Personal and political motivations for the actions of

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[5] Sheehan, Helena, *Irish Television Drama: A Society and its Stories*, Radio Telefis Éireann (pub), 1987, revised 2004, pp. 7-12

[6] Ibid

[7] O'Toole, 'Beyond amnesia and piety,' p. 156

[8] Ibid

the participants were explored, as were perspectives that were not explored in previous commemorations, such as those of civilians, women, and Irish First World War servicemen. Portraying the Rising in this way appealed to contemporary audiences in 2016, where the style of mythology surrounding the Rising that was popular in 1966 would not have resonated, as it focused on glorifying the military aspects of the Rising, and the conflict in Northern Ireland in the late twentieth century had recontextualised the public understanding of political violence. Sheehan identified the point of this manner of re-mythologising as 'to re-interpret and re-appropriate myth in a way that is true to our rationality and modernity.'[9] While Sheehan was writing well before the Decade of Centenaries and referring specifically to the way that stories were developed for television drama, her thesis can be applied to commemorations as a whole, including those in 2016. By definition, the commemorations engaged with the mythology surrounding historical events and offered an opportunity to either reinforce or reinvent existing legends. As a medium that reaches a national audience, television could be a powerful tool in communicating the myths, both old and new, about a given historical event.

The role of commemoration as a contemporary interpretation of past events frequently leads to a sense that the current political, economic, and social situation is an inevitable result of the event being commemorated.[10] These narratives can distract from the fact that at the time of the Rising, there was so much social and cultural change occurring that nearly infinite potential futures existed. Laird refers to this as a 'period of potent possibility.'[11] She notes that since commemorations use the present as an 'implicit starting point,' the focus of commemorative activity will be on the people and events that led to the current state of being. This results in entire groups of people and their ideologies

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[9] Ibid

[10] Laird, *Commemoration*, p. 30

[11] Ibid

being either left out of commemorative events or having their roles oversimplified. While this is still a concern regarding commemorations, the 2016 organisers did acknowledge the previous exclusions and attempt to rectify at least some of them. Senator Catherine Noone criticised the 1966 commemoration's 'somewhat monochrome view of history' and stated the intention for the 2016 events to 'expand beyond the set-piece events to cover thematic issues such as the treatment of women and minorities.'[12]

The ability to critically analyse the context and intentions of commemorations is vital to any work based around the subject. However, for a study evaluating the 'success' of a commemorative activity, it was also important to determine how that success is defined. While teaching people the history of the event is certainly a part of commemoration, there is a great deal more that was necessary for a truly successful commemoration. Creative Centenaries, a project created in collaboration between the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund, set out 'Principles for Commemoration' as a guide for creating meaningful commemorative content.[13] They highlighted the importance of acknowledging historical knowledge as well as its implications and consequences, understanding and exploring different interpretations and perceptions, and showing how commemorative events can deepen understanding of the history. 2016 Managing Director of RTÉ Glen Killane explained that the broadcaster adhered to similar guidelines with their centenary programming.[14] He cited inspiring discussion about the historical events as well as their impact on modern culture as a major goal of their commemorative content.[15] This goal addressed a concern that Peter Carrier had expressed: that commemoration would 'ritually create and fulfil an appetite for uncritical

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[12] Seanad Éireann debate- 22 May 2013, Vol. 223, No. 7

[13] 'What is commemoration?' *Creative Centenaries*

[14] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

[15] Ibid

information, and thereby renders ineffective the pertinence of the past in the present.'[16] This concern was and remains valid, as commemorations that do not encourage discussion can have the effect of making audiences feel removed from history and disinterested in the subject. However, in the case of the Easter Rising, where there are so many contested legacies and divisive opinions, the Advisory Group recommended that commemorative events invite people to think critically and reexamine their opinions on the subject. A presentation of 'uncritical information' that failed to do so would have been considered a failure to the content creators.

A final issue that had a significant impact on the perceived 'success' of commemorative activities was audience reach and engagement. After stating his opinion that museums with engaging, interactive components were the most effective tools for critical commemoration, Carrier expressed concern that such exhibitions would reach a fairly small audience, comprised mostly of people with an existing interest in history. Beatty, whose consulting firm instructs museums and historical sites in increasing community engagement, explained that commemorations interest the public because they have 'brand recognition.'[17] Commemorations are typically held for events deemed historically significant, and the greater likelihood that audiences have a familiarity with the topic makes them more likely to choose to participate. In the Irish context, the Easter Rising has been the subject of books, songs, and memorials, and even audiences unfamiliar with the details of the event are likely to have heard of it. Beatty also explained that 'no place is a community until it has awareness of its history,' and that engaging with history as a group strengthens a sense of community, even among those with differing

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[16] Carrier, Peter, 'Historical traces of the present'

[17] Beatty, Bob, 'Commemoration: the promise of remembrance and new beginnings,' *Medium*, February 15, 2018

viewpoints.[18] Again, this is relevant in the case of the Easter Rising because it was a pivotal event in Irish history, but has a divisive legacy. By engaging with the history in a commemorative context, the public is given an opportunity to understand what the Rising means to others. While people may still have different opinions on the Rising and its legacy, the understanding of opposing views fosters a greater sense of community.

Audience reach and engagement was the starting point for analysing the role of television in commemoration, as that is what allows television programming to be a national event. Unlike ceremonies, museums, and parades, television was not limited by location and can reach a wide audience in a manner that was convenient and easy to access. By using television programming as an element of a commemorative event, creators can ensure that their work was available to a broad range of people. Television draws a significant audience: but viewing numbers alone do not determine the impact of a television programme. Livingstone explains that, in the twenty-first century, television is 'no longer simply or even mainly mass communication ('from one to many') but rather the media now facilitates communication among peers (both 'one to one' and 'many to many').'[19] The message being communicated to the audience by the content of a programme matters, but the true importance in a contemporary context was the conversation that the content sparked among viewers. In the case of the Easter Rising commemorations, inspiring discussion and reflection was a key goal of the event, though it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of the commemorations in doing so. By presenting the story of the Rising and the debates surrounding it through television, RTÉ was able to use the manner in which viewers typically engage with the medium to further the aims of the commemoration. The research Livingstone has done on mass media audiences also

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[18] Ibid

[19] Livingstone, Sonia, 'The challenge of changing audiences : or, what is the audience researcher to do in the age of the internet?' *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 75-86, 11 October 2005

supported the use of television as a means to engage with people from a variety of backgrounds and traditions. Her research demonstrates that the common mid-twentieth-century view of television audiences as homogenous and gullible did not hold up to scrutiny.[20] On the contrary, 'audiences work to make sense of media contents before, during, and after viewing, they are themselves heterogenous in their interpretations, even, at times, resistant to the dominant meanings encoded into a text.'[21]

Livingstone's research builds on Hall's work 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse.'[22] Hall explains that producers of television content must encode meaning and messages into story form before they can become a 'communicative event.'[23] Viewers then must decode the story to determine what messages are being communicated. However, there is no guarantee that the audience's decoded interpretation will match the intended message of the content. Hall describes three potential audience understandings. In a 'dominant' or 'hegemonic' code, the viewer understands and interprets the content as was intended by the creator, accepting the ideas being put forth by a perceived authority figure.[24] In a 'negotiated' code, content is understood in a hegemonic way in principle, but the individual viewer's opinions and life experience lead them to not fully accept the idea being put forth.[25] Finally, Hall describes the 'oppositional' code, in which the viewer understands what is being communicated, but disagrees entirely with the message.[26] Fiske applied this concept to the crime series of the 1980s, using the

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[20] Livingstone, Sonia, 'Audiences in an age of datafication: critical questions for media research,' *Television and New Media*, ISSN 1552-8316, 22 October 2018

[21] Livingstone, Sonia, 'The challenge of changing audiences'

[22] Hall, Stuart, Writings on media: history of the present, Duke University Press, Durham, 2021, pp. 259-264

[23] Ibid

[24] Ibid

[25] Ibid

[26] Ibid

example of a middle-class white viewer agreeing wholeheartedly with the (usually wealthy, white) protagonists.[27] A person from a different socioeconomic or racial background, meanwhile, is more likely to question the messages being communicated by a programme that consistently presents their own community in a negative light. When applied to a commemorative context, knowing how differently viewers can decode the same content is important so that creators do not alienate viewers whose experiences and opinions would cause them to reject the hegemonic narrative. Using a more pluralistic approach, there is increased likelihood that while audiences may not entirely agree with what is encoded in the programming, they could have a negotiated interpretation rather than being purely opposed.

Rosenstone's article 'The historical film as real history' explained both the limitations and benefits of portraying history in a visual medium.[28] He acknowledged that any historical film would have historical inaccuracies just by the nature of the medium. He cites the example of a film portraying a conversation as taking place in person when in fact it was conducted by letter. While the participants and content of the conversation remain unchanged, it is more engaging for audiences to watch people speak then see letters being delivered over the course of weeks. Changes to known historiography can go too far, however, and Rosenstone laid out a general guide for distinguishing 'true invention' from 'false invention.'[29] He defined 'true invention' as an event being portrayed in a manner that did not actually occur, but does not change the meaning of the event or contradict the known historical record. 'False invention,' meanwhile, is change that ignores history in such a way that the story defies historical discourse around the actual event. Of course, the degree to which a portrayal does or does not challenge the historical discourse is subjective, but knowing the difference between the two gives a

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[27] Fiske, John, *Television Culture (2nd Edition)*, Routledge, New York, 2011, pp. 62-65

[28] Rosenstone, Robert, 'The Historical Film as Real History,' *Film Historia*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1995

[29] Ibid

researcher the framework to explain why they viewed a particular piece as inherently 'true' or 'false.' Writing in anticipation of the Centenary commemorations, O'Toole expressed a similar sentiment:

> Art functions according to its own rules and necessities; the question for historians is whether it ends up creating a seriously distorted view of the past or, more optimistically, whether it succeeds in creating a concrete and immediate distillation of people and events that have otherwise retreated into the great abstraction of death.[30]

An important question in the study of television as a tool for both teaching and interpreting history was how accurate the audience perceived a work to be. As evidenced by the literature above, historians have traditionally been wary of the manner in which media portray history, but the question of whether audiences believed what they saw or not was addressed in a 2021 study by Beavers and Warnecke. Their study collected audience opinions on historical accuracy in television, film, and video games.[31] While only 6.1% of respondents considered television 'authentic' to history, the number who considered it 'somewhat authentic' jumped to 59.7%.[32] In both rankings, television was considered more authentic than films and video games. Meanwhile, television was at the bottom of the 'somewhat inauthentic' and 'inauthentic' categories.[33] Beavers and Warnecke hypothesised that this perception may have existed because television was associated with news reporting and, by extension, truth.[34] They also observed the same pattern in audience responses that had been observed by Rosenstone twenty-six years

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[30] O'Toole, 'Beyond amnesia and piety,' p.160

[31] Beavers, Sian and Warnecke, Sylvia, 'Audience perceptions of historical authenticity in visual media,' in Alvestad, Karl and Houghton, Robert (eds) *The Middle Ages in Modern Culture: History and Authenticity in Contemporary Medievalism*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2021 pp. 74-89

[32] Ibid

[33] Ibid

[34] Ibid

earlier: audiences considered programmes more authentic when they felt that the costumes and sets fit their idea of what history looked like.[35] Rosenstone referred to this as the 'myth of factity,' where the 'look' of the past became more important to audiences than the actions occurring onscreen.[36] Understanding that audiences view television as at least somewhat authentic to real history demonstrates the power of the medium. While audiences understand that what they are seeing is not entirely factual, they do generally accept what they are shown. Therefore, television programming does play a role in shaping how audiences view history.

The audience perception of television as a 'somewhat authentic' representation of history indicated that audiences did think at least somewhat critically about the history they saw onscreen. At the time of O'Connor's writing, there was concern that audiences would simply accept anything that they were shown as historical fact; hence his insistence that students needed to be taught to critically analyse media.[37] It has become common for historical films and television programmes to be shown and discussed in classrooms. A greater number of viewers have been taught to judge a programme by taking the creators and era in which it was produced into account. This is where the most significant change between the time of O'Connor and Rosenstone and the modern era becomes important: the internet. The prevalence of smartphones and wifi access has led to a culture in which a series can be instantaneously fact-checked.

Discussing television as a method for introducing the public to historical topics, Brennan cited reactions to the HBO series *Watchmen* as a recent example.[38] The programme was set in an alternate-history version of the United States filled with

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[35] Ibid

[36] Rosenstone, Robert, 'The Historical Film as Real History.' *Film Historia*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1995

[37] O'Connor, John E, 'History in images/images in history: reflections on the importance of film and television study for an understanding of the past,' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 5, Dec, 1988, p. 1200-1209

[38] Brennan, Edward, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 28 March 2024

superheroes: very clearly not a history lesson. However, the premiere episode depicted a fictionalised version of the Tulsa Massacre. Prior to being depicted on *Watchmen*, this real event was not in the American consciousness, largely ignored in textbooks and the national narrative. Within days of the broadcast of *Watchmen*, interest in the event spiked, with new research being conducted, articles written, and documentaries made.[39] Brennan cited this as a prime example of television bringing public attention to history and creating a desire in audiences to learn more about the reality that inspired the series.

In the context of the Easter Rising centenary commemorations, the precedent of television inspiring audiences to engage with historical topics made it an attractive medium for conveying the commemorative message. Based on the goals laid out by the Advisory Committee, organisers wanted the public to learn the story of the Rising, reflect on the meaning of the event, and have meaningful discussions about both the Rising itself and its legacy. While television programming had the potential to achieve that goal, viewers would need to examine the content through a critical lens for it to truly do so. In this way, television is like any other historical source. Printed books may be seen as the traditional way to learn about history, but a student does themselves a disservice by not taking the historical context and motives behind the book into account. Likewise, in order to truly learn from television programming, audiences must demonstrate critical media literacy.

While discussion so far has focused on the historical accuracy of television from an audience perspective, Ó Tuathaigh addressed the subject of the involvement of historians in 'public history,' including television, and asserted that 'I believe this notion of an incompatibility between professional and public history to be fundamentally misconceived.'[40] Ó Tuathaigh discussed the concern that historians would be tempted to

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[39] Phillips, Kynala, 'How HBO's 'Watchmen' brought the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre to life,' *Wall Street Journal*, 30 June 2020

[40] Ó Tuathaigh, 'Commemoration, public history and the professional historian'

stray from historical discipline for the sake of appeasing the sponsors or producers who had commissioned the programme.[41] However, he argued that the responsibility of historians engaging in public history was to learn how to best apply their knowledge to public media, and that 'deliberate, purposeful unhistoricity' was not only unnecessary but a 'betrayal of their discipline.'[42] The application of these principles to commemorative television production will be discussed at length in this study, as the producers of the 2016 programming were keenly aware of the need for both historical truth and emotional engagement with audiences. This is particularly apparent in the case of *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, which was written and produced by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada. As history professor and filmmaker, Nic Dhiarmada took the differences between academic writing and television writing into account to tell the story of the Rising in a way that was both accurate and accessible to the public.[43] This was advocated by Ó Tuathaigh, who explained that while writing for different media necessitated different approaches, 'no medium requires the historian to abandon the fundamental, professional obligations to attend scrupulously to the evidence.'[44]

RTÉ, the State, and Commemoration

In 1966 for the Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising, RTÉ devoted a great deal of airtime to the subject of Irish history. During Easter Week alone, there were fifty-three hours of material related to the Rising, in addition to a number of historical programmes earlier in the year.[45] *The Course of Irish History*, which aired in early 1966, traced the

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[41] Ibid

[42] Ibid

[43] Nic Dhiarmada, Bríona, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 24 May 2022

[44] Ó Tuathaigh, 'Commemoration, public history and the professional historian'

[45] Brennan, Cathal, 'A TV pageant - the golden jubilee commemorations of the 1916 Rising,' *The Irish Story*, 18 November 2010

history of Ireland going back to prehistoric times and ended each episode with a debate between the contributing historians.[46] By presenting different viewpoints and allowing audiences to draw their own conclusions about the topics under discussion, the series created a meaningful engagement with history. Airing before Easter Week 1966, *The Course of Irish History* prepared audiences to critically analyse history as it appeared on television before the bulk of commemorative programming was broadcast.[47] While many of the pageants and footage of memorial ceremonies that RTÉ presented were largely uncritical of the Rising, at least some effort was made to encourage deeper thought on the subject. According to Brennan, the inclusion of all content in the television broadcasts resulted in 'the popular consciousness of the week [being] heavily influenced by the broadcasts and people throughout the country could watch and listen to the main events as they took place in Dublin.'[48]

While the RTÉ of 1966 did not present a perfectly balanced view of the Easter Rising, it set the stage for the use of television as a vehicle for enacting a thoughtful and engaging commemoration. However, the increasing tension and eventual violence in Northern Ireland prevented further major Easter Rising commemorations from occurring in the twentieth century. Support for the violence of 1916 could easily be construed as support for contemporary violence and neither RTÉ nor the Irish government wanted to risk that perception. As a result, official state commemoration of the Rising did not resume until 2006, when 'the peace process in the North [was] seemingly well bedded-in, the government in Dublin felt safe in re-instating a military parade to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Rising.'[49] While commemorations continued to occur in the decade between 2006 and 2016, the centenary drew national attention to the Rising on a

[46] Ibid

[47] Ibid

[48] Ibid

[49] Ó Tuathaigh, 'Commemoration, public history and the professional historian'

larger scale than in previous years. It was in these commemorations that RTÉ had an opportunity to continue the work that had begun in 1966 and deliver thoughtfully produced material that encouraged discussion and engagement with history among the general public.

While the beginning of RTÉ as a network and the impact of television on Irish culture will be explored in depth in the next chapter, there are key concepts that are essential to understand the importance of the research undertaken. One is the unique relationship between Irish audiences and television culture. Brennan examined the history of television in Ireland with a particular focus on audience response, as opposed to more traditional histories that were predominantly dedicated to the production side of television history, such as those by Sheehan and Bowman.[50] In order to effectively analyse television in a social context as a form of commemoration it was necessary to understand both of these aspects of television culture. The value of analysing television production was that it demonstrated what a broadcaster and funding committees deemed important, but if a programme did not resonate with audiences then its actual impact on society was reduced. Meanwhile, an independent or low-budget production that became a hit served as proof that there was a demand for that content that was not being filled. Brennan also stressed the idea that television does not exist in a vacuum. He argued that 'media are sewn into society. They cannot exist separately. Society shapes media not just at the institutional level but at the level of the everyday.'[51] Kinsella echoed this sentiment.[52] He explained that while the history of censoring television proved that there was a belief that audience behaviour would be swayed by what they watched, it was not actually possible to demonstrate the extent to which this was true given that a 'myriad of other social

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[50] Brennan, Edward, *A Post-Nationalist History of Television in Ireland*, Palgrave McMillan, Cham, 2019 p. 43-76

[51] Ibid

[52] Kinsella, Patrick, 'War and peace on the screen: television representations of conflict in Ireland,' *Mapping Irish Media*, University College Dublin Press, Dublin, 2007, p. 95-111

circumstances affect our decisions.'[53] Therefore, even if an audience member was hearing of the Easter Rising for the first time on television, it is unlikely that they would unconditionally accept everything that was presented in the programme. Their own knowledge of history and human behaviour, as well as their existing opinions about issues such as independence, nationalism, and violence would affect their interpretation. For this reason it is difficult to determine the effect that a television programme on its own would have an an audience from a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints.

Television Genre

Each of the programmes reviewed for this work represents a different genre of television. This was not intentional in the selection of programmes, but it is notable that RTÉ produced programming across a variety of genres, appealing to different audiences and presenting the story of the Rising in different ways. How each programme's genre affected its presentation of the same topic will be explored in the individual chapters dedicated to each programme. To understand the intersection between genre and commemoration, however, it is necessary to examine the conventions of each genre and how they apply to a historical and commemorative context.

'Documentary' can refer to media with a wide range of styles, formats, and modes of relaying information. The common factor between them is the idea that what is being presented 'implicitly claims to truthfully represent the world.'[54] While there are many styles of documentary, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* represents reality through a combination of contemporary newsreel footage, photographs, and illustrations as well as filmed

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[53] Ibid

[54] Beattie, Keith, Documentary screens: non-fiction film and television, Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire, 2004, p. 10

interviews with experts on the topics being covered. Interspersed with these images is footage of 2010s Dublin, comparing the city at the time of the Rising and the time of the documentary. Audio consisted of narration, interviews, and recordings of witnesses to the Rising recalling the event. The use of primary sources contributes to the idea of the documentary as truth, though it must be remembered that even when content is not being created by the filmmaker, it is being curated. Discussing the historical documentaries of the 1960s and 1970s, Rockett observed that 'these twentieth-century eyes do not simply look through the window but also reorganise and select historical material.'[55] Nichols agrees, stating that

> It is the choices available for representing any given situation or event—choices involving commentary and interviews, observation and editing, the contextualisation and juxtaposition of scenes—that raise historiographic, ethical, and aesthetic issues in forms that are distinct to documentary.[56]

While it is accurate to say that the curation of documentary footage raises questions of authenticity, Beattie argues that audiences are savvy enough to 'interpret or decode the documentary text in complex and sophisticated ways.'[57] They are aware that documentary does not present a complete, unaltered truth, and take that into account when processing the information presented onscreen. Viewers understand that they must 'balance and validate the information and interpretations provided in a documentary against their own experiences and other sources of information.'[58] Particularly in 2016, when information about the Easter Rising was available in the form of books, newspaper

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[55] Rockett, Kevin, 'Documentaries,' in Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, & John Hill (eds.) *Cinema in Ireland*, Routledge, London, 1987, p. 87

[56] Nichols, Bill, *Representing Reality: Issues and concepts in documentary*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991, p. x

[57] Beattie, *Documentary Screens*, p. 12

[58] Ibid

articles, and online resources, audiences had access to a great number of sources to inform their interpretation of what was presented on television.

Rebellion falls into the genre of 'period drama' or 'historical drama.' Both phrases refer to works that 'recreate the spaces, people, society and politics of years past,' while telling a fictional story.[59] *Rebellion* being a period drama meant that it had a great degree of flexibility with which to tell the story of the Easter Rising. The creators were free to design characters and story arcs that would serve the commemorative goals of 2016 without relying on existing histories that may or may not have supported those goals. Woods notes that 'period drama can rework, invert, challenge or settle comfortably within dominant narratives of the past.'[60] Creators can choose which elements of the dominant narrative they wish to engage with, which to support, and which to question. In this way the values of 1916 could be reinterpreted in a modern context, 'return[ing] to the past to understand the present.'[61] Since the main area of the past and present being connected in *Rebellion* was the experience of Irish women, who had been been previously underrepresented in revolutionary histories, creating a narrative around the topic brought gender into the commemorative conversation in a manner that represented the lived experience of women in 1916.

The conventions of the historical drama are uniquely suited for representing historical lives. Set decoration, costumes, and lighting can evoke a particular period, through visual connotations for the audience. Fiske and Hartley describe how each element of mise-en-scène contributes to the meaning of an image, so each of these elements being within the creators' control allows greater control of what is signified to the

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[59] Woods, *Period Drama*, p. 9

[60] Woods, *Period Drama*, p. 21

[61] Ibid

audience.[62] A single object can have a host of meanings, but with the added context of its surroundings, can give the audience a more complete picture of what kind of environment the characters inhabit. Costume can also tell viewers a great deal about the characters lived experiences, particularly in the case of women. While there have been changes in men's clothing styles since 1916, they are not as noticeably different as women's clothing in that era and 2016. The expectations for women's lives are readable in their clothing. Woods specifically identifies the 'corset-encased body' as a part of the 'iconography of period drama.' The distinctive body shape created by the corset not only marks the character as a product of a different time, but also communicates a restrained, structured lifestyle.[63] Costuming also signifies financial and social standing, giving viewers a visual shorthand for what a character's lifestyle might be. Through the use of visual cues, a great deal about time period and character can be quickly established, bringing the viewer into the world of a programme and encouraging empathy with people of a historical era.

The story structure of drama also contributes to its suitability as a historical medium. Fileva notes that 'history does not come to us in a narrative form, but we expect historical exposition to be largely narratival.'[64] She explains that this incompatibility causes historians to 'fill in gaps, choose angles, and produce coherent narratives on the basis of the disjointed bits of available evidence.'[65] By contrast, historical drama is constructed in narrative form, where characters and events serve the story, rather than the other way around. This allows creators to decide on the meaning they wish to interpret from a historical event, and create scenarios related to history that will effectively communicate that meaning to the audience. Doing so within the conventions of television ensures that

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[62] Fiske, John & Hartley, John, *Reading television (second edition)*, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 44

[63] Woods, *Period Drama*, p. 198

[64] Fileva, Iskra, 'Historical inaccuracy in fiction,' *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 2, April 2019

[65] Ibid

the audience will understand what is being symbolised by relating it to their own experiences with the medium.[66]

Insurrection falls into the subgenre of docudrama, where the events portrayed onscreen are based on historical events, but are performed by actors. Nichols observes that all documentaries, regardless of subgenere, are 'fictions with plots, characters, situations, and events like any other. They offer introductory lacks, challenges, or dilemmas; they build heightened tensions and dramatically rising conflicts, and they terminate with resolution and closure.'[67] He goes on to say that docudrama scripting is based on 'both documents and conjecture.'[68] A narrative story needs to flow in a logical and coherent manner, and the historical record may not contain enough information to support a continuous narrative. In this case the docudrama creator must rely on their opinion of what likely happened in those in-between moments. It may be informed conjecture, based on accounts of the events and personalities involved, but there is an element of additional fictionalisation. Therefore, the docudrama can draw on the advantages of both documentary and drama to tell a compelling story. By using the familiar conventions of drama storytelling, the docudrama can use visual shorthand familiar to audiences for communicating meaning.[69] Bignell explains 'that many docudramas are interested in intimacy, character, psychology and the establishment of mirroring, comparative relationship between the viewer and the people featured in the programme.'[70] Creating emotional resonance between characters and audiences is particularly useful in the context of a commemorative docudrama. Viewers are being

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[66] Fiske, & Hartley, *Reading television*. p. 44

[67] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 107

[68] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 160

[69] Bignell, Jonathan, 'Docudrama performance: realism, recognition, and representation,' in Christine Cornea (ed.) *Genre and performance: film and television*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2017, pp. 59-75

[70] Ibid

asked to consider what it would have been like to experience historical events firsthand, and docudrama allows them to do so through the eyes of the figures involved. While docudrama's use of performers and sets may diminish the effect that what the viewer sees is 'real,' it treats its characters much the same way as a more traditional documentary might. Discussing biographical documentary, Nichols identifies the manner in which 'the historic congeals into the mythic and, similarly the social actor solidifies into a specifiable type; he or she becomes a character in the sense of displaying a set of behaviours that exemplify a particular, conventionalised conception of the human.'[71] This process happens regardless of whether the figure is being portrayed by an actor or in archival footage. Both forms of documentary rely on a streamlined narrative that leaves information out by necessity, detracting from the idea that docudrama is significantly less accurate than more traditional documentary. Bignell posits that docudrama has a greater appeal to audiences than other forms of nonfiction programming due to the emotional resonance of the narrative form, as well as the fact that it has more in common with the fictional television many viewers associate with the idea of entertainment.[72] For creators, this makes it an appealing genre to work in, as it communicates the historical information that they wish to impart, while drawing a larger audience and spreading the message further. For commemorative television this is certainly a benefit, and therefore it is unsurprising that *Insurrection* took the form of a docudrama to bring the story of the Easter Rising to the viewing public.

Centenary falls into the much more fluid category of spectacle. MacAloon describes the spectacle format as a 'frame' into which other genres could be fit.[73] *Centenary*

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[71] Nichols, Bill, 'History, myth, and narrative in documentary,' *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Autumn 1987, p. 9-20

[72] Bignell, 'Docudrama performance'

[73] MacAloon, John, 'Olympic games and the theory of spectacle in modern societies,' in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle*, John MacAloon (ed.), Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 250

demonstrates this in the variety of the programme's segments, which range from music video to interpretive dance to documentary. As the culmination of the Easter Rising commemorative programme, *Centenary* encompassed the overall themes of the commemorations. It created a unifying experience that acknowledged the difficulties of twentieth-century Irish history while maintaining a positive theme: that these events shaped contemporary Ireland. In the context of 2016, when global political, economic, and social conditions were rapidly changing, the televised spectacle also served as a reassurance. Myerhoff explains that 'by inserting traditional elements into the present, the past is read as prefiguring what is happening in the here and now, and by implication the future is seen as foreshadowed in all that has gone before.'[74] The presentation of contemporary conditions as a continuation of a history marked by steady improvement reinforced the idea that positive change could continue into the future. Myerhoff identifies the role that drama can play in alleviating fears of uncertainty by finding 'messages of continuity, human potency, and freedom amid threats of individual and societal obliteration.'[75] By revisiting key moments in which Ireland and its people faced these threats, then surpassed them, *Centenary* emphasised the idea of the value and resilience in Irish culture that had existed in the past and would continue into the future.

Feminism: 1916, 1966, and 2016

It has been established that commemorations are inherently a product of their time. In order to fully understand the programmes being analysed in this work, therefore, it is necessary to place them in the context of the eras in which they were made. Comparing each of these time periods to the social conditions in which the Easter Rising

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[74] Myerhoff, Barbara, 'A death in due time: construction of self and culture in ritual drama,' in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle*, John MacAloon (ed.), Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 173

[75] Myerhoff, 'A death in due time,' p. 150

occurred provides insight not only into the changing landscape of Irish life, but also which elements of the Rising were deemed most compatible with the attitudes of the commemorative era.

During the 2016 commemorations, there was a new emphasis on the role women had played in the Rising. Scholarship on the topic had been increasing since the 1980s, following the women's liberation movement of the 1970s.[76] The 1984 interview collection *Voices of Ireland* included a section on 'Women of the Revolution,' featuring interviews with Julia Grenan, Nora Connolly-O'Brien, and Leslie Bean de Barra.[77] Their first-hand accounts of being 'out' in Easter Week highlighted their roles in combat, rather than in the more traditionally feminine roles of cooks or nurses. The information on women's roles in 1916 was greatly expanded in 2003, when the 1,773 interviews conducted by the Bureau of Military History became publicly available.[78] These detailed people's experiences of the Revolutionary Period in their own words, and women's contributions ranged from Mary Catherine Mulcahy (née Ryan) recalling her last meeting with Sean MacDermott before his execution to Kathleen Lynn's first-hand description of the fighting at City Hall.[79]

By the time of the Golden Jubilee, women's roles in Irish society had changed dramatically. The 1937 constitution had 'equated women, home, and motherhood and enshrined the patriarchal nuclear family as the cornerstone upon which the new state

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[76] Frawley, Oona, 'Naming names: countering oblivious remembering in the Decade of Commemorations,' in *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*, ed. Oona Frawley, Indiana University Press, 2021, p.12-41

[77] O Dúlaing, Donncha, *Voices of Ireland*, O'Brien Press, Dublin, 1984

[78] McGarry, Fearghal, '1916 and Irish republicanism: between myth and history,' in *Towards commemoration: Ireland in war and revolution, 1912-1923*, eds. John Horne & Edward Madigan, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2013, p. 47

[79] Lynn, Kathleen, Bureau of Military History witness statement, (N.A.I., B.M.H., WS 357); Mulcahy, Mary Josephine, Bureau of Military History witness statement, (N.A.I., B.M.H., WS 399)

would be built.'[80] This followed restrictions on women's employment opportunities, including a ban on working in teaching or civil service after marriage, and the prohibition of contraceptives.[81] While the Irish Women's Liberation Movement was formed in 1970 to advocate for equality in legal, social, and employment spheres, discontent with the gender roles established in the 1930s were already becoming evident by the 1960s.[82] Groups such as the Irish Housewives Association were campaigning for increased rights and opportunities, and making women's dissatisfaction with the existing gender roles heard.[83] Despite these changes in the cultural landscape, women did not feature prominently in the Golden Jubilee events, an omission that Daly and O'Callaghan describe as 'predictable,' with Cumann na mBan receiving 'marginal attention.'[84]

The commemorations of 2016 saw a dramatic change from 1966. Ireland was now a country that had seen two female Presidents, legalisation of divorce and contraception, and the removal of employment barriers based on gender and marital status. While a number of factors including increased scholarship and women's prominence in government made it certain that women would have received more attention than in 1966, the commemorative plans would be greatly affected by the 'Waking the Feminists' movement.[85] In October 2015, the Abbey Theatre announced its commemorative programme, *Waking the Nation*, and only one of the plays in the entire programme was

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[80] Hagan, Linda, 'Missing voices: women and the three "ps": politics, prejudice, and paternalism,' *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1, Spring 2006, p. 12-22

[81] Kennedy, Catriona, 'Women and gender in modern Ireland,' in *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland*, eds. Richard Bourke and Ian McBride, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2016, pp. 361-382

[82] Luddy, Maria, 'Feminism,' in *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland*, eds. Richard Bourke and Ian McBride, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2016, pp. 470-490

[83] Ibid

[84] Daly, Mary & O'Callaghan, Margaret, 'Irish modernity and "the Patriot Dead" in 1966,' in Mary E. Daly & Margaret O'Callaghan (eds.) *Commemorating 1916 in 1966: The Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising*, Royal Irish Academy, 2007, p. 12

[85] O'Connell, Brenda, 'Waking the feminists' pp. 348-382

written by a woman.[86] This was despite the Abbey itself having been co-founded by female playwright and revolutionary Lady Gregory. When the lack of representation in the programme was addressed on social media, Abbey director Fiach MacConghail responded by tweeting 'Them's the breaks,' incensing those who were already upset by the exclusion of women from the commemorative programme.[87] The result was an event hosted by the Abbey and arranged by theatre artist Lian Bell, who had dubbed the growing movement 'Waking the Feminists,' and sought to publicise the experiences of women in the theatre industry, particularly the difficulty of remaining in the space after having children.[88] While the movement was focused specifically on theatre, the national attention it gained had an 'extraordinary impact,' inspiring a reevaluation of the treatment of women across the arts, particularly in reference to harassment and abuse of power by influential men.[89] This movement being prompted by a lack of equality in the commemorative programme emphasises the power of commemorative activity to draw attention to underlying issues within a society through examination not only of the past, but also the ways in which the past is remembered and acknowledged.

While 'Waking the Feminists' played a significant role in women's involvement in the commemorations, it was not the only way in which the commemoration engaged with women's changing role in society. An increase in the number of female historians and newly discovered information about women in 1916 resulted in a greater number of female-focused stories being told. McAuliffe notes that 'first, almost every writer or journalist comments on women's airbrushing out of history, and, second, they remark that the 2016 commemoration will, assuredly, mark a moment when this airbrushing will

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[86] Ibid

[87] Ibid

[88] Ibid

[89] Ibid

end.'[90] The public attention to both the previous erasure of women and the dedication to restoring their stories to the myth of the Rising is reflected in the television produced for the Centenary, as will be explored throughout this work.

The Irish Language: 1916, 1966, and 2016

While the formation of the Gaelic League in 1893 was prompted by an academic concern over the decline of the Irish language, membership in the League and proficiency in Irish quickly gained political connotations, with members considering Irish language proficiency 'a necessary prelude to an independence which was implicitly political.'[91] Despite the political importance assigned to the language, however, everyday use did not become widespread in the nationalist movement. Foster describes Liam de Róiste 'agonising' over his inability to learn Irish, and publications of the period suggest that he was not the only one who failed to achieve everyday fluency.[92] While a number of newspapers and magazines endorsed the nationalist cause, Irish language content was kept to 'token columns,' with the primary means of communication being English.[93] Morley puts forth the idea that the failure of Gaelic League members to learn the language did not represent a failure of the movement as a whole. He argued that:

> The League's most important achievement was less obvious and more gradual: the growing stream of students visiting Gaeltacht areas and the increased cultural prestige attaching to Irish convinced a critical mass of native speakers that

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[90] McAuliffe, Mary, 'Remembered for being forgotten: the women of 1916, memory, and commemoration,' in Oona Frawley (ed.), *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*, Indiana University Press, 2021, p. 61

[91] Foster, Roy, *Vivid faces: the revolutionary generation in Ireland 1890-1923*, W.W. Norton & Co, London, 2014, p. 48

[92] Foster, *Vivid Faces*, p. 50

[93] Foster, *Vivid Faces*, p. 149

knowledge of the language would be an asset rather than a liability for their children.[94]

This reversed the existing pattern in Irish language use, where successive generations spoke less than their parents. In the post-famine world of the late nineteenth century, when many Irish speakers had died or emigrated, many parents believed that the language would not help their children succeed, and encouraged them to speak English exclusively.[95] The census conducted in 1851 had revealed that while 23.3% of the population spoke Irish, only 12.7% of children under ten were fluent. By 1891 that number had dropped to 3.5%.[96] The pattern of decline would likely have continued had groups such as the Gaelic League not promoted the Irish language as a valuable cultural institution that deserved to be passed to the next generation.

While the actions of the Gaelic League may have prevented the extinction of the Irish language, they did not succeed in making it the primary language of independent Ireland. This failure to meet the expectations of the revolutionary generation was commented on by Eamon de Valera in 1966, when he gave an Easter Sunday address claiming that 'Ireland could not adequately honour the men of 1916 if we did not strive to bring about the Ireland of their desire by reviving the language.'[97] In 1966 there were 309 schools that taught all subjects through Irish, as compared to 1939, when they numbered 704.[98] Concern over the decline was exacerbated by a proposal from Fine Gael to end mandatory Irish examinations in schools.[99] Daly explains how 'the Golden Jubilee proved

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[94] Morley, Vincent, 'The Irish language,' in The Princeton History of Modern Ireland, eds. Richard Bourke and Ian McBride, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2016, p. 336

[95] Falc'her-Poyroux, Erick, 'The Great Famine in Ireland: a linguistic and cultural disruption,' 2014, dissertation, HAL-SHS

[96] Morley, 'The Irish language,' p. 335

[97] Daly, 'Less a commemoration of the actual achievements,' p. 55

[98] McNamara, John, 'Successes and failures in the movement for the restoration of Irish,'in Joan Rubin & Bjorn Jernudd (eds.) *Can language be planned? Sociolinguistic theory and practice for developing nations*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1971

[99] Daly, Mary, 'Less a commemoration of the actual achievements,' p. 52

an opportune event for Irish language activists. There was a much more active debate during the 1960s over the future of the Irish language than at any time since the foundation of the state.'[100] Irish language content was produced for the Golden Jubilee, with the Gael Linn documentary *An Tine Bheo* premiering during Easter Week of 1966.[101] While the commemorations did spark an increased interest in the Irish language and its role in contemporary Ireland, it did not result in the large-scale return to the language envisioned by the revolutionary generation.

The commemorations in 2016 once again drew attention to the fact that regular use of the Irish language had not become widespread. In a Senead debate devoted to commemoration planning, Senator Susan O'Keefe stated 'it is important that we have an emphasis on the Irish language next year on an all-island basis.'[102] Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Heather Humphries agreed on the importance of the language being 'prominent throughout the commemoration programme.'[103] This attitude continued into 2016, when TD Maureen O'Sullivan explained that 'when we think of the Easter Rising and the War of Independence, the leaders and the members spoke Irish and had a great love of Irish, and yet Irish is not the language of the majority of the population.'[104] The Irish language did play a role in commemorations, with President Michael D. Higgins frequently beginning and ending commemorative addresses in Irish, though the bulk of these speeches was in English (an example of this can be seen in *Centenary*).[105] The key difference between the role of the Irish language in the commemorations of 1966 and 2016 is that interest in the language has remained strong even after Easter Rising

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[100] Ibid

[101] Daly, Mary, 'Less a commemoration of the actual achievements,' p. 19

[102] Senead Éireann debate- 29 September 2015

[103] Ibid

[104] Dáil Éireann debate- 18 May 2016

[105] *Centenary,* created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

centenary. In 2020 language-learning app Duolingo reported that Irish was the fastest-growing of the language courses they offer.[106] In 2022 Irish-language film *An Cailín Ciúin* became the first Irish language film to be nominated for an Academy Award.[107] In 2024, Hector Ó hEochagáin's *The Irish Words You Should Know* won the An Post Irish Book Award for Best Irish-Published Book of the Year, with Manchán Magan's *Ninety-Nine Words for Rain (and One for Sun)* taking the same prize in 2025.[108] The future of the Irish language remains to be seen, but the Decade of Centenaries does appear to have inspired a more lasting interest in learning the language than previous commemorations' language efforts.

Views on Violence: 1916, 1966, and 2016

There has been much debate over whether the violence of the Easter Rising was justified, but there is consensus that it was a violent event. Changing attitudes towards political violence over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first have had a significant impact on how the rebellion has been viewed. Prior to the Rising, Irish politics had been experiencing a relatively peaceful progression. Mullholland explains that 'rural agitation and violent Fenianism had substantially died down,' and that the latter movement was 'on the fringes' throughout the 1890s.[109] Recalling the political activity of the early 1900s, Richard Mulcahy claimed that:

> you were reared in a nationalist atmosphere but nevertheless in common-sense surroundings and you got into the University atmosphere and the Gaelic League

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[106] 'Irish fastest growing language on Duolingo app,' *RTÉ*, 23 December 2020

[107] '*An Cailín Ciúin* makes history with Oscar nomination,' *The Irish Film and Television Academy*

[108] 'Winners of the An Post Irish Book Awards 2025 announced,' *An Post Irish Book Awards*, 28 November, 2025

[109] Mulholland, Marc, 'Political violence,' in The Princeton History of Modern Ireland, eds. Richard Bourke and Ian McBride, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2016, p. 389

atmosphere without having any military tendency in your bones or your marrow at all[110]

In this era, Home Rule through peaceful legal means seemed to be the most plausible path to Irish freedom, while 'armed revolution appeared to be completely out of the question.'[111] Even in 1912, when the passage of the Home Rule Bill created tensions between unionists and nationalists, Mulligan noted the lack of violence, observing that 'Guns were shipped in, men drilled and marched in formation, and threats were uttered, yet violent acts remained isolated incidents.'[112] Even as the First World War engulfed Europe, 'the comparative absence of violence [was] a striking feature of Irish politics.'[113] This time of relative peace was broken by the Easter Rising, which established the 'sanctification of violence,' according to Foster.[114] Even at the time of the Rising the use of political violence was unpopular among the Irish people, with Foster noting that 'the executions of the revolutionary leaders are generally held to have begun the shift towards endorsement of revolutionary violence among a wider sector of the population.'[115]

By 1966, Ireland had seen the War of Independence, Civil War, and IRA activity in Northern Ireland from 1956-1962, and the upcoming Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising sparked fears that violence would be renewed in the North.[116] Prime Minister Terence O'Neil shared these concerns, although he 'moved back from this in early 1966 as

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[110] Foster, *Vivid Faces* p. 70

[111] Mulholland, 'Political violence' p. 391

[112] Mulligan, William, 'Violence and war in Europe and Ireland, 1911-14,' in *Towards commemoration: Ireland in war and revolution, 1912-1923*, eds. John Horne & Edward Madigan, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2013, p. 18

[113] Ibid

[114] Foster, *Vivid Faces,* p. 257

[115] Foster, *Vivid Faces,* p. 25

[116] Daly & O'Callaghan, 'Irish modernity and "the Patriot Dead" in 1966', p. 8

extremist Protestant groups attempted to use the threat of IRA violence to initiate their own.'[117] Daly and O'Callaghan note that 'the eruption of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in 1969, and the consequent aftershocks in the Republic, resulted in the 1966 commemoration being retrospectively interpreted as a factor in the resurgence of IRA military activity,' but question whether there is actual evidence to support this claim.[118] Instead, they argue, the time preceding the Golden Jubilee reflects an 'obsession with the possibility of violence' in both the Republic and the North.[119]

By 2016, eighteen years had passed since the Good Friday Agreement, which deescalated conflict in Northern Ireland, and it had been eleven years since the Provisional IRA had declared a ceasefire.[120] However, the idea of Britain leaving the European Union presented new concerns that tensions would once again increase along the Northern Irish border.[121] While Britain did vote to leave the EU in June of 2016, the Rising commemorations (which occurred in March of that year) had already passed. Planning of commemorative events was not affected by fears of violence in the way that those in 1966 had been. While Deputy Fintan McGrath drew attention to the issue of violence in Northern Ireland in relation to the commemoration, he framed the connection in a positive light, saying 'it is not enough to say we oppose sectarian violence… we must be proactive in pushing conflict resolution measures.'[122] He presented the Proclamation as a reminder of the work that still needed to be done in unifying the diverse population of

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[117] Ibid

[118] Daly & O'Callaghan, 'Irish modernity and "the Patriot Dead" in 1966', p. 5

[119] O'Donnell, Catherine, 'Pragmatism vs unity: the Stormont government and the 1966 Easter commemoration,' in Mary E. Daly & Margaret O'Callaghan (eds.) *Commemorating 1916 in 1966: The Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising*, 2016, p. 244

[120] Doyle, John, 'Reflecting on the Northern Ireland Conflict and Peace Process: 20 years since the Good Friday Agreement,' *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 2018

[121] Ibid

[122] Dáil Éireann debate- 20 January 2015

Ireland, particularly in the area of acceptance and respect across religious divides.[123] By framing the Proclamation in this way, McGrath applied the language and values of the Easter Rising leaders to a more contemporary, peaceful method of handling differences within the Irish population.

As demonstrated in this review of the existing literature, a great deal of research has been done on the topics of commemoration, television, and Irish revolutionary history. By synthesising the findings of these works, a clear picture begins to emerge of the role of television in commemorating the Easter Rising in both its Golden Jubilee and Centenary years.

[123] Ibid

Chapter One

Commemoration, Identity, and Irish Television

'I must admit that sometimes when I think of television and radio and their immense power I feel somewhat afraid. Like atomic energy, it can be used for incalculable good but it can also do irreparable harm. Never before was there in the hands of men an instrument so powerful to influence the thoughts and actions of the multitude.'[1] These were the words of President Éamon de Valera as he introduced the newly created Irish national broadcaster, Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) in 1961. He expressed his hope that the Irish people would hold the broadcaster to a high standard, so that it could be used for education as well as recreation. Five years later, the fledgling RTÉ would bring the fiftieth anniversary commemorations of the Easter Rising to the public, uniting the entire country in a shared media experience. By the Rising centenary in 2016, ninety-six percent of Irish households owned a television set, and a plethora of commemorative content was created to mark the centenary.[2] RTÉ chairwoman Moya Doherty described the broadcaster having 'a central role in our efforts as a nation to remember our history and respond to the lessons to be found there. It was both a joyous and thought-provoking year of commemoration and future planning.'[3] By analysing the commemorative programming produced by RTÉ in both 1966 and 2016, this thesis will examine the use of television as a vehicle for commemoration.

Irish Audiences and the Birth of RTÉ

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[1] 'President first on new television service,' *RTÉ Archives*, 1961

[2] 'Household budget survey 2015-2016,' *Central Statistics Office*, 21 June 2017

[3] 'RTÉ Annual Report: a year in review,' *RTÉ*, 2016

To understand its effectiveness in communicating the message of the Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising in 1966, one must understand the relationship between Irish audiences and television in the mid-1960s. In 1961, Telefis Éireann had been developed as a uniquely Irish alternative to the British broadcasts that had dominated early Irish television.[4] Despite television ownership being fairly uncommon in the 1950s in Ireland, the improving economy of the early 1960s had already increased the percentage of Irish households that owned a television, and that number was continuing to rise.[5] To meet this increase in Irish television viewing, it would be essential to provide programming that mitigated the reliance on British television. RTÉ was created to provide Irish-developed content that was tailored specifically to the needs of the Irish people.[6] In the words of Gibbons, public broadcasting is 'in the business of *establishing* a national consensus and projecting a symbolic image of the nation,'[7] and RTÉ was created with this goal very clearly in mind.

Kevin Boland, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs at the time of the broadcaster's inception, stated that RTÉ was designed to be 'a service that is Irish in origin and character, that will enrich the lives of our people… what we would like to avoid is a television service which would be Irish in name only.'[8] In the early days it was a struggle to meet this goal, as the combination of financial constraints and small viewership led to the network's reliance on foreign programming, largely from the United States.[9] As

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[4] Brennan, Edward, 'Television in Ireland before Irish Television: 1950s Audiences and British Programming,' Shared Histories Conference 2016, National Library, Dublin, Ireland. 6 July 2016

[5] Flynn, Roddy, ''It Is against the basic concepts of good government to subject our people to *Rosemary Clooney* at the public expense': imported programming on early Irish television,' *Éire-Ireland,* Vol 50, No. 1-2, Spring/Summer 2015, pp. 66-94

[6] Brennan, Edward. 'Television in Ireland went far beyond RTÉ,' *Irish Times*, 11 January 2020

[7] Gibbons, Luke, 'Broadcasting and Irish Culture,' *Transformations in Irish Culture*, Cork University Press, 1996, p. 70-81

[8] 'Broadcasting in Ireland Enters a New Chapter,' *Irish Times*, 29 December 1961

[9] Flynn, Roddy, ''It Is against the basic concepts of good government'

television ownership increased and interest in domestic programmes grew, RTÉ began to develop its own programming, and in 1964 there was a dramatic drop in the proportion of RTÉ programming that came from abroad.[10] Having finally established itself as a producer of television instead of a mere consumer, RTÉ sought to prove itself as a source of distinctly Irish television.

Perhaps more intriguing than the network is the culture that audiences developed around television viewing in the mid-1960s. The most common narrative around this topic is that it brought discussions of controversial issues into people's homes and played a role in 'modernising' Ireland.[11] Shows such as *The Late Late Show* talked about sex, crime, and religion in a manner that was more candid than had ever previously been broadcast in Ireland, particularly in more rural communities.[12] Even the soap opera *The Riordans* discussed premarital sex and contraception in a way that was uncommon for its time.[13] Lee posited that *The Riordans* may have been even more effective in normalising previously taboo subjects by 'rousing the sympathy of many viewers who might not be regular clients of more cerebral programmes.'[14] But the discussion of taboo subjects was only a part of why audiences engaged as deeply as they did with television.

Non-academic recollections of early Irish television viewing tend to be centred mostly around connections to the people onscreen. In an editorial for the *Irish Times*, one viewer recalled that 'as a child, I vaguely assumed [the Riordans] lived down the road.'[15] Writer Wesley Burrowes had hoped for this effect, spending time in a rural town in County

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[10] Ibid

[11] Brennan, Edward, 'Television in Ireland before Irish television'

[12] Ibid

[13] Byrne, Andrea, 'The plough and the stars: how TV's revolutionary Riordans changed Ireland,' *Irish Independent*, 8 February 2009

[14] Bowman, John, *Window and Mirror: RTÉ Television: 1916-2011*, Collins Press, Cork, 2011

[15] 'A Death in the Family,' *Irish Times*, 17 February 1998

Kilkenny to get a better sense of local character and values.[16] The idea that the characters on the screen were part of the local community was further bolstered by the fact that *The Riordans* was one of the few Irish programmes on the air at the time. For audiences so unused to seeing people like themselves on television, there was a sense of familiarity with the characters that went beyond anything that could have been felt towards characters living in foreign countries and unfamiliar situations. However, the novelty of television combined with the relative rarity of seeing people with lifestyles so close to their own also created some confusion in early audiences, and RTÉ reported receiving wedding gifts addressed to the fictional couple whose marriage had taken place on *The Riordans*.

Closeness with the audience was not limited to fictional programming, either. The candid discussions and encouragement of the audience to write and phone in to *The Late Late Show* quickly made host Gay Byrne a household name.[17] Producer Tom McGrath organised the programme with the idea that it 'would be informal and have the feel of people dropping in for a chat.'[18] This feeling of casual intimacy allowed Byrne to speak frankly about topics such as religion, sex, and politics in a way that had not been seen before.[19] Byrne himself claimed that he only discussed topics that Irish people were 'ready to talk about' and sought to demystify taboo subjects.[20] *Irish Times* editor Douglas Gageby felt that Byrne had accomplished this, crediting *The Late Late Show* with allowing ideas that had previously been seen as obscene and blasphemous to 'be taken to the

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[16] Bowman, John, *Window and Mirror: RTÉ Television: 1916-2011*, Collins Press, Cork, 2011 p.159

[17] Ibid

[18] 'Late Late Show 1965.' *RTÉ Archives*, 2 April 1965

[19] Bowman, John, *Window and Mirror: RTÉ Television: 1916-2011*, Collins Press, Cork, 2011 p. 219-221

[20] Ibid

heart of the viewing public as an ordinary tea-time chat.'[21] For many Irish people, Byrne was the first person who had spoken to them in this manner, making him a trusted source of information as well as putting him into the role of a friend or family member.

In addition to the connection to figures onscreen, television built a sense of community away from the set as well. In the era of a single network, everyone watched the same programmes at the same time, and television became a topic to bond over.[22] The lives of characters or the topics discussed on a talk show gave people things to talk about and debate with their friends and family. They introduced new ideas to people who may have otherwise not even heard of a certain topic. They created a sense of shared experience when a whole country saw the same events on the same programme, which Adams described as creating a 'gathering place' outside of physical space.[23] On a more literal level, Irish audiences did commonly physically gather together to experience programmes together. People watched television in groups with their family, friends, and neighbours, creating their own small community based around their viewing habits. When celebrations occurred on a series, some members of the audience even audience dressed up and made treats to ‘celebrate’ with them.[24] When characters mourned, the audience joined them.[25]

While Irish-made programming was beloved and successful among audiences, their expectations for what a television series should be had been established in the days of imported content. This meant that many of the new domestic offerings were similar in genre and style to their English and American counterparts. To some critics, such as

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[21] Ibid

[22] Flynn, Roddy, ''It Is against the basic concepts of good government’

[23] Adams, Paul C, 'Television as gathering place,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 82, No. 1, 1992, pp. 117–35

[24] Byrne, Andrea, 'The plough and the stars: how TV's revolutionary Riordans changed Ireland,' *Irish Independent*, 8 February 2009

[25] Ibid

Schiller, this detracted from their status as 'Irish programmes.' He wrote that 'the content and style of the programming, however adapted to local conditions, bear the ideological imprint of the main centres of the capitalist world economy.'[26] While this concern was understandable in the mid-1970s, it was later refuted by Gibbons, who argued that most 'traditional' cultural elements had some form of foreign influence, and that the adaptions to local conditions were what made those elements distinctly Irish.[27] He cited *The Late Late Show* and *The Riordans* as examples of this, as both fit into Anglo-American genres (the talk show and the soap opera, respectively), but were adapted in ways that were so specific to Irish culture that they became iconic as Irish programmes in their own right, rather than simply being viewed as the Irish versions of other series. This was an early step towards the development of an indigenous Irish television culture, and factored in to television's role in the 1966 commemorations, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

As Higgins noted 'television coverage provided a way for the public to share an experience across the geographical spread of the country.'[28] Bringing people together for this experience played well into the goal of strengthening national identity and unity in a country where rapidly changing lifestyles caused divisions between people holding on to tradition and those who eagerly accepted the new way of life.

The celebration of such a significant event in the formation of the independent Irish nation called on citizens to look back at the past and measure how the achievements of the nation over the past fifty years compared to the hopes of the 1916 generation.[29] An Taoiseach Seán Lemass was eager to use this comparison to highlight the progress the

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[26] Schiller, Herbert I. *Communication and Cultural Domination*. M.E. Sharpe. 1976.

[27] Gibbons, Luke, 'Broadcasting and Irish Culture,' *Transformations in Irish Culture,* Cork University Press, Cork,1996, pp. 70-81

[28] Higgins, Roisín, *Transforming 1916: Meaning, Memory, and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Easter Rising*, Cork University Press, Cork, 2012 p. 18

[29] Ibid

country had made and instil a new sense of national pride.[30] In 2006 Higgins, Holohan, and O'Donnell examined the promotion of the 'spirit of 1916' as a way for the government to direct the population to more practical, everyday concerns.[31] Young Irish people were told in school and church that buying Irish-made goods was an act of patriotism, and that pride in their country could be expressed by not littering.[32] Attempts to appeal to the civic pride of teenagers through pageantry and religious events were, however, largely unsuccessful, with Holohan noting that 'for much of Irish youth, new messages were either obscured or irrelevant, delivered as they were in traditional forms.'[33]

1966 and the Golden Jubilee

In the 1960s, Ireland was experiencing rapid economic and technological growth, leading to significant cultural changes in people's everyday lives. Amid this social upheaval there was a great deal of debate about the idea that modernisation was eroding national identity and the rural traditions that were so deeply associated with 'Irishness.'[34] The need to construct a new national identity that both preserved the traditions of the past and integrated the new ideas of the current generation was apparent, and the opportunity to do so presented itself in the Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising. While Irish audiences were primed for a major national event to enter their homes through the television, the success of the Golden Jubilee programming was also largely due to the importance of commemoration in national culture. Any commemorative event is

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[30] Higgins, Roisín, et al, '1966 and all that: the 50th anniversary commemorations.' *History Ireland*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2006, pp. 31–36

[31] Ibid

[32] Ibid

[33] Holohan, Carole, 'More than a revival of memories? 1960s youth and the 1916 Rising,' in Mary E. Daly & Margaret O'Callaghan (eds.) *Commemorating 1916 in 1966: The Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising*, Royal Irish Academy, 2007, p. 176

[34] Gibbons, Luke, 'From Kitchen Sink to Soap: Drama and the Serial Form on Irish Television.' *Transformations in Irish* Culture. Cork University Press. 1996, p. 44-69

influenced by the opinions and goals of the people or group organising it. Therefore, in the words of Carrier, 'their meaning derives from elements of both the original event and the new context within which the commemorative 'event' takes place.'[35] Similarly, Higgins argued that commemorations direct focus at a particular event, selectively choosing what audiences will focus on, explaining that 'remembering the Easter Rising was a way of forgetting both the First World War and the Irish Civil War.'[36] 1966 was not only the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising, but also the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, where the Thirty-Sixth (Ulster) Division suffered what historian Guy Beiner described as 'devastating fatalities.'[37] These losses coming less than three months after the Easter Rising increased tensions in Ireland, where unionists viewed rebelling during wartime as an act of disloyalty that dishonoured the war dead, particularly those from Ireland who fought and died for Britain.[38] By focusing 1966 events on the Easter Rising without mention of Irish involvement in WWI, the commemorations avoided discussing a divisive topic that did not fit in to the triumphalist messaging of the Golden Jubilee.

The involvement of many Rising participants in the Irish Civil War meant that memorialising their actions in one event was sure to bring up memories of the other. For a nation where the Civil War was within living memory and still causing political divisions, discussing it would bring up old wounds and detract from the Jubilee message of a modern, progressive Ireland. It was ultimately decided that the correct way to deal with the Civil War in the context of commemorating the Rising was to ignore it.[39] Foster explains:

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[35] Carrier, Peter, 'Historical traces of the present: the uses of commemoration'

[36] Higgins, *Transforming 1916*, p. 19

[37] Beiner, Guy, 'Between trauma and triumphalism: the Easter Rising, the Somme, and the crux of deep memory in modern Ireland,' *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Cambridge University Press, The North American Conference on British Studies, 2007, p. 366–89

[38] Ibid

[39] Higgins, *Transforming 1916*, p. 19

> If the function of public commemoration was to create the bonding cement of social memory, this implied the creation of an agreed version of history. And one inheritance of the traumatic split over the Treaty and the subsequent Civil War was a wide, if often unspoken, chasm between different interpretations of what the revolution had actually been about. This disagreement revolved around events from the Truce to the Treaty and thereafter, which is one reason why the commemoration of the 1916 Rising was seen as a safer option.[40]

This was especially evident at Kilmainham Jail, which became a museum in 1966. While the jail had been used to incarcerate both the leaders of the Easter Rising and anti-treaty prisoners during the Civil War, memorials were carefully designed to omit any reference to the latter, a decision which Higgins explained as 'the attempt to limit all possible divisions by jettisoning the civil war demarcat[ing] the jail as a less contested site in Irish history.'[41] This strategy carried through to the National Museum, where the death masks of Michael Collins and Cathal Brugha, who fought on opposite sides of the Civil War, were displayed together in a 'Dáil Éireann' exhibit with no reference to their later activities.[42] Higgins described this arrangement as the men being 'suspended in time, safely contained within the history of the struggle for independence.'[43] For a nation trying to create a sense of unity surrounding the Easter Rising, keeping the focus of commemorations tightly concentrated on the Rising itself without the context of surrounding history was intended to gloss over major political and social divides that were still affecting Irish life in 1966.

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[40] Foster, *Vivid faces,* p. 290

[41] Higgins, *Transforming 1916*, p. 154

[42] Ibid

[43] Ibid

Early Commemorations of the Easter Rising

By controlling the narrative of the Easter Rising, the committees in charge of the 1966 commemorations were able to combine a number of goals in their arrangement of the celebrations.[44] First and foremost, Ireland was promoted both at home and abroad as a modern, developed country that lived up to the expectations of a contemporary western European country despite only recently becoming a republic. For a recently-established state, international legitimacy was a vital part of establishing an identity as its own separate country. Domestically, the idea of being a successful nation was closely tied to the leaders of 1916 and their hopes for the country. By presenting the contemporary generation as the embodiment of their ancestors' dream for the country, commemoration organisers could instil a sense of national pride that was felt on a personal and emotional level as well as politically. Additionally, Higgins pointed out, the government publicly expressing reverence and respect for the 1916 leaders presented the current state as the 'heirs' to the revolutionaries, and support for them as support for the ideals of the Rising.[45] This had long been a feature of Rising commemorations, with every faction insisting that their agenda was the correct continuation of the Rising.[46] Finally, control over people's view of the past and their national origin gave control over people's sense of national identity and what it meant to be Irish. Organisers could select the events and ideals of the Rising that they wanted to emphasise as well as those that they wanted to downplay.[47] This is likely the reason that the fiercely socialist ideas of James Connolly

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[44] Higgins, Roisín, et al, '1966 and all that: the 50th anniversary commemorations.' *History Ireland*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2006, p. 31–36

[45] Higgins, Roisín, 'The 'incorruptible inheritors of 1916': the battle for ownership of the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising,' *Saothar*, Vol. 41, Irish Labour History Society, 2016, p. 33–42

[46] Ferriter, Diarmuid, 'Commemorating the Rising 1922-65,' pp. 199-220

[47] Higgins, Roisín, et al. '1966 and All That: The 50th Anniversary Commemorations.' *History Ireland*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Wordwell Ltd., 2006, pp. 31–36

received far less attention than the dignified martyrdom of Padraic Pearse.[48] Even the legacy of Pearse was carefully curated for the Golden Jubilee. His name and photograph were prominent, but his writings and poetry that were presented as part of the commemoration were carefully selected to avoid his most radical works. Referring to Pearse's poem 'Invocation,' Lemass described being 'disturbed by the fierce and vengeful tone of the poem.'[49] Denison observes that conditions give the political elites 'fairly wide scope to shape the terms, if not the complete content, of national identity production,' and this was evident in the handling of the Golden Jubilee.[50] In 1960s Ireland- which was rapidly modernising and adapting to the rest of the world in terms of technology and economics- national identity was a major concern and the Rising provided an ideal opportunity to shape it.

Remembering the Rising in 2016

By the 2016 centenary of the Easter Rising the world had changed dramatically, and Ireland had changed with it. Access to the internet and satellite television allowed audiences could watch anything they wanted at any time they wanted and were much more critical of what they saw on the television. Sophistication among television viewers was amplified by the fact that information seen on television programmes could easily be fact-checked online, and a search of a writer or director could reveal opinions or affiliations that would affect their work, so bias was far more easily identified. For the organisers of the centenary commemorations, this meant that the strategy from 1966

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[48] Higgins, Roisín, 'The 'incorruptible inheritors of 1916': the battle for ownership of the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising,' *Saothar*, Vol. 41, Irish Labour History Society, 2016, p. 33–42

[49] Ferriter, Diarmuid, 'Commemorating the Rising 1922-65,' p. 216

[50] Denison, Michael, 'The art of the impossible: political symbolism, and the creation of national identity and collective memory in post-Soviet Turkmenistan,' *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 7, 2009, pp. 1167–87

would need to be adapted to the new era and modified to appeal to contemporary audiences.

The changing nature of Irish political and cultural goals between 1966 and 2016 led to a shift in focus between 50th and 100th anniversary commemorations. This was largely affected by events in Northern Ireland in this era. From 1969 through 1997 the region experienced paramilitary violence between Nationalists with the goal of Northern Ireland becoming part of the Republic and Unionists who wished to remain a part of Great Britain.[51] The death toll of the conflict was over 3,500 and led to deep rifts not only in the North but between the Irish and British governments.[52] While the Golden Jubilee of the Rising occurred as the tensions between Northern factions were rising, the situation in the North had shifted dramatically by the time of the centenary.[53] The 1998 Good Friday Agreement was a result of nearly a decade of attempts at peace agreements and was designed to alleviate the major factors in the violence by instituting civil rights provisions, disarmament of paramilitary groups, reforms in policing, and power-sharing agreements between disparate political groups.[54] While the Agreement did not completely end the conflict, it did stop most of the violence and is viewed as the end point of the Troubles.[55] Between 1998 and 2016, a number of additional agreements and compromises served to further de-escalate the situation. In the spirit of this new relationship, centenary commemorations in Ireland included the names of British soldiers killed during Easter

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[51] McKittrick, David & McVea, David, *Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict in Northern Ireland (Revised Edition),* Penguin Publishing, 2012

[52] Ibid

[53] Ibid

[54] McDonagh, Philip, 'The Good Friday Agreement: 1998,' *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1, India International Centre, 2004, p. 12–22

[55] McKittrick, David & McVea, David, *Making Sense of the Troubles*

Week, which British Ambassador to Ireland Dominick Chilcott felt was 'useful in promoting reconciliation and good relations.'[56]

Another major change between 1966 and 2016 was the way that Ireland and its culture were perceived internationally. The Irish Tourism Industry Confederation reported that between 1965 and 2000 the number of visitors increased fivefold, with the greatest increases occurring from the late 1980s into the 1990s.[57] Exploring tourism and cultural identity, Rapuano and Fernandez explained that 'the view of Irishness that Irish Americans bring with them to their tour of the Republic of Ireland is manufactured largely through tourism and secondarily through other media.'[58] They went on to explain that since tourist attractions are designed to play into guests' expectations, they present a carefully curated idea of Irish culture based on traditional music, ancient monuments, and beautiful landscapes.[59] The 'other media' referred to supports this view of Irish culture as well. In 1995 the music and dance stage show *Riverdance* became a major hit internationally, particularly in the United States among Americans of Irish descent.[60] The show's blending of traditional and modern dance appealed to Irish Americans looking to embrace their culture without being associated with the negative stereotypes of earlier 'Irish' elements in American pop culture.[61] The commemorative events of 2016 provided

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[56] Roche, Barry, 'Rising centenary marked with 'great dignity', British ambassador says,' *Irish Times*, 6 April 2016

[57] 'The impact of tourism on the Irish economy,' *Irish Tourism Industry Confederation*. 11 October, 2002

[58] Rapuano, Deborah, and Jessica R. Fernandez, 'Remembering and living Irishness: tourism, place and memory,' *International Review of Modern Sociology*, Vol. 36, No. 1, International Journals, 2010, pp. 1–21

[59] Ibid

[60] Casey, Natasha, 'Riverdance: the importance of being Irish American,' *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, Vol. 6, No. 4, University of St. Thomas (Center for Irish Studies), 2002, pp. 9–25

[61] Ibid

an opportunity to adjust the image of Ireland abroad by portraying traditional music and culture in the context of a modern nation.

RTÉ and the Centenary Year

Given the financial success of these shows and the economic benefits of tourism in Ireland, it was not surprising that the focus for the centenary was shifted to the arts and celebrating Irish culture more than the military elements of the Rising.[62] This attitude was on full display with RTÉ's centenary programming, where it was declared that 'arts rather than arms will be the focus.'[63] Reflecting on the commemorations several months after they occurred, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Heather Humphreys discussed the role arts and culture played in the 'successful 1916 commemorations' acknowledging that 'we put arts at the centre.'[64] Given the influence that music, art, and literature had on the Rising in the era of the Gaelic Revival, it was decided in the Seanad that the centenary would explore what the notion of an Irish national culture meant to the rebellion's participants.[65] This fit in with the centenary theme of how far Ireland had come since 1916. While the Golden Jubilee generation had measured the success of the nation in terms of economics and technology, the focus of the centenary generation was on the blending of traditional Irish arts with more modern interpretations to create a culture that was both distinctly Irish and thoroughly modern. RTÉ Director-General Noel Curran expressed this in 2015, explaining that in the programming being devised for the

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[62] 'The Impact of Tourism on the Irish Economy.' *Irish Tourism Industry Confederation*. 11 Oct 2002.

[63] 'RTÉ gets to the art of the matter for 1916 centenary,' *RTÉ.ie,* 12 March 2016

[64] Dáil debate, 22 June 2016, Vol 914, No 2

[65] Seanad Éireann debate- 22 May 2013, Vol. 223, No. 7

commemoration 'we're also looking at Ireland over the last 100 years. It's not just about The Rising.'[66]

When asked what he felt the most important part of the strategy RTÉ followed in planning the Rising commemorations was, Glen Killane (RTÉ Managing Director in 1916) explained that a clear distinction was always made: the goal was to commemorate the Rising, not celebrate it.[67] While these concepts are related and frequently do overlap, a commemoration is a time for thoughtful reflection on a subject, and in the case of the Easter Rising there were enough divisive events and decisions made that celebration did not feel appropriate. There were questions about the ethics of starting an armed conflict in a populated city, whether or not martyrdom was admirable, and a slew of political and religious divisions that were still impacting Irish culture in 2016. Celebrating the Rising would be taking a particular stance on these issues and potentially alienating large groups of people who were also Irish and also impacted by the Rising. To prevent this, RTÉ wanted their commemorative contributions to be centred around discussion and civil debate. None of the programming that was produced made a moral judgement about the Rising or any of its participants, and efforts were made to present conflicting viewpoints and allow audiences to draw their own conclusions. In doing so, Killane explained, people could come together to examine the impact of the Rising on the country despite having different backgrounds and opinions. To this end, any part of the commemorative programming that was celebratory was centred around things that people across Ireland have in common, such as music, dance, and storytelling. Cultural elements that were present both at the time of the Rising and in 2016 unified past and present without excluding specific groups.

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[66] 'RTÉ to 'bring 1916 to life' with centenary content,' *RTÉ.ie*, 5 November 2015

[67] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

This philosophy of commemoration could most clearly be seen on Easter Monday itself. The primetime slot on RTÉ was occupied by *Centenary*, which was described as 'a cultural celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising' and consisted of song and dance performances, poetry, and video of the Ireland of 2016 and the contemporary generation of Irish people.[68] The show's creator, Cilian Fennell, explained that his goal was to express the story of the Irish people and that 'I wanted the cultural element first and foremost for me because it was a cultural show and then when you start looking through the great canon of Irish song you see the whole story to be told just by singing these songs.'[69] To this end he chose not to have narration or an explicit story, but allowed the audience to connect with the culture just by experiencing the music and dance. This style of show resonated with viewers, with high viewership numbers both in the original airing and on the RTÉ online player, demonstrating audience appreciation for the presentation.[70]

Even the programmes that directly depicted the events of Easter Week sought to provide a view of the event that went beyond military manoeuvres. Drama *Rebellion* featured female protagonists whose lives became entangled with the Rising.[71] Renewed interest in the history of 1916 surrounding the centenary had revealed a number of previously underplayed women who participated in the Rising, such as Dr. Kathleen Lynn, activist and chief medical officer of the Irish Citizen Army, and Winnie Carney, James Connolly's secretary who remained in the GPO until the evacuation order.[72] These stories drove interest in women's role in 1916 and provided a new lens through which to view the

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[68] 'RTÉ gets to the art of the matter for 1916 centenary,' *RTÉ.ie,* 12 March 2016

[69] 'Centenary creator says no decision made on tour,' *RTÉ.ie*, 31 March 2016

[70] Ibid

[71] Hale, Mike, 'Review: 'Rebellion' pits soap opera vs. drama of the Easter Rising,' *New York Times*, 22 Apr 2016

[72] Ó hÓgartaigh, Margaret, 'Lynn, Kathleen,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, November 2013

Rising. *Rebellion* was promoted as a feminist take on the story of Easter Week. It also expressed the point of view of people who did not choose to become involved in the fighting. The insurrection occurring in major buildings around the city resulted in that daily lives being affected despite people's attempts to avoid becoming involved in politics or nationalist movements. By taking on these less-acknowledged stories of the Rising, *Rebellion* aimed to provide a more well-rounded view of 1916 and its effects on the citizens of Dublin than a drama focused exclusively on combatants.

The programme whose format allowed it to present the Rising from as many angles as possible was the documentary *1916: The Irish Rebellion*. Co-produced by RTÉ and Notre Dame University, the three-part series examined the factors that led to the Rising, the events of Easter Week itself, and the aftermath of the conflict from a global perspective. By situating the Irish independence movement within the larger context of the early twentieth century, the documentary presented a thorough picture of the perspectives that influenced each faction that became involved. This will be explored in-depth in the chapter devoted to the programme. Of the centenary programming created by RTÉ, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* required the least prior knowledge of the Easter Rising. Causes, events, and the impact of the rebellion were all fully explained. Fittingly, the series aired on RTÉ over the course of three weeks in January 2016, before *Rebellion* and *Centenary* and just as discussion of the commemoration was becoming more common. The series gave an overview of the subject that would provide context for all of the other parts of the commemoration. The co-production also meant that it aired on public television in the United States, where there is a large Irish diaspora, but the existence of the Easter Rising is not commonly taught in schools. *1916: The Irish Rebellion* invited these people to learn about the rebellion and had the potential to spark an interest that would encourage further research and engagement with the centenary commemoration.

Conclusion

The Easter Rising has become a symbol of the entire struggle for Irish independence, and the idea of what modern Ireland should be is frequently based on the ideals set forth in the Proclamation. This association means that commemoration of the rebellion is closely linked to how Ireland views itself, and the changes in how the anniversaries are marked reflect changes in Irish identity over time. The role of television as a means of connecting people across the country to one unified message demonstrates how the programming associated with each major anniversary serves as a benchmark of what 'Irishness' represented at the time of the commemoration.[73] The military focus and emphasis on the actual, military events of the Rising of 1966 are a sharp contrast to the artistic and cultural programming of 2016, which dealt with the ideas that the Rising stood for more than the fighting itself. The reason for these changes becomes apparent when the social, political, and economic position that Ireland was experiencing in each era is examined. While television tends to reflect the attitudes of the era, it is also important to remember that these programmes were made with political as well as entertainment goals. This provided historians with the opportunity to analyse the way that the Irish people were guided to think of themselves and their country through the content created for television broadcast.

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[73] Moseley, Rachel, and Helen Wheatley, 'Is Archiving a Feminist Issue? Historical Research and the Past, Present, and Future of Television Studies,' *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 3, Spring 2008, p. 152-158

Chapter Two

Insurrection

The major social, economic, and technological advances Ireland was making in the 1960s meant significant cultural changes. For fledgling network RTÉ, the Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising was an ideal opportunity to contribute to the developing cultural identity of the new, modern Ireland. Since the commemoration aimed to look at the Rising through the lens of the rapidly evolving culture of the 1960s, it stood to reason that the newly-created Irish national television broadcaster would be a perfect medium through which the message of modernisation could be communicated. RTÉ would need to develop a programme that would appeal to audiences, tell the story of the Rising, and inspire pride in contemporary Ireland. The broadcaster had found success in adapting imported programmes to an Irish context, so that approach was applied to the commemorative programme. The result was the faux-newsreel series *Insurrection*. The familiar format attracted viewers, while the content of the series created a cultural conversation around the Rising and how it was still relevant in 1960s Ireland.

Presenting History as News

The format of *Insurrection* is perhaps the best-remembered element of the programme. Presented as a modern-day newscast reporting the events of the Rising as they happen, the series brought past and present together, explaining historical events in a way that audiences were accustomed to seeing on television. An anchor presented maps and described strategies while ‘man on the street’ interviews and dramatisations of actual events gave the impression that the newscast was cutting away to a live feed. Of course, audiences were aware that it was a historical programme and not occurring in the moment, but presenting the history of the Rising in this manner made the story feel more

relatable than a traditional documentary format. *Insurrection* was designed to look like the newscasts viewers watched every night, and invited them to consider what they would do or feel if the Rising was happening in their time. The very modern medium of television bridged the gap between past and present, pulling the Rising into the Ireland of the 1960s.

The newscast concept also created a unique blend of documentary and drama that ensured that audiences were educated and entertained in equal measure. But the format of *Insurrection* was hardly a risk for RTÉ. The 'newsreel portraying historical events' had been done on several programmes before, and both the American and British versions of the concept had been both critically and commercially popular in Ireland.[1] These will be discussed in full in this chapter. By taking a proven format and applying it to a uniquely Irish story, RTÉ had set *Insurrection* up for success.

The American programme *You Are There* is commonly credited as the first example of the faux-newscast style. Beginning on radio in 1947 and transitioning to television in 1953, the series took audiences to a different historical event each episode, delivering reports in a style indistinguishable from contemporary newscasts. Perhaps the main reason for the success of the series was the involvement of host and narrator Walter Cronkite. Known as the 'most trusted man in America,' Cronkite had made his career as a reporter on the principle of being devoted to the truth, even when it was not as glamorous or optimistic as audiences would have hoped. Eulogising Cronkite after his death in 2009, journalism professor Jeff Cunningham wrote that Cronkite firmly believed 'a journalist's only duty was to get the facts and get them right.'[2] This attitude may have been controversial at times, but ultimately it meant that listeners and viewers knew that they could trust Cronkite to present them with accurate accounts of what was going on in the

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[1] 'To-night on TV and radio,' *Evening Herald*, 2 January 1963

[2] Cunningham, Jeff, 'Walter Lelend Cronkite, Jr. 4 November 1916 · 17 July 2009,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 160, No. 1, 2016, p. 75–95

world. Along with field reporters portrayed by other newsmen of the day, Cronkite gave *You Are There* a sense of veracity that drew audiences into the historical events presented each episode.[3]

For the cast and crew of *You Are There*, it was vital that the reports on the show be as factual as would be expected of any contemporary newscast. To this end, scripts were sent to the history department at New York University to be checked for historical accuracy.[4] This was not done solely in the interest of educating the audience, however. *You Are There* was being produced during the Cold War, when conformity and intense nationalism were both deeply valued in the United States. The strict adherence to historical accuracy was intended to counterbalance programmes such as *Cavalcade of America*, which exclusively presented the United States and common mid-century values in a positive light, glossing over any inconvenient historical events that may have implied otherwise. The writers of *You Are There*, several of whom had been blacklisted from Hollywood during the anti-Communist fervour of the late 1940s and early 1950s, were determined to present history as it had been, not how people wished it had been.[5] Their political opinions and experiences also affected the stories that were chosen for the series. Paul noted that the episodes about Joan of Arc and Galileo Galilei were two of the strongest, as the writers' passion for stories of people standing up for their beliefs against authority figures resonated with viewers watching their plight.[6] In a country caught in a struggle between conformity and individuality, *You Are There*'s writers sought to sway public opinion in favour of personal freedom, a cultural shift that would not fully take hold until the late 1960s into the 1970s.

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[3] Howard, Maureen, 'You Are There,' *Threepenny Review*, No. 61, 1995, pp. 34–38

[4] Paul, Andrew, 'Reassessing blacklist era television: civil libertarianism in 'You Are There' ,'The Adventures of Robin Hood', and 'The Buccaneers.'' *American Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 2015, pp. 29–52

[5] Ibid

[6] Ibid

While the politics of the show may not have sat well with the network (production was moved from New York to Los Angeles and the entire writing staff replaced partway through its run), *You Are There* was an undeniable hit with audiences.[7] Running for one hundred and twenty six episodes over nineteen years, the show's longevity speaks to the skill with which education and entertainment were blended to create an appealing series.[8] In 1956 this effort was acknowledged by the Peabody Board of Directors, who gave the programme their Television Education Award 'for helping to remind us that the men who made United States history did walk and talk, and think and feel, and for making the statues and portraits come briefly to life again.'[9] The efficacy of *You Are There*'s format at teaching history also led to a great deal of imitators, ranging from newscast-style university exhibits to articles in mathematical journals.[10] [11]

By the time *Insurrection* was being developed, *You Are There* had won the Television Education Award. In addition to attaching itself to the popularity of the format, RTÉ was using a concept that had been lauded for entertaining and educating the audience while making them feel a personal connection to the figures of the past. That was exactly what they wanted the effect of the commemoration to be, so it was a logical choice to adapt that style. The use of the newsreel style rather than a traditional 'talking heads' documentary also addressed the concern that young people would be disinterested in the commemoration. Trying to present the Rising to an audience that needed to be convinced that the topic was worth their time was already a challenge; making a programme that felt like a lecture would only confirm the idea that history was

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[7] Ibid

[8] '*You Are There,*' *Internet Movie Database*.

[9] '*You Are There*: CBS television,' *Peabody: Stories That Matter*

[10] Dichtl, John, 'The Indiana experience: 'You Are There.' *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 98, No. 1, 2011, pp. 128–134

[11] Straley, H.W., 'An interview with Sir Issac Newton.' *Math Horizons*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2007, pp. 11–38

not relatable or relevant in their lives. By connecting the story of 1916 to contemporary lived experience through the newsreel, RTÉ assured both that a larger audience would tune in and that those who did would be impressed with what they saw and more inclined to engage with the material and think more critically about the Rising.

While *You Are There* laid the groundwork for presenting history through newsreel, the concept was brought to new popularity by Peter Watkins' 1964 television movie *The Battle of Culloden*.[12] Created for the BBC, Watkins' film depicted the 1746 battle between the British forces and the Jacobites in Culloden, Scotland. The realism provided by the newsreel format allowed Watkins to depict the brutality of the battle in a candid manner that did not gloss over the misery of the event.[13] The involvement of John Prebble, who had written a definitive history of the battle, as historical advisor also ensured that the film would portray the event in a manner consistent with the historiography surrounding it.[14] It was a decision that RTÉ would replicate by bringing in historian Kevin Nowlan to consult on the script for *Insurrection*, and in both cases ensured a degree of accuracy in the material. In the case of the Easter Rising there were veterans of the conflict still alive in 1966 and any potential inaccuracies would have been noticed and commented on, damaging the reputation of the series as a whole. Even in its final form, with the script having been edited for accuracy, there were veterans who argued that some of the details were not correct. Other veterans insisted that the programme faithfully portrayed the events of Easter Week. The difference in opinion reflects the varied experiences and memories of people who had been involved; the modern understanding of commemoration acknowledges that individuals can interpret an experience in myriad ways based on their background and beliefs. By involving historians in the writing of the

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[12] The Battle of Culloden, dir. Peter Watkins, BBC, 1964, television

[13] Arthur, Paul, 'The Troublemaker,' *Film Comment*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2004, pp. 58–65

[14] Rapfogel, Jared, 'Cautionary tales and alternate histories: the films of Peter Watkins,' *Cinéaste*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2007, pp. 20–25

script, the creators ensured that *Insurrection* would adhere to the understood facts of the event, even if it could not capture every lived experience. The perspectives presented by the series were not without controversy, however. Nowlan consulted with Richard Mulcahy, a Rising veteran who went on to fight on the pro-Treaty side of the Civil War and serve as a politician for Fine Gael.[15] Ruiarí Brugha, son of Rising veteran and anti-Treaty IRA member Cathal, objected to *Insurrection* featuring Michael Collins prominently, but not Eamon de Valera.[16] It is unknown whether the decision to only portray Collins would have been different had a larger number of veterans from both sides of the Civil War been consulted. As it was, Daly notes that 'complaints were remarkably few; most veterans appear to have gloried in the commemoration.'[17]

While *Culloden* may not have been created to mark a specific anniversary associated with the battle, it still fits the mould of a commemoration. While an anniversary marks a date, commemorations are about reflecting on a historical event and what it meant both the people who experienced it and the people who were affected by it after.[18] *Culloden* certainly accomplished this goal as it was released at a time where seeing harsh, violent content on the news was not uncommon. Irish television critic Tom O'Dea noted in a review of the film that 'using the technique of the newsreel camera, 'interviewing' the participants, dispensing with dramatic dialogue- these were the things that gave the film the directness of a programme like 'Newsbeat' or 'Panorama.''[19] By adopting the style of the then-current news reports covering the Vietnam War, *Culloden* drew direct parallels between the brutality of the past and present in a way that spoke to

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[15] Daly, 'Less a commemoration of the actual achievements,' p. 44

[16] Ibid

[17] Ibid

[18] Beatty, Bob, 'Commemoration: the promise of remembrance and new beginnings'

[19] O'Dea, Tom, 'The Fame of Hall,' Irish Press, 19 December 1964

audiences.[20] This idea was repeated in a retrospective on Watkins' work by *Cinéaste* editor Jared Rapfogel, who asserted that 'The conceit of an eighteenth-century film crew allows Watkins to avoid the trappings of the conventional period film- its preoccupation with a narrative arc, personal drama, and the spectacle of period dress and props. These are all things which, in most period films, create a comfortable distance- and this is why the immediacy of the newsreel approach is invaluable here, a way of making history come alive again.'[21] Removing the 'comfortable distance' that audiences expected from a period piece made *Culloden* jarring to watch, but was also the reason for its effectiveness. Similarly, Higgins notes that viewers of *Insurrection* 'watched as events unfolded as if in real time. Disbelief and knowledge were both suspended so that, despite the programme's title, the narrator and audience conspired in their apparent innocence of outcomes.'[22]

Upon reviewing the film several months after his first review, O'Dea 'found it just as brilliant and just as real' as the first time he had watched it. He complimented the fact that the film 'did not just bring the battle to the viewer but brought the viewer to the battle' and 'assaulted the viewer's complacency.'[23] Viewers' strong reactions to the film's visceral portrayal of the battle served to confirm that the newsreel style of filmmaking was highly effective at giving audiences a sense of involvement in the story they were taking in rather than allowing them to sit passively and watch. The strength of Irish audiences' reaction to *Culloden* is evident in the fact that RTÉ rebroadcast the programme several

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[20] Arthur, Paul, 'The Troublemaker,' *Film Comment*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2004, pp. 58–65

[21] Rapfogel, Jared, 'Cautionary tales and alternate histories'

[22] Higgins, Roisín, 'Sites of memory and memorial,' in Mary E. Daly & Margaret O'Callaghan (eds.) *Commemorating 1916 in 1966: The Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising*, Royal Irish Academy, 2007, p. 165

[23] O'Dea, Tom, 'Review of the Week's Television Programmes,' Irish Press, 20 March 1965

times after glowing reviews in both the *Irish Press* and the *Irish Times*.[24] This occurred two years before the production of *Insurrection*, supporting the idea that the broadcaster took the popularity of *Culloden* into account when developing the commemorative programme.

Some of the reaction to *Culloden* in Ireland may have been related to the unique cultural space it occupied. It was made for the BBC by an English director, so it could easily be considered an English programme, however it did not portray the English forces at the Battle of Culloden in a particularly heroic light.[25] For a country that had long viewed themselves as noble in their conquering of 'uncivilised' peoples, it was part of a shift from the imperialist attitudes of the early twentieth century and before into the increasingly globalist mindset of the latter half of the century. Here again *Culloden* fits into the commemorative space by using the events of the past to encourage contemporary people to reflect on their past and how it affects their present. For a Britain experiencing a great deal of change, *Culloden* forced a reckoning with their imperialist past.

Given the popularity of *Culloden*, it is unsurprising that Peter Watkins was the first choice to create a newsreel docudrama about the Easter Rising. While in Dublin to collect an award for *Culloden*, Watkins was reported to be planning a 'full-length feature for cinema distribution' about the Rising.[26] In addition to the decision to use the newsreel format, *Insurrection* followed *Culloden* in the casting of performers who were not household names.[27] Peter Watkins' intention in casting unknowns and non-actors in *Culloden* was twofold: the audience would not be distracted from the story and

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[24] 'What's on next week: television,' *Irish Times*, 12 December 1964 & 10 Sept 1966; O'Dea, Tom, 'The Fame of Hall,' Irish Press, 19 December 1964; O'Dea, Tom, 'Review of the Week's Television Programmes,' Irish Press, 20 March 1965; Gray, Ken, 'Close-up of 'Culloden,' *Irish Times*, 23 December 1964

[25] Arthur, Paul, 'The Troublemaker,' *Film Comment*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2004, pp. 58–65

[26] 'Full-length documentary on Easter rebellion,' *Irish Independent*, 11 December 1965

[27] 'Insurrection: full cast and crew,' Internet Movie Database

characters by recognising famous faces, while a cast without formal training could deliver grittier, more realistic performances, making the series feel truer to history.[28] This plan had been successful in *Culloden*, and was likewise effective in *Insurrection* at keeping the focus on the characters and events rather than the stars. While *Insurrection*'s cast did feature more professional actors than *Culloden*, many of them came from radio and theatre backgrounds and were not household names when they were cast, nor were they instantly recognisable onscreen.

When the success of both *You Are There* and *The Battle of Culloden* are taken into account, it is unsurprising that RTÉ chose to adapt their style for the main event of their Golden Jubilee television programming. The newsreel style of presenting history had proven itself as a way to engage with audiences and deliver education and entertainment in equal measure. Rapfogel asserted that Watkins was 'one of the few who has not only borrowed the *look* of newsreel filmmaking but has consistently adopted the conceit that the film is in fact a newscast, with the breaking of the fourth wall that implies' and that 'any anachronism is easily trumped by the opportunity to engage directly with these characters.'[29] For producers looking to bring history to life for a new generation, that level of engagement through the fourth wall was exactly what they needed. As noted by Rosalind Coward in 'Literature, Television, and Cultural Values,' 'television feeds off a sense of being a substitute “eye” for the viewer at home. News, and all documentaries, feed off this sense of “being-there,” with the camera used as an extension of the viewer as immediate witness.'[30] By combining documentary with news, *Insurrection* amplified this effect. Figures who had been mythologised over time became human again. The foregone conclusion that the Rising would fail, but Ireland would gain independence, was

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[28] Rapfogel, Jared, 'Cautionary tales and alternate histories’

[29] Ibid

[30] Coward, Rosalind, 'Literature, television, and cultural values.' *Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 20, 1990, p. 82–91

temporarily forgotten.[31] The core values of the Rebellion were brought to the forefront. For a series aiming to use the commemoration of the Rising to build a sense of what in meant to be Irish for a new generation these effects were vital. The programme brought viewers together with their national roots and allowed them to connect on a deeper emotional level with their country's history. For a celebration whose goal was 'to bring home to them some sense of the heroic drama of that week,'[32] in the words of An Taoiseach Seán Lemass, this was the ideal format, both figuratively and literally.

The Making and Broadcast of *Insurrection*

Described by the RTÉ of 2016 as 'a hugely ambitious project,'[33] *Insurrection* was the result of months of work by a directors Michael Garvey and Louis Lentin, as well as writer Hugh Leonard, who sought to condense the events of a week of city-wide rebellion (and some that ventured outside of Dublin) into four hours of coherent material. While the general history of the Rising was common knowledge, the detailed, day-by-day presentation of *Insurrection* provided audiences with a more complete view of the events of Easter Week. Beyond presenting the facts, the creators of the series were aware that the Rising was viewed as the beginning of the Irish nation, and that Irish values and identity were deeply connected to the Rebellion. The manner in which the leaders, combatants, and civilians were presented had the potential to impact the idea of what it meant to be Irish. This was particularly true in 1966, when the country was changing and a new idea of national identity was being developed. The Golden Jubilee commemorations, including *Insurrection*, were meant to highlight the core values of the

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[31] Higgins, Roisín, *Transforming 1916*, pp. 134-141

[32] Linehan, Hugh, 'Remembering the Rising: how they did it in 1966.' *Irish Times*, 26 March 2016

[33] '1916 drama *Insurrection* back on screen after 50 years.' *RTÉ.ie*, 8 March, 2016

nation, which could be carried into the new, modern Ireland. Writer Hugh Leonard described the project being 'as gallant and doomed as the Rising itself.'[34]

Given the importance of the project, the series' producers were adamant that historical accuracy would not be superseded by style. To this end, Telefis Éireann director-general Kevin McCourt hired University College Dublin history professor Dr. Kevin B. Nowlan as historical advisor for all commemoration-related projects and ensured that Nowlan worked closely with the production team on *Insurrection*.[35] It was not only Nowlan who wanted the scripts to be as close to accepted history as possible, however. Screenwriter Hugh Leonard claimed that his task was for 'all characters, locales, and events to be strictly factual use the actual words spoken, wherever these words have been documented.'[36]

When his body of work is taken into account, it is clear why Hugh Leonard was chosen to write *Insurrection*. In addition to writing original screenplays, he was known for adapting literary works to the stage and screen.[37] For a project so centred on bringing history to life on television Leonard's experience taking a narrative and converting it to dialogue would prove to be a valuable skill.[38] He was also deeply devoted to the idea of television as an educational medium and hoped that *Insurrection* would serve as a way to teach Irish audiences about their country's history. The success of the programme would confirm this belief and change public and academic expectations of television as a tool for engaging the public with history. In a letter to the *Irish Times* Leonard claimed that

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[34] Ferriter, Diarmaid, 'Challenging myths and underlining tensions,' *Irish Examiner*, 26 May 2012

[35] Lynch, Brian, 'Through the eyes of 1916,' History Ireland, March/April 2006

[36] 'Dramatising the Rising.' *RTÉ.ie*

[37] Nicholson, Robert, and A.S, 'NEWS,' *James Joyce Broadsheet*, No. 82, 2009, p. 4

[38] Maume, Patrick, 'Leonard, Hugh,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, December 2014

'truth can be the only justification for any documentary,' and this belief is evident in his attention to historical details in the script for *Insurrection*.[39]

Six months were spent ensuring that every detail of the series would ring true for audiences. *The Western People* noted that 'As the leading figures were intimately known… particular attention had to be paid to casting.'[40] An actor whose appearance differed too greatly from a famous face had the potential to pull viewers out of the story. In addition to physical resemblance, it was vital that the actors be able to capture the speech patterns, physical mannerisms, and attitudes of the people they were portraying. Declan Harvey, in the role of Joseph Plunkett, was noted for his resemblance to the leader and photographs of him from the series were frequently used in promotional materials as an example of how realistic the series would appear.[41] Eoin O'Súilleabháin, who played Padraic Pearse, was not only a well-known actor but a fluent Irish speaker, which made him an ideal choice for Irish language advocate and educator Pearse.[42]

The painstaking attention to detail for *Insurrection* was also reflected in the production design, where costumes, props, and weaponry were thoroughly vetted for accuracy before being put on film. Production designer Alpho O'Reilly was even able to locate an actual GPO clock from 1916 to decorate the set.[43] The timepiece had survived the burning of the GPO during the Rising, and once again made it through flames when it was used in the recreation of the fire for the series.[44] Additionally, the Defence Forces contributed their own personnel to act as extras so military manoeuvres could be

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[39] Leonard, Hugh, 'Insurrection,' [letter to the editor] *Irish Times*, 22 April 1966

[40] 'Telefis Éireann's '*Insurrection*' will re-create Rising,' *Western People*, 9 April 1966

[41] O'Dea, Tom, 'Spring Fever,' *Irish Press*, 8 April 1966; *Evening Echo*, 9 April 1966

[42] 'Plays Pearse,' *Evening* Echo, 12 April 1966

[43] Lynch, Brian, 'Through the eyes of 1916,' *History Ireland*, March/April 2006

[44] 'Telefis Éireann's '*Insurrection*' will re-create Rising,' *Western People*, 9 April 1966

depicted by trained professionals.[45] This cooperation also allowed for the use of live explosives for the production, meaning that no special effects were required for combat and bombardment scenes.[46] The involvement of the military in the production demonstrated the importance of *Insurrection* in the commemorative events- the government was willing to devote the time and energy of the Defence Forces to the project.

While all aspects of *Insurrection* were carefully considered before being committed to film, the greatest challenge for the series' creators was the city itself. Dublin had modernised significantly since the time of the Rising, meaning that extensive work was required before outdoor scenes could be shot. Trinity College archivist Estelle Gittins noted that filming was difficult 'not only due to the proliferation of contemporary signage, bus stops, TV aerials and cars, but also because of the large numbers of interested onlookers, many of whom claimed to have been there 'first time round.''[47] Luckily, many of the occupants of houses near the filming sites were happy to be involved and removed outdoor decorations that would have ruined a shot.[48] Local cooperation combined with creative camera angles meant that outdoor scenes, particularly on O'Connell Street, could be successfully filmed. It was also an early indicator of how both the series and the commemoration would be received. The local citizens who assisted the set dressers were already establishing that they believed in the project and wanted to be a part of it. Their enthusiasm demonstrated a confidence in RTÉ being able to successfully commemorate the Rising through television.

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[45] Gittins, Estelle, 'The making of 'Insurrection,'' *Trinity College Dublin: Changed Utterly*, 15 January 2016

[46] 'Telefis Éireann's '*Insurrection*' will re-create Rising,' *Western People*, 9 April 1966

[47] Gittins, Estelle, 'The making of 'Insurrection,'' *Trinity College Dublin: Changed Utterly*, 15 January 2016

[48] Lynch, Brian, 'Through the eyes of 1916,' History Ireland, March/April 2006

The accuracy of every part of *Insurrection* not only added to its value as an educational programme, but also worked to support the newsreel format by balancing the modern and historical elements. Since the reporters were thoroughly modern it was necessary to ensure that everything about the 1916-era props and settings was effective at setting the programme in that time and allowing for some suspension of disbelief from the audience. *You Are There* and *Culloden* had both featured significant attention to detail in these areas, but for *Insurrection*, which sought to express the identity of the Irish nation, it was even more vital. A balance between the historical and the modern was necessary to communicate the importance of continuity from 1916 to 1966 in Ireland. Additionally, there were a significant number of Rising veterans still alive to view the series, so errors would be spotted much more easily by people who had experienced the original event and who were meant to be honoured by the Golden Jubilee festivities.

RTÉ's devotion to maintaining the blend between history and contemporary reporting extended even to the programme guide advertising *Insurrection*. Rather than describing the events covered in each episode as past happenings, the guide presented them in the present tense.[49] In addition to supporting the format of the show itself, this presentation brought the Rising into the present for potential audiences, giving them an idea of what to expect from *Insurrection* and encouraging them to watch the series. The excitement surrounding the programme was further increased by news reports anticipating its broadcast. Major national newspapers printed glowing reviews in anticipation of the series.[50] Local newspapers, such as Mayo's *Western People*, did in-depth articles explaining the meticulous attention to detail in the series' production.[51] Even articles about the actual Easter Rising and not the television programme were

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[49] *RTV Guide*, 8 April 1966

[50] 'The Rising- in eight parts,' *Evening Herald*, 8 April 1966

[51] 'Telefis Éireann's '*Insurrection*' will re-create Rising,' *Western People*, 9 April 1966

illustrated with stills from *Insurrection*.[52] Two days before the series had even premiered the *Evening Herald* declared that *Insurrection* 'overshadows and, indeed, obscures everything else on television. It is right that this should be so, not only because of the subject matter of these programmes, but also because of the vision which inspired them and the immense work that has gone into them.'[53]

The published declaration that *Insurrection* deserved to overshadow anything else being presented during Easter Week of 1966 demonstrates the anticipated impact of the programme. Examining critical and audience response after the broadcast demonstrated that the series had met, and perhaps exceeded, the anticipation that had been built before it was broadcast. For producers trying to create an image of the Rising that audiences would watch as a community and be inspired to reflect on the origins of their nation, the project had been successful. For viewers, the figures and events that they had learnt about in school were brought to life; seeing them represented on television as moving, talking people rather than images in a textbook allowed for a more emotional connection to the story of the Easter Rising. Additionally, seeing how devoted the rebels of 1916 had been to the cause of Irish freedom and self-determination inspired pride in both the history of the Irish nation and the contemporary successes it had achieved.

Contemporary Praise

Insurrection's original broadcast was met with glowing praise from critics and audiences alike. The series had not even concluded before audiences were requesting that it be rebroadcast so they could see episodes that they had missed on the first airing.[54] The balance between dialogue and action was praised by *Irish Independent* critic

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[52] Reeves, Mary, 'They were ready to carry the cross for Ireland,' *Limerick Leader*, 9 April 1966

[53] 'The Rising- in eight parts,' *Evening Herald*, 8 April 1966

[54] 'Series is worth a repeat,' *Evening Herald*, 15 April 1966

Brian Devenney, who asserted that 'Hugh Leonard's script bore the imprint of the master craftsman.' In drawing attention to the action scenes, Devenney gave due credit to the programme for presenting the Rising in a manner that was historically accurate while still being engaging for contemporary television audiences.[55] Commenting on the emotional moments of the leaders' experience juxtaposed with action-packed combat sequences, *Irish Times* reviewer Ken Gray declared that 'this series provided some memorable moments as well as some of the most exciting television that has ever come out of Montrose.'[56] The use of actual locations for outdoor filming enhanced the sense of the Rising occurring alongside the audiences' daily lives and added a thrill to watching the programme that also served the commemorative goal of bringing past and present together. In doing so, public interest in the events of 1916 and the lives of the participants was encouraged, and the popularity of the programme also ensured that the series, and by extension the Rising, would be a topic of discussion among audiences.

For RTÉ (then commonly referred to simply as Telefís Éireann or TÉ), *Insurrection* was proof that the fledgeling network could create programming on a previously unseen level of quality and scale. In producing 'not only the most ambitious thing Telefis Éireann has ever done but also the best,' the bar was raised for future series, and the amount of time and money that was devoted to the production of *Insurrection* was justified.[57] In an article entitled 'TÉ increases its stature' television critic Tom O'Dea lauded the 'masterly production' and declared that 'anyone who has been watching closely… cannot fail to be impressed with the thoroughness with which it is covering the events of the Rising.'[58] Similar sentiments had been expressed in the *Evening Herald*, which noted that *Insurrection* 'continues to dominate the television scene… not merely because its subject

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[55] Devenney, Brian, 'T.E.'s 19 well done,' *Irish Independent*, 16 April 1966

[56] Gray, Ken, 'The best of the week,' *Irish Times*, 21 April 1966

[57] O'Dea, Tom, 'T.E. Increases its stature,' *Irish Press*, 16 April 1966

[58] Ibid

matter deserves our respect but because the series is the biggest thing of its kind yet undertaken by TÉ - and in many respects, the most successful.'[59] The Golden Jubilee was a major event, and as a part of that commemoration *Insurrection* was being held to a high standard. Being lauded for both its approach to the historical subject as well as its entertainment value set a precedent for television being considered a valuable medium for commemorative content.

Positive reactions were strong enough that on 1 May, 1966 RTÉ rebroadcast the series, this time in two large segments separated by a brief 'intermission.'[60] Requests for the programme to be shown again had been numerous, emphasising that *Insurrection* was not only a success with critics, but spoke to audiences as well.[61] This was a sign of the series' effectiveness, as it indicated not only that audiences were watching the programme, but that they were engaged enough that missing episodes was considered a disappointment. Additionally, the desire to rewatch episodes showed that *Insurrection* was holding the interest of those who did see it. In the context of the Golden Jubilee, this level of audience engagement was evidence that contemporary Irish people were interested in the history of the Easter Rising; television provided an entertaining, convenient way to learn that history.

By establishing RTÉ as a source of meaningful, high-quality programming, *Insurrection* contributed to the development of a distinctly Irish television culture in a manner unrelated to its content. Positive reactions from both audiences and critics generated interest in watching television programming that was made specifically for an Irish audience about topics that resonated with the Irish people. Increased viewing numbers meant greater appeal to advertisers, and the revenue from ad sales allowed for the production of more domestic content. This cycle allowed for the network to grow and

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[59] 'Republic is Three Days old,' *Evening Herald*, 14 April 1966

[60] 'Feature on 1916 in Full,' *Evening Herald*, 30 April, 1966

[61] Ibid

increase both the quantity and quality of programming being produced. For a broadcaster that had been on the air for only five years and had struggled financially in its early days, this was an important step towards competing with older, larger networks. The positive reactions to both the programme and network went a long way towards establishing RTÉ as a major player in Irish culture, elevating it from a source of pure entertainment to a trendsetting, opinion-forming part of the national identity. In the late 1960s, when television ownership was rising and a less localised, more nationally homogenous culture was developing, the door was opened for RTÉ to expand on its catalog of distinctly Irish programming.

Criticism

While *Insurrection* was generally well-received, it was not without its detractors. Speaking at a 1916 commemoration ceremony in Wicklow, Senator Seamus Ó Riain voiced his belief that 'the film gave a completely false picture of the fight.'[62] He also claimed that the series depicted British Officers behaving 'as Telefis Éireann believed they should have.'[63] It is notable that while both the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press* did report on Ó Riain's comments, neither article provided details on what specifically he found objectionable, merely stating that he criticised the series.[64] Since the comments were made at a public event that was not recorded, it is unclear whether or not Senator Ó Riain did elaborate.

Significantly more detail is available on the criticisms of S.P. Irwin, who wrote in to the *Irish Times* to express his opinions on *Insurrection*. While he did refer to the programme as 'very entertaining and educational,' he also expressed some

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[62] '*Insurrection* Gives False Impression,' *Irish Independent*, 25 April 1966

[63] 'T.E. film is criticised by Dr. Ryan,' *Irish Press*, 25 April, 1966

[64] Ibid

dissatisfaction.[65] In response to a previous letter published in the *Irish Times* in which a viewer questioned harsh language depicted in the series being directed at Eoin MacNeill, Irwin agreed that the pejorative term was unnecessary.[66] However, rather than suspecting 'Télefis politics' as the reason, he merely explained that '*Insurrection* would not have suffered one jot… if Tom Clarke's opinion of Professor MacNeill had been couched in terms equally expressive of his frustration, but far less painful and objectionable to the Professor's relatives.'[67] There is no public record of the MacNeill family's reaction to the programme, so it is unknown whether they were offended or whether they would have preferred different phrasing. In terms of accuracy to 1916, MacNeill's countermanding order was a major source of anger and frustration at the time, so it did not seem like an exaggeration that others involved would have strong words regarding him. The objection to portraying that language illustrates the difficulty of wishing to portray an event as accurately as possible, but still being sensitive to people still living who witnessed the events and knew those involved personally.

The letter from S.P. Irwin to the *Irish Times* also raised the question of whether 'even 50 years may be too near the event for correct historical perspective.'[68] While having living veterans of the Rising available to interview for commemoration programming was seen as a major benefit, the fact remained that for the generation who lived through it, the occurrences of Easter Week would always be entwined with emotional reactions. This had the potential to skew perspectives and introduce some (likely unintentional) inaccuracies into the accepted story of any aspect of the Rising. Additionally, as Irwin pointed out, 'there has always been controversy on the truth of

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[65] Irwin, S.P., 'Insurrection,' [letter to the editor] *Irish Times*, 27 April 1966

[66]Leonard, Hugh, 'Insurrection,' [letter to the editor] *Irish Times*, 22 April 1966

[67] Ibid

[68] Ibid

certain happenings.'[69] He did not give specific examples of these debated happenings, but did raise a fair point. A concrete understanding of exactly what occurred in each moment of the Rising is essentially impossible, and the argument can be made that over time, as additional information is revealed, evidence is found, and emotions are put aside the truth does become clearer. The changes in commemorative methods and goals between 1966 and 2016 demonstrated an increasing awareness of this fact on the part of commemoration organisers.

Insurrection and the Troubles

While *Insurrection* seemed poised to usher in a new era of Irish nationalist television, escalating political tensions in Northern Ireland would set that idea back significantly. The conflict commonly known as 'The Troubles' is accepted as having begun in 1969; however, the violence of that year was preceded by significant tension and concern that any wrong move could lead to violence.[70] Northern Prime Minister Terence O'Neill was already convinced that commemoration of the Easter Rising would lead to renewed IRA activity, which would present a physical danger to citizens, but also a danger to O'Neill's political career if he was seen as having allowed such a thing to happen.[71] This delicate situation meant that any commemoration of the Rising conducted in Northern Ireland would need to be carefully handled to prevent conflict, and the nature of identity politics in the North meant that the goal of creating a national sense of identity would need to be superseded by the desire to maintain peace.

For northern nationalists, already alienated by government support of unionist celebrations and events, the Jubilee events provided a way to feel united with the history

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[69] Ibid

[70] Munck, Ronnie, 'The making of the troubles in Northern Ireland,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1992, pp. 211–229

[71] O'Donnell, 'Pragmatism vs unity,' p. 8

and culture of the Republic over a shared celebration.[72] However, the tenuous relationship between the governments in the Republic and the North and the desire to maintain the fragile peace made this unity difficult, as emblems that were in common use in the Republic, particularly the tricolour, were banned in Northern Ireland.[73] Attempts to create cross-border events were quickly cancelled, leaving nationalists in Ulster feeling snubbed by both the Republic and the Northern Irish government.This extended to television programming, as *Insurrection* was not shown in Northern Ireland.

An Taoiseach Lemass was concerned that celebrations involving the north would be seen as implicit support for the Irish Republican Army (IRA).[74] This was where his plan to emphasise the spirit of 1916 in the people of 1966 had the potential to backfire. In a free Republic, one could consider participating in cultural events and learning about history as ways to live that ideal. In the north, there was potential for people to create a very literal connection to the Rising with their own armed rebellion. Having worked diligently to create a good rapport with the Northern Irish leadership, Lemass was hesitant to allow any connection to be made between the partition and the Jubilee.[75] Months before the anniversary, the *Irish Independent* reported that 'In fact, he felt that persons who were active in party politics should not seek to play any prominent role in the various ceremonies where this might cause misunderstanding.'[76] This excluded most northern political figures from the events, widening the existing rift between north and south. It also meant that Northern Irish audiences had only the programming that was

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[72] O'Callaghan, Margaret, ''From Casement Park to Toomebridge'- The Commemoration of the Easter Rising in Northern Ireland in 1966.' in Mary E. Daly & Margaret O'Callaghan (eds.) *Commemorating 1916 in 1966: The Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising*, 2016, pp. 87-149

[73] Ibid

[74] Higgins, Roisín, Holohan, Carole, & O'Donnell, Catherine. '1966 And all that: The 50th anniversary commemorations,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2006, pp. 31–36

[75] Ibid

[76] '1916 Jubilee: Lemass asks for Harmony,' *Irish Independent*, 12 February 1966

produced for the Republic, rather than programming specifically designed with the identity struggle of nationalists living in a space still ruled by Britain. This content largely ignored the more complicated situation in the North to focus on victory in the counties that had become the Republic.

Given these circumstances, Northern Prime Minister Terence O'Neill found himself at an impasse. He had made significant progress in improving relations between the North and the Republic, damaging his reputation among staunch unionists.[77] If he were to endorse any kind of commemoration, he would further anger his constituents and be accused of spurring on IRA activity. Strictly banning celebrations, however, would damage the goodwill he had built both with the Republic and with the Catholic community of Northern Ireland.[78] The solution he decided on was to have Easter Rising events carefully monitored by police, but allowing them to occur.[79]

The arrangements in the North provided an unusual situation for developing a cultural identity. Northern nationalists considered themselves Irish, and wanted to be a part of the Irish culture that was developing in the Republic. While television was creating a shared experience and uniting the citizens of the Republic, nationalists from Northern Ireland were unable to participate in that experience. Northern Irish republicans began developing a cultural identity that was related to that of the Republic, but ultimately its own entity as it was based on the distinct shared experiences of Northern Irish nationalists.

Despite the concerns surrounding commemorations in Northern Ireland, there was less controversy regarding the Rising in Britain. Historical focus was primarily on the 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, but the then-fledgling BBC2 actually did air

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[77] Mulholland, Marc, 'O'Neill, Terence Marne, Baron O'Neill of the Maine,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 4 September 2004

[78] O'Callaghan, Margaret, 'From Casement Park to Toomebridge'

[79] Mulholland, Marc, 'O'Neill, Terence Marne, Baron O'Neill of the Maine,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 4 September 2004

Insurrection in its entirety in the spring of 1966.[80] While the time slot in which it was broadcast and newness of the network meant limited viewership, *Insurrection* did receive generally positive reviews in British newspapers, with the *Liverpool Echo* particularly praising the application of the 'you are there' treatment to the Rising.'[81] Positive reaction to the series may have been influenced by the number of Irish people living in the UK and the fact that they would be more likely to seek out the programme than those opposed to its message.[82] For these viewers, *Insurrection* provided a way to feel connected to their home culture despite living abroad, and served as a reminder of what Irish identity meant.

The concern about the portrayal of the Rising in the political climate of the late 1960s lead to the one area in which *Insurrection* has a commemorative disadvantage in comparison to the centenary programming. This is the question of inviting further reflection and discussion of the topic being presented. While in 2016 the contested legacy of the Rising was openly questioned in all elements of the commemoration, in 1966 there was a greater focus on presenting a single, unified story that would be easily interpreted by audiences.[83] Limited perspectives were presented, and few questions were intentionally raised to the audience. While this appears to be a detriment from a modern perspective, it does provide additional insight on the Ireland of 1966 and the concerns that needed to be taken into account by producers of television programming. The knowledge that the limitation was caused by social and political issues of the era also serves as evidence that the format of television is only as effective as the society creating it. Programming reflects the attitudes and opinions of the era in which it is made, and is designed to serve the goals of those producing it. For 1966, when the aim was to create a

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[80] 'Dramatising the Rising.' *RTÉ.ie*

[81] 'Telecrit,' *Liverpool Echo*, 25 April 1966

[82] Pettitt, Lance, 'Remembering a controversial 1916 Rising drama shown on the BBC,' *Irish World*, 5 January 2019

[83] Sheehan, Helena, Irish Television Drama: A Society and its Stories, Radio Telefis Éireann (pub), 1987, revised 2004

cohesive narrative of 1916 with as little controversy as possible, *Insurrection* was a very successful vehicle for the type of commemoration that was being presented.

Legacy of *Insurrection*

In anticipation of the Rising Centenary in 2016, RTÉ began a project to restore *Insurrection* for its first television broadcast in fifty years.[84] The series had been copied over to film and was therefore not completely lost, as many other television programmes of the time had been.[85] Still, a great deal of work was required to enhance the quality of both video and audio that had degraded over time.[86] For the 2016 commemorations of the Rising, however, *Insurrection* was a key link between the contemporary celebrations and the Golden Jubilee. In the words of journalist Hugh Linehan, 'Looking at the events of 1916 through the eyes of 1966 offers a different perspective on the Easter Rising, and it is all the more valuable for that.'[87]

The series' impact upon its original airing combined with the fact that it had not been seen in so long meant that there was a great deal of excitement around the new broadcast. In addition to airing on RTÉ One and being available on-demand online, *Insurrection* was also screened at cinemas in Dublin as part of the centenary programming.[88] Described as the new generation 'get[ting] their chance to pass verdict on a series lauded as 'visionary', 'brave' and 'creatively ground-breaking' when first screened five decades ago,' curiosity surrounding the programme was high.[89] In fact, it was argued in the *Evening Herald* that 'the fact that *Insurrection* sat in the archives for

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[84] '1916 drama *Insurrection* back on screen after 50 years.' *RTÉ.ie*, 8 March, 2016

[85] Ibid

[86] Linehan, Hugh, 'Remembering the Rising: how they did it in 1966.' Irish Times, 26 March 2016

[87] Ibid

[88] '1916 drama *Insurrection* back on screen after 50 years.' *RTÉ.ie*, 8 March, 2016

[89] Daly, John, 'RTÉ's epic 1916 recreation remembered,' *Daily Mail*, 17 March 2016

half-a-century has only burnished its legend.'[90] While there was never an official statement on why such an important series had not been shown in the years between 1966 and 2016, it was believed that 'political tensions and mounting violence in Northern Ireland during the worst years of the Troubles made *Insurrection* too hot a potato to handle.'[91] This seems a likely explanation given the complicated attitude toward commemoration in the North, and the fact that the years immediately following 1966 were some of the most turbulent in the region.[92] By 2016, however, political tensions had eased and celebration of the Rising seemed far less likely to end in conflict.

In 2016, despite being fifty years old, *Insurrection* was generally well received. While reviewers acknowledged some of the limitations of the time period and overacting by some cast members who were more accustomed to performing in stage productions, these flaws were considered to be outweighed by the value of the series.[93] In an article exploring what impact the 1916 celebrations had on the 2016 commemorations, Linehan noted that 'the entire project has a narrative clarity about the unfolding events of Easter Week, along with the sense of dramatic urgency.' This blending of education and entertainment was exactly the aim of the series' original creators, and here proved to have achieved that goal not only in its own time, but many years later.

Conclusion

Insurrection's broadcast came at a time when Irish people were in a period of cultural transition. The economic successes and social and technological progress of the 1960s meant rapid changes in lifestyle and values as Ireland moved closer to the rest of

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[90] Stacey, Pat. 'Insurrection is as much about TV history as 1916.' *Evening Herald*. 10 March, 2016.

[91] Ibid

[92] O'Callaghan, Margaret, 'From Casement Park to Toomebridge'

[93] Linehan, Hugh, ''Insurrection': Looking at 1916 through the eyes of 1966,' Irish Times, 17 March 2016

Europe and North America and away from the more conservative values of its past. Meanwhile, the anniversary of the Easter Rising drew a great deal of attention to the past and the close connection that many Irish people felt to their national heritage. RTÉ sought to bridge this gap with *Insurrection*, which blended the modern Ireland of the television newsroom with the Ireland of the Rising. By bringing historical figures to life in this way the programme emphasised the traits and values of the 1916 rebels that defined what it meant to be Irish. The focus on cultural heritage created a blueprint for holding on to an Irish identity in a modernising, globalising world.

Additionally, *Insurrection* laid the groundwork for television as an engine for commemorating Irish history, and RTÉ as a respected provider of content on the subject. *Insurrection* was an early example of Irish-produced content addressing a specifically Irish topic achieving success. It quite literally brought the Rising into the homes of contemporary Irish citizens.

Chapter Three

1916: The Irish Rebellion

Being interviewed in the 1960s, Bulmer Hobson claimed 'people live on mythology. The historian sorts some of it out afterwards, but the historians won't be read by very many people and the myths will go on continuing to co-exist side by side with the history.' In the creation of *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, Bríona Nic Dhiarmada and her team took on the monumental task of attempting to sort out the history and complicated legacy of the Easter Rising in a manner that *would* be consumed by 'very many people.' Their devotion to telling the story from as many perspectives as possible and placing the Rising in the context of its time and place was only matched by their desire to create a series that would appeal to a broad audience and make them want to learn the history of the Rebellion.[1] The behind-the-scenes companion programme included filmed interviews conducted after screenings of the documentary with a variety of audience members explaining what the series meant to them.[2] Of course, these interviews were selected by the editors, meaning that the responses to the history were themselves being curated. Ultimately, though, conclusions were left up to the viewer. The complex nature of 1916 and the events surrounding it allow for myriad interpretations of what the Rising really meant and continues to mean. Interviewed for the documentary, Ferriter explained that 'when you're looking for the legacy of 1916, you can find the legacy that you want. You can find the 1916 legacy that you desire, depending on your priorities, your preferences, your prejudices. There are a whole variety of 1916 legacies.'[3] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*

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[1] *Backstory: 1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Brenda Bowyer, PBS Michiana, 2016

[2] Ibid

[3] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

respected this idea, providing historical information from a wide variety of viewpoints and allowing audiences to reflect on the material and draw their own conclusions. In a commemorative year devoted to all of those ideas, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* demonstrated the effectiveness of television as a vehicle for commemoration.

In a report to the University of Notre Dame, (who provided primary funding for both the television documentary and accompanying book) the goal of the piece was declared to be 'to produce a landmark, three-part documentary that tells the story of Dublin's 1916 Rising and that will be broadcast nationally and internationally.'[4] While Glen Killane, Managing Director of RTÉ in 2016, expressed that the broadcaster had a firm directive to produce content for an Irish audience, the status of the documentary as a co-production meant that the writers and director were also being asked to engage with audiences outside of Ireland.[5] This is the primary example of funding dictating content in the commemorations, as *Rebellion* was primarily funded by RTÉ and *Centenary* was backed by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.[6] The intention for the documentary to have international appeal was evident in the finished product. The premiere episode began by explaining the history of British rule in Ireland and setting a foundation for understanding the Rising and the political, social, and economic factors that contributed to it.[7] While topics such as the plantation of Ulster and the political implications of the Great Hunger of 1845 would have been common knowledge in Ireland, it was necessary to clarify these events for international viewers who were less likely to be familiar with Irish history. The desire for the documentary to be appreciated outside of Ireland was also reflected in the emphasis placed on the context for the Rising and its

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[4] 'The 1916 Project: A Preliminary Report,' University of Notre Dame, December 2016

[5] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

[6] *Centenary,* created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[7] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

international effects. The influence of the First World War on the Rising was explored, as was the increasing anti-imperialist sentiment worldwide over the course of the twentieth century, and how the Rising inspired other anti-colonial rebellions.[8] This is in direct contrast to 1966 commemoration programmes as well as more recent Rising material, such as TG4's *Seachtar na Cásca* in 2010, which were primarily concerned with the events surrounding the rebellion in Ireland and its domestic effects. By placing the Rising in a broader context both geographically and temporally, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* positioned the Rising as an important event not only for Ireland, but for the world. In the words of Fox, '[The Rising] is an Irish story. It is an English story. It is an American story. It is a World War I story. Most profoundly, it is a deeply human story.'[9]

1916: The Irish Rebellion differs from the other programmes discussed in this work in that it does not dramatise or recreate any elements of the Rising. The audience is shown photographs and archival footage from 1916, video of experts being interviewed for the documentary, and footage of modern Dublin. The use of imagery that has not been staged contributes to the idea that the viewer is seeing reality, 'asking us to consider it as a representation of the historical world rather than a likeness or imitation of it.'[10] It should be noted, however, that while the images in the documentary are not created by the filmmakers, they are curated. Visuals were selected based on how they would fit with the narrative being presented. Given the era being discussed, it was necessary for the voice-over to provide context for the historical images. While footage of 1916 Dublin does exist and is used in the documentary, the technological constraints of the era did not allow for accompanying sound. Cagle comments on the necessity for documentary narration to code the images being seen, and the lack of diegetic audio only increases the importance

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[8] Ibid

[9] Nic Dhiarmada, Bríona, *The 1916 Irish Rebellion*, Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame, 2016

[10] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 110

of dong so.[11] Meaning being assigned to images through narration is one of the key areas in which documentaries reflect the opinions of the writers. Nichols notes that a documentary consisting solely of historical images 'would be subject to endless interpretation if we had nothing but their extraordinarily diverse and historically intriguing images to guide us.'[12] While *1916: The Irish Rebellion* does feature narration (provided by actor Liam Neeson), it is limited, with far more audio being provided by interviewed historians than Neeson. Additionally, explanations of ideology, motivations, and causation are left to the academics, rather than being part of the scripted narration. This does not negate the existence of bias in the documentary, but does display efforts to mediate it while adding a sense of authority to the piece, as the viewer is shown that the commentary is provided by multiple experts and not a single and/or uninformed source.

In discussing *1916: The Irish Rebellion* in the context of television, one must point out that two versions of the programme were created. The three-hour television version took full advantage of the fact that the medium allowed for multiple episodes over several nights, so that audiences could watch the programme in hour-long increments. Therefore viewers had time to reflect on the material and fully absorb it before the next episode aired. It also meant that audiences were not faced with a daunting amount of information in one sitting. Nic Dhiarmada was well aware of this concern, and explained how important she considered it that a shorter, 'film-length' version was created for screening events.[13] With a runtime of roughly two hours, this version condensed the material into something that audiences could grasp in a shorter period of time without losing the overarching themes of the programme. The television version, however, had the time to include far more information and provide a deeper discussion of each topic. A number of

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[11] Cagle, Chris, 'Postclassical nonfiction: narration in the contemporary documentary,' *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1, Fall 2012, p. 45-65

[12] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 4

[13] Nic Dhiarmada, Bríona, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 24 May 2022

experts from different backgrounds and specialties were interviewed so that each aspect of the story was not being presented from only one viewpoint.[14] Time was taken to examine the nuances of the era, such as men who fought in the British Army, yet also supported Irish independence from Britain. The television version not only presented a more complete version of the historical knowledge, but engaged with the material in a way that the film version could not due to time restraints.

A television version also allowed the series to reach a wider audience, as documentaries (particularly those about a topic considered niche) rarely get a wide theatrical release. Television, however, is available in the vast majority of places and, with recording and streaming technology, can be viewed at any time. In the case of *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, potential viewers did not need a paid service to watch the documentary. In Ireland, RTÉ and the streaming service attached to it, iPlayer, are both available free of charge. In the United States, home to millions of members of the Irish diaspora, the programme aired on public television. Not only is this service free, but it is known for high-quality nonfiction programming, so the audience most likely to appreciate *1916: The Irish Rebellion* would be exposed to advertising for the series even before the programme was broadcast.

For all of these reasons, the television version of *1916: The Irish Rebellion* was a more complete presentation than the feature-length version. It was the medium that the documentary had been developed for, and allowed for all of the content that the producers intended to be included, making it truer to their vision of the project. It is interesting to note that while film has historically been considered more prestigious than television, in the case of *1916: The Irish Rebellion* the television version was a far more effective vehicle for commemoration. It presented the subject, introduced some of the debates surrounding it, showed a variety of perspectives, then reflected on the legacy of

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[14] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

the rebellion. By touching on all of these points the television version of the documentary was able to engage with all of the elements that are vital for an effective commemoration. It is the television version that is discussed in this chapter.

As a part of the centenary commemoration programming, *1916: The Irish Rising* was designed to educate the public about the Rising in a manner that was informative, but also made viewers realise the impact that the Rebellion had on their own lives and culture. The writers were aware that general television audiences may not have been familiar with the event, so the documentary begins with a brief explanation of what actually happened during Easter Week in 1916. It also alludes to the fact that the Rising would have impact on international independence struggles. Presenting this summary before even showing the title card established what viewers would be learning about and why it mattered within a larger context. Since commemorations are fundamentally rooted in connecting the past and present, the documentary interspersed newsreel footage from the revolutionary era with video taken in the streets of contemporary Dublin. This effect visually communicated the commemorative message that the past and present were inextricably linked, calling to mind the same effect in *Insurrection* fifty years prior. Unlike *Insurrection*, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* did not feature any direct interaction between historical figures and contemporary people, removing an element of obvious fiction and adding to the conceit that it presented 'reality.'

1916: The Irish Rebellion made it clear to audiences that the Rising was only one part of the much larger story of Irish history. By discussing the history of colonialism in Ireland going back to 1171 CE, the documentary challenged the idea that the Rising was the beginning of a new Irish independence movement. Instead, 1916 was shown to be a continuation of the struggle that had been occurring for centuries. This presentation of events not only provided context for the Ireland of 1916, but also commemorated, however briefly, the previous rebellions that had not received the same attention as the

Easter Rising. For some audience members, this is simply background information. However, a viewer who is intrigued by the information in the documentary then has the opportunity to do further research on those early rebellions. As previously discussed, one of the benefits of television is the ability to invite viewers to learn more about a topic; referencing the ongoing independence movement prior to 1916 acts as just such an invitation.

Additionally, beginning a story focused on the Easter Rising with the colonisation of Ireland contributes to the narrative arc being presented. *1916: The Irish Rebellion* presents Irish revolutionary history as a story that begins with colonisation, builds over the course of the intervening centuries, then culminates in 1916, with the denouement being the remainder of the twentieth century. While this is a neatly structured plot line that parallels the vast majority of fictional work, history is rarely so simple. Nichols identifies works as existing as a set of coordinates on the axes of narrative and history.[15] While individual works within the documentary genre may vary in their exact location on this plane, they do tend to stress historical reference in comparison to historical fiction, which is more greatly influenced by narrative.[16] *1916: The Irish Rebellion* uses the narrative structure to create a continuous arc leading to the time in which it was made. Laird identifies the tendency of commemoration to use the present as an 'implicit starting point,' and create histories that present the current state of the world as inevitable.[17] This can be problematic, as history is rarely so straightforward and creating a clear narrative can require the downplaying or omission of complicating factors. This will be discussed in the documentary's treatment of the War of Independence and Civil War.

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[15] Nichols, Bill, 'History, myth, and narrative in documentary,' *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Autumn 1987, pp. 9-20

[16] Ibid

[17] Laird, *Commemoration*, p. 27

Placing the Rising in a Global Context

The influence of the documentary being written in the United States and largely funded by an American university quickly becomes clear, as the first episode devotes a significant amount of time to the Irish-American contributions to the planning of the Rising. As the presented history of Ireland reaches the mid-1800s and Irish emigration to the United States occurred in unprecedented numbers, the documentary narration begins to distinguish between the Irish in Ireland and those in America, whose new cultural experiences had given them a different mindset then their countrymen at home.[18] Speaking of the mass emigration of the 1840s, Griffin explained that 'When the emigrés go over to America they're not going to a foreign land, they're going to a land that they want Ireland to ultimately be.'[19] Their experience of living in a republic, combined with the freedom to criticise Britain without fear of arrest allowed nationalist sentiment to develop in a different manner among Irish-Americans. The importance that *1916: The Irish Rebellion* places on the Irish diaspora in America does contribute to the goal of placing the Rising into a wider global context. While the ultimate goal of an independent Ireland was the same, the American version of Irish nationalism was heavily influenced by American military and political history. Discussing the Fenian bombing campaigns in the documentary, historian Ruán O'Donnell explained that many of the bombers had fought in the American Civil War, and that it was their experience in that conflict that educated them in insurgence tactics that would then be used in Britain.

By taking the time to make a distinction between the cultures of the Irish living in Ireland and Irish-Americans, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* was able to clearly explain how Irish-Americans played a pivotal role in organising and funding the rebellion.[20] In doing so,

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[18] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[19] Ibid

[20] Ibid

it also made an interesting point about the split legacy of Irish history. People of Irish descent living abroad developed their own cultures that blended the Irish tradition with the heritage of the country in which they lived. By representing Irish America as a unique culture, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* contributed to another of the overarching themes of the commemoration: that there are many interpretations of what it means to be Irish, and that the Ireland of 2016 embraced that fact.

The discussion of Irish America also added dimension to the story of the Rising by addressing the social and financial conditions that allowed the rebellion to happen. In the short space of a film this contextual information may have been cut to focus on the events of Easter Week. In a television programme, however, where there was not pressure to condense the content into two hours, time could be taken to explore this aspect of late nineteenth and early twentieth century republicanism. The role of Irish Americans in planning and financially supporting the Rising had not been discussed at length in previous commemorations, which had been funded by Irish institutions and did not need to appeal to an Irish-American audience. By devoting screen-time to the importance of support from the diaspora, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* provided a deeper understanding of the Rising while simultaneously commemorating the efforts of those who supported the Rebellion from abroad. The documentary focuses on this element of the Rising through the story of John Devoy. Having gone to New York as part of an amnesty programme that would allow him to leave prison on the condition of exile from Ireland, Devoy remained a fervent supporter of Irish independence.[21] He joined nationalist group Clan na Gael, and provided financial support for the bombing campaigns of the late 1870s and early 1880s, which 'arch-Fenian' Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa called the 'skirmishing fund.'[22] In *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, Ruán O'Donnell explained how those bombings were 'the first time

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[21] Maume, Patrick, 'Devoy, John,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 2009

[22] Kenna, Shane. 'The revolutionary life and afterlife of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa.' *History Ireland* 23, No. 4, Wordwell Ltd., 2015, pp. 26–30

Britain had ever faced a sustained threat to its security in its own country.'[23] By establishing this concept in episode one, the documentary established the confidence and perceived invincibility of the British Empire prior to the Irish independence struggle. This not only set the scene for the rebellion itself, but also laid the groundwork for episode three, in which the influence of the Rising on other British colonies and their own independence struggles was discussed. Additionally, the discussion of the bombing campaigns of the nineteenth century established that physical violence in civilian areas had been a part of the Irish independence movement far before 1916. By examining the role of violence in the Fenian movement, the documentary contributed to the larger discussion of the topic that was occurring in 2016. The Easter Rising leaders knew that starting a battle in a city centre would result in civilian casualties, and debates surrounding the moral implications of their decision to have the Rising in Dublin anyway entered the public sphere as early as 2014.[24] In presenting the history of the bombings, the documentary established that the 1916 rebels were continuing an existing pattern of behaviour which excused civilian casualties that occurred in the name of the independence struggle. Was the Rising different? Was the violence in Northern Ireland? *1916: The Irish Rebellion* did not aim to answer these questions, but provided the historical background and allowed audiences to form their own opinions. This manner of presenting information was appropriate for a programme that was created as part of a commemoration with the stated goal inspiring thought and discussion, rather than stating opinions and expecting consensus.[25]

The concepts of Fenian violence, Irish-America, and the 1916 Rising converged in the life of Tom Clarke. While previous commemorations had always included the 1916

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[23] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[24] Humpheys, Joe, 'Was the 1916 Rising morally justified?' *Irish Times*, 22 August 2014

[25] 'Decade of centenaries,' *Gov.ie*, pub. 10 January 2020, updated 15 July 2024

leader, this programme examined his early life. Clarke was taught to construct explosives by Dr. Thomas Gallagher, who ran a ‘dynamite school’ in Brooklyn for the purpose of training Fenian operatives. Gallagher also accompanied Clarke to Britain for the purposed of planting bombs.[26] This plan was unsuccessful and Gallagher’s 'team' were arrested before the explosives could be placed, however, the arrest would have a more significant impact on the independence movement than Gallagher could have anticipated.[27] His experiences in prison would only reaffirm Clarke’s devotion to the nationalist cause, and when Clarke moved back to Ireland in 1907, it was with letters of introduction from the Gaelic League that earned him immediate acceptance into the Irish Republican Brotherhood.[28] The IRB was a secret society whose members swore an oath to make Ireland 'an independent democratic republic.'[29] It was through this organisation that Clarke would meet many of the Rising’s other leaders.[30] In addition to financial support, it was the facilitation of these meetings and relationships that bolstered the importance of Irish America in the story of the Rising.[31] By discussing the relevance of the time Tom Clarke spent in America to his role in the Rising, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* depicted the continuity between the Fenians of the 1860s and the rebels of 1916, creating a more complete view of the place the rebellion held in Irish history. Additionally, it drew attention to the idea of the leaders of the Rising as complete people, rather than the mythical heroes of prior commemorations. Discussing his early experiences provided audiences

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[26] Whelehan, Niall, ''‘Scientific warfare or the quickest way to liberate Ireland’: The Brooklyn Dynamite School.' *History Ireland*, Vol. 16, No. 6, Wordwell Ltd., 2008, pp. 42–45

[27] Quinn, James, 'Clarke, Thomas James ('Tom'),' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, March 2021

[28] Freyne, Patrick, ‘O’Dynamite Rossa: was Fenian leader the first terrorist?,’ *Irish Times,* 1 August 2015

[29] Ramón, Marta, 'Stephens, James,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography,* October 2009

[30] Quinn, James, 'Clarke, Thomas James ('Tom'),' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, March 2021

[31] *Cogadh faoi Cheilt - Scéal an IRB*, TG4, 25 September 2019

with a better understanding of who Clarke was and how he became convinced that an armed rebellion was necessary for Irish independence.

For Irish-Americans, the explanation of the role their ancestors played in the Rising bolstered Nic Dhiarmada's goal of making the story of the Easter Rising feel more personal and resonate with the audience on a human level.[32] The rebellion in 1916 Ireland is not a commonly taught event in the United States, so the documentary had the double challenge of explaining what had actually happened as well as evoking a response from viewers. By bringing the story of the Rising to America and connecting it to places that were familiar to viewers the preparations for the Rising could be personalised. The actions of John Devoy and Clan na Gael also appealed to American audiences on an ideological level. In an interview with Notre Dame student newspaper *The Observer*, Bríona Nic Dhiarmada explained that the Easter Rising was 'certainly resonant for people who respect equality, people who struggle and strive for equality, and justice, and freedom and things like that.'[33] Since these are ideals that Americans are taught to cherish from an early age, presenting the Rising as a fight to defend them engaged audiences in the United States on a deeper level than if it was presented solely as an Irish conflict. It also provided an opportunity to reflect on the entwined histories of the two nations and engage more with Irish history as an integral part of the American story and vice versa.

1916: The Irish Rebellion was created with the goal of bringing the Easter Rising into a larger, more global context, and the first episode's focus on the United States reflects the American source of funding for the documentary.[34] While the second episode focused more on events within Ireland, the role of American media in reporting on the

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[32] Nic Dhiarmada, Bríona, *The 1916 Irish Rebellion*, Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame, 2016

[33] Becker, Courtney, 'Documentary reflects on 1916 Irish rebellion,' *Observer*, 6 April 2016

[34] Nic Dhiarmada, Bríona, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 24 May 2022

rebellion as it happened is still discussed. This topic is introduced through the reading of a witness statement from Irish Volunteer Jim Ryan, who gave insight into one of the more pragmatic goals of the rebellion.[35] He claimed that in his understanding, the object was 'being able to make enough noise to draw the attention of the world to this small nation.'[36]

The rebellion itself was largely overshadowed by the First World War in terms of press coverage and public attention. Even in England, the country the rebellion was meant as a strike against, it garnered little attention. In the documentary, Fanning told the reported story of Prime Minister H.H. Asquith being told of the Rising and replying 'well, that's something,' before going to bed.[37] Fanning considered this story significant since it 'encapsulates Ireland's inability to capture British attention because of the Great War.'[38] The competition between the war and the Rising for coverage would be further affected by German air and sea raids on Britain, which occurred just as the Rising was beginning.[39]

While Europe was too entrenched in the war to pay much attention to the rebellion in Ireland, the United States was fascinated, with the *New York Times* devoting its front page to the Rising for fourteen consecutive days.[40] While this can largely be attributed to the large number of Irish-Americans with strong feelings about the nationalist movement, there was another factor contributing to the coverage. Schmul presented the idea that Americans were invested in the independence movement in Ireland because it paralleled

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[35] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[36] Ibid

[37] Ibid

[38] Ibid

[39] 'Combined Naval and Air Raid,' *Times*, 26 April 1916

[40] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

the American War of Independence.[41] He explained that many Irish-Americans at this time 'believed that their past might be Ireland's future,' while Americans of other ethnicities supported the rebellion less because of the specific Irish situation and more because it reflected the values of American society.[42] Discussing the American reaction to the Rising may once again have been influenced by Notre Dame funding the documentary, but it also contributed to the goal of placing the Rising in a larger historical context. *1916: The Irish Rebellion* fought against the idea that the impact of the Rising was limited to Ireland, and demonstrated that there was international interest in the rebellion as it was happening. This point is further explored in episode three, which discusses the Irish example as a role model for other colonies seeking independence.

In discussing the aftermath of the Rising, the series returned to a more widely global perspective by examining the international effects of the Rising. The rebellion in Ireland occurred when the British Empire had 412 million subjects, twenty-three percent of the entire world population.[43] Being at the height of its wealth and influence, overcoming British occupation seemed impossible, but the Easter Rising and War of Independence showed other colonised countries that rebellion and independence were possible.[44] *1916: The Irish Rebellion* emphasised the importance of the Rising as the first major resistance against the British Empire since the American Revolution in 1776.[45] When combined with the destabilisation of the established world order, particularly in

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[41] Ibid

[42] Ibid

[43] Maddison, Angus, 'The world economy: a millennial perspective,' *Organisation for Economic Co–operation and Development*, 2001

[44] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[45] Ibid

Europe during the First World War, dissatisfied colonised people saw an opportunity to change their situation.[46]

In discussions of anti-imperialist movements of the twentieth century, Ireland is most frequently compared to India. Writing on the connections, Bayley explained that both countries were ''othered' in similar patterns of imperial discourse.'[47] Both had also experienced severe famines in which the indifference of the British government led to the peasant class was denied relief, allowing a crop crisis to develop into a deadly famine.[48] Both would even be partitioned upon gaining their independence, leading to violent struggles in the disputed territories.[49] Their mirrored situation was not lost on Irish or Indian people of the time: Indian activist Sayee had studied in Ireland and was in fact a member of the Irish Volunteers.[50] This would have come as little surprise to future president V.V. Giri, who observed that Indian students 'felt a great affinity for the Irish who were chaffing under British rule, suffering from similar problems as Indians.'[51] The Irish were also aware of the relationship between themselves and their fellow colonials. Travelling to the United States in the wake of the Rising, Éamon De Valera made a point to meet with Indian anti-imperialists who had settled there.[52] O'Malley, whose research focuses on Indo-Irish relations, asserted that these meetings did not only occur between high-ranking leaders, but that Irish and Indian immigrant communities in the US formed

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[46] Ibid

[47] Bayly, C. A., 'Ireland, India and the empire: 1780-1914,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 10, Cambridge University Press, Royal Historical Society, 2000, pp. 377–97

[48] Ó Gráda, Cormac, 'Revisiting the Bengal famine of 1943–4,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Wordwell Ltd., 2010, pp. 36–39

[49] McMahon, Deirdre, 'The 1947 partition of India: Irish parallels,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Wordwell Ltd., 2010, pp. 40–43

[50] O'Malley, Kate, ''Thrilled by the Irish Rising ... and the Irish story ever since': Indian nationalist reactions to the Easter Rising.' *Saothar*, Vol. 41, Irish Labour History Society, 2016, pp. 77–82

[51] Ibid

[52] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

bonds and 'were able to exchange ideas about their revolutionary movements.'[53] These exchanges continued throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Boycotting British goods was a tactic used in both countries, and after a visit to Ireland by Indian politician V.J. Patel, Dublin newspapers encouraged consumers to 'Buy Irish first, then buy Indian.'[54] Ireland would play a role in India's independence movement until the very end, when De Valera joined Jawaharlal Nehru for a lunch with Lord Mountbatten the week before the viceroy was replaced by independence activist Chakravarti Rajagopalachari.[55] It is noted in the documentary that while Mahatma Gandhi had not considered the Irish rebellion a good model for independence agitation, Nehru had strongly believed that India should follow Ireland's example.

1916: The Irish Rebellion also drew attention to the connections between the Easter Rising and the Russian Bolshevik revolution.[56] Interviewed onscreen, Kevin Whelan notes that 'the proximity in dates is striking.'[57] The similarities in both rebellions were not coincidental: that several notable Russian revolutionaries were in contact with the children of James Connolly praising his work.[58] Vladimir Lenin was reported to have told Roddy Connolly that his father was 'head and shoulders above' other socialist agitators and introduced him to others as 'the son of the Irish Lenin.'[59] While Lenin sympathised with the socialist element of the Rising and the strike against the British capitalism establishment, he understood that the manner in which the Rising was carried out was

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[53] O'Malley, Kate, ''Thrilled by the Irish Rising'

[54] O'Malley, Kate, 'Learning the tricks of the imperial secession trade: Irish and Indian nationalism in the '30s and '40s.' *History Ireland*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Wordwell Ltd., 2010, p. 32–35

[55] Ibid

[56] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[57] Ibid

[58] McGreevey, Brendan, 'The Easter Rising and the Soviet Union: an untold chapter in Ireland's great rebellion,' *opendemocracy.net*, 25 March 2016

[59] Ibid

doomed to fail. Speaking in the documentary, Foster explained that Lenin appreciated 'the modernity of it and the theatre of it' and that was what he wished to replicate in Russia.[60] Lenin's performance was much more successful from a military standpoint, but Russia did not forget Ireland after the revolution. Interest in the Easter Rising continued throughout the twentieth century, although later retellings would call it 'Red Easter,' in keeping with the colour theming of Russian revolutionary culture.[61] The connection between Ireland and Russia was not mentioned nearly as often as Ireland and other revolutionary movements, likely due to long-standing political tensions between Russia and many of the nations with large Irish diaspora populations. By drawing attention to the topic the documentary continued the mission of bringing back the untold elements of the Rising and emphasising its global consequences.[62]

For a project so focused on appealing to an international audience while telling a uniquely Irish story, much thought was given to where the premiere of the documentary would take place. Ultimately it was decided to hold the premiere in Argentina. Nic Dhiarmada explained how South America proved to be an ideal region in which to introduce *1916: The Irish Rebellion* to the world.[63] On the surface this seemed to be due to the significant number of Argentine citizens of Irish descent. A nineteenth-century campaign to draw immigrants to Argentina with promises of land and riches had tempted thousands of Irish people to the country, where few became wealthy, but many settled their families.[64] In addition to appealing to the Irish diaspora, the story of 1916 drew

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[60] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[61] McGreevey, Brendan, 'The Easter Rising and the Soviet Union'

[62] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[63] Nic Dhiarmada, Bríona, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 24 May 2022

[64] Geraghty, Michael John, 'Argentina: Land of Broken Promises,' *Society for Latin Irish Studies,* 17 March 1999

comparisons to Argentina's own battle for independence from Spain.[65] The shared anti-imperialist sentiments of Ireland and Argentina were further bolstered by the fact that while 2016 was the centenary of the Easter Rising, it was also the bicentennial of Argentina's independence, which came in July of 1816. The success of the Argentine premiere led to the documentary being screened across South America, where Nic Dhiarmada remembered a number of viewers telling her that the programme 'spoke to [their] heart.'[66] It is notable, however, that despite the connections between Ireland and Argentina that prompted the decision, the South American nation is not referenced at all in the documentary. In fact, there are only passing visual references to Africa and South America while the narration describes the loss of imperial colonies. While this may be attributed to a desire to focus on former *British* colonies, it still presents a missed opportunity to fit Ireland into an even larger global anti-imperialist framework. While these countries may not have been represented onscreen, the themes discussed in it had worldwide applications that made it appeal as a human story and not just an Irish one. The documentary won several awards, including the American Public Television 'Excellence in Programming' award, the 'Silver Saber' at the International Historical and Military Film Festival, and 'Best Documentary Series' at the Irish Film and Television Awards.[67] The widespread praise for *1916: The Irish Rebellion* demonstrated the importance of the centenary commemorations in fostering unity not only between Irish people, but Ireland and the rest of the world.

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[65] Nic Dhiarmada, Bríona, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 24 May 2022

[66] Ibid

[67] Hendriksen, Mary, '*1916: The Irish Rebellion* wins two more awards,' *Keogh-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies*, 18 November 2016

A Plurality of Perspectives

1916: The Irish Rebellion was designed to include diverse perspectives on the events of early twentieth century Ireland, since only presenting one perspective and ignoring other interpretations of historical events does a disservice to the audience by oversimplifying and not allowing the viewer to draw their own conclusions. Presenting the major arguments of several groups, however, gives a much more complete picture of the nuance involved in a historical event and educates the viewer while inviting exploration and reflection. With this goal in mind, Nic Dhiarmada sought out a 'plurality' of historians from different backgrounds and areas of study so that the documentary would present a multitude of viewpoints and avoid veering into triumphalism.[68]

For example, the founding of the UVF is explained in the programme by Alvin Jackson of the University of Edinburgh, whose primary research focus is Irish Unionism and who has written extensively on the subject.[69] The choice of Professor Jackson to explain this topic is in keeping with the plan explained by producer Christopher Fox 'not to use political pundits or commentators, we wanted historians involved, serious historians. Now they don't all agree, but they can have a discussion here.'[70] While the historians consulted for the programme do not have discussions with each other onscreen, the documentary edits their commentary together in a manner that juxtaposes conflicting viewpoints, giving the appearance of a debate. However, the presentation of the material does not make explicit value judgements. Instead, multiple opinions are stated and audiences are free to decide their own views on the topics being discussed. To this end, Jackson describes the formation of the UVF in a manner that was informed by the context of the event and the emotions of the people involved. Rather than

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[68] *Backstory: 1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Brenda Bowyer, PBS Michiana, 2016

[69] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[70] Becker, Courtney, 'Documentary reflects on 1916 Irish rebellion,' *Observer*, 6 April 2016

attempting to make an argument for or against unionism, he presents historical events and the reasoning behind them. He also contributes information that would not be known to a historian who did not have the same specific specialty. In an interview after the documentary was released, Nic Dhiarmada commented that 'the surprising response we've gotten is actually from some unionists and some British people who have seen it and said afterwards, 'This is balanced, this is fair.'[71] She recalled speaking to a Protestant couple at a Belfast screening of the programme who expressed surprise and gratitude at the even-handedness of the programme.[72] It should be noted, however, that as the creator of the programme Nic Dhiarmada is hardly an unbiased source of information on audience responses. That being said, Nic Dhiarmada considered that reaction a demonstration of the success of the programme in presenting the Rising from a pluralistic viewpoint rather than allowing contemporary politics to affect the presentation of the material. It was also another example of how presenting more of the history surrounding the Rising in a non-judgemental manner invited more people to be a part of the conversation surrounding the meaning and legacy of the Rising.

In a review of both the documentary and its companion book for *History Ireland*, John Gibney praised the project for allowing the audience to draw their own conclusions from the information presented 'rather than being told what they should think and feel about it, and being berated for not agreeing with a range of diverse prejudices.'[73] He goes on to say that 'there is a gap for a good, solid, well-made, academically respectable, accessible and up-to-date account of what happened in Ireland at Easter 1916. Notre Dame has provided it.'[74] The opinion expressed by Gibney is that the strategy of

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[71] Ibid

[72] Nic Dhiarmada, Bríona, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 24 May 2022

[73] Gibney, John, 'Reviews: 1916,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Wordwell Ltd., 2016, pp. 50-51

[74] Ibid

presenting human experiences and emotions without making a decision on which is 'right' is the most responsible way to portray history, and that audiences will connect to the material on their own if they are not being told what to think about each person and event. It is also notable that Gibney referred to an 'account of what happened' without specifying the medium. He did not describe the programme as being good by 'television standards,' but acknowledged the programme's excellence in comparison to all retellings of the Rising story.

Perhaps the most prominent example of introducing new perspectives is the focus on the Irish experience in the First World War. The complicated circumstances surrounding Irish soldiers in the First World War made it difficult to fit their stories neatly into the narrative of the Easter Rising, particularly when it was being glorified, so the decision had frequently been made to avoid the topic altogether, effectively erasing those men from commemorative discourse.[75] However, the impact that the First World War had on Ireland and the Irish independence movement cannot be overstated. However, previous commemorations had always treated the Rising and the War as separate events.[76] Discussing the commemorations in 1966, Rosín Higgins explained that 'in the North it was axiomatic that to glorify the events of Easter Week 1916 was to desecrate the memory of the First World War dead.'[77] In the Republic, the Rising was treated as a 'way of forgetting the First World War.'[78] By 2016, increased scholarship surrounding Irish participants in the Great War had presented a far more complicated view, with Jeffery noting that 'as people in the Irish Republic began to rediscover the involvement of

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[75] Higgins, Roisín. *Transforming 1916*, p. 19

[76] Ibid

[77] Ibid

[78] Ibid

forebears in the First World War, the commemoration of that war started to be integrated into public life much more fully than ever before, or at least ever since the late 1930s.'[79]

1916: The Irish Rebellion clearly states that supporting Irish independence and joining the British Army were not mutually exclusive; Madigan argued against splitting those who joined the army and those who did not into distinct groups, citing the significant number of men who fought in the First World War, then the Irish War of Independence upon returning home.[80] He explained that the two events not being mutually exclusive 'should make us think twice about taking an 'either/or' approach to commemoration as the centenaries unfold.'[81] The view of commemoration taken by Madigan was also that of RTÉ. All centenary events and programming were designed to inspire conversation and encourage people to view history in a new light. Making sweeping generalisations would have hindered this process. Additionally, part of the goal of *1916: The Irish Rebellion* was to create a holistic picture of the Rising. Treating those who joined the army and those who believed in independence as distinct groups would have oversimplified the issue and ignored known historiography. The Irish men and women of 1916 made decisions based on personal interpretations of a complex geopolitical situation, or sometimes for less ideological, more personal reasons. Tom Barry, who would later serve in the War of Independence, recalled his own reasons for joining the British Army: 'I went to war for no other reason than that I wanted to see what war was like, to get a gun, to see new countries and to feel a grown man.'[82] To truly

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[79] Jeffery, Keith, 'Irish varieties of Great War commemoration,' in *Towards commemoration: Ireland in war and revolution, 1912-1923*, eds. John Horne & Edward Madigan, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2013, p. 122

[80] Madigan, Edward, ''A seamless robe of Irish experience': the First World War, the Irish revolution and centenary commemoration.' *History Ireland*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Wordwell Ltd., 2014, pp. 14–17

[81] Ibid

[82] Barry, Tom, *Guerrilla days in Ireland,'* serialised in *The Irish Press*, 1949

commemorate those people and their experiences, the variety of those experiences needed to be taken into account and explored.

In a ‘making of documentary’ that aired immediately after the broadcast of *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, Bríona Nic Dhiarmada explained her intention of giving the Rising back some of the context that had been lost over the years.[83] Unwillingness to talk about difficult topics that were both complicated and controversial (such as the First World War) was a large factor in this. It was an effect that Boyce described as an 'official amnesia, as the guardians of the independent Irish state felt themselves obliged to forget those who rallied to Britain’s cause.'[84] By bringing the connections between the War and the Rising to the forefront, Nic Dhiarmada aimed for what she describes as a 'plurality of viewpoints' that form a more complete picture of 1916 and returned the Irishmen who fought in the First World War to a space where they could be remembered.[85]

The documentary’s attention to demographics that had not been represented in previous commemorations of the Rising also extended to the civilian population of Dublin, who did not choose to participate in the Rising, but were drawn into the conflict nevertheless. The focus on the non-combatant experience of the Rising in 2016 is unsurprising. Dolan noted that

> Far more carried on carrying on through all these wars than went out to take whatever part, yet we listen to the minority of fighters for whatever cause so much more. It is in those carrying on in spite of, or despite, it all that we are maybe most likely to find any kind of ‘shared history’ or common ground.[86]

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[83] *Backstory: 1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Brenda Bowyer, PBS Michiana, 2016

[84] Boyce, George, 'Ireland and the First World War,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Wordwell Ltd., 1994, pp. 48–53

[85] *Backstory: 1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Brenda Bowyer, PBS Michiana, 2016

[86] Dolan, Anne, ‘Divisions and divisions and divisions: who to commemorate?’ in *Towards commemoration: Ireland in war and revolution, 1912-1923*, eds. John Horne & Edward Madigan, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 2013, p. 151

A possible explanation for the absence of civilian accounts in previous commemorations was the fact that many people were strongly opposed to the Rising as it was happening. In the triumphant spirit of 1966, the public disdain for the rebellion would have contradicted the triumphant narrative that was being presented. In 2016, however, when the Rising was being examined with more nuance, the opinions and experiences of bystanders were more thoroughly explored.

Early on, the narration of *1916: The Irish Rebellion* remarked on the speed with which 'the curiosity of some onlookers turn[ed] to shock and then anger.'[87] Dubliners were used to seeing the Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army on parades and manoeuvres, so seeing them on the streets was not a surprise, but the seizing of public buildings certainly was.[88] A common reaction of civilians witnessing the Rising was a sense of betrayal in light of the number of Irishmen serving in the British Army. Irish Volunteer Martin Walton recalled hearing shouts of 'you want to fight, go out and fight in France' as he went to Jacob's Biscuit Factory to join his garrison.[89] For families who had lost loved ones in the war, seeing fellow Dubliners revolting against the government was a deep insult and inspired intense rage.[90] Despite the large number of civilians who held this opinion, it was not generally acknowledged until the Decade of Centenaries, when new scholarship on the Rising sought to create a more complete picture of Dublin in 1916.

Another major contributor to public disdain for the Rising was widespread poverty in Dublin city. In *Children of the Rising: The Untold Story of the Young Lives Lost During Easter 1916*, Duffy explained that in 1916 twenty-six thousand families were living in tenement housing and that conditions in Dublin slums were considered the worst in the

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[87] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[88] Ibid

[89] Ibid

[90] Ibid

United Kingdom.[91] For the people living in these conditions the ideals of the Rising were irrelevant- their focus was on getting enough to survive. This attitude was exemplified in a story told by Roddy Connolly, son of James. He recalled being in the GPO with his father and being told of a man who was trying to return to work despite being 'in the middle of a revolution.'[92] James Connolly, who had devoted his life to fighting for the rights of workers, allowed him to do so when the man said 'I have the keys to the warehouse, and if I don't open up, all the other men on the job are going to lose a day's pay.'[93] This anecdote not only displayed the indifference felt by many people towards the rebellion, but also that James Connolly remained first and foremost dedicated to the workers, even in the midst of leading an uprising. By including this anecdote in the documentary, viewers were reminded that the leaders of the Rising had values outside of independence, and that they were aware of the chaos that they were bringing into daily life in the city.

Even for those who were not a part of the workforce, the disruption to city institutions could cause financial hardship. Women whose husbands were fighting in the British Army received allowances through the mail, referred to as 'separation money' that enabled them to afford food and clothing for their children. The seizure of the GPO halted mail delivery and prevented these women from getting the badly-needed money. Crowe put it bluntly: 'they had no interest in dying for Ireland. They wanted their money to rear their children.'[94]

The interruption of already difficult lives by the rebellion was not limited to access to money. The fighting and firing of artillery in a crowded urban environment destroyed food stalls and shops and forced many to close for safety reasons. The combination of

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[91] Duffy, Joe, *Children of the Rising: The Untold Story of the Young Lives Lost During Easter 1916*, Hachette Books Ireland, London, 2015, pp. 5-9

[92] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[93] Ibid

[94] Ibid

severe need and public chaos led to a new issue: looting.[95] While fruits and vegetables were among the first items stolen, thefts quickly escalated to luxury items that Dublin's poor saw in shop windows every day but could never have dreamed of owning.[96] The lack of police on the streets allowed the looting to escalate into violence as people fought over the most desirable items, and fires were started that contributed greatly to the destruction of Dublin city centre.[97] Seán MacDiarmada left his post to address the looters 'calling on them not to disgrace the battle for freedom.'[98] The belief that Dubliners taking the chaos of the Rising as an opportunity to loot was a disgrace to the rebellion was one that seemed to have been held in previous commemorations of the Rising, as attention was not drawn to it. Little to no mention was made of civilians being violent or criminal and the blame for destruction of property was placed squarely at the feet of the British soldiers. Ignoring inconvenient historical events is a part of the curation of history that commemorations engaged in, and it was a far better story to portray the people and property of Dublin as innocents wronged by a foreign enemy in previous commemorations. However, Nic Dhiarmada has repeatedly stated that her goal was to ignore the triumphalism of previous Rising stories and determine the facts of Easter Week, and acknowledging that those uninvolved in the ideological conflict were still involved in violence is an important step towards replacing myth with historical information.[99]

While casualty numbers are usually relayed in terms of deaths per each side in a conflict, the historians interviewed for *1916: The Irish Rebellion* placed a great deal of

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[95] Ibid

[96] Poleon, Stephen, 'Easter 1916: Looting and Mayhem,' *HeadStuff*, 28 March 2016

[97] Malone, Brenda, '1916: looters turned anything they could into weapons on O'Connell Street.' *Irish Examiner*, 21 March 2016

[98] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[99] *Backstory: 1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Brenda Bowyer, PBS Michiana, 2016

emphasis on the number of civilian casualties.[100] Professor Thomas Bartlett explained that the plan to stage a rebellion in a major urban area must have taken into account the inevitability of civilian casualties. He expressed his belief that those deaths had been deliberately left out of previous histories of the Rising, as the leaders knowing that non-combatants would be killed and proceeding anyway raised a moral dilemma that conflicted with the heroic presentation of those leaders.[101] He summarised the issue by pointing out that 'none of these civilians were consulted as to whether they were prepared to die for the cause.'[102] The concerns that Bartlett raised applied even more to the forty children killed during the Rising. The close confines of the Dublin city streets did not provide room for civilians to get out of the way of the fighting, and at least three of the children killed were under two and being held by their mothers.[103] One of the mothers was attempting to flee the violence at the time of the shooting.[104] As with the adult casualties, the stories of these children presented the horror of the rebellion in a way that detracted from the triumphant legacy that earlier commemorations wished to convey. Maurice Hayes of the *Irish Independent* began his review of *Children of the Rising* by discussing the grave of Christina Caffrey.[105] At 22 months old, Christina was the youngest person killed during the Rising and is now buried in an unmarked grave at Glasnevin Cemetery. The place where she was buried is now covered by a walkway to the nearby republican monument.[106] Hayes described this as 'sadly symbolic… that her memory

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[100] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[101] *Backstory: 1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Brenda Bowyer, PBS Michiana, 2016

[102] Ibid

[103] Murphy, Darragh, '1916: 40 under-16s were shot in a single week,' *Irish Times*, 23 September 2015

[104] Ibid

[105] Hayes, Maurice, 'Review: innocent children killed in the 1916 Rising are also worthy of our remembrance,' *Independent*, 10 October 2015

[106] Ibid

should have been trampled on for so many years and by none more than the throngs arriving to celebrate the memory of those who fought and died for a promise to cherish all the children of the nation equally.'[107] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, like *Children of the Rising*, sought to bring the stories of the Rising's forgotten victims to a wider audience and include them in the historiography of Easter Week. In doing so it also brought them into the discussion of commemoration and made their names publicly known, so that they could be remembered along with the combatants. This was exemplified by the decision of the Irish government to produce a stamp featuring the image of Sean Foster, who was killed at two years old when a stray bullet struck him in his pram.[108]

The inclusion of civilian Dubliners in studies of the Rising created around 2016 represented both the desire of modern audiences to learn about the rebellion from a variety of perspectives, as well as historians' endeavour to tell the history of the Rising in a more complete manner. By embracing the full range of experiences during Easter Week the myth of good versus evil began to deteriorate and was replaced with a more nuanced, human view of events. The public interest in this element of the Easter Rising was proven by the status of *Children of the Rising* as the top selling Irish book of 2015.[109] While the Rising had a major impact on the course of Irish history after the fact, at the time it was occurring it was seen as a nuisance at best and a tragedy at worst. For ordinary Dubliners it was not about unionism or republicanism, merely survival. Asked years later which side of the conflict his Catholic father and Protestant mother were on, Michael Gorman Jr replied 'they weren't on any side in 1916, except the getting on with life side.'[110]

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[107] Ibid

[108] Anderson, Nicola, 'Relatives of Sean Foster (2) recall youngest victim,' *Independent*, 27 March 2016

[109] Spain, John, 'Joe Duffy's book focused on children of the Rebellion is the biggest Irish book of the year,' *Irish Independent*, 3 January 2016

[110] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

Curating Historical Imagery in 1916 and 2016

Discussing the ideological success that followed the military failure of the Rising, McGarry wrote ‘as a revolutionary, Pearse had many shortcomings, but an understanding of the importance of the power of symbolism, myth and imagination was not among them.’[111] Volunteer Desmond Ryan recalled Pearse telling him 'after a few years they will see the meaning of what we tried to do.'[112] Historians often discussed the keen sense Pearse had of how his actions would fit into the larger story of Irish nationalism.[113] His plans for the Rising were designed to create a spectacle that would be remembered, and he was fully aware of the likelihood of his own death but embraced the idea of becoming a martyr.[114] Ó Tuathaigh refers to this as 'a deep historical self-consciousness' and an awareness of 'the historic moment that they have arrived at and what they are creating.’[115] The knowledge that this moment in Irish history would be remembered and retold is evident in the actions taken by all of the Rising leaders, becoming publicly apparent in 1915 at the funeral of Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa.

When Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa died in New York at the age of eighty-three, Tom Clarke claimed that 'if Rossa had planned to die at the most opportune time for serving his country he could not have done better.’[116] He then demanded that John Devoy ‘send his body home at once' to be buried at Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin.[117] Rossa’s life had

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[111] McGarry, ‘1916 and Irish republicanism,’ p. 46

[112] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[113] Lee, JJ., 'Pearse, Patrick Henry,' Dictionary of Irish Biography, November 2013

[114] Ibid

[115] Ó Tuathaigh, ‘Commemoration, public history and the professional historian’

[116] 'Mary Jane O’Donovan Rossa to Thomas James Clarke', July 1915 in O’Brien and Ryan, *Devoy’s Postbag*, Dublin, 1948

[117] McGreevy, Ronan, 'Easter Rising leaders spied on in days before O’Donovan Rossa funeral,' *Irish Times*, 31 July 2015

encompassed many of the ideas that the new republican movement valued: oppression by colonial forces, devotion to reclaiming Irish culture, political activism, garnering international support, and being willing to use violence to achieve Irish independence. A figure who could embody all of these things at once would provide a powerful propaganda opportunity to unite the many disparate groups who believed in the cause of Irish independence. It is important to note that *1916: The Irish Rebellion* does not commemorate Rossa as a person, but rather the impact that his funeral had on the republican movement. This is noteworthy in that it acknowledges that his life and actions were part of a different era of nationalism, and his relevance to the Rising was in the way that the leaders used Rossa's story for propaganda purposes.

The goal of the funeral was to create a spectacle that showed the world that the rebels were both correct in their cause and organised enough to achieve it. Clan na Gael was attempting to arrange the purchase of German weapons for use in the rebellion; they also wished to build an alliance to secure Irish freedom in the event of a German victory over Britain.[118] The relevance of O'Donovan Rossa's funeral in swaying international opinion becomes clear in the documentary, as there is British Pathé newsreel footage of the funeral procession shown in the programme.[119] The fact that newsreel videographers considered the event worth capturing demonstrates the perceived importance of the funeral, even in 1915 without the knowledge of what would follow. Additionally, large crowds are visible alongside the elaborately decorated hearse, allowing the viewer to see how much support there was for O'Donovan Rossa and, by extension, the cause he championed. While the newsreel footage has significant visual impact, the documentary does not draw attention to the staging of the funeral. Efforts were undertaken to ensure that the funeral would have a visual impact and work as a propaganda event, though this

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[118] Kenny, John, 'John Kenny's interview with Prince von Beulow [sic],' *Gaelic American*, 5 March 1924

[119] 1916: The Irish Rebellion, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

is not explored in the documentary. The funeral planning committee had organised trains to bring supporters in from all over the country.[120] The escort of the hearse by military guards from the Irish Volunteers, the National Volunteers, and the Dublin Citizen Army, was purposely chosen to give an air of military importance to the proceedings, which was only reinforced by the rifle salute over the grave after the oration, which is depicted in the newsreel.[121] While all of these elements were 'real' in that the people depicted were genuine supporters of the independence movement, knowing that they were deliberately brought to Dublin to create a larger crowd would have emphasised the planning of the funeral as a propaganda event. In this respect, the funeral was not dissimilar to modern television reporting. The visual elements were curated to give a specific impression of the event, so that while not technically false, the viewer was still experiencing a purposefully designed 'show.' In many ways the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa can be considered the first 'pop culture' moment in twentieth century Ireland, turning a commemoration (in this case, of a person) into a spectacle for public appreciation. This was the intent of the funeral organising committee, and had there been a medium for broadcasting the procession into homes, they likely would have embraced it.

Despite the availability of moving images depicting the funeral and graveside salute, the most famous part of the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa is represented in the documentary with a still image. Pearse was seen standing at the graveside, with James Connolly beside him, as he delivered a speech more focused on the struggle for independence than on O'Donovan Rossa as a person.[122] The press of 1915 understood the importance and significance of the speech, as displayed in newspaper reports of the time. The day after the funeral itself an extremely detailed report was published in the *Irish*

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[120] 'Enormous crowds attend funeral of O'Donovan Rossa,' *Century Ireland*, 1 Aug 2015

[121] Ibid

[122] 1916: The Irish Rebellion, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

Times.[123] The procession and services were described as one would expect for an article covering a public event, but Pearse's entire speech is recorded almost word for word (the omissions appear to be due to the journalist forgetting them rather than intentionally).[124] Additionally, while the headline read 'O'Donovan Rossa's Funeral,' the secondary heading of 'Scenes in Dublin - speech at graveside' shows what was considered the most important part of the funeral.[125] The impact of hearing the oration was understood by the creators of *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, and the audiovisual format ensured that the producers could bring the speech to life for the audience. Rather than showing the speech written out or having it be a part of the narration, the oration was delivered by an actor who read it with the emotion and intensity that Pearse used in his own delivery.[126] This choice allowed the audience to understand how rousing the speech was and the power that it had over listeners in a way that could not be communicated without an impassioned reading.

The effectiveness of the oration both as a funeral speech and a political rallying cry lay in its bridging of the old Fenian ideals and the new republican organisation. This was acknowledged by Pearse himself in the opening of his speech, where he introduced himself as a representative of 'a new generation that has been re-baptised in the Fenian faith.'[127] He affirmed his devotion to the vision Rossa had of complete, Gaelic independence, indirectly comparing that to the conditional independence of Home Rule. Additionally, the praise heaped on 'brave and splendid' Rossa is encouragement to others to follow his path and take up his cause so that they themselves can be

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[123] 'O'Donovan Rossa's funeral: scenes in Dublin speech at graveside,' *Irish Times*, 2 August 1915

[124] Ibid

[125] Ibid

[126] 1916: The Irish Rebellion, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[127] Hull, Eleanor, 'Oration of P.H. Pearse over the grave of O'Donovan 'Rossa.'' A History of Ireland and Her People, Vol. 2, appendix 2, 1926-1931, libraryireland.com

considered brave and splendid.[128] Having addressed both past and present Pearse turned to the future, declaring that 'while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.'[129] This became a slogan throughout the rebellion and following War of Independence as it called to mind both the duty to carry on the legacy of the past and the encouragement that any act of revolution was in keeping with Pearse's promise that rebellion would continue until freedom was achieved. The phrase was also emblematic of the belief that republican violence had been justified in the nineteenth century and continued to be morally correct in the twentieth. In *1916: The Irish Rebellion* Professor Ruán O'Donnell explained the message that was being sent: 'the IRB, the modern day Fenians were back in business, and they meant business. They would indeed rise again.'[130]

The funeral oration was also an early example of the rebels, especially Pearse and Clarke, having an acute awareness of how to manage the legacy of existing history for their own purposes. By condensing hundreds of years of complicated history and unsuccessful rebellion into a short, poetic tribute to fallen Irish rebels Pearse created a romantic image that was much easier to identify with and want to emulate. He also set up the way he and his comrades wanted to be viewed and ultimately remembered. A fairly short speech with powerful, easy to remember phrases praising those who were willing to fight for Irish freedom was easily repeated and quoted, as shown by the *Irish Times* reporter who recalled it almost verbatim.[131] By creating an epitaph not only for Rossa's generation but also his own, Pearse began to curate the image of the movement, both for his contemporaries and future historians. It was this concern with appearances that lent

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[128] Ibid

[129] Ibid

[130] 1916: The Irish Rebellion, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[131] 'O'Donovan Rossa's funeral: scenes in Dublin speech at graveside,' *Irish Times*, 2 August 1915

the Rising a very dramatic (and in the modern era, cinematic) air and maintained public interest in both the event and the figures involved.

In examining the history of the Easter Rising one cannot underestimate the effect that the funeral of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa had both on the Fenian movement and on the public who witnessed the event. The graveside oration is second only to the Proclamation of the Republic as Padraic Pearse's most famous oratory work, and set him in the public consciousness not only as an academic but as a revolutionary leader. It was also a commemorative event, not just for the life of O'Donovan Rossa but for the Fenian movement as a whole. The funeral was an opportunity to reflect on the past fifty years of the nationalist movement and assess what would and would not be useful in the coming years. It was also a symbol of inheritance, a public passing of the torch to the new generation which began a movement led by scholars and artists who were keenly aware that how they were perceived and remembered was absolutely crucial to their success. In this way Pearse presaged the events of 2016, in which the legacy of 1916 was examined for contemporary significance and guidance. However, while Pearse came to the conclusion that the artists and writers of his generation should engage in armed revolution, in 2016 the message was that Ireland was a nation of creatives, who should put their focus into those areas rather than violence, with Deenihan declaring

> As we seek to relate to former times, there is a special and direct insight to be gained from their artistic output which has endured across the years. Equally, the response of this generation expressed through the arts will be of wide public interest, encourage discussion and be a special part of our contribution to the continuing legacy of the revolutionary age.

It should be noted that *1916: The Irish Rebellion* does not adhere strictly to maintaining Pearse's cultivated public persona. In the segment devoted to the decision to surrender, the narration describes how Seán MacDiarmada recalled Pearse seeing three

dead, elderly men in the street, having been shot while holding white flags.[132] Seeing this, Pearse decided that the only way to prevent more civilian casualties was to end the rebellion.[133] For added resonance, this narration is paired with images of contemporary Moore Street, reminding the viewer that this upsetting event occurred in an area familiar to modern-day Dubliners and the shock that such in event in this place would cause. The story of Pearse witnessing the civilian dead and deciding to surrender was not often included in previous accounts of the Rising, likely for the reason discussed previously- that civilian deaths call the heroism of the rebels into question and complicate the narrative. It also raised the question of how much thought Pearse had put into the likelihood of civilians being killed during the Rising. Had he not considered it in his enthusiasm for the plot? Had he decided it was worth it, but then the sight of real non-combatant casualties changed his mind? In the context of *1916: The Irish Rebellion* working to bring everyday Dubliners back into the Rising story, this telling of such an important moment brought clarity to the decision to surrender, but also raised a host of issues that invited the viewer to reevaluate the way in which Pearse has been remembered.

1916: The Irish Rebellion also features an interview (conducted in the 1960s and not for the documentary) with John Loder, son of the British Major General John Lowe, who recalled escorting Pearse on the drive to Kilmainham Gaol.[134] By the time that they had reached Kilmainham Pearse had not finished speaking to the priest accompanying him, and Loder agreed to drive around the block again to give him time to do so.[135] Pearse thanked Loder with the gift of his hat and Sinn Féin badge, describing Loder's

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[132] Ibid

[133] Ibid

[134] 1916: The Irish Rebellion, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[135] Ibid

actions as 'a noble gesture.'[136] Including this interview in a commemorative documentary was unique and notable for several reasons. The first was that it provided the perspective of a British officer during the Rising. The 'us versus them' mentality of many other Rising-themed works led to the exclusion of any British opinions, and the decision to include it here was indicative of the goal of expanding the Rising narrative. Additionally, it was one of the few stories of Pearse that feels truly personal. Most of his public appearances were crafted to present himself as a leader and educator, and many of the things that people who knew him remember him saying are expressions of his lofty ideals. Since Loder saw Pearse in a moment of vulnerability that was not part of a public 'performance,' the story feels more intimate and presents him as a human rather than an icon.

The curation of history by the rebel leaders is again evident in the section of the documentary concerning their imprisonment and execution. Letters written by the condemned men and recollections from family members of their final conversations reveal the degree to which they were focused on the future, even at the end of their lives. The narration explains that families were notified that the executions were to take place very late. Of the first three executed leaders, only Tom Clarke's wife had time to make it to Kilmainham and say goodbye in person.[137] Kathleen Clarke was interviewed in the 1960s, and *1916: The Irish Rebellion* includes video of her describing how before his execution, she and Tom Clarke only spoke of the future of the country.[138] Padraic Pearse had written to his mother, and the letter was read in the documentary over an image of a single candle in darkness, with a photograph of Pearse appearing towards the end of the letter.[139] While Thomas MacDonagh, wrote to his wife and both of his children, the

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[136] Ibid

[137] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[138] Ibid

[139] Ibid

documentary featured a reading of the section addressed to his son Donagh. Presented with an image of MacDonagh, his wife Muriel, and their son as a baby, the letter expressed hope that Donagh would recognise that his father had 'done a great thing for Ireland. Won the first step of her freedom.'[140] By keeping the visuals simple, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* allowed attention to be focused completely on the words in the letters. Since the last communications from the executed leaders to their families had deep emotional resonance on their own, very little embellishment was needed and complex visuals would have likely just been a distraction.

These letters, as well as stories such as the wedding of Joseph Mary Plunkett and Grace Gifford, personalised the rebels in the eyes of the public and elicited sympathy that had not existed for them while the Rising was happening.[141] Historian J.J. Lee explained that 'Pearse imagined execution as a weapon, a great rebel weapon… execution means drama.'[142] The drama of the executions certainly drew attention. In Ireland Plunkett's marriage was reported on in the *Independent* two days in a row, presented as a romantic drama with complete sympathy for the groom.[143] Meanwhile in America, the *New York Times* had abandoned their previous neutrality and published articles about the executed revolutionaries focusing on their artistic and academic accomplishments.[144] The sympathy stirred by these articles was only increased by the timetable of the executions. Spread out over nine days, the constant news of more deaths turned public opinion in favour of the rebels.[145] When asked what effect the executions had on him personally, former Senator Edward Mac Lysaght replied 'Same as it had on everybody. It's made me

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[140] Ibid

[141] Ibid

[142] Ibid

[143] 'Rebel's Marriage Before Execution: Mrs. Gifford's Story.' *Irish Independent*. 8 May 1916.

[144] Kilmer, Joyce. 'Poets marched in the van of Irish revolt,' *New York Times*, 7 May 1916

[145] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

completely pro-them and became a political Irishman from that day.'[146] Mac Lysaght would go on to express sympathy for Sinn Féin during the War of Independence and serve as a senator of the Irish Free State.[147] The emotions raised by the deaths of the leaders also served to increase interest in learning about nationalism. In the programme, Crowe explained how people who had not been involved in the Rising 'began to try to understand what drove them to this extremity, when it was clear that they couldn't possibly win.'[148] *1916: The Irish Rebellion* showed paintings and prayer cards created in the wake of the executions depicting the leaders of the rebellion accompanied by saints and angels, glorifying both their actions and the cause that they stood for. While the documentary did not explicitly connect these images to the concept of commemoration, they show how contemporary people remembered the event and how meanings were assigned to people and their actions in the immediate aftermath of the Rising. These first commemorations of the rebellion demonstrate the earliest instances of people reframing the Rising to fit into their own interpretation of the rebellion.

What is Left Out?

Discussing nonfiction filmmaking, Beattie observed that 'interpretation and manipulation of reality occurs at all stages of the documentary process.'[149] While this analysis has so far focused on what is present in *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, it is also important to note what has been left out. A single documentary, even a long-form, episodic television production, cannot encompass every known event and opinion regarding a topic, but the decision of what to exclude is a deliberate one. Not every

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[146] Ibid

[147] Lysaght, Charles, 'MacLysaght, Edward Anthony Edgeworth,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 2009

[148] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[149] Beattie, *Documentary screens*, p. 13

element of history fits into a narrative arc or supports the filmmakers' goals, but much can be learned by what is not presented in the work.

The most noticeable example of a topic being underrepresented by *1916: The Irish Rebellion* is the brief mention of the War of Independence and Civil War.[150] These were both formative events in modern Irish history with consequences that sill affect politics both in the Republic and island-wide. However, the documentary devoted less than a minute of screen time to each war. For a documentary that went into such detail on every other topic it addressed, the lack of attention paid to the War of Independence and Civil War is a stark contrast. Interviewed onscreen, Whelan posits that the idea that the Rising led to the Civil War altered the legacy of the former. 'When the Irish state came into existence, it came in darkness. It came in sadness. It came with a toxic legacy to it.'[151] The disillusionment following the Civil War was partly based on the belief that the Ireland that existed then was not the Ireland that the 1916 revolutionaries would have wanted, and that their vision of regaining cultural heritage and national pride had not happened.[152] The young men who had survived the Rising were

Bitter rivalries still existed, exacerbated by the divisions of the Civil War. Veterans of the Irish Citizen Army who had followed James Connolly and Constance Markievicz because of their firm belief in a socialist Ireland where women were treated as equals to men found themselves without many more opportunities than they had had before independence.[153] In the 1920s and 1930s, the increasing influence of the Catholic Church on Irish lawmakers resulted in strict social conservatism, with the banning of divorce and contraception, as well as the banning of literature that fell under a far-reaching definition

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[150] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[151] Ibid

[152] Ibid

[153] Connell, Joseph E. A., 'Countdown to 2016: the founding of the Irish Citizen Army,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 21, No. 5, Wordwell Ltd., 2013, p. 66

of 'obscenity.'[154] Foster asserted that these laws 'left a whole generation of disappointed radical Irish people, people who had expected liberation on many levels to follow liberation from British rule.'[155] In 1956 Bulmer Hobson remarked 'I cannot and will not write about the people and times when we were young for reasons that are long and complicated. Briefly the phoenix of our youth has fluttered to earth such a miserable old hen I have no heart for it.'[156] In 2016, when focus was on the achievements of twentieth-century Ireland, the disillusionment of the revolutionary generation would have contradicted the intended message.

A more complicated demonstration of the editorial decisions made by the filmmakers is in the documentary's treatment of Michael O'Rahilly, known as 'The O'Rahilly.' *1916: The Irish Rebellion* devoted a great deal of time to his story, and more emphasis was placed on his involvement in the conflict than on his initial opposition to it. His belief that the Rising would fail did not prevent him from joining the fighting once he realised it was happening despite his interventions. He was quoted in the documentary as having said 'I have wound the clock. I may as well hear it strike.'[157] Despite this quote sounding resigned rather than enthusiastic, O'Rahilly served in the GPO during Easter Week, where aide-de-camp Desmond Fitzgerald noted that he was both convinced that the Rising would fail yet also cheerful and steadfast.[158] After the shooting and wounding of James Connolly, O'Rahilly was put in charge of military operations.[159]

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[154] Quinlan, Tom, 'Ferreting out evil: the records of the Committee on Evil Literature,'' *Journal of the Irish Society for National Archives*, Autumn, 1995

[155] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[156] Foster, *Vivid faces*, p. 289

[157] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[158] Maume, Patrick, 'O'Rahilly, Michael Joseph ('The O'Rahilly'),' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 2009

[159] *Backstory: 1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Brenda Bowyer, PBS Michiana, 2016

During the evacuation of the burning post office, O'Rahilly was shot multiple times. Believing him to be dead, his comrades continued their route up Moore Street, while he took cover in a nearby alleyway.[160] Despite his injuries, O'Rahilly lived for several hours, using this time to write a goodbye note to his pregnant wife.[161] In it, he referred to the rebellion as 'a good fight.'[162] The O'Rahilly was remembered as a hero of the Rising, and his initial misgivings about it were frequently ignored in tours, museum exhibits, and documentaries. Drawing attention to both his opposition to the rebellion and his heroism during it is in keeping with the intention of the producers that *1916: The Irish Rising* present a more nuanced view of people's attitude towards the Rising, even when those grey areas do not fit in with traditional mythology surrounding the event.

It should be noted that the attention received by The O'Rahilly in *1916: The Irish Rebellion*is likely an example of history being curated by the programme creators. Documentary director Ruán Magan is the great-grandnephew of The O'Rahilly.[163] While the narrative did not present any information about him that contradicted the historical record, the disproportionate amount of screen time that was devoted to his story is a reminder that even a series devoted to a fair portrayal of history was subject to the personal opinions and interests of the creators. Additionally, no mention was made of The O'Rahilly's less honourable characteristics. Foster discusses an interaction between him and Rosamund Jacobs in which 'her good impression of O'Rahilly (elegant, dark good looks, simple delivery) was torpedoed by his self-importance and above all his violently racist beliefs about American blacks.'[164] He quotes Jacobs: 'It was awful. I suppose he is

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[160] Maume, Patrick, 'O'Rahilly, Michael Joseph ('The O'Rahilly')

[161] 'Michael Joseph O'Rahilly & Nancy Brown,' *Scéalta Grá na hÉireann*, TG4, 2023

[162] *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, created by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2016

[163] Áilin Quinlan, 'The Irish Revolution: the story behind the documentary,' *Irish Examiner*, 2 February 2019

[164] Foster, Roy, *Vivid faces*, p. 14

an anti-democratic Griffithite sort of Sinn Féiner.'[165] Foster then observes that 'O'Rahilly would later be one of the most celebrated combatants in the 1916 Rising, and thus placed beyond criticism.'[166] That status extends to *1916: The Irish Rebellion*.

Conclusion

In many ways, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* successfully contributes to the commemorative goals of 2016. The exploration of multiple viewpoints presents a more complex idea of the Easter Rising without telling viewers which opinion is 'correct.' By allowing audiences to understand the varied motivations and goals of the people involved in the Rising, the documentary encourages them to engage with the material and form their own opinions of both the event and its meaning in contemporary Ireland. Additionally, the documentary's focus on the propaganda value of the Rising in its own time provides insight into how it has been commemorated over time. Revealing the leaders' awareness of how they and their cause would be perceived after the rebellion provides insight into their values and beliefs about the rebellion. Finally, by acknowledging the areas in which the documentary did not provide complex historical analysis, the values, intentions, and personal opinions of the filmmakers become more apparent. While this does not negate the documentary's value as a historical and commemorative work, it does allow the viewer to be more aware of areas in which editorial decisions affect the piece as a whole.

Of the programmes discussed here, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* gives the most complete picture of the Rising and the world in which it occurred. The combination of archival footage, scripted narration, and interviews with experts in the topic allows a great deal of information to be covered across the three hour-long episodes. It is likely for this reason that the special was originally broadcast in January of 2016. The centenary of the

[165] Ibid

[166] Ibid

Easter Rising would be marked by a plethora of television programmes, educational initiatives, newspaper articles, and public discussions. By beginning the year with a programme that provided an overview of the event, even audiences previously unfamiliar with the Rising could be brought into the national conversation.

Chapter Four

Rebellion

While the majority of the programming surrounding the centenary consisted of non-fiction discussions, documentaries, and cultural exhibitions, the historical fiction drama *Rebellion* was referred to in the *Irish Times* as the 'centrepiece' of the television commemorations.[1] Airing in January of 2016, just as the centenary year was beginning, the marketing for the series focused heavily on the idea that the programme would examine the Rising from a female perspective. This decision made sense given the increased public interest in the women of 1916 that arose around the centenary. Previous media centred around the Rising had predominantly been presented from a male point of view. In 1966, *Insurrection*'s female characters were largely in supporting roles, and during the Golden Jubilee as a whole the Rising was not 'discussed in terms of contemporary women's roles or position in society.'[2]

The omissions of the previous commemorations meant that *Rebellion* had the opportunity to tell the known story of the Rising in a new way and invite discussion around the role of women in the Easter Rising. There was a great deal of potential for the programme. Historical fiction could be used to commemorate the Rising by giving faces and voices to the underrepresented groups that existed in 1916 Dublin. These were people who may not have had their first-hand accounts included in previous histories of the Rising, but who nevertheless had their lives changed by the events of Easter Week. The portrayal of civilians affected by both the First World War and the Rising had the potential to inspire debate about the ethics of the timing and location of the rebellion, while characters representing different factions could display the nuanced differences between the groups that participated. In the context of the 2016 commemorations,

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[1] McGreevy, Ronan, ''Rebellion: what an outsider's eye brings to RTÉ's Easter Rising centrepiece,' *Irish Times*, 2 January 2016

[2] McAuliffe, 'Remembered for being forgotten' p. 50

Managing Director of RTÉ Glen Killane expressed the goal of creating content that would invite discussion while highlighting unity among Irish people of differing backgrounds.[3] An increase in representation had the potential to draw in a diverse audience, some of whom may never have had a prior interest in the history of the Rising. A narrative drama was also likely to have a broader appeal than a historical documentary. Even audiences without a particular interest in history might watch for the story and become intrigued by the history that inspired it, introducing the Easter Rising to a new generation.

In presenting the story of women in the Easter Rising, making a fictional drama presented several advantages. The Bureau of Military History witness statements released in 2003 demonstrated the variety of experiences had by women in the revolutionary era. A fiction series allowed for the creation of composite characters who represented the experiences of many women, without being limited by what a particular historical figure did or did not witness. Additionally, Woods explains the genre's traditional association with femininity, and how terminology was changed to avoid that connotation: 'period' or 'costume' drama became 'heritage' or 'historical' drama.[4] The series was intended to return the female perspective to the story of the Rising, so a traditionally female-coded genre was in keeping with that mission.

However, the greatest benefit of using fictional drama to tell a historical story is the more complete control of mise-en-scène. The visuals in *1916: The Irish Rebellion* primarily consisted of archival footage, and while the filmmakers could control how that material was edited, the actual content of the images was already established. As a concert being broadcast live, *Centenary* was limited by limitations on how quickly sets and costumes could be changed, and the necessity to arrange the production so that the live theatre audience could see all of the action. By contrast, the creators of *Rebellion* could fully control the set design, props, costumes, and framing of each shot. The

[3] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

[4] Woods, *Period Drama*, pp. 16-19

appearance of authenticity helps the audience become immersed in a programme and accept the story as a part of the historical era being portrayed.[5] Close-ups and perspective shots encourage audiences to feel a connection to the characters, balancing the temporal distance with emotional closeness. Considering that one of the roles of commemoration is to help contemporary citizens create 'a "useable past"… where stories involving historical figures and events are used to clarify the present and discover the future.'[6]

Had *Rebellion* made use of all of the advantages it had as a fictional drama, it might have been a strong example of televised historical fiction as a vehicle for presenting and commemorating Irish history. However, this was not what occurred. Initially, excitement for the series was high, but viewing figures steadily dropped, following the first episode.[7] The series was met with negative reviews both in Ireland and internationally, and it was unpopular both among historians and the general public. The most common complaints addressed a lack of historical accuracy and stereotypical portrayals of female characters, as will be discussed throughout this chapter. While *Rebellion* as a series was not effective in meeting the aims of the 2016 commemorations, that failure does not negate the value of television as a vehicle for commemoration. Rather, the drama illustrates the fact that a programme must be developed in a manner that engages with the historiography of an event, as well as appealing to areas of contemporary public interest. In examining the criticisms of *Rebellion*, it becomes clear that the problems was with the execution, not the medium.

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[5] Rosenstone, Robert, *Visions of the past*, p. 211

[6] Edgerton, Gary, 'Television as historian,' p. 4

[7] Knox, Kirsty Blake, 'RTE boss 'not concerned' by Rebellion's drop in viewing figures,' *Irish Independent,* 27 January 2016

Development

When interviewed with the benefit of hindsight, 2016 Managing Director of RTÉ Glen Killane acknowledged that *Rebellion* failed to meet the expectations of the broadcaster or of the viewing public.[8] The drama was intended to bring the female perspective into the Rising, but also to present a story and characters that audiences could relate to and emotionally invest in. As a historical fiction piece, *Rebellion* gave the creators the freedom to create their own characters and scenarios that were specifically designed for this purpose. Killane explained, however, that while a multitude of writers and directors were considered for the project, busy schedules in the months leading up to the centenary created conflicts. By the time writer Colin Teevan and director Aku Louhimies were secured, the amount of time in which the programme could be produced was much shorter than originally intended and Killane expressed his opinion that this time crunch was detrimental to the process.[9] There is a question of whether more lead time would have allowed for additional editing of the script by a larger number of people. More contributors and editors might have identified some of the flaws that ultimately contributed to the poor reception *Rebellion* received and corrected them before the programme was presented to the public. Ultimately, however, the series was produced with a large budget, but an unforgiving schedule.

Another result of the scheduling difficulties was that a director was chosen who had never been involved in any Irish productions before *Rebellion*. The selection of Aku Louhimies to direct was initially treated as a benefit: an outsider bringing a fresh perspective to the Rising.[10] A non-Irish director with no background in history was an unusual choice, but the argument could have been made that an Irish director would

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[8] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

[9] Ibid

[10] McGreevy, Ronan, ''Rebellion: what an outsider's eye brings to RTÉ's Easter Rising centrepiece,' *Irish Times*, 2 January 2016

approach the project with preconceived notions and cultural assumptions, while this would not be the case for a foreign director.[11] The Finnish director was very open about the fact that he did not have any prior knowledge of Irish history and put his faith entirely in the script.[12] In the context of commemorating a contentious historical event, this strategy put *Rebellion* at a disadvantage. Commemorations focus on shared history and national memory, and Louhimies was unfamiliar with the legacy of the Easter Rising in Irish culture. Likewise, editor Ben Mercer, (an Englishman raised in Hong Kong and living in Finland) was provided with so little background information that he had to use Wikipedia to gain understanding of the historical context.[13] A television editor would not be expected to have an extensive background in the subject of the programme, but the decision to rely on a single source demonstrates a lack of effort, particularly when that source is publicly editable and not held to any standard of accuracy.

Additional frustration with Louhimies' approach to the project stems from the fact that there are hundreds if not thousands of resources where one can learn the history of the Easter Rising. Once he was selected to direct *Rebellion*, Louhimies had an opportunity to educate himself both on the history of the event and its enduring relevance in the Ireland of 2016. In the context of 2016, when Irish history was being presented in a larger global context and its international influence was being explored, the viewpoint of a non-Irish director could have been an insightful addition to the commemorative events. This is particularly true of Louhimies as a Finnish director. Like Ireland, Finland is a current member of the European Union after having gained independence in the early twentieth century.[14] Both independence movements had received aid from Germany during the

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[11] Mercer, Ben, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo 23 March 2024

[12] Brophy, Daragh, 'Rebellion's Finnish director on criticism of the drama, and his bid to demystify 1916,' *thejournal.ie*, 17 January 2016

[13] Mercer, Ben, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo 23 March 2024

[14] Stults, Taylor, 'Finland gains independence,' *EBSCO*, 2023

First World War, both countries had Civil Wars immediately following their independence, and both placed a strong focus on providing land for small farmers.[15] Given these similarities, yet the fundamental cultural differences between Ireland and Finland, a Finnish approach to Irish history had the potential to invite a larger discussion about shared histories and national development within Europe. By choosing not to engage with the historiography surrounding the Rising, Louhimies relinquished the opportunity to bring a new viewpoint to the centenary; he also failed to open a conversation on the similarities and differences in Irish and Finnish history as both commemorated national centenaries.

Another element which may have impacted upon the failure of *Rebellion* as a commemorative work was the fact that there was only one writer for the entire series. In an interview conducted with historian and screenwriter Sinéad McCoole, she explained how having more writers involved leads to better quality programming, since there are more people generating creative ideas that can all be blended into the finished product.[16] Additionally, it provides an opportunity for parts of a script that do not work well to be identified and improved upon as more people read it. She cited long-running comedy *The Simpsons* as an example. The series has a very large fanbase, and McCoole attributes this to the fact that many episodes have three or four writers, rather than one. This arrangement allowed the writers to combine all of their senses of humour, provided an opportunity to get rid of jokes that did not land well with the other writers, and appeal to audiences who might respond to the sensibilities of one writer over another.[17] While the example provided by McCoole was a comedy, the same principle can be applied to any series. Individual audience members have different life experiences, which affect the way they interpret what they see.[18] The more writers a project employs, the more likely it is

[15] Ibid

[16] McCoole, Sinéad, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 26 June 2023

[17] Ibid

[18] Brennan, Edward, *A Post-Nationalist History of Television in Ireland*, Palgrave McMillan, Cham, 2019 pp. 43-76

that an audience member will connect to at least one of their viewpoints and engage with the content. In contrast, a single writer brings a single viewpoint informed by their own experiences and opinions. While it is likely that at least some viewers will identify with that specific worldview, it does limit the opportunity to engage with a wider audience. By writing all of *Rebellion* alone, Colin Teevan was at a disadvantage; there was no one else giving input and refining the script with him, and the perspective of the series would only be informed by the views that Teevan held of the events of 1916 and the people involved. As with the director, there is a missed opportunity for *Rebellion* to represent a more diverse set of viewpoints than previous works. Particularly given the emphasis that the advertising placed on *Rebellion* depicting the lives of women, the fact that the entire series was written by a man seems incongruous. Many of the negative reviews of the drama cited its stereotypical portrayal of women as a serious flaw, and women providing input on the screenplay may have prevented that issue.

When the goals that Glen Killane set for the programme are compared to those described by Aki Louhimies, it becomes apparent that they had drastically differing ideas of what *Rebellion* should be. When asked whether RTÉ took the opinions of foreign audiences into account when planning the commemoration programming, Killane replied that as an Irish broadcaster the first goal of RTÉ was always to satisfy Irish viewers.[19] 'Of course,' he added 'if it flies internationally that's great.'[20] Killane approached the project as part of the larger concept of Ireland 2016, where Irish people could examine their past to understand their present and plan their future. Louhimies, however, did not share the idea that the primary aim of the series was to create something meaningful for Irish audiences watching RTÉ. Commenting on the €6m budget (making Rebellion the most expensive project ever undertaken by the broadcaster), Louhimies explained that the budget would be recouped by international licensing as the project was 'good enough to

[19] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

[20] Ibid

travel anywhere.'[21] He also expressed certainty that the series would be shown in his native Finland.[22] While RTÉ was not opposed to *Rebellion* being an international success, it was the national broadcaster of Ireland creating content for an Irish national event. Had the production team been primarily focused on the role that the series would play in the Irish commemorative events and how it would contribute to the overall message of the centenary year as described by the Advisory Group, it may have more effectively met the goals of the commemoration organisers. Instead, the diverging visions that RTÉ and Louhimies had for *Rebellion* resulted in a programme that was too rooted in Irish history to be fully embraced by an international audience, yet lacked the attention to detail and nuance that would have made it a success among Irish audiences.

Understanding the challenges that led to the poor reception of *Rebellion* is significant in understanding the role of television in commemorating history. The series had the potential to entertain audiences, while also creating a sense of connection with the people who lived through 1916. By exploring the areas in which opportunities were missed, one can gain a deeper understanding of what prevents a series from being effective in commemoration, as well as where better decision making could have produced a valuable part of the commemorative programme of 2016.

Rebellion **and the Women of 1916**

One of the most frequently advertised aspects of *Rebellion* was the decision to focus on the female perspective of the Easter Rising.[23] In the years leading up to 2016, the government had conducted a series of town-hall style meetings throughout the country to determine what the Irish people wanted to see and considered most important

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[21] McGreevy, Ronan, ''Rebellion: what an outsider's eye brings to RTÉ's Easter Rising centrepiece,' *Irish Times*, 2 January 2016

[22] Ibid

[23] Kehoe, Emmanuel, 'TV: Women to the fore in this *Rebellion*,' *Sunday Business Post*, 10 January 2016

to the commemoration.[24] One of the most frequent responses was that people were interested in the role that women played in the Rising and wanted to learn more about that aspect of 1916.[25] It was an unsurprising attitude given how significantly the role of women had changed in society over the previous hundred years. Contemporary women held active roles in public life and shaped Irish culture and society just as much as men did. As a commemoration that reflected on the connections between the Ireland of 1916 and that of 2016 it was logical that people would want to know how women contributed to the Rising. McAuliffe describes the academic interest in women's role in the Rising as 'constant recovery, rewriting, and reiteration' since the 1980s.[26] She describes how this work has resulted in a 'real richness of scholarship' on women in the revolutionary era. All of this material meant that a wealth of knowledge on the women of 1916 was available during the production of *Rebellion*.

The manner in which the commemoration events of 2016 acknowledged the public enthusiasm for a female perspective on the Easter Rising was reflected in a 2017 article by Casserly and O'Neill. Looking back on the commemoration, they reflected on 'the broad themes of the 2016 centenary programme' and describe the move towards an 'updated traditional narrative' focused on bringing women and civilians into the story of the Rising.[27] Research on women's role in the Easter Rising had increased alongside the number of women working in the field of history and making an effort to tell the stories of other women.[28] This sentiment was explained by Gillis, who put forth the opinion that women are interested in different elements of history and tell stories differently than men,

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[24] McCoole, Sinéad, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 26 June 2023

[25] Ibid

[26] McAuliffe, Mary, 'Remembered for being forgotten,' p. 60

[27] Casserly, Maeve, and Ciaran O'Neill, 'Public history, invisibility, and women in the Republic of Ireland,' *The Public Historian*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2017, pp. 10–30

[28] Mullally, Una, 'Why women have risen to the top in 1916 lore,' *Irish Times*, 28 March 2016

and female readers and viewers respond more to the stories told by women.[29] The importance of female representation in historical discourse had been established, so it followed that it would be reflected in historical media and popular culture. The issue of female representation in 2016 commemorations would draw the most attention following the Waking the Feminists response to the Abbey Theatre's overwhelmingly male commemorative programme.[30] By the time of the Abbey controversy, however, *Rebellion* had already been made, showing that the programme was not made in response to the Waking the Feminists movement.

The idea behind *Rebellion* was to bring female stories from 1916 into the limelight, with the series airing in the coveted Sunday night time slot, where it was likely to reach the greatest number of viewers. The programme was designed to commemorate the women who experienced the Easter Rising, with the fictional main characters acting as representations of the many women who fought, spied, and struggled to survive during the rebellion. The use of composite characters allowed the producers to acknowledge the women whose names were not included in traditional commemorations, but who did experience the rising as bystanders as well as combatants. From the viewpoint of using television as a vehicle for commemoration, a concept like *Rebellion* did have the potential to entertain, educate, and honour the everyday people who lived through extraordinary events. As will be discussed, however, the execution of the project missed the mark in that it did not present the stories of the women of 1916 in a way that communicated the reality of their experience. A more factual basis would have been necessary in order to contribute meaningfully to the discussions surrounding the legacy of the Rising.

Overlapping with the increased interest in the role of women in 1916 was an increase in research regarding the non-combatants who experienced the Rising. The vast majority of these civilians were women, as the number of men who were away fighting in

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[29] Gillis, Liz, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 18 April 2022

[30] O'Connell, Brenda, 'Waking the feminists'

the First World War meant that the population of Dublin consisted disproportionately of women.[31] *Rebellion* alluded to this imbalance and the war that caused it, with a family discussing their reliance on 'separation money' while the man of the house is at the front, but did not directly portray the changed gender proportions in Dublin.[32] The soldier husband is home on leave, so his previous absence is discussed but the audience actually sees a gender-balanced household. Additionally, several characters interacted with their fathers, brothers, and husbands, and street scenes contained roughly balanced numbers of male and female background extras. Since television is a visual medium where the creators have full control over the world that the audience sees, this could have been presented differently. Fewer visible male characters alongside the discussion of the First World War would have supported the narrative that many Dublin men were away fighting. Instead, the series presented visuals that contradicted the spoken dialogue. As discussed in the chapter on *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, the connection between the Easter Rising and the First World War was being examined more thoroughly in 2016 than it had been in past commemorations. By engaging with the concern over conscription in Ireland and the economic and emotional impact that men being at the front had on their families, *Rebellion* had the opportunity to bring a new, more personal dimension to the experience of the First World War in Ireland. While these topics were briefly mentioned, they were not explored in any depth. This narrative choice not only ignored a significant factor in the timing of the Easter Rising, but also downplayed the struggle of the women and children living in Dublin in 1916. Failing to engage with major social conditions of the era in a meaningful way meant that the series could not appropriately commemorate the people who lived in those conditions.

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[31] Walsh, Fionnuala, *Irish women and the Great War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, pp. 98-102

[32] Ibid

Despite the inaccuracies in demographic portrayals, it is notable that non-combatant Dubliners are depicted at all, as the 1966 commemorations placed their focus exclusively on the active participants in the insurrection. The importance of this representation is discussed by White.[33] She argues that while the combatant women of 1916 have received increased attention surrounding the centenary, 'the true female heroes of 1916 are the poor women who defeated forces much mightier than those of the Crown — hunger, pestilence, poverty — to get their families through Easter Week.'[34] It is understandable that a television miniseries could not depict the full extent of every lived experience in 1916. However, more attention paid to the struggles of impoverished women trying to take care of their families would have both raised discussion about conditions in Dublin at the time and provided more variety in the stories told. Instead, the heroines of *Rebellion* were three young, single, childless women. None of them experienced the desperate conditions of the Dublin tenements, therefore the audience was not asked to empathise with a woman in that situation. The main characters being fictional meant that the creators could have invented someone who represented the common women of Dublin, but that was not the decision that was made. Criticism of the way *Rebellion* did portray poverty will be discussed later, but relegating the topic to a minor subplot instead of making it an overarching theme did not do justice to the experience of 1916 Dublin. For a programme that was designed to communicate the reality of the Dublin that experienced the Rising to a contemporary audience, this was a significant failure.

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[33] White, Victoria. 'True heroines of 1916 forgotten in attempt to feminise the Rising,' *Irish Examiner*, 31 March 2016

[34] Ibid

A Feminist Perspective?

Creating a series that told the stories of the women of 1916 was logical considering the renewed interest in those women among both historians and the public. However, the handling of the storylines created for these characters was not well received, particularly by women. McCoole, who has studied the way that women are depicted in history extensively, explained that focus directed at the love lives of famous women, distracts from their accomplishments and beliefs.[35] In portrayals of famous men from history, they are depicted as leaders, warriors, and artists with minimal attention paid to their personal lives unless those relationships directly influence the plot. For a series attempting to commemorate the women of the Rising and what they experienced, it would not have been incorrect to feature romances. However, the series presented romance storylines in a manner that downplayed the characters' personal devotion to Irish independence. McAuliffe writes that

> [women's] involvement was as political and as ideologically motivated as that of the men of 1916. They were not there because they simply followed their brothers, husbands, lovers, or fathers into battle; they were there because they were committed to the ideal of an Irish Republic in which they had full and equal citizenship, as promised in the Proclamation of 1916.

In a review entitled 'Brave rebels turned into doe-eyed girls fighting over men,' journalist Niamh Horan expressed her disappointment in the series for making romantic relationships the main motivation of two of the three major characters.[36] Series lead Elizabeth Butler was a member of the Irish Citizen Army from the beginning, but more attention was paid to her romance with a fellow ICA member than her principles. The audience was left questioning whether her decision to participate in the Rising was driven

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[35] McCoole, Sinéad, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 26 June 2023

[36] Horan, Niamh, 'Brave rebels turned into doe-eyed girls fighting over men,' *Irish Independent*, 10 January 2016

by her personal relationship or her ideals. Meanwhile, a secondary character only began assisting the rebels after becoming jealous of her romantic interest and his wife.[37] As Horan put it 'a moment of female scorn and the gloves are off, not for love of country but revenge on her lover.'[38] Prior to this moment, she was shown to be unwilling to participate in revolutionary activity, going so far as to vocally defend the British administration in Ireland.[39] In this case there was no room for interpretation, her actions were clearly driven by her emotions regarding her relationship and not her beliefs regarding the country.[40]

In contrast, many historical women who used their administrative positions to become intelligence operatives for the independence movement did so out of devotion to the cause of independence, despite the risk involved. Women were deeply involved in spying and message delivery and that Michael Collins 'simply would not have been able to operate without the aid of his women spies and couriers.'[41] Among these women was Collins' cousin Nancy O'Brien, who worked as a secretary to James MacMahon, director of the Posts and Telegraphs office. According to her son, O'Brien had been the one to bring a replacement Tricolour to Dublin Castle on Easter Tuesday after the original was captured.[42] Similarly, teenager Molly O'Reilly had been involved with the Irish Citizen Army from a very young age and was chosen by James Connolly to raise the flag over Liberty Hall on Easter Monday.[43] She went on to act as a spy during the War of Independence, using her employment at a club popular with British officers to gather

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[37] Ibid

[38] Horan, Niamh, 'Brave rebels turned into doe-eyed girls fighting over men,' *Irish Independent*, 10 January 2016

[39] *Rebellion*, created by Colin Teevan, RTÉ, 2016

[40] *Ibid*

[41] Connell, J.E., 'Michael Collins's women: spies, couriers and mothers,' *Irish Times*, 6 May 2017

[42] Fitzgerald, Garrett, 'The light of other days,' *The Irish Times*, 12 September 1997

[43] 'Molly O'Reilly Easter Rising Stories.' YouTube, uploaded by Easterrinsingstories9729, 20 Apr. 2015

information, transferring when another club became more popular with the men whose information she needed.[44] While *Rebellion* attempted to use the character of May to represent these women, it did not correctly portray their motivations. The women who involved themselves in the Rebellion were equally as informed, involved, and passionate as the men they worked with, and driven by the same desire for independence. They risked their lives in these tasks, and to make the character inspired by them motivated by petty romantic jealousy is ultimately counterproductive to commemorating historical women.

Due to the secretive nature of their actions, women who worked as spies were not honoured in their own time, and later commemorations had overlooked them on the basis of gender. *Rebellion* could have brought their stories to the public and inspired discussion of the real women who worked in secret to aid the rebellion. By misrepresenting historical fact in a manner that oversimplified the known history and did not invite reflection on the women of the time, *Rebellion* went against the commemorative goal of creating discussion around complicated historical topics. However, different decisions being made in the writing and production of the series could have alleviated these concerns. The potential for the drama to depict the main characters in more historically realistic roles that would present previously unexplored perspectives, demonstrated that the problem lay in the execution of the project, not in television as a medium.

The centenary commemorations were designed to represent the diversity of the people involved in 1916, and *Rebellion* made several attempts to meet this goal. While the most obvious is the decision to focus on women, *Rebellion* also portrayed the fact that there were queer women who fought for Irish independence. New research was being published in the mid-2010s exploring the possible same-sex relationships within the nationalist movement. In late 2015 McAuliffe told the *Dublin Inquirer* that historical

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[44] Connell, J.E., 'Michael Collins's women: spies, couriers and mothers,' *Irish Times*, 6 May 2017

evidence indicated that Rising participants Dr. Kathleen Lynn and Madeleine ffrench-Mullen were a couple, as were nurses Elizabeth O'Farrell and Julia Grennan.[45] McAuliffe explained that while male homosexuality was strictly policed, lesbianism remained legal in the 1910s. 'If women lived together, people presumed they were just friends who never managed to find men to marry.'[46] For this reason it was relatively easy for female couples to 'hide in plain sight.'[47] This was helped by the fact that 'the idea of lesbian love was so outrageous that it was not felt necessary to have a law against it,' according to Niall O'Dowd, author of *A New Ireland.*[48]

Rebellion attempted to engage with this new historiography by incorporating it into the story, but did not develop the theme enough to properly commemorate that aspect of women's lives. There was one scene in which radical revolutionary Frances kissed her best friend May, but there was no indication before or after that moment that Frances was interested in May or any other woman, and May was defined almost entirely by her relationship with a man.[49] Without context in the story, this moment did not have any emotional impact and did not communicate anything about the historical era to the audience. Given the recently-explored history of queer relationships within the nationalist movement, as well as *Rebellion*'s use individual characters to represent groups that existed in Dublin at the time, further exploration of Frances' sexuality would have been an opportunity to give a voice to the sapphic women of 1916. Acknowledging the idea without explanation or follow-up, however, created an apparently random moment, rather than an exploration of the lives of women in the revolutionary era. Again, we see potential

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[45] McGrath, Louisa, 'It's time to acknowledge the lesbians who fought in the Easter Rising,' *Dublin Inquirer*, 25 November 2015

[46] Ibid

[47] Ibid

[48] O'Dowd, Niall, 'The major role of gay women in the 1916 Easter Rising,' *Irish Central*, 30 April 2022

[49] *Rebellion*, created by Colin Teevan, RTÉ, 2016

that *Rebellion* did not meet. By not having any kind of meaningful reflection on the queer experience during the Rising, the scene did not effectively serve as a means to commemorate those women and their experience, nor did it invite audiences to learn about the more recent historical revelations and theories regarding homosexuality among the women of the Irish independence movement.

The Real Women of the Rising

Rebellion brought fictional women into the limelight in telling the story of the Rising, but in doing so failed to accurately portray the real women who participated in the rebellion. The most famous woman to fight during the Rising, Irish Citizen Army leader Constance Markievicz, was briefly shown in the first episode of the series but was never brought back into the story. Her significance was not discussed by the characters, and without previous knowledge of who Markievicz was audiences would have no context to understand why attention was brought to her at all. Her disappearance from the story could be attributed to the fact that none of the main characters are stationed at St. Stephen's Green, where Markievicz was posted.[50] However, the main characters were fictional, so the writer could have easily placed one of them under Markievicz's command. Excluding her was a choice, not a requirement to maintain accuracy or focus. One potential reason for the exclusion of Markievicz was that the character of Elizabeth, who is also a woman in the ICA, would share her beliefs and opinions, so the argument could be made that featuring both would be redundant. The same cannot be said of other significant women of the Rising.

The historical woman who appeared most prominently in *Rebellion* was Dr. Kathleen Lynn. Lynn became commander of the rebels at Dublin Castle after the death of Seán Connolly.[51] Fictional character Elizabeth is part of this unit, and portraying her

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[50] Paseta, Senia, 'Markievicz, Constance Georgine,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 2009

[51] Ibid

alongside the real Lynn provided an opportunity to remind audiences that the fictional characters of the series had real-life counterparts who lived through the Rising. In 2016, when the commemoration aimed to bring forgotten figures back into the narrative surrounding the Rising, making Lynn a character would have commemorated a female doctor who risked her life and career to participate in the Rising. However, commemoration requires accuracy. While Kathleen Lynn was devoted to the idea of an independent, socialist Ireland, she was first and foremost a doctor, and her primary role during the Rising was to care for the wounded.[52] While she did become commander of the Dublin Castle/City Hall garrison after the death of Seán Connolly, Lynn was known for her compassion to everyone around her, and was arrested without incident the night of Easter Monday when British forces overwhelmed the City Hall garrison.[53] The version of Lynn depicted in *Rebellion* telling concerned ICA members to return to their posts and be glad that they will die a glorious death was the complete antithesis of the known history surrounding her. Lynn devoted her life before, during, and after the Rising to ensuring the well-being of the people in her care, so her portrayal in *Rebellion* was not only brief, but directly contradicted known facts about her actions and philosophy.[54] Not only was the inaccurate portrayal disrespectful to the memory of Kathleen Lynn, but it also downplayed a conversation that was happening during the 2016 commemorations. The decision of the 1916 leaders to engage in violent insurrection was being brought into question, and the complicated motives of everyone involved in the Rebellion were being examined. Had *Rebellion* shown Kathleen Lynn as a fundamentally caring person, it could have inspired questions about why a person with that personality would choose to join a violent movement. Exploring this decision, and how people like Lynn justified the violence of the Rising to themselves would have complicated the narrative and added nuance to the

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[52] Ó hÓgartaigh, Margaret, 'Lynn, Kathleen,' Dictionary of Irish Biography, November 2013

[53] Wheelock, Harriet, '1916: Diary of rebel doctor Kathleen Lynn,' *Irish Times*, 27 March 2016

[54] Ibid

manner in which *Rebellion* presented the decision-making of historical figures to audiences. By removing the apparent contradictions in her life, *Rebellion* failed to engage with the known history of Kathleen Lynn, as well as the more complicated view of history that the commemorations were centred around.

Another historical woman who may have been alluded to in *Rebellion* was Winifred Carney, longtime secretary of James Connolly and the only woman involved in the seizure of the GPO.[55] Having identified Carney as being equally as devoted to the causes of both socialism and independence as himself, Connolly included her in the small group who were privy to the plans for the rebellion.[56] This was a mark of high trust and respect, as the rebellion was a contentious subject even within independence groups and any risk of being found out was life-threateningly dangerous. For Connolly to want Carney involved in the planning was also a sign of respect for her intelligence and strategic ability. In *Rebellion*, a woman who seemed to be Carney was shown standing alongside James Connolly at the GPO. The phrasing of 'seemed to be' is used because a woman in the GPO with Connolly would be in the same place as Carney historically, but the woman in the series is not named, even in the closing credits.[57] The story of Winifred Carney could have potentially bolstered the idea of commemorating the role women played in the rebellion. Carney was a woman who held the traditionally feminine occupation of typist, yet was one of the last people to leave the burning GPO. In *Rebellion*, however, her role and significance were never explained.[58] She is never shown doing anything. This may be because her true status as secretary and trusted advisor to Connolly would have contradicted a previous scene in which all women at the GPO are ordered to work as

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[55] Quinn, James, 'Carney, Winifred ('Winnie'),' Dictionary of Irish Biography, October 2009

[56] Ibid

[57] *Rebellion,* created by Colin Teevan, RTÉ, 2016

[58] Ibid

cooks.[59] While cooking was among the duties of women stationed in the GPO, it was not their only role. Rising veteran Moira Regan recalled spending some time in the kitchen, but predominantly being sent on errands and running messages between the rebel outposts.[60] This recalls Nancy O'Brien being sent to deliver the flag to City Hall as well.[61] These stories were widely available at the time that *Rebellion* was written, so the decision to portray women being ordered into menial labour appears to be deliberate, despite contradicting history.

In addition to downplaying the role women played in the conflict, the choice to depict Rising leadership as staunchly opposed to involving women in more physical and intellectual jobs is in direct opposition to their known beliefs. James Connolly was very public about his opinion that the liberation of women was vital to the liberation of workers.[62] Connolly and the Irish Citizen Army allowed women to hold the same positions and responsibilities as men, believing them to be fully capable of doing so. By reducing Winnie Carney, the 'typist with a Webley' to an unnamed background role, female presence and agency is removed from the GPO of *Rebellion*, despite the stated goal of paying tribute to the women of 1916. In addition to ignoring these women, the decision to show women being forced into traditional roles fails to properly represent the men who supported them. At the time of the commemoration, when past beliefs were being reevaluated and previously untold stories brought back into the limelight, the feminist beliefs associated with the independence movement were being brought into the public consciousness. Had *Rebellion* depicted the reasons that leaders in the independence movement supported rights for women, as well as the disagreements on the subject

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[59] Ibid

[60] Kilmer, Joyce. 'Irish girl rebel tells of Dublin fighting; Moira Regan, now here, served in post office, the headquarters of the Irish Republic**,** and carried dispatches for the leaders,' *New York Times*, 20 August, 1916

[61] Fitzgerald, Garrett, 'The light of other days,' *The Irish Times*, 12 September 1997

[62] D'Arcy, Fergus, 'James Connolly,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 2009

within the cause, it could have shown the television audience that the rebels of 1916 were socially progressive for their time. James Connolly wrote that the oppression of the Irish working class paralleled the oppression of women in society, and encouraged radical feminist movements.

> None so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter. In its march towards freedom, the working class of Ireland must cheer on the efforts of those women who, feeling on their souls and bodies the fetters of the ages, have arisen to strike them off.[63]

Connolly was not alone in his advocacy for women's rights. When Francis Skeffington married Hanna Sheehy, they both chose to hyphenate their surnames as 'Sheehy-Skeffington,' symbolising their equality in the marriage.[64] The couple worked on the *Irish Citizen* newspaper, which had been founded as a suffragette publication, but frequently featured nationalist content as well. None of these attitudes or opinions among the revolutionary circle were alluded to in *Rebellion*.

Perhaps the most egregious exclusion of a historical figure in *Rebellion* is Elizabeth O'Farrell. Personally selected by Padraic Pearse to deliver the surrender, O'Farrell was chosen specifically because of her gender, as it was believed that any man seen leaving the rebel hideout on Moore Street would be immediately killed.[65] Negotiations were conducted through O'Farrell, and she accompanied Pearse to the official surrender, standing beside him as he agreed to stand down.[66] O'Farrell had been largely ignored in previous commemorations, but in 2016 discussions of bringing women back into the Rising narrative frequently mentioned her as a major example of a vital figure in the

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[63] Connolly, James, *The re-conquest of Ireland*, 1915

[64] Foster, Roy, *Vivid faces*, p. 117

[65] Quinn, James & Clarke, Frances, 'O'Farrell, Elizabeth,' Dictionary of Irish Biography, October 2009

[66] Ibid

conflict who had not previously been widely acknowledged.[67] A photograph of her in which she is largely obscured by Padraic Pearse was frequently referenced as an example or the erasure of women from the historiography of 1916.

Despite the fact that O'Farrell was 'remembered for being forgotten,' she was conspicuously missing from *Rebellion*, which was ironic given the intention of the series to present the Rising from a female perspective.[68] The series had the opportunity to publicly commemorate O'Farrell's bravery to a wide audience. This was not what happened. While programme did show the white flag being brought out on Moore Street, it was in the hands of an armed man in an Irish Volunteers uniform, immediately followed by a parade of everyone who had been inside the building.[69] The scene not only went against the historical record of the event, but did so in a way that would negate all of the planning Pearse put into the act of surrender. A large group of armed men would almost certainly be interpreted as an attack force and fired upon. For a series that made much of its determination to bring a women's stories into the Rising narrative, the surrender scene served as an erasure of the one moment of the Rising that was completely, essentially female. The change did not go unnoticed, with *Irish Times* journalist Bernice Harrison claiming that '*Rebellion* lost its feminist badge in episode four: at a key moment, the rebels surrender at Moore Street, it replaced nurse Elizabeth O'Farrell, who actually carried the white flag, with a man.'[70] While deviations from the historical record are necessary and to be expected in any historical fiction narrative, the key to making those changes effectively is to ensure that they do not change the overall meaning of the

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[67] Cox, Catherine, 'The woman airbrushed from history: Elizabeth O'Farrell,' *Irish Independent*, 4 February 2016

[68] Ibid

[69] *Rebellion*, created by Colin Teevan, RTÉ, 2016

[70] Harrison, Bernice, 'Rebellion review: truth more dramatic than this fiction,' *Irish Times*, 31 January 2016

event.[71] Because Elizabeth O'Farrell was chosen to deliver the surrender for specific reasons, altering the moment in a way that negated the decision making of the time and removed a female presence, went against the ideals *Rebellion* claimed to be representing. This decision was emblematic of a frequent concern voiced about the series: that the effort to create a female narrative around the Rising ended up doing a disservice to the real women of 1916. Notably, O'Farrell *was* represented in both *1916: The Irish Rebellion* and *Centenary*.

When a film or series focused on women does not succeed with audiences, the reaction is typically explained away as viewers not connecting with a female lead. The lead-up to *Rebellion*, however, indicated that this was not likely to be the case for the series. Being released right at the beginning of the 1916 centenary commemorations meant that it was a topic that was fresh for audiences, and there was a steadily increasing interest in the role that women played in the Irish revolutionary era.[72] This led many critics to acknowledge that the criticism and declining viewership of the programme was not due to the decision to feature women as protagonists. In the words of Casserly and O'Neill, 'the ambivalent reception of the female-centric RTÉ drama *Rebellion* was related more to its weak scripting than to its foregrounding of female protagonists.'[73] The scripting issues referred to here may have been a result of a show about women being exclusively written and primarily directed by men. Casserly and O'Neill referred to the decisions leading to this as 'significant systemic issues,' while Sinéad McCoole speculated that the drama would have been 'very different' had there been more of a female presence in the writers' room.[74] While male writers absolutely can write female characters and in many cases have excelled at doing so, writing in the context of a

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[71] Rosenstone, Robert, 'The Historical Film as Real History.' *Film Historia*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1995

[72] McCoole, Sinéad, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 26 June 2023

[73] Casserly, Maeve, and Ciaran O'Neill, 'Public history, invisibility, and women'

[74] McCoole, Sinéad, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 26 June 2023

commemoration was different. The centenary was seen as an opportunity to bring new perspectives into the story of the Rising. *Rebellion* presented a man's idea of what a woman's perspective might have been. While no one in 2016 could know exactly what the women of 1916 thought and felt, a contemporary woman would have had a better sense of what female audiences were interested in watching, and the kind of characters they would relate to. This would have aligned with the commemorative goal of creating connections between the people of 1916 and the contemporary audience. A mainstream television series highlighting the experiences of Irish women was not only telling the story in a new way, but invited contemporary women to reflect on the difference between their own lives and those of the characters. It also had the potential to inspire discussion on the differences between the experiences that men and women had during the Rising. Bringing those conversations to a national television audience would have demonstrated the power of television for engaging audiences in commemorative discussions.

As it was, however, *Rebellion* proved to be counterproductive to the aims of the centenary events. Despite ample opportunity to demonstrate how the rights that women enjoyed in 2016 were fought for by the women of 1916, as well as the support women received from several of the men who planned the Rebellion, the series never drew attention to that topic. Instead, it defined female characters by their relationships to men, reinforcing the outdated idea that important events in history were exclusively male-driven. Had more attention been paid to crafting characters who represented the real, consequential actions taken by the women of 1916, *Rebellion* would have been more effective as a commemorative vehicle. As it was, Cronin expressed his disappointment that the 'mistakes and omissions went against all of the work on women in 1916.'[75]

[75] Cronin, Michael, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 21 March 2024

Contextual Concerns

Before *Rebellion* had even premiered in Ireland, it had already been picked up for international broadcast by the American channel Sundance TV.[76] This was fully expected by director Aku Louhiminies, who told the *Irish Times* that he 'would assume it will travel to England… I'm sure it is going to be shown in Finland.'[77] Given that the director was aware that the series would by shown internationally, it was notable that *Rebellion* did not provide context for the historical events it depicted. There was not a guarantee that international audiences had heard of the Easter Rising before, and even within Ireland, not every viewer could be expected to be well-versed in national history. Commemoration is fundamentally about how historical knowledge is communicated to the next generation and made to fit with contemporary values; therefore it would be expected that a commemorative programme would tell the story of the Rising in a manner that made the significance of the event clear. Without context, audiences found the programme difficult to follow.[78] This is a major missed opportunity: worldwide television availability meant that *Rebellion* could have educated a large audience about the Easter Rising and its impact on history. However, casual viewers being unable to understand why or how the Rising occurred rendered the wide availability meaningless.

There were occasionally attempts to inform audiences why certain places were relevant to the story. Establishing shots of buildings were identified with descriptions such as 'Dublin Castle, headquarters of the British administration in Ireland.'[79] For viewers unfamiliar with Dublin and its architecture and history, it was helpful to have an

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[76] McGowan, Sharon, 'Rising TV series Rebellion is picked up by US TV giant,' *Irish Independent*, 7 October 2015

[77] McGreevy, Ronan, ''Rebellion: what an outsider's eye brings to RTÉ's Easter Rising centrepiece,' *Irish Times*, 2 January 2016

[78] Murthi, Vikram, '*Rebellion* tries to give the epic treatment to the Easter Rebellion, but comes up short,' *The AV Club*, 22 April 2016

[79] *Rebellion*, created by Colin Teevan, RTÉ, 2016

understanding of what they were looking at. Unfortunately, even these basic explanations were limited to buildings. Historical figures were mentioned in dialogue that only sometimes indicated why they were important, while others were depicted with no context, meaning that only an audience already familiar with the key players in the Rising would be able to fully appreciate what they were seeing. Similarly, events and historical ideas such as the Dublin Lockout and Home Rule Bill were referenced, but without explanation. The centenary of the Dublin Lockout was only three years before *Rebellion* was broadcast, and had been marked with a commemorative ceremony and reenactments attended by large crowds.[80] Had *Rebellion* even briefly addressed the causes of the Lockout it would have demonstrated continuity between the events being commemorated over the Decade of Centenaries.

For example, supporting character Jimmy was said to be out of work because he was 'still blacklisted.' Given the time frame and Jimmy's association with the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU), it is likely that he was blacklisted as a result of the Lockout. The Irish Citizen Army, to which the character of Jimmy belonged, was founded to protect striking workers from police brutality.[81] His blacklisting was likely a result of union involvement, but the series never mentioned the lockout or the possible connection the character had to it.[82] Exploration of this topic would have also given a clearer picture of the connection between the labour movement and the nationalist movement, as the ICA shifted its goals to promoting the idea that 'the ownership of Ireland, moral and material, is vested of right in the people of Ireland.'[83] Since the series depicted Jimmy participating in the Easter Rising, the character could have represented how the ICA became increasingly devoted to the nationalist cause. In 2016, when the

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[80] 'Thousands attend Dublin Lockout commemoration,' *Irish Times*, 31 August 2013

[81] Ibid

[82] *Rebellion*, created by Colin Teevan, RTÉ, 2016

[83] O'Casey, Seán, 'Constitution of the Irish Citizen Army,' 22 March 1914

citizens of Ireland were directing their attention to the manner in which the past impacted the present, bringing labour into the discussion would have expanded the conversation about the relationship between working conditions and nationalism.

LA Times critic McNamara went so far as to refer to *Rebellion* as 'an astonishment of context avoidance.'[84] McNamara was not the only person to voice concerns about the need for greater explanation of historical events in *Rebellion*. Vikram Murthi of the American media review site *The AV Club* admired the 'compassion' the series showed towards the Dubliners of 1916, but noted that '*Rebellion* spends little time establishing the political details of the Uprising, like the distinct identities of the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army, and Cumann na mBan... that coupled with the rapid cross-cutting may make some of the particulars difficult to follow for those unfamiliar with the historical context.'[85] *Rebellion* never did explain that the Irish Volunteers and Irish Citizen Army were distinct groups with similar, but not identical goals. The audience was told that main characters Elizabeth and Jimmy were members of the ICA and Frances was a member of Cumann na mBan, but the difference is never explained and they are all seen to be involved in similar actions during the rebellion. Similarly, Cumann na mBan was referenced repeatedly but not explained. Knowing that Cumann na mBan was the women's auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers, but that members were not considered Volunteers, would have added a layer of complexity to the series' examination of the roles women played in the rebellion. By having individual characters represent different groups, a historical fiction drama could easily have explained the differences and similarities in a manner that audiences could clearly understand. By not taking this opportunity, *Rebellion* did its audience a disservice.

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[84] McNamara, Mary, ''Rebellion': squashing Ireland's Easter uprising one more time.' *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 2016

[85] Murthi, Vikram, '*Rebellion* tries to give the epic treatment to the Easter Rebellion, but comes up short,' *The AV Club*, 22 April 2016

For a programme that made much of focusing on a feminist perspective of the Rising, *Rebellion* missed an opportunity to examine the treatment of women in each of these groups and the tensions that it caused at the time. In the early days of Cumann na mBan, the organisation faced criticism for being framed as an auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers instead of a fully equal branch.[86] The ICA, meanwhile, considered women full members. As a programme focused on the experience of women in the revolutionary movement, this difference and the debate it caused would have allowed *Rebellion* to explore another aspect of the female rebel experience. Characters Elizabeth and Frances are in the ICA and Cumann na mBan, respectively, so there was an opportunity for this conversation to occur, but it never did. By excluding the debate over the role of women in nationalist groups, *Rebellion* left viewers without a strong background in Irish history confused as to why women would choose to join one faction over the other. It also failed to portray the fact that even within the independence movement there were varying views on the roles that women should play, both in the conflict and in an independent Ireland. It was a debate that continued long after 1916, and the centenary commemorations provided an opportunity for Irish women to reflect on their changing role in society over the past century. Within the Decade of Centenaries, Irish women achieving the right to vote in 1918 was one of the historical events being commemorated.[87] Had *Rebellion* devoted screentime to the relationship between suffragism and Irish nationalism, it would have engaged with a significant issue in the lives of women while also demonstrating the connection between national independence and voting rights.

Socialism was frequently discussed in *Rebellion*, yet the reasons that so many people in the Irish independence movement were socialists was never explained. Had the series done so, it would have contributed to the commemorative goal of bringing a variety

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[86] Connell, Joseph E.A., 'Cumann na mBan,' *History Ireland*. Vol. 21, No. 3, Wordwell Ltd., 2013

[87] Falvey, Deirdre, 'Vote 100: Events to mark the centenary of the vote for women in Ireland,' *Irish Times*, 10 December 2018

of previously unexplored viewpoints into the story of the Rising. Yet the connection between socialism and nationalism was only given the briefest mention, when Elizabeth acknowledged that the poor of Dublin were primarily impoverished due to economic policies put in place by the British government.[88] The parallels between the relationship Britain had with Ireland and the relationship between business owners and labourers was a major focus of the Irish Citizen Army, but this was not clearly explained in the series. Therefore, a viewer without background knowledge of the intersection between colonialism and economics in Ireland had no way of understanding the connection between wealth and loyalty to the empire. How Elizabeth, who has spent her life benefitting from the unscrupulous business practices of her father, came to be involved with the socialist movement could have been explored further. Historically, women such as Constance Markievicz and Maud Gonne were born into wealthy families yet became ardent supporters of both independence and labour reform. Elements of their biographies could have been worked into the characterisation of Elizabeth to both explain her ideals and encourage conversation about the women who gave up comfortable lives to support their beliefs.

Ignoring the relationship between wealth and British rule also downplays the role that poverty played in inciting people to revolution. A population whose needs were met and lives were comfortable would be unlikely to rebel against the system that supported them. Conversely, a struggling, impoverished population is dissatisfied with the status quo and has much more reason to fight for change. Had the creators decided to explore the parallels between national economic oppression and individual poverty and exploitation, conventions of television drama would have easily allowed for a visual comparison. Professor John Ellis described how ‘the multistranded narrative allows for many more incidental and seemingly accidental “in between” moments of a narrative,

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[88] *Rebellion*, created by Colin Teevan, RTÉ, 2016

allowing writers to explore more of the implications and by-ways of the scenario than would be possible within a tighter feature-film format.'[89] Had the creators of *Rebellion* chosen to depict one plot line in which a character is personally affected by economic oppression, and in other scenes have ICA members discuss oppressive British policy in Ireland, the comparison would have been made clear to audiences in a manner that encourages personal empathy for a larger social situation. Techniques such as multistranded narratives allow television programmes to enhance the story in ways that are unique to the medium. By choosing not to employ those techniques, the creators of *Rebellion* ignored a method for personalising the major societal issues that led to the Easter Rising.

Perhaps the biggest oversight *Rebellion* made in providing context for the Rising was in the vagueness with which it described the reasons for the conflict. The desire to be free of British rule was made clear, but there was not much explanation of specific reasons why the participants in the Rising wanted that freedom. For example, it was specified that some characters were Catholic and others were Protestant, but the audience was never told what the significance of religion is in the context of nationalism. While in Ireland the historical predominance of Protestantism among the British and Anglo-Irish aristocracy and Catholicism among the nationalist working class would have been common knowledge, this was never clarified for a foreign audience. Neither is the long history of suppression of the Catholic religion, with the Penal Laws of the early eighteenth century barring Catholics from becoming teachers, inheriting land, or voting.[90] Even after the repeal of these laws, resentment continued; the Penal Laws had all but ensured that most Catholics were reduced to poverty. Anti-Catholic prejudice continued in Ireland, and during the Famine relief was denied to Catholics who refused instruction in

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[89] Ellis, John & van den Ever, Annie, 'Storytelling and mainstream television today'

[90] Cullen, Louis, 'Catholics under the Penal Laws,' *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, Vol. 1, 1986, pp. 23-36

Protestantism.[91] The religious tension was still strong in 1916, and the rebellion was generally viewed as a Catholic cause. Had the economic effects of religion or the social prejudices against Catholics been depicted in the series, *Rebellion* would have demonstrated to viewers how relevant religious differences were in early twentieth century Ireland. Instead, the closest *Rebellion* came to addressing the issue of religion in the era was when a Catholic priest went into the GPO to offer Last Rites to the wounded, with the implication that the men inside would want Catholic sacraments.[92] However, in 2016 commemorative events were focused on presenting a variety of stories and adding nuance to the 1916 narrative. This aim would have been better served by acknowledging that there were Protestants who supported independence and fought in the Easter Rising, while explaining why it was nonetheless remembered as a Catholic event. This would have been possible with the established characters: Elizabeth is a Protestant, yet also a member of the ICA. Had the series included dialogue explaining why someone might make this choice, it would have brought nuance into the discussion of religion in the rebellion.

The missed opportunity to portray the complicated role of religion in the conflict did not go unnoticed. Critic Mary McNamara expressed disappointment that the series 'doesn't even bother to examine the religious tensions that have defined Irish politics for centuries.'[93] The fact that these tensions continued to be a source of conflict through the twentieth century meant that they affected Irish life within living memory of the intended audience for all of the commemorative events. While the commemoration was generally seen as a time of healing and reflecting on the past, conversations about religion still needed to be handled delicately. Perhaps this was why the issue was not addressed in

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[91] McCarthy, Gerard, 'The disturbing origins of the Irish Famine term "take the soup,'" *Irish Central*, 24 August, 2022

[92] Ibid

[93] McNamara, Mary, ''Rebellion': squashing Ireland's Easter uprising one more time.' *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 2016

Rebellion. However, as a crucial element of the Irish independence story it left a large hole in the story of the Rising depicted in the series.

Beyond religion, there was significant discussion of the First World War in *Rebellion*, but the fear that conscription would be introduced in Ireland was limited to one scene in which a character was handing out pamphlets. In truth that concern actually played a role in radicalising men who would otherwise not have been politically inclined.[94] Additionally, while the argument that men should enlist to defend small nations on the continent appealed to many, others were angered by the irony of being asked to risk their lives to liberate small nations from empires while their own country remained an imperial colony.[95] *Rebellion* depicted brothers, one of whom had joined the British Army while the other stayed in Dublin and joined the ICA. As discussed in the context of *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, the centenary commemorations were reexamining the complex attitudes that Irish people held towards the First World War, and reconsidering the notion that people could either support the War effort or Irish independence, but not both. Instead, *Rebellion* presented the two as mutually exclusive, simplifying the historical narrative. By not engaging with the complicated relationship between Ireland and the First World War, *Rebellion* failed to acknowledge the people whose attitudes fell between the two extremes. It also would have made the audience more sympathetic to the difficult choices men had to make. A character torn between his sense of duty and his republican beliefs, or one who believed that joining the British Army would bring Home Rule more quickly would have created a compelling narrative while remaining true to historical evidence.

In order to commemorate the impact that a historical event has had on the present day, an understanding of what actually occurred is imperative. In the case of *Rebellion*, there is not a clear presentation of what occurred during Easter Week of 1916 or why the

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[94] Destenay, Emmanuel. 'Conscription, rural populations and the dynamics of war and revolution in Ireland (1914–18).' *Rural History*. Vol. 33, No. 1, Apr 2022, pp. 105-117

[95] Jeffery, Keith, 'Ireland and World War One,' *BBC History*, 10 Mar 2011

rebellion happened. Therefore, it fails to engage with a key component of commemoration: demonstrating why an event was important. Had *Rebellion* provided a clear idea of what each faction stood for, why they felt the way they did, and how they believed the Rising would accomplish their goals, audiences would have been left with an understanding of what the Easter Rising was and why it mattered in the present day. Presenting this information in the form of a narrative drama would have engaged viewers who may not have had a strong interest in history, but watched for the characters and story.

The creators were aware of the contextual problems before *Rebellion* was filmed. Director Aku Louhiminies acknowledged that 'the script has elements that are harder for foreigners to understand. I didn't have a background in that sense of these historical characters.'[96] Despite knowing that the potential for confusion abroad existed, Louhiminies and screenwriter Colin Teevan did not amend the script to address this issue. The result was a programme that was difficult to understand for anyone who did not have a firm background in Irish history, domestically or abroad, and required significant research to be comprehensible. The need for clarification led Maureen Ryan of *Variety* to write that *Rebellion* 'regularly fails to provide meaningful context for the actions of Irish patriots hoping to free the nation from British rule during World War 1.'[97] For a programme intended to be the 'centrepiece' of the centenary, *Rebellion* did not engage with the commemorative goal of placing the Rising into the larger story of twentieth century history.

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[96] McGreevy, Ronan, ''Rebellion: what an outsider's eye brings to RTÉ's Easter Rising centrepiece,' *Irish Times*, 2 January 2016

[97] Ryan, Maureen, 'TV review: 'Rebellion,'' *Variety,* 22 April 2016

Questions of Historical Accuracy

While the necessity for historical context impacted international audiences, within Ireland concerns regarding the historical accuracy of *Rebellion* were voiced by academics and television critics alike. Commemoration is based on contemporary interpretation of historical events; a programme that misrepresents what actually occurred prevents audiences from understanding the importance of the Rising and its place in history. While some fictionalisation happens in any portrayal of historical events by necessity, the manner in which it differs from the historical record has a significant impact on whether the work is considered 'accurate.' In the essay 'The Historical Film as Real History,' film professor Robert Rosenstone explained that some films use 'true invention,' where the narrative is not literal fact but retains the overall meaning of the event.[98] Others, however, use 'false invention,' where the filmmakers' portrayal of an event goes directly against known facts in a way that distorts historical discourse.[99] While *Rebellion* does include both forms of invention, it is the latter that drew criticism upon release of the series.

In terms of history, the most controversial scene in *Rebellion* was the Citizen Army's approach to Dublin Castle. Specifically cited in the *Irish Independent* as an example of a 'historical howler,' the scene depicted a group led by Seán Connolly approaching Dublin Castle and demanding that Constable James O'Brien open the gates.[100] O'Brien remained still and verbally refused, leading Connolly to shoot him.[101] While in many cases, the argument can be made that the screenwriter has flexibility in depicting historical events where the details of what happened are unclear, that was not the case for this moment. Actress and ICA member Helena Molony had described the

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[98] Rosenstone, Robert, 'The Historical Film as Real History.' *Film Historia*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1995

[99] Ibid

[100] *Rebellion*, created by Colin Teevan, RTÉ, 2016

[101] Ibid

approach to Dublin Castle in a statement to the Bureau of Military History.[102] Not only was this a first-hand account of the events at Dublin Castle, but it was also a publicly accessible story of a female experience of the Rising. For the creative team of a television series devoted to that topic, the statement given by Molony could provide insight into her thoughts and emotions during the events of Easter Week. However, they seem to have ignored her statement entirely. In contrast to the events depicted in *Rebellion*, Molony recalled approaching the open Castle gates and that 'the Sergeant put out his arm; and Connolly shot him dead.'[103] Seán Connolly's biographer, Lawrence William White, described a similar version of events, in which 'the duty constable, James O'Brien, slammed shut the castle gates against them, Connolly fired what was probably the first shot of the Rising when he shot O'Brien dead.'[104] By changing the known record of O'Brien's action or inaction, *Rebellion* changed the meaning of the scene dramatically. In the television version, O'Brien did not appear to pose a threat to the rebels, and his statement that the gates were unlocked indicates that entry into the Castle would have been possible without his death. This lent a sense of needless violence and cruelty to his shooting, emphasised by protagonist Elizabeth insisting on providing him with medical care while the other Citizen Army members rushed past her. Meanwhile, Molony described how Connolly 'was excited because he had shot the policeman dead' and how initially 'we were all in excitement,' and Molony drew her own revolver.[105] The idea that O'Brien was actively closing the gate meant that the opportunity to enter Dublin Castle was being taken away, and by shooting him Connolly prevented the Constable from locking his group out. Preventing him from doing so was a success from the point of view of the rebellion, so in the moment it was seen as a necessary act of war. It was only on

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[102] Molony, Helena, Bureau of Military History witness statement, (N.A.I., B.M.H., WS 391)

[103] Ibid

[104] White, Lawrence William, 'Connolly, Seán,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 2009

[105] Molony, Helena, Bureau of Military History witness statement

later reflection that Molony realised that she 'did not like to think of the policeman dead' and was glad that other Castle employees and guards had escaped.[106] The shift in emotion that Molony felt over time provides insight into the experience of the rebellion. The way that people feel in the moment can be drastically different when remembering the event after the fact. Reflecting on and reevaluating past events is a part of the human experience.

The killing of James O'Brien was the most frequently referenced example of actual events being incorrectly portrayed in the series, but the second most common complaint about accuracy comes from the presentation of tenement life. Critic Pat Stacey noted the 'unconvincing depiction of tenement life, which was made to look positively comfortable compared to the reality – that Dublin at the time had the worst slums in Europe.'[107] By inaccurately portraying these conditions, *Rebellion* obscured a major reason for people to support the Rising, as well as failing to commemorate the citizens of Dublin who were struggling to survive even before violence broke out in the city.

While it is not uncommon for media to avoid showing the harsh realities of poverty for aesthetic reasons, understanding the conditions among the Dublin poor is essential to understanding the motives for the Easter Rising. Poverty played a major role in creating dissatisfaction and encouraging people to become involved in the independence movement in the hopes of improving their lives. The 1911 census demonstrates the severity of conditions in Dublin- a single house contained eight households, seven of whom lived in single rooms.[108] Tuberculosis was a constant concern, and the reliance on single taps to provide water for an entire house of people led to the spread of dysentery

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[106] Ibid

[107] Stacey, Pat, 'Pat Stacey: Historical howlers are the least of the things wrong with RTE's Rebellion drama,' *Irish Independent*, 15 January 2016

[108] Crowe, Catriona, 'How the other half lived - life for poor women in Dublin in 1911,' *Irish Times*, 17 October 2012

and cholera.[109] Photographs of Dublin children from the period show shoeless children in ill-fitting, heavily patched clothes.[110] Desperation to improve their circumstances led to political radicalisation among the poor, who came to believe that any change would be better than the lives they led. Grandson of a 1916 veteran Tom Stokes explained that an understanding of life in the tenements of Dublin is necessary to understand the Rising, as 'it gives context to the revolution in terms of extreme social conditions.'[111] As a television series, *Rebellion* was uniquely positioned to give audiences a glimpse into the lives of the urban poor. The visual impact of an unsanitary tenement overcrowded with starving residents desperate to take care of their families would have been harrowing, but conveyed how dire the situation actually was for the people living in those conditions. Enough photographs exist from the era for the production designers to create costumes and interior sets that reflected the lived experience in 1916 Dublin. The drama's mishandling of the mise-en-scène downplayed the conditions of tenement life, making the desperation that led to revolution unclear to the audience.

While *Rebellion* did feature a family living in a tenement who talked about their reliance on the 'separation money' paid to the families of soldiers fighting in the First World War to survive, the costuming, casting, and set dressing detracted from the idea that they were among the destitute of Dublin. The introduction to the family showed daughter Sadie beginning to outgrow her shoes and her mother saying that she has set enough money aside for new ones.[112] Each member of the family appeared well-fed, and the son was easily given enough money to buy bacon, eggs, and beer. While the Mahons were certainly not wealthy, their situation lacked the extremism that led people to support

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[109] Murtagh, Timothy, 'Henrietta Street: From Townhouse to Tenement,' *The Irish Story*, 13 June, 2023

[110] Duffy, Joe, *Children of the Rising: The untold story of the young lives lost during Easter 1916*, Hachette Ireland, London, 2015, p. 9, 79, 151

[111] Stokes, Tom, 'The deliberate disaster that is RTE's 'Rebellion,'' *Irish Republic Blog*. 11 January 2016

[112] Ibid

nationalist groups that promised change.[113] As Stokes wrote, 'show the children of the tenements as chubby-faced shoe-wearing healthy kids, and who in their right mind would want a revolution?'[114] That is not to say that there were not people living in the way the Mahons were depicted in *Rebellion*. Many people were. However, the dialogue in the series claimed that this was deep poverty, when the reality was much grimmer. In 2016, a large part of commemorating the Rising was acknowledging and honouring the people of 1916 Dublin regardless of their level of involvement in the conflict. The rebellion was happening on populated city streets and people became involved whether they wanted to or not. The reality of their lives is difficult and upsetting to learn about, but a commemoration dedicated to understanding what happened in 1916 loses efficacy when unpleasant realities are sugarcoated. *Rebellion* inaccurately depicting conditions in Dublin was in direct conflict with the principles of the 2016 commemoration, which sought to look at 1916 from all angles, even those that were uncomfortable to consider.

Discussing his lack of familiarity with the historical events on which *Rebellion* is based, director Aku Louhiminies explained 'I have to trust that it's accurate script-wise if it's gone through historians and they've said it's okay to do this way, then I assume it's right.'[115] However, *Rebellion* does not appear to have been reviewed by any historian. A full crew list made no mention of any sort of historical advisor.[116] By comparison, the War of Independence film *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* credited five military advisors and a historical advisor.[117]While decisions are ultimately made by the creative team producing a programme, the input of a historian can at least guide the writing process by drawing

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[113] Ibid

[114] Stokes, Tom, 'The deliberate disaster that is RTE's 'Rebellion,'' *Irish Republic Blog*, 11 January 2016

[115] Brophy, Daragh, 'Rebellion's Finnish director on criticism of the drama, and his bid to demystify 1916,' *thejournal.ie*, 17 January 2016

[116] '*Rebellion*: Full Cast and Crew,' *Internet Movie Database*

[117] '*The Wind That Shakes the Barley*: Full Cast and Crew.' *Internet Movie Database*.

attention to areas where the script does not line up with the historical record. In some cases this advice may be ignored for aesthetic or plot reasons, though it can also prompt a correction or clarification being worked into the project. By not involving a historical advisor *Rebellion* left the question open of whether the historical discrepancies were the result of deliberate choices or a lack of familiarity with the history. In the context of examining television as a vehicle for commemoration, the decision not to consult a historical advisor for *Rebellion* does a disservice to the medium. An inaccurate, poorly executed series can create academic cynicism around the idea of television as a historical source. However, the failure of an individual programme to meaningfully engage with the historical discourse surrounding a topic indicates poor decision making on the part of the creators, rather than television being unsuitable for complex historical narratives. Conversely, a historical fiction series provides many opportunities to immerse audiences in the world of the programme in a manner that is both entertaining and informative. Discussing the series *Shogun*, Professor of Japanese and East Asian history Michael Thornton claimed that 'everyone is sort of standing in for a broader array of complexity, but I would give an undergraduate lecture on that time that's about at that level of complexity.'[118] The success of historical dramas like *Shogun* and *Chernobyl* demonstrated the potential for television to commemorate historical eras and events. The major difference between these series and *Rebellion* was the involvement of historical experts, whose input may have prevented some of the latter's missteps.

A Rising Programme Without the Rising

While historical inaccuracies and confused audiences certainly did not help *Rebellion*, the most common criticism of the series was directed less towards those factors and more towards the fact that it was a series about the Rising that failed to focus

[118] Mello-Klein, Cody, 'The hit series 'Shogun' is exposing more people to Japanese history. But how accurate is it?,' *Northeastern Global News*, 25 March 2024

on the Rising. Many reviewers claimed that the series felt like a soap opera that was more concerned with the personal drama of the protagonists than the revolution happening around them. Critic Mary McNamara wrote that *Rebellion*

> ignores the actual drama of the times in favour of following three women as they deal with sexism, forbidden love, unwanted pregnancy, and the need for women doctors. All of which are legitimate and potentially fascinating topics, but so is the Easter Uprising, which is why I thought we were here.[119]

This would have been less of a concern had the series not been lauded as the centrepiece of the television commemorations of the Easter Rising. The other commemorative events, whether they were on television, in books, or public events, were all focused on the legacy of the Rising, its meaning in modern Ireland, and acknowledging the sacrifices of the people who lived through the rebellion. Had *Rebellion* engaged with these themes and included the other topics as subplots, it may have contributed more to the centenary. As it was, the multitude of unrelated plot lines felt like distractions rather than important additions to the story.

While the argument could be made that *Rebellion* was both an Easter Rising story and a story of Irish women, a subplot that served neither was that of Elizabeth's brother Harry. His gambling debts, excessive drinking, and robbery from his own father contributed nothing to the main story and had so little to do with Ireland or the Rising that they could easily have been transplanted into another time and location with no adjustments.[120] The character had so little impact that he was only referenced in one review of the show in which he was referred to as 'extraneous.'[121] While not referring specifically to this character by name, the sentiment is echoed by critic Vikram Murthi,

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[119] McNamara, Mary, ''Rebellion': squashing Ireland's Easter uprising one more time.' *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 2016

[120] Ibi

[121] Harrison, Bernice, 'Rebellion review: truth more dramatic than this fiction,' *Irish Times*, 31 January 2016

who expressed confusion at 'the storylines, some of which are so far on the fringes of the central conflict that it's a wonder why they're included at all.'[122] Ironically given this reaction, editor Ben Mercer cited Harry as his favourite character, saying that he was the most fun to watch while referring to series lead Elizabeth as 'a bit boring.'[123] However, in a series with a limited runtime and the stated goal of honouring the women of the Rising, who does Harry commemorate? The centenary programme was examining the impact that the Rebellion had on the Ireland of 2016, while devoting an entire plot line to a character who was not impacted by the Rising even as it was happening downplayed the importance of the event. Had the time the series devoted to his story been spent on developing any of the characters directly involved in the Rising, it may have served the commemorative goals more efficiently.

Even when the story did maintain focus on participants in the rebellion there was notably little combat. Characters had discussions and gave speeches, but the physical danger seemed to come mainly from offscreen snipers.[124] Adelman, who wrote a generally favourable review of the series, questioned why it did not make any reference to the artillery fire in the city centre, or the shelling from the gunboat *Helga* in the river Liffey.[125] The artillery and shelling were responsible for a significant amount of damage to the city, as well as civilian casualties. The explosions caused by these attacks would also have added to the excitement of the combat scenes and given the audience a sense of the risks that the characters were facing. Even *Insurrection*, facing both budgetary constraints and primitive special effects technology, created excitement in viewers by making the battle scenes feel authentically violent.

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[122] Murthi, Vikram, '*Rebellion* tries to give the epic treatment to the Easter Rebellion, but comes up short,' *The AV Club*, 22 April 2016

[123] Mercer, Ben, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo 23 March 2024

[124] *Rebellion*, created by Colin Teevan, RTÉ, 2016

[125] Adelman, Howard, '*Rebellion*: a review.' *Howardadelman.com*, 2 May 2016

Also detracting from the sense of danger was the fact that the streets were shown to be mostly empty, when it is known that there were civilians, looters, and soldiers moving through the city throughout the week. The emptiness of the city in *Rebellion* understated the chaos that witnesses described about when they recall the Rising. For contemporary audiences to whom the Rising was being presented as a momentous occasion, the series made it look less significant than it was, while understating the dramatic effect that it had on the entire city. The sense of smallness was exacerbated by the decision to only show Rising participants at the GPO and City Hall, when there were actually many more places that were held by the rebels.[126] In addition to diminishing the impact of the Rising, not depicting the other garrisons failed to acknowledge the people who fought at those sites. In a centenary that aimed to commemorate everyone whose lives were touched by the Rebellion, cutting entire units out of the story is at odds with the stated goal. This is another area where the problem could have been easily avoided through the conventions of television storytelling. A montage showing combat at the various buildings occupied by the rebels would have communicated the scale of the conflict in a short period of time. Crosscutting would also have allowed viewers to see the reactions of a variety of characters around the city as the rebellion went on. By keeping the onscreen action limited to a few locations, *Rebellion* made the Rising seem more like a minor inconvenience than a major disruption in daily life. In the context of a commemoration that sought to draw attention to the effect of the Rising on every aspect of Irish life and bring more stories from 1916 to the forefront, making the event appear smaller and less influential than it was was counterproductive.

[126] *Rebellion*, created by Colin Teevan, RTÉ, 2016

Conclusion

Rebellion was an ambitious project that aimed to encapsulate the female experience of the Easter Rising, while telling the story of the rebellion in a compelling manner. Even critic Vikram Murthi, who took issue with several elements of the programme, commended the series for 'clear, palpable compassion for those who valiantly fought for freedom and aim[ing] to give their story the epic sweep it deserves.' This interpretation was supported by writer Colin Teevan, who explained that 'it's so important to explore the forgotten voices of those who struggled, suffered, and, in many cases, sacrificed themselves for a cause. Their names are always forgotten. That's the reason I believe that it's so important to listen to them.'[127] The 2016 centenary programme was designed to bring those voices to the forefront and present history from a new perspective, and *Rebellion* had been an opportunity to share that perspective with a national (and international) television audience.

While effort was clearly made to honour the story of the Rising, decisions made in the script and production process served to undermine the narrative rather than enhance it. Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of the series is that it had the potential to be a meaningful part of the RTÉ programming surrounding the centenary. 2016 audiences wanted to learn about the experiences of women and non-combatants in the Rising. RTÉ provided a generous budget and cast talented actors. The outline of the plot touched on a number of topics, such as poverty, labour, the impact of the First World War, and family dynamics that all were significant factors in the decision to join the rebellion or not, and how to react once it began. Had the historical knowledge surrounding these subjects been explored in greater detail, *Rebellion* could have been a meaningful, moving

[127] Stevens, Peter F., ''What would you do?' in 'Rebellion,' writer and co-producer Colin Teevan challenges the audience to ponder what they would have done amid the Rising,' *Boston Irish Reporter*, 31 March 2016

depiction of the difficult decisions and complex situations faced by the citizens of Dublin in 1916.

Despite the negative public and academic reaction to *Rebellion*, it does not discredit the idea of television as a vehicle for meaningful commemoration. Narrative fiction has the potential to engage audiences with history and create an emotional investment in the lives of the people onscreen. The empathy encouraged by historical fiction makes the events feel more human and real, inspiring more thought, reflection, and discussion among the audience, which is exactly what a commemoration should do. Throughout this chapter, the opportunities that *Rebellion* had to be the emotional centre of the centenary television programming have been discussed. Had these different decisions been made, the television series could have embraced the unique visual storytelling opportunities presented by the medium and met the high expectations of audiences. While *Rebellion* did not meet these goals in the centenary year, there is still potential for a historical fiction series set during the Easter Rising to engage with history while creating an emotionally resonant experience for a contemporary audience. It is a part of history that still has many aspects that have not been explored, and new information is still being discovered about the events of Easter Week and their effects on the people of Dublin. Given the number of unique Rising stories that are currently known, and the many that continue to come into the national consciousness, there is a wealth of material on the subject that could be made into meaningful, historically aware narrative drama.

Chapter Five

Centenary

Filmmaker Ken Burns claimed that history ‘is the great pageant of everything that has come before this moment and there could be nothing more important than an awareness of what went before us, because without that awareness we have no sense of where we’ve been in order to know where we’re going.’[1] The idea that each historical moment is a step on a path towards the present and future was a major theme in *Centenary,* a concert that RTÉ broadcast live on Easter Monday of 2016. Described by Glen Killane as 'the culmination of RTÉ 1916,’ *Centenary* sought to portray the previous hundred years of Irish history with an emphasis on the ways in which the events of the past had shaped the present.[2] The programme featured song, dance, and spoken word segments, and was originally pitched as both a commemoration of the Rising itself and a celebration of 'the country the Rising delivered.'[3]

Cilian Fennel, the creator and producer of *Centenary*, explained that he wanted to honour the Rising while also expressing the idea that nation-building was a process that took many years. He told the *Irish Independent* 'our parents gave an awful lot. It was important to acknowledge their courage, vision and sacrifice.'[4] While *Centenary* was broadcast on Easter Monday and developed specifically for the 2016 commemorations, it served the additional purpose of commemorating the people who built the modern Irish nation between 1916 and 2016. This wider focus not only put the Easter Rising into a larger historical context, but also demonstrated how television can effectively

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[1] Thelan, David, ‘The movie maker as historian: conversations with Ken Burns,’ *The Journal of American History*, Volume. 81, No. 3, The Practice of American History: A Special Issue, December 1994, pp. 1031-1050

[2] Brosnan, Seán, 'Acclaimed ‘Centenary’ concert book-ends RT’És Easter Rising programming.' *IFTN.ie*, 29 March, 2016

[3] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

[4] Power, Ed, 'The Rising’s ‘Riverdance’ Moment,' *Irish Independent*, 30 March 2016

commemorate broad time periods, not just specific events. Fennell explained that he designed the show with four 'beats': awakening, arising, aspiring and arriving.[5] By following through the course of Irish history in this way, *Centenary* was able to present a wide range of images and songs that have become ingrained in the Irish psyche and connect them through the theme of the Rising. The use of music to express these ideas brought them to the audience in a way that still felt relevant, even when discussing events that occurred a hundred years ago. Fennell purposely chose not to use a voiceover narration, as he felt that it would create a separation and give a sense of the events portrayed as being distinctly in the past, while he wanted the audience to interpret the work in relation to their own lives.[6] This is in contrast to the traditional documentary form used in *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, where the narration gives 'the impression of objectivity.'[7] While the primary purpose of the documentary is to inform the viewer, *Centenary* appeals to audiences on an emotional level and makes no pretence of objectivity. Without a 'voice of God' narrator guiding the experience, audiences were given more room to engage with *Centenary* as an expressionist piece rather than a series of truth claims.

While *Centenary* was both a live performance and a television broadcast, this analysis will focus on the role that the television version played in commemorating the Rising. Hall had praised television's 'relay function,' explaining that 'via television, we can be in the theatre, Covent Garden, the Festival Hall.'[8] In this case, the viewer was able to be 'in' the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre from anywhere in the world. The programme was initially broadcast on RTÉ, and was therefore available internationally on the RTÉ iPlayer,

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[5] Fennell, Cilian, 'History, storytelling, and the 1916 Rising - in conversation with Cilian Fennell,' 6 October 2021, virtual, Irish History Research Group, University of Edinburgh

[6] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

[7] Beattie, *Documentary screens*, p. 21

[8] Hall, Stuart, Writings on media: history of the present, Duke University Press, Durham, 2021, p. 220

with the understanding that the television version would remain available to audiences long after the centenary year had passed. Additionally, the television version had the benefit of editing. While audiences who attended the in-person concert were able to view the segments that were filmed at the Garden of Remembrance and Kilmainham Gaol, these were presented on a screen behind the stage. For television audiences, however, the footage from those locations is directly edited into the programme. Without a second screen to separate them from the action, television viewers had an advantage. The television camera allowed audiences to feel both physically and emotionally closer to the events being depicted. Instead of watching the live audience watch those performances, television viewers saw everything directly. Additionally, the ability of the camera to zoom in and focus allowed audiences to see details that may not have been as clear in person or on the screen within the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre. Television audiences could see the facial expressions of the performers much more clearly, which was a significant benefit in a commemoration devoted to human expression and connection. By making use of the stylistic techniques available in television, the creators of *Centenary* were able to provide a more compelling visual piece than merely placing a camera in the theatre to try to recreate that experience.

While the television version was able to enhance the experience of *Centenary*, there was a live concert audience, and their experience needed to be considered when developing the programme. *Centenary* included several elements that are associated with more traditional, in-person commemorations. These included a speech from President Higgins, a tribute to the dead at the Garden of Remembrance, and musical performances. Given that it was selected to air during primetime on Easter Monday itself, it is understandable that *Centenary* included the most traditional forms of commemoration alongside more modern, innovative segments. This format meant that *Centenary* could appeal to a wider national and international television audience while still meeting

expectations of what a commemoration 'should' be. It called up images of 1916, but also linked the commemorations of 2016 with previous Rising anniversaries, creating a visual line through the history surrounding the Rising and its legacy. The concert format and non-narrative presentation meant that *Centenary* avoided some of the major challenges of television presentations of history. Since the abstract presentation made it clear that audiences were not seeing a literal recreation of history, there was less pressure to present details accurately. However, the decision to rely on symbolism created a new challenge. The segments would need to provoke an emotional reaction in the audience, while still being clear about what exactly the viewer was seeing. Particularly in a project that spanned a century of history, clarity would be necessary for viewers to understand what was being commemorated and why it still mattered a century later.

Centenary was presented as a series of connected segments that combined to tell the story of Irish history over the previous hundred years. While there were elements that were definitively celebratory of Irish cultural achievements, the concert did adhere to the policy RTÉ set of 'commemoration rather than celebration' as far as the Rebellion itself. The segments devoted to the Rising and its immediate aftermath have a sombre tone, while the more joyful parts are those devoted solely to cultural accomplishments. The main themes throughout the programme were music and storytelling, which Glen Killane described as the major unifying elements of Irish culture.[9] By focusing the historical information through this cultural lens, he explained, the goal was to create something that would be meaningful to all Irish people regardless of political, religious, or ethnic background.

Developing *Centenary*

[9] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

Cilian Fennell had a clear vision for the programme even before being approached by RTÉ with the funding to bring it to life.[10] His interest in the subject of Irish history (specifically the more human aspects of 1916) was inspired by his father, historian Desmond Fennell. Cilian Fennell described a paper his father authored entitled 'The Humanism of 1916,' which he explained had served as a guideline during the planning of *Centenary.*'[11] In the article, Desmond Fennell wrote that the independence movement in 1916 was centred around the concept that an independent republic was necessary for the Irish people to fully realise their own potential.[12] He cited accounts from French travellers writing in 1835 and 1908. The earlier writer commented on the 'total absence of self-respect and personality' of the Catholic Irish and claimed that this was 'the direct result of his former condition,' referring to the recently repealed Penal Laws.[13] The visitor in 1908 described the Irishman as someone who 'lacks confidence in himself, initiative, and energy, and has lost the habit of looking things in the face.'[14] He also attributed this attitude to the conditions created by colonialism, claiming that the Irishman's 'soul is still a serf.'[15] Fennell carried this idea forward to the time of the Easter Rising by including quotations from Padraic Pearse and James Connolly reinforcing the idea that the Irish people were 'broken' by centuries of colonialism and that independence and economic opportunity were necessary for 'the Irish race to recover its self-respect.'[16] The influence of this article is evident throughout *Centenary*. The concert opened with a tribute to the Celtic Revival of the early 1900s, in which ancient Irish heritage was celebrated and brought to public attention. While each segment focused on a different aspect of

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[10] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

[11] Ibid

[12] Fennell, Desmond, 'The Humanism of 1916,' *Tinteán.org.au,* 6 July 2016

[13] Ibid

[14] Ibid

[15] Ibid

[16] Ibid

twentieth-century Ireland, the unifying theme was a pride in distinctly Irish cultural expression: the self-respect that was believed to have been lost for at least a century. Fennell sought to bring that renewed personality and spiritual freedom to the screen in *Centenary*, and while it was not a celebration of the Rising as an event, it was a celebration of the culture that Ireland was able to revive and build on in the wake of independence.[17]

To ensure that the concert could be fully appreciated by audiences unfamiliar with the context and nuance of Irish history, RTÉ made a programme for the event available digitally. Appropriately, the guide was authored by Theo Dorgan. While Dorgan is primarily a poet (and lists this first of his accomplishments on his website), he has also edited a number of books on the topics of Irish history and politics.[18] As both an artist and a historian, he was uniquely suited to write the programme guiding the audience through an artistic expression of twentieth century Irish history. Additionally, many of the Easter Rising leaders were themselves poets and educators, positioning Dorgan as a continuation of the tradition of artists framing Irish national identity. The programme contained an explanation for each segment providing context and insight into the reason for its inclusion. It also provided clarity for some of the more abstractly depicted segments- while some were self-explanatory, many were presented in a symbolic fashion and the guide proved helpful in clarifying what was occurring onscreen. The dedication to opening a conversation without telling audiences what they 'should' think or feel was also evident in the guide. Descriptions were statements of fact without opinion or commentary. In the introduction to the guide, Dorgan described *Centenary* as:

> today's generation of artists [telling] the Centenary story in song, dance, and poetry' and stated that the aim of the concert was to 'honour the past,

[17] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

[18] 'Poetry,' *Theodorgan.com;* 'Books edited,' *Theodorgan.com*

> celebrate the present, and remind ourselves why we should be hopeful for the future.[19]

The reference to 'today's generation of artists' connected to the focus on culture as a unifying factor in the contemporary era as well as hearkening back to the number of artists who participated in the rebellion. By phrasing his introduction in this way, Dorgan created a connection between the historical figures being honoured and the creators of the programme. Both strove to promote a distinctly Irish cultural heritage by calling on the past; those in 1916 looked to the times of Gaelic Ireland for inspiration, while in 2016 Irish history of the twentieth century formed the basis for the art being created for the concert. The idea of Ireland as a country of creatives was a major theme in the concert, and the finale song 'We Are the Music Makers' put a modern tune to a nineteenth-century poem, reiterating the idea of Ireland as a nation that both historically and currently places a high value on art and artists. It is appropriate, therefore, that *Centenary* used the medium of television to tell this story. Television provides a platform for artists and writers to share their creativity with a wide audience, with RTÉ in particular sharing Irish creative voices with the rest of the country and the world.

For a programme celebrating the long tradition of storytelling in Ireland, a hybrid concert-television broadcast was perhaps a more meaningful format than was acknowledged at the time. Ireland has an oral storytelling tradition that 'involves visual and auditory dimensions that tend to heighten its emotional and dramatic impact…. It brings oral literature closer to dance, music, and drama, which are more enjoyable than the fixed forms of literature.'[20] For the audience who gathered to see *Centenary* live, the parallel to a traditional culture of people coming together to witness this style of storytelling is apparent. At first glance this would not appear to be the case for the

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[19] Dorgan, Theo, '*Centenary* online programme,' *RTÉ.ie*, 28 March 2016

[20] Khasawneh, Hana F., 'The Irish oral tradition and print cuture,' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Volume 103, No. 409, Changing Ireland, Spring 2014, pp. 81-91

television audience, viewing the same material, but through a much more modern medium. However, Ken Burns argued that television is an 'electronic campfire,' where history is 'sung' in the 'Homeric mode.'[21] This idea was echoed by Edgerton:

> The popular history tradition is actually as old as the historical impulse itself. The first historians, dating back to the ancient Hebrews and Greeks, were poets and storytellers, and their original approach to the past was to marshal whatever evidence and first-person stories they could into an all-inclusive historical epic[22]

In the case of *Centenary*, it was clear to the television audience that the programme was being performed on a stage for a live audience, inviting viewers to put themselves in the place of the live audience. The concept of coming together to see and hear history being performed allowed the television audience to participate in an ancient model of learning. It also provided an opportunity for the presenters of history to return to 'their role as tribal storytellers who craft tales about the past in which the nation can find its identity.'[23]

As a spectacle comprised of eighteen segments, *Centenary* presented a range of genres within one performance. 'Awakening' is a dance performance, while 'Grieving' is a music video. 'It Ain't Easy' and 'You Raise Me Up' are miniature compilation documentaries, and 'Music Makers' is a classic concert film in that the viewer sees a band perform onstage. Rather than creating confusion, however, the variety of genres may be a benefit to the programme. The more abstract nature of some segments might have appealed to some audience members, while others may have preferred the more literal pieces. Much as the commemorations as a whole were designed to appeal to a plurality of viewpoints, *Centenary* includes a variety of formats, increasing the likelihood

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[21] Cripps, Thomas, 'Historical truth: an interview with Ken Burns,' *The American Historical Review*, Volume. 100, No. 3, June 1995, pp. 741-764

[22] Edgerton, Gary, 'Television as historian,' p. 8

[23] Ibid

that at least one of the segments would resonate with every viewer. MacAloon described the spectacle as a 'public form of thinking out, of telling stories about growing ambiguities and ambivalences in our shared existence.'[24] By representing these ambiguous situations in multiple ways, *Centenary* encouraged audiences to 'think out' the content from a number of angles and interpret the content in the way that resonated best with themselves.

Celtic Legend and 1916

The first segment of *Centenary* used this ancient method of storytelling to tell a very ancient story. Entitled 'Awakening,' it began with a title card explaining that Ireland had been 'in slumber,' but that at the beginning of the twentieth century 'the spirits and symbols of her past begin to awaken.'[25] The text refers to the movement known as the Gaelic Revival, where the language, music, and myths of ancient Ireland were revered as a connection between contemporary Irish people and their ancestors.[26] The movement was staunchly nationalist and promoted reclaiming Gaelic culture as a way of rejecting English cultural intrusion in Ireland.[27] This was a sentiment shared by many writers of the era, including Padraic Pearse. He had been writing essays on Gaelic culture since he was a teenager and was a devoted member of the Gaelic League with a strong interest in Celtic legends, particularly the story of Cúchulainn.[28] Pearse believed in a continuity between the ideals of Irish revolutionaries and their Gaelic ancestors, a belief that was embraced by many of his followers. This is the first of many instances in which *Centenary* alluded to beliefs and cultures of the past directly guiding the present throughout

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[24] MacAloon, John, 'Olympic games and the theory of spectacle,' p. 247

[25] Dorgan, Theo, '*Centenary* online programme,' *RTÉ.ie*, 28 March 2016

[26] Maume, Patrick, 'Hyde, Douglas (de Híde, Dubhghlas),' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 2009

[27] Ibid

[28] Lee, JJ., 'Pearse, Patrick Henry,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, November 2013

twentieth-century Irish history, a major theme in the piece. It should be noted, however, that Celtic mythology was part of an oral tradition, and the written versions that were available in both 1916 and 2016 were predominantly written in the late nineteenth century. These accounts were heavily influenced by the values of the era in which they were written. The inclusion of these references in *Centenary*, then, is less of a tribute to Gaelic Ireland itself than a commemoration of the manner in which the revolutionaries of the early twentieth century looked to the past to inform their vision for the future.

Before *Centenary* even began, the opening titles established a link between the Easter Rising and Celtic legend by combining imagery of the Proclamation and burning GPO with swans and ravens, both of which are significant in legends strongly associated with the Irish Independence movement. While attention is not specifically drawn to this imagery in the introduction, both swans and ravens make repeated appearances in *Centenary*. This is one of the areas in which the visual medium of television benefited the creators. Background images allowed the creators to introduce motifs in a subtle manner. In the case of the swan imagery, the allusion is to the story of the Children of Lir, who were transformed into swans by their jealous stepmother and were made to wait nine hundred years before becoming human again.[29] The story resonated with the nationalists of the early twentieth century, as Ireland had been under foreign rule for close to nine hundred years in 1916, and the notion of freedom after such a long period of suffering appealed to nationalist sensibilities.[30] Incorporating the legend also related to Fennell's interest in independence as a catalyst for the Irish people reclaiming their own culture and self-determination. As an introduction to *Centenary*, alluding to the Children of Lir established the idea that Irish independence and nation-building was a long process that had followed centuries of oppression. Since the primary focus of the concert was 1916

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[29] Gregory, Augusta, 'Fate of the Children of Lir,' from *Gods and Fighting Men*, 1904

[30] Kelly, Fergus S., *The Life and Work of Oisín Kelly*, Derreen Books, Killarney, 2015

and the Ireland that it created, referring to the legend in the opening acknowledged that history quickly, though symbolism, to bring audiences to the ‘transformation’ that began with the Easter Rising.

An additional connection between the Children of Lir and commemoration of the Easter Rising was created in 1966 when it was announced that sculptor Oisín Kelly would be depicting the transformation of the Children of Lir in a piece to be placed in the Garden of Remembrance in Dublin.[31] Kelly claimed to have drawn inspiration from the William Butler Yeats line that 'men at certain moments of history are transformed utterly' and felt that the Easter Rising was one of those moments; therefore transformation was an appropriate theme for the work.[32] An *Irish Independent* article announcing the statue also explained that 'the swan is the generally-accepted image of resurgence, triumph, and perfection, with undertones of regal sadness and isolation, which is the image the sculptor would wish to give.'[33] The image fit well with the existing connection between the legend and the rebellion, where Ireland had been seen as the mournful swan that was transformed by the Rising into a triumphant being. The statue appears later in *Centenary,* during the 'Grieving' segment, where singer Iarla Ó Lionáird was positioned directly in front of the statue. This segment included several close-up pans over the statue set to the song 'Caoineadh na dTrí Mhuire,' a traditional song about the grief of Christ’s mother after his death. In the online programme designed to accompany *Centenary*, Theo Dorgan explained that the song 'becomes a universal lament giving voice to all grieving mothers who have lost a child.'[34] Coming immediately after the reading of the last letters that the rebel leaders wrote to their loved ones, including several of their mothers, *Centenary* uses

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[31] Approval of ‘Lir’ Sculpture,' *Evening Herald,* 26 February 1966

[32] ''Approval given to controversial sculpture,' *Irish Independent*, 28 February 1966

[33] Ibid

[34] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,' RTÉ.ie, 28 March 2016

the combination of lyrics and imagery to acknowledge both the people who lost their lives in the struggle for independence as well as those who were left behind to grieve them.

The final connection between *Centenary* and the legend of the Children of Lir is related to the role of music in each. After being transformed into swans, the children were allowed to retain their human voices and became known for their singing. In the 1904 translation by noted Gaelic Revivalist and nationalist Lady Gregory, the curse on the children included the caveat that 'there will be no music in the world equal to [yours]; and your own sense and your own nobility will stay with you.'[35] The preservation of distinctly Irish music despite centuries of imperialism and the value placed on Irish music in 2016 both domestically and abroad created a through-line from the Gaelic Era, through the independence movement, and into modern Ireland. This line also resonates with the assertion of Desmond Fennell that independence rekindled self-respect among the Irish people. The nobility referred to by Lady Gregory may have been dormant, but it was never entirely gone and was revived in the wake of independence. By putting Irish music and dance at the forefront of *Centenary*, the creators demonstrated the idea that Irish musical tradition had never been lost, and was in fact flourishing in the Ireland of 2016. Doing so not only commemorated the Gaelic origins of Irish cultural tradition, but also the people of the Gaelic Revival movement who sought to preserve and revitalise that culture for themselves and their descendants.

While the story of The Children of Lir is never directly presented or even spoken of in *Centenary*, the recurring images of swans create a connection between the legend and the themes associated with the Easter Rising. From a commemorative standpoint, the symbolism associated with the legend honours the past struggles of the Irish people to regain their independence and humanity. It connects their efforts to those of the 1916 leaders, who had the same vision and considered their own actions to be a continuation

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[35] Gregory, Augusta, 'Fate of the Children of Lir,' from *Gods and Fighting Men*, 1904

of previous efforts to fight for independence. By connecting the nationalist movement with the promotion of Irish cultural practice, particularly music, *Centenary* positioned itself as a part of a larger tradition of using song and dance to commemorate the independence struggle. It also brought those traditions into the twenty-first century by using the medium of television to represent an ancient story, connecting audiences not only with the past, but with each other through a shared experience.

While the links to the Children of Lir were largely metaphorical, *Centenary* featured a far more direct comparison between the rebels of 1916 and the Celtic hero Cúchulainn. Referencing Cúchulainn in the context of commemorating the Easter Rising was not an idea original to *Centenary*- in 1935 Oliver Sheppard sculpted *The Death of Cúchulainn*, which was was chosen as the commemorative artwork for the GPO.[36] In an article about the meaning of the statue in the context of the Rising, Tracy explained that Cúchulainn 'went into battle to obey a complex code of honour and to become a heroic exemplar, knowing that to do so would bring about his own death.'[37] It was the same philosophy embraced by the leaders of 1916, especially Padraic Pearse. He had been devoted to the legend of Cúchulainn since childhood and viewed him as the ideal of what an Irish warrior should be, including his brave death and inspiration of future generations.[38] *Centenary* acknowledged the connection between 1916 and the death of Cúchulainn almost immediately. The opening titles feature ravens alongside images of the GPO and Proclamation, calling to mind the raven that perched on the shoulder of the warrior and indicated to those around him that he had actually died.

While there was a long tradition of celebrating the martyrdom of Pearse and his comrades, Glen Killane explained that the RTÉ committee overseeing the 2016

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[36] Murphy, Paula, '1916 Centenary: warriors and statesmen,' *Irish Arts Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Irish Arts Review, 2016, pp. 112–15

[37] Tracy, Robert, ''A statue's there to mark the place': Cú Chulainn in the GPO.' *Field Day Review*, Vol. 4, Field Day Publications, 2008, pp. 202–15

[38] Ibid

commemorations did not want that to be a theme of their efforts.[39] The world had changed significantly since 1916, and violence as a means of political change was viewed in a much more negative light then it would have been in 1916 or even into the 1940s. Celebrating a death, even one that the deceased saw as necessary and glorious, felt out of place in the world of 2016. The executions of the leaders could not be ignored, as they were a major part of the story of the Rising and were the catalyst for a shift in public opinion that gained more sympathy for the nationalist cause, but a great deal of care was taken to ensure that they were not glorified. Just as those deaths could not be ignored, the death of Cúchulainn could not be ignored as the statue in the GPO has created a link between the two in public perception. By including the ravens in the opening titles the story was alluded to and included, but not celebrated or given focus in place of twentieth-century Ireland, which was the true focus of the programme.

Within the production itself, the Cúchulainn segment of *Centenary* did not portray his death at all, but focused on his childhood training and feats as an adult, which were represented by an acrobatic dance performance.[40] While the segment was largely energetic and joyful, throughout his adult life a raven swooped over the stage, representing the impending doom of the legendary hero. However, his dance ended in a triumphant pose before he was flanked by Irish Volunteers and exited behind them. This transition visually communicated Pearse's idea of the 1916 rebels as direct heirs to the legacy of Cúchulainn. They embraced the choice of 'a short life and immortal deeds over a long life spent in ordinary pursuits,' as the *Centenary* programme explained.[41] This moment in the concert also served as an illustration of Higgins observation that 'in his writings Patrick Pearse had located himself within Ireland's mythical, nationalist and religious traditions and the Proclamation explicitly set the Rising within a longer sequence

[39] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

[40] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[41] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,' RTÉ.ie, 28 March 2016

of rebellions.'[42] The movement from Cúchulainn to 1916 also symbolised the movement over the course of the 1910s from the Gaelic Revival and a nostalgia for Ireland's lost Celtic past to contemporary action intended to secure its future as a free nation.

Centenary was created to commemorate the Easter Rising, but also the distinctly Irish culture that arose from the creation of an independent Irish state.[43] By beginning the programme with a series of allusions to Celtic folklore, the concert paid tribute to the pre-colonial Irish culture. This heritage was considered aspirational by the leaders of 1916, as it represented a version of Ireland that had not been blended with English cultural influences, and its inclusion in *Centenary* provided the perspective of the Gaelic Revivalists who sought to return Ireland to its cultural roots. Celtic mythology was also emblematic of the form that nationalism took in the early twentieth century, thus it was an effective beginning to set the scene for a programme designed to commemorate the entire century through the lens of the Rising. For a contemporary audience it raised the question of how much influence the culture of Gaelic Ireland had on modern life, and how much that was even possible.

Protest and Social Upheaval

Before moving on to its presentation of the Rising itself, *Centenary* included a segment entitled 'Protesting' which addressed the number of political issues Ireland was facing in the years leading up to 1916.[44] Irish Volunteers marched across the stage throughout the segment as a reminder that all of the other factors being depicted contributed to the increase in nationalist sentiment which ultimately led to the Rising. The

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[42] Higgins, Roisín (2016) ‘'The Irish Republic was proclaimed by poster': the politics of commemorating the Easter Rising', in R.S. Grayson and F. McGarry (eds.) *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 43–62

[43] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

[44] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

song selected for this piece is 'The Minstrel Boy,' a Thomas Moore poem set to music that was originally written about the Rebellion of 1798.[45] The story of a young Irish warrior-poet who would rather destroy his harp than allow it to 'sound in slavery' was a deeply appealing message to a generation of nationalists who were plotting an armed rebellion despite themselves being predominantly poets and writers.[46] Setting the 'Protesting' segment to this particular song ties depicted some of the issues that created poverty and 'slavery' in Ireland in the early 1910s and establishing why it was deemed necessary to destroy parts of Dublin (the harp) to spare it from those conditions. The segment highlighted the labour movement, women's suffrage, and Irish language revival movement.

The first social issue presented in 'Protesting' was the push for the rights of workers in the early 1910s. Throughout this segment, the face of James Connolly was projected behind the performers.[47] *Centenary* was designed to avoid glorifying the leaders of the Easter Rising for their violent actions, but 'Protesting' celebrated Connolly in his role as a protector of the working class. The passion Connolly had for both socialism and nationalism were deeply connected, and he believed that Ireland would never be truly free until it was a socialist republic.[48] In an 1899 article for the *Workers' Republic*, he expressed the belief that establishing an independent Ireland based on capitalist values would lead to the same problems for the poor that were already being experienced. In a satirical conversation between a worker and a capitalist nationalist, Connolly wrote 'And, says the town worker, after we have crushed the Saxon and freed Ireland, what will we do? Oh, then you can go back to your slums, same as before.

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[45] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,' RTÉ.ie, 28 March 2016

[46] Moore, Thomas, 'The Minstrel Boy,' *Irish Melodies*, Boosey & Co, London, 1895

[47] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[48] D'Arcy, Fergus A., 'Connolly, James.' Dictionary of Irish Biography, October 2009

Whoop it up for liberty!'[49] The concern expressed by Connolly was the cause of a great deal of debate throughout the twentieth century.[50] An RTÉ article examining the role of class in the Civil War explained that while there were a variety of factors that influenced whether people backed the Treaty or not, there was a tendency for working class people to side with the Anti-Treaty IRA.[51] The role of socialism in post-independence Ireland was also a major theme in the 2006 film *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*. Set during the War of Independence and Civil War, several main characters join the Anti-Treaty IRA specifically because of their belief that Ireland will not be truly free until it is a socialist republic.[52] As previously discussed, historical media reveals as much about the creators as it does about the era portrayed, and director Ken Loach is a longtime outspoken socialist.[53] What makes his portrayal of the topic in *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* resonate is that the concerns voiced by both the characters of the film and Loach in contemporary interviews echo those of Connolly. By including the labour movement and socialism as major causes of the Rising, *Centenary* drew attention to the fact that this debate has been affected the past century of Irish history and continued to be a source of tension in 2016. By focusing on the association between Connolly and socialism in this segment, the concert reminded audiences that historical figures are complex people whose lives should not be defined by a single event or action.

Despite the fact that the Irish Citizen Army was largely remembered for their participation in the Easter Rising, the group was actually formed in 1913 during the Dublin

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[49] Connolly, James, 'Let us free Ireland!', *Workers' Republic*, 1899

[50] Yeates, Padraig, 'Another view of the Easter Rising, 1916,' Annual General Meeting of the Irish Labour History Society, 23 April 2016

[51] Foster, Gavin, 'Class warfare: was there a social basis for the Civil War divide?' *RTÉ.ie*, 13 June, 2022

[52] *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*. Directed by Ken Loach, Sixteen Films, 2006

[53] Pattison, Michael, 'Britain's socialist cinema master,' *Tribune*, 17 June 2023

Lockout.[54] The lockout had been commemorated during its own centenary, but that commemoration took the form of a lecture series in Dublin rather than a national entertainment event.[55] From August of 1913 to January of 1914 disputes between the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and employers in the city over the right of labourers to organise led to a strike, followed by a lockout.[56] The increasing tension between workers and employers led to violent police action against the strikers.[57] The need to protect the workers from this treatment led to the formation of the Irish Citizen Army.[58] While the lockout ended in January of 1914 with the workers having failed to achieve their goals, the Citizen Army did not disband.[59] The Dublin Lockout had been commemorated in 2013 with a public event in the Dublin City Centre. However, that commemoration had been a single, location-based event. As a television broadcast, *Centenary* was able to bring the same story to a wider audience.

While the Citizen Army was not founded as a nationalist organisation, their 1914 constitution showed that their focus had shifted between the end of the lockout in January and the adoption of the document in March. It claimed that 'the first and last principle of the Irish Citizen Army is the avowal that the ownership of Ireland, moral and material, is vested of right in the people of Ireland.'[60] It is likely that this shift was influenced by the realisation that the values held by imperialist Britain would never align with the tenets of socialism. A new, Irish government, founded on principles decided by

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[54] Lysaght, D. R. O'Connor, 'The Irish Citizen Army, 1913-16: White, Larkin and Connolly,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Wordwell Ltd., 2006, pp. 16–21

[55] 'Anniversary of the 1913 Lockout,' *Dublin City* Council, 29 August 2013

[56] Connell, Joseph E. A., 'Countdown to 2016: the Great Lockout of 1913,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Wordwell Ltd., 2013, p. 66

[57] Connell, Joseph E. A., 'Countdown to 2016: the founding of the Irish Citizen Army,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 21, No. 5, Wordwell Ltd., 2013, p. 66

[58] Ibid

[59] Lysaght, D. R. O'Connor, 'Labour in waiting: the after-effects of the Dublin Lockout,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Wordwell Ltd., 2013, pp. 44–47

[60] O'Casey, Seán, 'Constitution of the Irish Citizen Army', 22 March 1914

the largely working class citizens, would be far more likely to embrace the rights of workers. Despite the shift to a nationalist focus, the socialist beliefs of the Citizen Army could still be seen in the stated goal to 'sink all difference of birth, property and creed' and the provision that anyone wishing to join them must be a member of a labour union.[61] While there had always been significant overlap between the labour movement and the nationalist movement, the adoption of the Constitution of the Irish Citizen Army established the ICA as the first group to officially devote itself to both.

While the entire history of the ICA could not be portrayed in the three-minute segment, the visual inclusion of the labour movement among the causes of the Rising acknowledged the origins of one of the major factions who fought in the Rebellion. Additionally, it showed contemporary audiences a connection between the issues faced by Irish people in 1916 and their own lives. Socialism, the rights of workers, and class divides were still hotly debated issues in 2016. 'Protesting' does not make any value judgements or express distinct opinions on these topics, but depicting them as contributing factors in 1916 is in keeping with the goal of RTÉ to use the commemoration as an opportunity to examine the history of controversial issues and open up discussion about their role in the contemporary era. The role of socialism in the rebellion had been downplayed in previous commemorations, and by bringing that perspective back into the narrative of 1916 *Centenary* both expanded the narrative surrounding the Rising and invited audiences to question why this particular aspect had not been publicised in the past and the value of bringing it back into the discussion.

The next subject of protest to be introduced was the question of women's suffrage. While the focus on performers holding 'votes for women' signs was brief, it acknowledged the relationship between nationalism and feminism in 1916 Ireland. The suffrage movement had been gaining popularity in Britain, and this enthusiasm spread to

[61] Ibid

Ireland, leading Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, Margaret Cousins, and their husbands to establish the Irish Women's Franchise League in 1908.[62] They also edited the *Irish Citizen* newspaper. Despite Sheehy-Skeffington being strongly nationalistic herself (she would be directly involved in delivering messages and supplies during the Easter Rising), the newspaper published opinion articles and letters from women of all viewpoints.[63] This meant that anyone who wanted to had an outlet to share their opinion, even if it deviated from the beliefs held by the editors of the publication. Unfortunately, the attempt to give voice to and unify so many people from so many different backgrounds created tensions within the suffragist movement, leading some women to feel that they needed to decide between suffragism and nationalism and choosing the latter.[64] This idea was reinforced by articles in the *Irish Citizen* whose authors claimed that the role of Cumann na mBan as an auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers undermined the feminist agenda of equality between men and women, and claiming that members were 'to a deplorable extent sacrificing their own claims and rights to helping the men.'[65] Meanwhile the women of Cumann na mBan who chose to be members of the organisation despite knowing that it was an auxiliary clearly disagreed. By portraying the issue of suffrage as a precursor to the Easter Rising, *Centenary* commemorated the people who fought for their rights as women, but specifically Irish women.

Despite differences of opinion on how women's rights should be handled, it was clear in the 1910s that women were growing increasingly frustrated with the limitations on their lives and were ready for change. *Centenary* depicted this through one actress who entered the scene pushing a baby in a pram, then left the pram on the side to join the

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[62] Luddy, Maria, 'Skeffington, (Johanna) Hanna Sheehy-,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 2009

[63] Ibid

[64] Butler, Leah, 'Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington: The life and times of the great Irish suffragette,' *The Journal*, 11 January 2014

[65] 'War in Ireland,' *Irish Citizen*, 6 May 2016

protesting suffragettes. As the segment ends, she returned to the pram and pulled out a rifle, becoming part of the march that begins the 'Foggy Dew' segment.[66] While the symbolism of abandoning the traditional role of motherhood to become a rebel fighter does commemorate the experience that some women had in 1916, *Centenary* seems to present the two roles as mutually exclusive. The staging seemed to reinforce the idea that women needed to choose between family, suffragism, and nationalism. Meanwhile, history shows that this was not always the case. Maud Gonne founded Inghinidhe na hÉireann, a group for women who both supported nationalism and wanted to have a voice in government, in 1900 when her daughter Iseult was six years old.[67] She was not the only woman who raised a family while being politically active as a feminist and a nationalist, and to imply otherwise does not take the stories of those women into account. It also connects to a contemporary issue that was gaining public attention in 2016. The Waking the Feminists movement had brought attention to the difficulties faced by women in the theatre industry, and it was revealed that many women had been forced to stop working after having children.[68] The reasons for this included the cost of childcare, late hours in the theatre being incompatible with children's schedules, and difficulty reentering the workforce after maternity leave, and identification of these issues led to the founding of advocacy group Mothers Artists Makers (MAM).[69] While *Centenary* did represent the role of women and feminism in the Rising, the manner in which it chose to portray the issue reinforced the idea that maternity and work were mutually exclusive. This is one of the areas in which relying on visual symbolism presents a problem, in that it is difficult to portray nuance through symbols.

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[66] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[67] O'Callaghan, Margaret & Nic Dháibhéid, Caoimhe, 'MacBride, (Edith) Maud Gonne, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 2009

[68] O'Connell, Brenda, 'Waking the Feminists'

[69] Ibid

While ‘Protesting’ commemorates one very specific manner in which some women fought for their personal rights and national independence, it did represent an effort to draw attention to the work of suffragettes who also fought in the Easter Rising. The belief that an independent Irish nation would allow women more opportunities led many advocates for gender equality to become involved in the nationalist struggle.[70] While previous commemorations had overlooked the connections between gender and the Rebellion, the more inclusive narrative being promoted in 2016 brought those stories into the public consciousness. Focus on the work of suffragettes in 1916 also set the stage for the centenary of women gaining the right to vote, which would be celebrated in 2018. By including the question of suffrage in ‘Protesting,’ *Centenary* established that the struggle for women to gain more rights, particularly the right to vote, had been ongoing throughout the 1910s, and was intrinsically linked to the issue of Irish independence.[71] While suffrage specifically was not brought up again in *Centenary*, a later segment focused heavily on the progress Irish women had made in the last century, which will be examined later. In a programme dedicated to demonstrating how the ideals of 1916 created the Ireland of 2016, the combination of ‘Protesting’ with the later segment commemorates the historical women who fought for the rights enjoyed by contemporary Irishwomen.

The third protestor depicted in *Centenary* held a sign reading 'Tír gan teanga,' meaning 'a country without a language.'[72] This is an abbreviation of a slogan attributed to Padraic Pearse: 'tír gan teanga, tír gan anam': 'a country without a language, a country without a soul.’[73] He represented the desire of groups such as the previously-discussed Gaelic League to promote teaching of the Irish language and return it to common use.

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[70] Butler, Leah, 'Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington: The life and times of the great Irish suffragette,' *The Journal*, 11 January 2014

[71] Crowe, Catriona, ‘How Irish women won the right to vote in 1918,’ *Irish Times*, 10 December 2018

[72] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[73] Titley, Alan, 'Linguistic Heritage,’ *Dublin UNESCO: City of Literature*

The inclusion of this concern in *Centenary* served as a commemoration of the people who fought to revive the language in the early twentieth century, but also of the language itself. Since official business in Ireland had been conducted exclusively in English for several centuries, the prosperous and educated ensured that their children were instructed in English; many families exclusively communicated in English and did not teach their children Irish at all.[74] This practise created a strong correlation between class and language over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the result that the wealthy spoke English and the poor continued to speak Irish. By 1845 the Irish language was predominantly spoken by rural tenant farmers.[75] The potato famine of 1845 had the greatest effect on this demographic, with an estimated one million people dying of starvation and related diseases, while an additional one and a half million emigrated.[76] Nat Hall, a researcher specialising in Violence, Conflict, and Development described the impact of the famine on the Irish language as a 'cultural genocide,' that hastened the decline of the language that had begun decades earlier.[77] While Irish was never a completely dead language, *Centenary* acknowledged that it had once been the dominant form of communication on the island and had lost that status. Similarly to how the programme used Celtic legend to create a link between eras, the issue of language also united ancient Ireland, 1916, and 2016.

Language had another, more allegorical role in the nationalist movement of the 1910s. The language had, like the country itself, been distinctly Gaelic and belonged to the Irish people. As the land had been conquered by England use of the language had

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[74] Falc'her-Poyroux, Erick, 'The Great Famine in Ireland: a linguistic and cultural disruption,' 2014, dissertation, HAL-SHS

[75] Ibid

[76] Ibid

[77] Hall, Nat, 'An Gorta Mór: the question of the Irish "genocide,"' *The Call: A Genocide Watch Blog*, 21 October 2021

been discouraged, leading to steady decline through the nineteenth century.[78] Therefore, symbolically, the reclamation of the language was a part of the reclamation of the country and the 'soul' of Ireland. The protester carrying the 'tír gan teanga, tír gan anam' sign can be seen as agitating for the return of Irish culture and self-determination that was embodied by the language. It is notable that this segment occurred towards the beginning of *Centenary* when the 1910s were being portrayed. By the end of the concert, when Irish history through 2016 had been covered and the modern era was being depicted, President Higgins gave a speech in Irish that he then translated into English, and the final number of the concert was performed by bilingual music group Seo Linn, whose slogan is 'tír le teanga, tír le hanam'- 'a country with a language, a country with a soul.' However, even these efforts to include the language emphasise the idea that the Irish language has not become more dominant in Irish culture: the President's speech required translation to be understood by audiences, and while Seo Linn primarily perform in Irish, their piece in *Centenary* was in the English language. In this way *Centenary* may have inadvertently reflected the status of the Irish language in 2016: idealised, but not in common use.

The depiction of protestors and the variety of social issues that drew an increasing number of people to the independence movement in *Centenary* served as a reminder that there were a great number of people in Ireland pushing for change even before the Rising. Economic and social disadvantages led people to act and fight to change the root causes of their poverty and oppression, many of which were caused by the government. The hope that a change in government would mean a change in the opportunities available to them inspired many people with a variety of grievances to join together in the fight for independence. By depicting the protestors and their role in instigating the events of Easter Week, *Centenary* expanded on the number of perspectives being portrayed, and

[78] Morley, 'The Irish language,' pp. 320-336

divided the nationalists as a whole to the smaller groups fighting for individual freedoms, putting the Rising into a more personal and human context.

The Rising in *Centenary*

While *Centenary* was made specifically to honour the anniversary of the Easter Rising, the events of Easter Week were relegated to two fairly short segments in the programme. The first, entitled 'Foggy Dew,' had the actors portraying revolutionaries remain stationary behind barricades while singer Gavin James sang the first two verses of 'The Foggy Dew,' written by Canon Charles O'Neill. O'Neill composed the song after attending the first Dáil in 1919 and hearing how many of the elected members were not present and reported as being ''faoi ghlas ag na Gaill,' or 'imprisoned by the foreigner.'[79] These people were almost all imprisoned for the roles they had played in the Easter RIsing. Moved by this, he wrote the song from the point of view of an onlooker witnessing the Rebellion. The selection of this song for the segment is appropriate for a commemoration for a number of reasons, the first being that 'The Foggy Dew' was written as a commemoration. Despite the fact that only three years had passed since the Rising at the time of composition, the lyrics were meant to honour those who had fought and keep the Rebellion in the public consciousness. Thus, using the song in *Centenary* created a connection between the commemorations being held in 2016 and those in the years immediately following the Rising. Having been written so soon after the Rebellion also meant that 'The Foggy Dew' was not influenced by decades of debate over the legacy of 1916. O'Neill wrote the song without the context of the Irish Civil War or the conflict in Northern Ireland, so his focus was exclusively on the Rising and its immediate aftermath. While the later segments of *Centenary* alluded to these later topics, the song choice in 'The Foggy Dew' keeps the segment firmly rooted in the 1910s.

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[79] Murphy, Pauline, 'Celebrating the beloved song 'Foggy Dew' and its history,' *Irish Central*, 29 August 2022

In addition to demonstrating continuity in commemorations of the Rising between the early twentieth century and the present, the choice of ‘The Foggy Dew’ also extended the commemorations past Easter Rising combatants. While those who participated in the Rebellion are the main focus of the song, the lyrics also contain multiple references to the Irishmen fighting in the First World War, claiming ''twas better to die ‘neath an Irish sky than at Suvla or Sud-el-Bar.'[80] Both of those locations were associated with heavy allied casualties during the disastrous Gallipoli Campaign.[81] Additionally, both were sites where there were multiple Irish regiments present, with 'more than a third of the attacking force [being] killed or wounded.'[82] In 2016 much more attention was being paid to Irishmen who had fought in the First World War, and the selection of a song that acknowledged their experience fit into the more inclusive commemorations. The lyrics even acknowledged that the rebels received far more attention and memorialising than soldiers in the army, asserting that 'had they died by Pearse’s side or fought with Cathal Brugha/ their names we would keep where the Fenians sleep.’[83] The inclusion of these lines not only mourn the loss of Irishmen in the War, but the loss of potential rebels, who were unable to fight for their own country, having died for Britain. Just like the 2016 centenary events, ‘The Foggy Dew’ primarily focused on the Easter Rising, but did not lose sight of the greater context in which the Rebellion occurred.

Keeping with the tone set by ‘Foggy Dew,’ *Centenary* consciously did not depict any of the violence of Easter Week.'The Foggy Dew' transitioned to 'Mise Éire,' a poem written by Padraic Pearse and put to music by composer Patrick Cassidy.[84] Singer Sibéal Ní Chasaide sang from the point of view of Ireland, lamenting her pain and sorrow that

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[80] Ibid

[81] Kildea, Jeff, 'The Irish at Gallipoli.' *History Ireland*, vol 23, No. 4, Wordwell Ltd., 2015, pp. 36-39

[82] Ibid

[83] 'The Foggy Dew,' *BBC History*, 24 September 2014

[84] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,' *RTÉ.ie*, 28 March 2016

'the people in whom I had hoped have died.'[85] Over the course of the song the GPO projected behind her began to burn and collapse.[86] By presenting the Rising (including its failure) through symbolism rather than literal reenactment, this segment of *Centenary* did not contradict the historical discourse on the actual events of Easter Week, nor did it make judgements on any specific person or event. In 2016, when a conscious effort was being made to avoid glorifying the Rebellion, the somber mood in this segment of *Centenary* communicated that the violence and destruction were a source of sadness, regardless of the opinion the viewer holds on the Rising. The tension between the negative effects of the Rebellion and the belief that it marked the beginning of the Irish nation was communicated through a projection of the words 'a terrible beauty is born.'[87] This line is from the William Butler Yeats poem 'Easter 1916,' where he described the leaders of the Rising, many of whom he had known personally, acknowledging both the sadness of their deaths and the idea that their sacrifice served as an inspiration to others.[88] Each stanza ended with an affirmation that life after the Rising has been changed 'utterly' followed by 'a terrible beauty is born.'[89] The phrase became emblematic of the Rising and has been used as a title for books, films, and journal articles about the event. In the context of *Centenary* it was used as a conclusion to the Rising and a transition point into the aftermath of the rebellion. As the rest of the concert went on to show, life in Ireland had indeed been changed utterly. The depiction of both the positive and negative aspects of twentieth century Irish history culminating in a celebration of the music, dance, and storytelling that has come out of it meant that the programme itself encompasses the phrase ‘a terrible beauty is born.’

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[85] Farrell, Jenny, ‘Easter Rising 1916: Mise Éire / I Am Ireland by Pádraig Pearse,” *Culture Matters*, 10 April 2020

[86] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[87] Ibid

[88] Yeats, William Butler, 'Easter 1916,’ *Poetry Foundation*

[89] Ibid

While *Centenary* was broadcast on Easter Monday as the culmination of the commemorative events, the primary goal of the programme was to celebrate the Ireland of 2016. The Rising was presented as the catalyst for change and the beginning of Irish independence that allowed the country to flourish. By condensing the events of Easter Week 1916 into a segment with a runtime of less than ten minutes, the emotions surrounding the Rising were conveyed without monopolising the concert. Had *Centenary* been the only programme created for the commemoration this would have been a problem, as it does not fully educate the audience about the Rising or what it meant. However, as the culmination of months of programming that examined every aspect of the Rising from a multitude of angles, this approach was effective without becoming repetitive.

Kilmainham, Captivity, and Execution

The segments of *Centenary* dealing with the fate of the captured leaders was the biggest departure that the programme took from the concert format, as both parts were recorded in locations significant to the part of the story being told rather than being recreated through projection and set design. While much of *Centenary* was designed to serve as both a live show and a television programme, this segment is where the benefit of viewing the concert on television is most pronounced. This is noticeable in the number of close-ups, particularly in 'Grieving,' compared to the rest of the programme. For a segment devoted entirely to human emotion, being able to clearly see the faces of the performers provided audiences with a deeper connection. While the joyous sections of *Centenary* are predominantly long shots of the entire stage, creating a sense of shared enthusiasm, the style of 'Captivity' and 'Grieving' creates a very personal experience. The other performers and audience members are removed from the shot, leaving the viewer and the performer in the close-up together in a manner that creates a more intimate

connection. For this reason, these segments provide the strongest evidence for the effectiveness of television as a commemorative vehicle. Techniques are employed that would be impossible to achieve in a live performance, and despite the greater physical distance, the television audience is brought emotionally closer to the performer. For the audience in the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, this segment was shown on a screen above the stage. While they could see what was being presented, for this segment the image was closer and clearer for the viewer at home than the live audience.

The 'Captivity' segment was filmed in Kilmainham Gaol, where the leaders of the Rising were imprisoned and executed. Creator Cilian Fennell explained that while getting permission to film in Kilmainham was difficult, he felt that the segment would lack emotional power if it was not recorded in the space where the 1916 rebels were held.[90] He went on to say that 'Captivity' is the segment that he felt had the most emotional resonance with audiences, which he partially attributes to its setting in the prison.[91] It begins with 'Wrap the Green Flag ‘Round Me,' a song written by Rising veteran Joseph Kevin O’Reilly in which a dying soldier expressed his belief that his death is 'more sweet' knowing that he died for Ireland.[92] This reflects the knowledge of the 1916 leaders that their actions would lead to their own deaths, and their belief that their martyrdom was worth the cause of Irish independence. Pearse had acknowledged many times that he was aware that the Rising was likely to end in his own death and that he trusted that his sacrifice would serve as an inspiration to future generations.[93] It was a sentiment he had also expressed in his writing. The hero of his 1915 play 'The Singer' declared that 'one man can save a people, as one man redeemed the world. I will take no pike. I will go into

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[90] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

[91] Ibid

[92] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[93] Heaney, James, 'Chesterton, Pearse, and the blood sacrifice theory of the 1916 Rising,' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 103, No. 411, Irish Province of the Society of Jesus, 2014, pp. 307–17

battle with bare hands. I will stand up before the Gall as Christ hung naked before men on the tree.'[94] Pearse was not alone in his acceptance of their sacrifice- *Centenary* includes a quote from James Connolly in response to being asked where the men are going on Easter Monday 'we are going out to be slaughtered.'[95]

While the 'Wrap the Green Flag 'Round Me' segment is the most direct in its commemoration of the combatants of 1916, it also introduces the idea that the imprisoned rebels were not the only ones suffering from their incarceration. The segment draws attention to their loved ones. Previous commemorations had focused heavily on the rebels themselves, while significantly less attention was paid to the people they left behind. *Centenary* brought those people back into the commemorative narrative, reminding audiences that the executions had personal effects as well as political ramifications. To introduce this idea, 'Captivity' alluded to one of the few well-remembered family members of a Rising leader. The segment featured a performance of the song 'Grace,' which was written from the perspective of Joseph Mary Plunkett as he married Grace Gifford in the Kilmainham chapel knowing that he was to be executed the next day.[96] In 1916, this romantic tragedy immediately struck a chord with the public- a mere four days after Plunkett was executed the *Irish Independent* published an article titled 'Rebel's Marriage Before Execution: Mrs. Gifford's Story.'[97] The mother of Grace Gifford gave the reporter the details of the marriage, including her daughter being sent for in the middle of the night to marry Plunkett, then separated hours later. Interest in the story is evident in the fact that the following day the *Independent* reprinted the same account, now titled 'Midnight Marriage: Last Moments of Joseph Plunkett.' These articles were some of the earliest commemorations of the Easter Rising. Published mere days

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[94] Lee, JJ., 'Pearse, Patrick Henry,' Dictionary of Irish Biography, November 2013

[95] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[96] Ibid

[97] 'Rebel's Marriage Before Execution: Mrs. Gifford's Story,' *Irish Independent*, 8 May 1916

after the wedding and execution, they drew public attention to the idea that Plunkett had sacrificed his life and his future for nationalist ideals. The composition of the song ‘Grace’ in 1985 commemorated those same sacrifices.[98] Despite the changing attitudes towards the Easter Rising between 1916 and 1985, the story of Plunkett and Gifford was commemorated in a strikingly similar manner. Focus was on personal grief and loss, with the Rising as a backdrop rather than the main focus.

Interest in the tragic story of the wedding of Plunkett and Gifford did not fade over the years. Historian and former Kilmainham Gaol tour guide Anne Clare recalled that of all the events she recounted for visitors, 'the story that most moved people was the wedding ceremony in 1916.’[99] The themes of love, isolation, and sorrow expressed the emotions of many associated with the mass incarceration following the rebellion. *Centenary* amplified the emotional effect by placing the three singers each in front of a cell door so that they are singing in harmony, but clearly physically separated. By staging the performance in this manner, *Centenary* used both the visual and audio elements of the presentation to communicate the loneliness not only of the imprisoned rebels, but also of their families and friends.

Interspersed with the songs were voiceovers reading excerpts from the letters the condemned men wrote to their loved ones.[100] Hearing these messages enhanced the emotion of the scenes by drawing attention to them not as mythical heroes, but as people who had lives and families that they gave up to participate in the rebellion. The wedding of Joseph Plunkett and Grace Gifford had become very famous because it is a distinct event that can be easily portrayed, but these letter excerpts served as a reminder that each of the rebel leaders had their own poignant parting stories. Despite the sorrow of

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[98] ‘Jim McCann sings Grace: 1985,’ *RTE.ie*

[99] Kelly, Shirley, 'Waving the tricolour in New York,' *Books Ireland*, No. 328, Wordwell Ltd., 2011, pp. 32–33

[100] Ibid

parting, however, several of the men referenced their certainty that they will join their comrades in heaven.[101] The belief that their actions were just and would earn them an eternal reward was in keeping with the idea that martyrdom was a triumph overriding the military defeat of the rebellion. The blending of grief and pride in the interactions between the condemned leaders and their families is best expressed in an interview with Nora Connolly O'Brien, daughter of James, who recalled a visit to her father while he was in the prison hospital. She described her mother grieving over the loss of '[his] beautiful life', and her father replying 'wasn't it a full life, Lillie, and isn't this a good end?'[102] This quote was included in *Centenary* as the final spoken line before the depiction of the executions. It is an intriguing line to end on, particularly as it leads into the segment highlighting the grief of the executed men's families. While the leaders of the Rising may have been happy to die for Ireland and considered it 'a good end,' they were not the only ones affected by that decision. Parents, wives, children, and friends felt those losses deeply, and while some may have felt that their loved ones made the right decision, others were simply left with pure grief. Historically, most Easter Rising commemorations have centred around honouring the executed leaders, and *Centenary* did do so in the following segment, but this portion of the programme adds to the acknowledgement of their sacrifice by reminding audiences that those men had families and loved ones who felt their loss on a more personal level. By including the reading of the letters and the song about Grace Gifford *Centenary* expands the story of the imprisonment and executions to honour the people who lost their loved ones for the sake of the country. Additionally, it brings real grief into the story of the executions. Past tellings of the Rising execution story have placed more emphasis on pride and courage on the parts of both the condemned men and their families. While *Centenary* acknowledged this attitude with the quote from

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[101] Ibid

[102] O'Brien, Nora Connolly, 'Wasn't it a full life Lillie and isn't this a good end.' *Portraits 1916*. 30 October 1965

Connolly, it also devoted time to the idea that not everyone had their grief tempered by a sense of duty and purpose. For some it was simply a devastating loss, a fact that has gotten lost in much of the lore surrounding the Rising. By bringing that sense of grief back into the narrative, *Centenary* opened an area of reflection that had previously been excluded from Rising commemorations.

The presentation of the executions in *Centenary* was intentionally very simple. Prison walls were projected as a background, with text on the wall providing each date and the names of the men who were executed on that day.[103] As each set of names appeared, actors representing those men stepped to the front of the stage and fell one by one. The only sound was a drumbeat as each man fell. This way of depicting the deaths minimised potential distractions and put the full focus of the viewer on the names and dates, letting the moment speak for itself rather than over-interpreting it. Each man quietly falling was also in keeping with the reported dignity of all the executed leaders.[104] Even the officer-in-command who oversaw the executions noted that 'they all died nobly' and even claimed that 'MacDonagh died like a prince.'[105]

Notably, while many sources only acknowledged the sixteen leaders executed in Dublin, *Centenary* included Roger Casement in the scene.[106] While Casement was involved in the planning of the Rising, including procuring weapons, the failure to secure a support from Germany convinced him that the Rebellion was doomed to fail.[107] However, Casement was arrested before he could communicate this message to the rebel leaders and was not allowed to contact them from his prison in London.[108] His attempts to stop

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[103] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[104] Ibid

[105] Wilson, Catherine, 'Thomas MacDonagh: charm offensive,' *Irish Independent*, 21 January 2016

[106] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[107] Laffan, Michael, 'Casement, Sir Roger David,' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, March 2021

[108] Ibid

the Rising from happening were never discussed at his trial for treason, leading to his conviction and death sentence.[109] The fact that he was not in Dublin during Easter Week, as well as his execution being separated from the Rising leaders by both time and location has led to Casement often being left off of lists of executed Rising participants. By including him in the programme *Centenary* commemorated the work that he did for the rebellion as well as the sacrifice that he ultimately made in the pursuit of independence. Had a similar commemoration been held in person at Kilmainham Gaol, the inclusion of Casement would have seemed out of place, since he had never been held there. In the medium of television, however, the sense of place is created by the producers. The scene was purposely designed so that Casement was not separated from the other planners of the Easter Rising, as there was no change of scenery or lighting, and his death was portrayed in the same manner. The inclusion of Casement supported the commemorative goal of bringing previously underrepresented elements of the Rising into focus.

The 'Grieving' segment that followed the executions was filmed at the Garden of Remembrance at night. Dedicated to 'all those who gave their lives in the cause of Irish Freedom,' the garden was a logical choice for the segment. It featured the previously discussed Children of Lir statue, as well as low-luminosity, blue-tinted lights backlighting the statue and reflecting off of the pool, which features broken weaponry painted onto the bottom as a representation of peace after a battle.[110] The scenery and lighting set a sombre tone that matched the feelings he segment was designed to evoke. The programme for *Centenary* described the emotions stirred by the executions following the Rising as 'pity, yes, and sympathy but also a deep rage… the sense of injustice went deep, and would fuel what was to come.'[111] The anger that the public felt towards the

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[109] Ibid

[110] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[111] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,' *RTÉ.ie*, 28 March 2016

rebels for the destruction they caused in the city was replaced by anger at the British establishment for executing them. This was due in part to the period of time over which the executions took place, with the earliest occurring on 3 May and the last in Dublin occurring on 12 May (Roger Casement was hanged in London on 3 August). News of executions and pictures of the men, mostly very young, who were being killed dragged out over nine days, and even those who had initially opposed the Rising found the punishment excessive. That feeling was only increased when James Connolly, who had been wounded during the conflict at the GPO, was executed sitting in a chair since he was not well enough to stand up. Connolly was clearly not a physical threat and his death in particular struck the public as cruel and unnecessary. Though this aspect of the executions is well-known, *Centenary* did not portray Connolly in the chair, with his actor falling from a standing position as the rest had.

Centenary gave the number of people killed during Easter Week as 485, specifically noting that that number includes men, women, and children.[112] The programme guide also included this information, and added that one in five of these fatalities were under the age of nineteen.[113] Attention was not drawn to the fact that that number included British troops and police officers killed putting down the rebellion as well as rebel combatants and civilians. The title text with the number was simply followed by the phrase 'suaimhneas síoraí dóibh'- 'peace eternal for them.'[114] The expression of grief for all of those killed in the Rising, regardless of allegiance, was in keeping with the commemorative theme of emphasising unity and commonalities between people rather than focusing on conflict and difference. Glen Killane explained that while there was a desire to open debates around 1916, one of the things that RTÉ firmly wanted to communicate was that death is a tragedy, regardless of who dies or the circumstances

[112] Killane, Glen, interviewed by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

[113] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme'

[114] Killane, Glen, interviewed by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

surrounding the death.[115] A poll in the GPO Museum showed that this attitude was shared by the public: when asked ‘Who is it most important to commemorate a century on from the Rising?’ 74 percent of respondents selected ‘All who lost their lives as a result of the violence of 1916 including the many civilians who died.’[116] In ‘Grieving’ this was clearly communicated and the mourning was clearly for everyone who lost their lives during Easter Week, regardless of affiliation.

'Foundation' and the Road to Modern Ireland

No 1916 commemoration would be complete without a recitation of the Proclamation, and *Centenary* was no exception. The segment 'Foundation' opened with the granddaughter of Thomas MacDonagh and the great-granddaughter of The O’Rahilly presenting a tricolour to be raised, followed by footage of the flag going up over each province.[117] The reading of the Proclamation was presented as a montage, with each phrase being read by a different person in a different location.[118] The readers varied greatly in age and appearance, and the group included men, women, and children both in Ireland and abroad. By showcasing the diversity of people living in Ireland and among the diaspora, *Centenary* embraced a modern view of Irishness that includes immigrants, emigrants, and descendants of the diaspora. Similarly to the casting of black Englishman Renako McDonald as Cúchulainn, this segment was designed to emphasise the idea that Irish people exist all over the world and are do not always fit the traditional idea of what an Irish person ‘should’ look like. Additionally, in a commemoration that was meant to open conversation about Ireland in 2016 as well as 1916, it showed that Irish people

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[115] Ibid

[116] *Commemoration*, permanent exhibit, GPO Museum, Dublin, Ireland. Poll results as of 12 October 2024

[117] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[118] Ibid

around the world were still a part of that conversation, and not just those living in Ireland. While this may appear to be a very modern view, it reflected the Proclamation itself, which acknowledged the support of Irish independence by 'her exiled children in America.'[119] While at the time the proclamation was written the vast majority of Irish emigrants lived in the United States or the United Kingdom, the diaspora had spread out much further by 2016. However, the principle remained that Ireland needed to acknowledge and include Irish people living abroad in larger conversations about what is meant and still means to be Irish.

'Foundation' was followed by 'Building,' which featured projected video of construction on the hydroelectric dam at Ardnacrusha.[120] Ardnacrusha had been the largest hydroelectric generator in the world, and the Electricity Supply Board took great pride in the project, even promoting the construction site as a tourist destination.[121] In the context of *Centenary*, which sought to commemorate the progress made by the Irish nation following independence, Ardnacrusha was representative of the technological advances and modernisation that Ireland had achieved. Writing about the dam, Professor of Electronic Engineering Damian Murphy asserted that 'its importance in supporting the economy of a new independent Ireland cannot be overstated, with the generating station intrinsically linked to rural electrification from the 1930s onwards.'[122] With actors representing the workers who built the dam, *Centenary* acknowledged that modernisation would not have been possible without the hard work of Irish citizens to make their country successful.

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[119] 'Poblacht na hÉireann,' 24 April, 1916

[120] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[121] Murphy, Damian, 'Ardnacrusha generating station, Co. Clare,' *History Ireland*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Wordwell Ltd., 2010, pp. 45–45

[122] Ibid

In the online programme for *Centenary*, Theo Dorgan explained that this segment was meant to capture the 'double pulse' of the era- projects such as Ardnacrusha inspired confidence and hope in the new Irish state, but there were still many people who were unemployed and impoverished.[123] For those whose lives had not improved despite the advances being made in the new nation, emigration was seen as the only way to achieve a better life. This is depicted in *Centenary* with a scene set in a dance hall, where couples waltzed, but as the song ended the men left, symbolising the mass emigration of the 1940s and 1950s, particularly of young men.[124] The men appeared stoic as they put on their hats and coats, while the women they had danced with expressed anguish at their departure.[125] By acknowledging the grief of the loved ones left behind by emigrants, *Centenary* commemorated the resilience of people (primarily women) who continued to build lives in Ireland following the departure of their loved ones.

While ‘Emigration’ began by commemorating grief, it quickly transitioned to a more optimistic theme. The second half of the segment combined the more inclusive nature of the 2016 commemorations and the theme of Irish traditions prevailing through history to shape contemporary culture. After the waltzers had left the stage, upbeat session music took over and young women in distinctly modern dress performed a very modernised version of step-dancing that allowed for arm movements and incorporated non-traditional moves into the routine.[126] Dorgan explained this performance as traditional Irish music being 'born again in new hands' as the Irish diaspora simultaneously held on to their own culture and integrated into the world around them.[127] This was a theme that musician and music historian Mick Moloney had a distinct interest in. In his lectures he described how

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[123] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,' RTÉ.ie, 28 March 2016

[124] Ibid

[125] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[126] Ibid

[127] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,' RTÉ.ie, 28 March 2016

in the 1960s during the folk revival bands such as the Clancy Brothers and The Dubliners recorded traditional Irish music in a style as close to the way those songs would have been played when they were written. Once traditional Irish music had been recorded and preserved, however, there was no longer a need to strictly protect the old form so that it could be passed down. This allowed for creativity and a wider range of interpretations of Irish music, and allowed it to be blended with a variety of musical styles to create sounds that were simultaneously traditional and contemporary. The end of 'Emigration' celebrated this by portraying variations on Irish traditional music and dance as a continuation of the tradition rather than abandonment of it. This is also where *Centenary* moved towards a celebration of Irish accomplishment in the wake of 1916 rather than continuing to focus on commemorating the event itself.

Many of the political and social issues that Ireland faced from the 1960s to 2016 were considered too complex to be presented in allegorical performances, so this era was represented in *Centenary* by a montage of newsreel footage titled 'It Ain't Easy'.[128] Cilian Fennell explained that he went through several incarnations of this section during the writing process.[129] There was concern about keeping the segment to a reasonable length, but the more pressing issue was the number of controversial topics this time period contained. While RTÉ wanted to open discussions about issues that continued to affect Irish life, introducing them in the middle of a concert that was meant to end on a joyful note would have disturbed the balance of the programme, as it would bring the tone down while simultaneously not allowing time for reflection or discussion. This is one of the areas where the live audience and the television audience likely had very different experiences of the programme. Watching television is typically done in a comfortable location either alone or with people that the viewer knows. For audiences not watching a

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[128] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[129] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

broadcast live there is also an option to pause or rewatch segments. These factors allow television programming to address potentially controversial content in a manner that allows audiences to handle it on their own terms. For the concert audience, however, who were in a large venue, possibly surrounded by strangers, and unable to take a break to process what they saw, there was a much greater potential for bringing up a sensitive topic to cause significant and unintended discomfort.

As a result, the montage consisted of video clips that predominantly were shorter than ten seconds and conveyed a feeling of change rather than fully addressing a specific topic. For example, an early clip showed the aftermath of a bombing in Northern Ireland, while a later one depicted Queen Elizabeth II laying a wreath at the Garden of Remembrance. Neither of these images were given any context, but their inclusion at the beginning and end of the montage indicated a changing relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom. By addressing the conflict in Northern Ireland briefly and devoting half of its screentime to the gradually healing relationship between Ireland and Britain, 'It Ain't Easy' acknowledged that the conflict had a major impact on Irish life in the latter half of the twentieth century while being careful that it 'wasn't going to alienate people,' in the words of Glen Killane.[130]

The unifying theme of the segment was 'a struggle with ancient powers and orthodoxies' that ultimately brought more freedoms and rights to the people of Ireland.[131] This included increasing personal freedoms in Ireland, culminating in the legalisation of same-sex marriage, as well as Ireland's shift from being a largely isolated country struggling to be perceived as legitimate to a participant in international events.[132] While none of these issues were elaborated on in detail, their inclusion in a three-minute compilation clearly communicated the idea of modernisation over time.

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[130] Killane, Glen, interview

[131] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,'

[132] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

'It Ain't Easy' touched on a wide variety of topics, but the one it most thoroughly represented was the change in the social and legal status of Irish women from 1916 to 2016. One of the clearest audio clips is a report on the discovery of the body of Ann Lovett in 1984.[133] Lovett was a fifteen year old schoolgirl who died of haemorrhagic shock giving birth alone in a field, trying to hide her pregnancy.[134] Her death was initially unreported, but a leak to the *Sunday Tribune* led to the case becoming a national topic of discussion.[135] Only a year earlier, a referendum adding an abortion ban to the Constitution had passed, and views on sexuality, pregnancy, and women's morality were still heavily guided by church doctrine.[136] Reports on the unnecessary death of the teenager opened a national conversation on these taboo topics, with Gay Byrne's popular radio show receiving so many letters about secret unwed pregnancies that reading them filled an entire episode.[137] The quantity of these letters proved that Lovett was not an isolated case and drew attention to the fact that abortions and pregnancy of single women occurred throughout Ireland and could not be ignored.[138] Conception, abortion, and the rights of single mothers were all causes championed by then-Senator Mary Robinson, who went on to be elected President of Ireland in 1990.[139] Her win was largely credited to female voters, who had voted in record numbers.[140] An excerpt from Robinson's acceptance speech was included in 'It Ain't Easy,' exemplifying the progress made

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[133] Ibid

[134] Maguire, Moira J., 'The changing face of Catholic Ireland: conservatism and liberalism in the Ann Lovett and Kerry babies scandals.' *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Feminist Studies, Inc., 2001, pp. 335–58

[135] Ibid

[136] Ibid

[137] 'Letters to Ann,' *RTÉ.ie*, 16 Jul 2021

[138] Kenny, Mary, 'Gay Byrne: the 'conservative Catholic' who changed Ireland,' *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 110, No. 438, Messenger Publications, 2021, pp. 175–90

[139] Smyth, Ailbhe, ''A great day for the women of Ireland' the meaning of Mary Robinson's presidency for Irish women,' *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Canadian Association of Irish Studies, 1992, pp. 61–75

[140] Ibid

between the Lovett tragedy and election of Robinson.[141] While no explicit connection was made between these events and the changes that women were campaigning for at the time of the Easter Rising, 'Protesting' and 'It Ain't Easy' expressed a sense of continuity between life in modern Ireland and the hopes and spirit of 1916. Both featured children and politics as major issues in the lives of women and how they were influenced by independence. The upholding of the abortion ban, and its addition to the Constitution in 1983, had been heavily influenced by the Catholic Church, and Catholic doctrine informing political decision-making had been commonplace since the administration of Éamon de Valera.[142] Mary Robinson's election served as an example of how enfranchised Irish women had the power to affect a national election. In Robinson's own words 'I was elected by the women of Ireland, who instead of rocking the cradle, rocked the system.' The theme of progress despite setbacks that portrayed this segment was ultimately a hopeful one, showing audiences that Irish life over the past hundred years has improved, even when it did not seem as though that was occurring.

In the context of discussing the role of television in the commemorations, 'It Ain't Easy' is also relevant in that the segment is comprised of clips from television news broadcasts. When selecting visual and audio media to represent Irish history in the latter half of the twentieth century, the creators determined that the best source was television, showing the importance of news as a chronicle of events. At its core, news is a commemoration: an event is determined to be significant to the general public, so it is presented as a story of what occurred, often accompanied by commentary on why the event was notable. Television news is constantly being generated and is frequently kept in an archive, whether physical or digital. This indicates that thousands of hours of small-scale commemorative footage exist; it is only logical that a selection of these should be

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[141] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[142] Calkin, Sydney & Kaminska, Monika Ewa, 'Persistence and change in morality policy: the role of the Catholic Church in politics of abortion in Ireland and Poland,' *Feminist Review*, vol 124, issue 1, March 2020, pp. 86-102

included in a larger-scale commemoration of an event with both national and global impact. By linking these news reports together, the creators of *Centenary* provided modern audiences with a glimpse of what events were considered important enough to report on in the era in which they occurred.

It must be kept in mind, however, that the footage that appeared in the concert was carefully selected to illustrate the narrative that fit into the message of *Centenary*. The arc of life improving over time was emphasised by presenting far more negative stories from earlier eras, then increasingly positive clips from more recent news. In this way, 'It Ain't Easy' can be seen as a microcosm of television commemoration as a whole: the information presented is generally accepted to be factually accurate, but attention must be paid to the ways in which it was curated for the public. Notably, this is true of this particular segment, but not *Centenary* as a whole. The abstract, music and dance based performances are very open to interpretation and have less of a direct message to communicate. It is also the area in which *Centenary* shows that it is not purely a celebratory piece. It would have been easy to portray the narrative that after independence everything was culturally Irish and wonderful and achieved all of the dreams of the 1916 generation. But to do so would be disrespectful to the people who truly did struggle, even after independence. Nation building and cultural development take work, and inevitably mistakes are made, but the hope is that things do get better over time. As Glen Killane phrased it 'we had to show that we as a nation are confident enough to point to our failings.' [143]'It Ain't Easy' made that clear in a manner that commemorated the struggles and problems in a manner that did not feel inappropriate in the context of celebrating the Ireland that had been built by 2016.

[143] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

2016 and the Spirit of the Rising

The final segments of *Centenary* were devoted to celebrating the Ireland of 2016 and how much progress the nation had made towards upholding the ideals of the Proclamation.[144] The first performance on this topic was focused on the spirit of community and citizenship, set to 'You Raise Me Up' by Brendan Graham.[145] The segment featured a montage of people helping those in need, with clips of food banks, flood rescues, and humanitarian missions.[146] Among these were images of the sleep-out, in which students of Belvedere College slept on the street in front of the GPO to raise money for charities that combat homelessness.[147] Also included was footage of the Pieta Darkness Into Light 5k, where participants expressed support for those affected by suicide and donate to fund resources for suicide prevention.[148] Both of these annual events consisted of citizens coming together to help others, and were representative of the efforts made by Irish people to help and support one another in times of crisis.[149] This was described in the *Centenary* programme as 'the true essence of 1916 made real, this willingness to show courage, vision, and sacrifice for the good of others.'[150] This message captured one of the core principles of not only the 2016 commemoration, but commemorations in general: reflection on the past can guide people in the present. While armed uprisings are not commended in the modern era, there are other elements of the spirit of 1916 that have value in modern Ireland, and ‘You Raise Me Up’ highlights the ways in which that spirit can be expressed.

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[144] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,' RTÉ.ie, 28 March 2016

[145] Ibid

[146] *Centenary*, created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[147] 'Sleep-Out,' *Belvedere College SJ*, 2021

[148] 'The History of Darkness Into Light,' *darknessintolight.ie*, 2021

[149] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,' RTÉ.ie, 28 March 2016

[150] Ibid

As *Centenary* drew to a close, President Michael D. Higgins came to the stage. He was introduced and gave his opening welcome in the Irish language. Commenting on the role of the Irish language in 2016 commemorations, Glen Killane explained that even outside of commemoration events RTÉ encourages presenters to use phrases of the language when they can to support the idea of Irish as a modern, living language.[151] The introduction and welcome in *Centenary* being in Irish served the same purpose, to present it in a contemporary context. A balance needed to be struck, however, between promoting the Irish language and understanding that even within Ireland not everyone was fluent. Fennell cited this as the reason for making commonly understood phrases, such as ‘welcome’ and ‘thank you’ in Irish, but the overarching meaning of the speech in English to ensure comprehension among the majority of the audience.[152] In the English language portion of the speech, President Higgins praised the 'vision, energy, and imagination' of the leaders of the Easter Rising.[153] He reiterated how important cultural expression and rejuvenation were in that era, and how the arts continued to form the basis of Irish identity both domestically and among the diaspora. Keeping with the theme throughout the concert of simultaneous continuity and evolution of culture throughout the twentieth century, Higgins explained that the 1916 centenary was an opportunity to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the island, but also contemporary arts that invoked the spirit of Irish identity while adapting to the modern world.[154] He concluded by looking to the future and expressing his confidence that future generations of artists would maintain the traditions of Irish music and art even as they imagined new ways to express

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[151] Killane, Glen, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 11 September 2023

[152] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

[153] *Centenary,* created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[154] Ibid

themselves.[155] This was immediately represented onstage in the final performance of the evening.

Seo Linn, who sang the final song of *Centenary*, are a Galway-based band whose work fuses contemporary and traditional Irish sounds. Their website promotes their 'unique takes on old traditional Irish songs and their Irish language folked-up versions of well-loved songs' that form a connection between their national roots and their place in the modern music scene.[156] For *Centenary* they performed 'Music Makers,' a poem composed by A.E. O'Shaugnessy in 1873, set to upbeat dance music with a blend of modern and traditional instrumentation.[157] The poem fit neatly with the focus on the rebel leaders as poets and writers, and was selected because it 'affirmed the role of the artist in disrupting and changing society,' according to the *Centenary* programme.[158] The performance also allowed *Centenary* to end on an upbeat, hopeful note, with the entire cast returning to the stage for the song, uniting past and present onstage.[159] It was a visual representation of the blending of past, present, and future that *Centenary* was designed to express. Additionally, it allowed the audience to come away from the performance feeling joyful after having dealt with some difficult themes earlier in the show. This was considered an essential part of the performance, and creator Cilian Fennell explained that he purposely moved the song from its original place in the middle of the show so that it could bring energy to the finale.[160]

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[155] Ibid

[156] 'About- Faoi,' *seolinn.com*, updated 2021

[157] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,' RTÉ.ie, 28 March 2016

[158] Ibid

[159] *Centenary,* created by Cilian Fennell, RTÉ, 2016

[160] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

Reception

For a commemoration to be considered effective, the reaction that audiences have to the content must be taken into account. Commemorations are designed to create a cultural experience based on shared emotional responses; a commemorative programme that does not evoke a response in viewers cannot be deemed successful. In the case of *Centenary*, both critics and audiences had an overwhelmingly positive response to the concert. Many commented on the comparisons between past and present that the programme presented, with *Irish Independent* critic Ed Power praising the fact that 'it looked to the future as much as to the past and acknowledged that modern Irishness is a glorious and complicated thing.'[161] Along with a review from critic Ciarán D'Arcy, the *Irish Times* published a variety of social media posts from the public to demonstrate how well the programme was received by audiences.[162] The celebration of what Ireland had been and could be as expressed through music struck a chord with viewers, many of whom interpret expressed renewed pride in their own Irishness.[163] *Centenary* may not have had all of the answers on what it meant to be Irish in 2016, but it highlighted some elements of cultural unity and shared values that resonated with audiences. Appreciation of the event extended to the Dáil, with Micheál Martin '[paying] particular tribute to RTÉ on its coverage of the centenary concert. The presentation was stunning and reflected well on the nation and our maturity and capacity to tolerate diverse views on the Rising.'[164]

The success of *Centenary* was can be attributed largely to the fact that the concert focused on the context of the Rising in twentieth century Irish history as a whole, rather than treating it as an isolated event. It acknowledged the difficulties of the revolutionary period, but brought that to a presentation of positive change over the century. As critic

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[161] Power, Ed, 'The Rising's 'Riverdance' Moment,' *Irish Independent*, 30 March 2016

[162] D'Arcy, Ciarán, 'Huge reaction to RTÉs Centenary programme,' *Irish Times*, 29 March 2016

[163] Ibid

[164] Dáil Éireann debate - April 6 2016, Vol. 906, No. 3

Darragh McManus put it 'This, as they say, is the finest of what we are. And more than that, music and dance and literature are living, breathing entities; in fact they're immortal, and stand in stark, brilliant contrast to the stony hand of history and the horrors of war and death.'[165]

Conclusion

Centenary was created to express how far the Irish nation had come since 1916, emphasising the manner in which the hopes and ideals of the rebel generation had shaped contemporary Irish culture.[166] Creator Cilian Fennell expressed the importance of 'making peace with our history and ourselves' through the programme's portrayal of twentieth century Ireland.[167] The use of music, dance, and performance allowed for a greater resonance between a modern audience and the events of the past. Presenting this sense of continuity through a television broadcast allowed the medium to become part of the message. Audiences may have been gathered around an electronic campfire rather than a physical one, and the storyteller may have been presenting to millions of people instead of a small group, but the fundamental idea of Irish culture being passed down through music and dance performance has stayed consistent for centuries. Presenting *Centenary* on television also supported the idea of the 'Foundation' segment that the commemorations included the Irish diaspora worldwide. The programme was available internationally, allowing people of Irish descent to engage with the commemoration; a non-televised concert would have excluded this population. By broadcasting *Centenary* on television, RTÉ allowed audiences to experience the culmination of the commemorative events in an accessible, inclusive manner.

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[165] McManus, Darragh, 'RTÉ's *Centenary*: 'This is the finest of what we are - tremendously entertaining and genuinely affecting,'' *Irish Independent*, 29 March 2016

[166] Dorgan, Theo, 'Centenary online programme,'

[167] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

The 2016 commemorations raised many questions about the Easter Rising and its legacy, and while *Centenary* was not designed to answer them, the programme did allow the centenary events to end on a positive note. Having the viewer connect with Irish history, then following through to expressions of pride in the modern Irish nation communicated both the tragedies of the past and the sense of resilience that allowed Ireland to thrive, inspiring pride in how far Ireland has come.[168] Fennell explained that while the commemorations of 1966 'replayed' the Rising by focusing on literal historical events, his goal was to 'revive' the spirit of the rebellion by emphasising the creativity and imagination required to build a nation.[169] This was a concept that had already been embraced in 1976, when the poem selected for the Garden of Remembrance concluded with the line 'O generations of freedom remember us, the generations of the vision.'[170] *Centenary* remembered those generations and placed new emphasis on their vision rather than their military actions. As singer and granddaughter of Rising participants Imelda May explained, ‘commemorating with music, art and poetry was very fitting considering that the Rising was led, not by traditional soldiers, but by poets and artists fighting with passion and pride.'[171] By bringing that passion and pride to the forefront and focusing on the aspects of Irish culture that bring people together, *Centenary* commemorated the Rising and celebrated the accomplishments of the Irish nation over the course of the twentieth century.

Ultimately, *Centenary* accomplished the goals set by Cilian Fennell. It portrayed twentieth century Ireland from an emotional, human standpoint and celebrated the cultural legacy of music, dance, and storytelling. Glen Killane described it as the

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[168] D’Arcy, Ciarán, 'Huge reaction to RT’És Centenary programme,' *Irish Times*, 29 March 2016

[169] Fennell, Cilian, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 30 March 2022

[170] Mac Uistin, Liam, 'We Saw a Vision,' *Garden of Remembrance*, 1976, Dublin, Ireland

[171] O’Keefe, Alan, 'Spectacular musical show features 600 performers in a rousing finale to a weekend of remembrance,' *Irish Independent*, 29 March 2016

'culmination of RTÉ 1916.' This assessment is supported both in the way that the concert brought together different elements of the country that 1916 allowed for the creation of, but also as a culmination of the way the Rising was presented on television. A viewer with no background knowledge hoping to learn the story of the Rising would not have been able to do so from *Centenary*, so it is not an effective commemoration on its own. But it was broadcast in April 2016, months after *Rebellion* and *1916: The Irish Rebellion* originally aired. Discussion and debate about the legacy of the Rising had been going on throughout the year, and the Irish public had access to 1916 material in books, television, museums, public events, and websites all designed to be part of the centenary year. It is in this context that *Centenary* can be considered a success. It was never meant to stand alone, it was meant to be the capstone on months of commemorative activity. By airing on Easter Monday with the President in attendance it was made clear that the *Centenary* concert was a notable event, and it addressed the main theme of the commemoration: a hundred years on, why did the Rising matter? The answer to this question, according to *Centenary*, is that it brought the Ireland of 2016 into being. By focusing on aspects of Irish culture that bring people together and making the programme available live to television audiences around the country and abroad, *Centenary* used the medium of television to create a unified experience where audiences everywhere could celebrate the Irish culture for which 1916 had paved the way.

The centenary of the Easter Rising occurred early in the Decade of Centenaries and served as a test case for what forms of commemoration did and did not appeal to the public. In the case of *Centenary*, there is now even firmer evidence that the programme was considered a success: it was replicated. In October of 2023 RTÉ and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media collaborated on *Ireland 100: An Old Song Re-Sung*.[172] The programme followed the same format as *Centenary*,

[172] 'Ireland 100: An Old Song Re-Sung,' *RTÉ.ie*, 19 September 2023

this time marking the centenary of the formation of the Irish state. The decision to repeat the format indicates that it was not only considered an effective way to commemorate significant events in Irish history through the medium of television.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this research was to explore the effectiveness of television as a vehicle for commemorating historical events, with the Easter Rising commemorative content produced by Irish national broadcaster RTÉ as a focused case-study. The four programmes examined, from the fiftieth and hundredth anniversaries of the 1916 Rising, represent four distinct approaches to commemoration through the medium of television. By exploring these programmes and identifying both the strengths and challenges of television as a form of commemoration, it has become apparent that television as a medium has the potential to contribute meaningfully to commemorations of the rebellion. The manner in which the messaging of the television content shifted to reflect the differences in commemorative goals between 1966 and 2016 demonstrates that television can adapt to changing values and interpretations of a historical event without sacrificing historical accuracy or audience engagement. This is particularly evident in the three programmes from the 2016 centenary commemorations. The commemoration organisers sought to present a more complex, nuanced view of the Rising, and the television content reflected that aim, using techniques unique to the medium to present a clearer, more complete story of the events of Easter Week 1916.

The commemorations of the Easter Rising, particularly in the Golden Jubilee and centenary years, have been the subject of a great deal of academic research and literature. However, the subject of television as a vehicle for commemorating the Rising had not yet been explored. By filling this gap in the literature, this study supports academic understanding of public history and the ways in which a commemorative message is communicated to the general public through the medium of television. The programmes created for the Easter Rising commemorations demonstrate successful methods for engaging the Irish public in the conversation surrounding the event, as well as providing cautionary examples of what failed to impress historians or the television

audience. An understanding of the successes and failures discussed in this work will provide the organisers of future national commemorations with guidance in creating effective, meaningful commemorative television programming.

Key Findings

In the case of the Easter Rising commemorative programming, there were varying levels of success. *Insurrection* was developed for the Golden Jubilee in 1966 and was appreciated by audiences and critics at the time of its release. That commemoration was focused on building consensus and celebrating the Rising as the foundation of the Irish state. *Insurrection* engaged with the commemorative goals of its own time, though it lacked the nuance that would be valued much more in the centenary year. However, *Insurrection* did adhere to the historical knowledge of the Rising at the time and did not misrepresent historical knowledge in favour of spectacle. Therefore, it was effective by the standards of the time and the goals of the commemorators in 1966.

The programmes created in 2016 were all developed based on the commemorative values of accuracy, inclusion, and inviting conversation around the controversial legacy of the Easter Rising. Each presented the story of the Easter Rising in a unique format designed to engage the audience in the discussion surrounding the commemoration while appealing to a variety of sensibilities.

Created in the most traditional documentary format of the three centenary programmes, *1916: The Irish Rebellion* thoroughly examined the causes for the Rising and numerous factions that existed in the Dublin of 1916 while placing the rebellion in a larger historical context. The producers involved historians from a variety of universities and specialties to ensure both accuracy and diversity of opinion. Audiences were introduced to the idea that the Rising has a complicated legacy, but encouraged to interpret meaning of the Rising and its aftermath for themselves. For these reasons, *1916:*

The Irish Rebellion can be considered a highly effective use of television as a commemorative vehicle.

Rebellion was a historical fiction drama marketed as an exploration of the female experience of the Rising, keeping with the commemorative goal of presenting stories that had not been told before. However, the lack of historical accuracy in the programme detracted from its value to the commemoration. Additionally, the series was written and directed by men, raising questions about whether it actually was presenting a new perspective. While the series was not an effective vehicle for the commemorative message of 2016, examining its missteps provided insight into how a similar programme might succeed if different decisions were made by the creative team.

Finally, *Centenary* presented twentieth century Irish history through song and dance. While it did not include the volume of historical content featured in *1916: The Irish Rebellion*, nothing in the programme contradicted the historiography of the Rising. The abstract nature of the concert meant that very little was directly told to audience members, leaving a great deal of room for interpretation. *Centenary* also engaged with the idea that 1916 was 'a barometer of what the nation should be. 1916 is the idealised form of what the nation should be,' in the words of Brennan.[1] It was a sentiment that had been expressed from the early planning stages of the commemoration. Speaking in June of 2015, TD Finian McGrath declared that 'we should refocus ourselves to see whether we are anywhere near the aspirations of the men and women of 1916.'[2] By presenting the the continuity between the Easter Rebels and modern Ireland, without over-explaining the idea, *Centenary* successfully communicated a major theme of the commemorations.

Practical Applications

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[1] Brennan, Cathal & Dorney, John, *The Irish History Show*, 'The Bridges Job & The Decade of Centenaries,' December 2015, Spotify

[2] Dáil Debate, 25 June 2015, Vol 884, No 2

The conclusions of this research have implications for both the academic world and the sphere of television production. Examination of the commemorative programming has established that both a deep understanding of history and skill in crafting a compelling narrative are necessary to create an effective commemorative vehicle. Therefore, cooperation between historians and television creators would be mutually beneficial.

Discussing the reluctance of academics to become involved in television productions, Ó Tuathaigh explained that 'historians will be involved, in various ways, in this rich feast of "public history". I do not see this involvement as necessarily a form of academic apostasy or betrayal.'[3] The production of historical content differs greatly between academia and television, though the latter provides an opportunity for historians to present their knowledge to a wider audience. While there can be pressure from content producers to stray from historical knowledge in favour of a sensational media moment, Ó Tuathaigh insisted that historians 'must retain at all times the severest sense of obligation to the established rules of their profession as academic historians.'[4] If they do so and advocate for content that engages with known historiography, historians can ensure that the material being presented to the public is accurate as well as educational.

While historians can ensure that a script fits into the historiography of an event, few are well-versed in writing for the general public. A television writer or director has much more experience in creating content that will resonate with audiences. Commemorative television requires audiences to care about the people and events being portrayed, so effectiveness relies on audience response as well as historical accuracy. This is where creatives specialising in the field of television can employ their skill set to ensure that the content engages the audience on an emotional level. The combined efforts of historians and creatives can ensure that programming engages with a historical topic in a manner

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[3] Ó Tuathaigh, Gearóid, 'Commemoration, public history and the professional historian'

[4] Ibid

that is respectful of the historiography of an event while still creating a compelling narrative for audiences to become invested in.

In addition to successfully commemorating a historical event in a manner that is satisfying to both historians and audiences, television content that engages with commemoration can be lucrative. Since Irish commemorative television is largely broadcast by RTÉ and funded by state commemoration committees, the ability to create thoughtful, meaningful content that communicates the Irish story to audiences in an engaging manner also increases the likelihood of receiving funding to produce a project. A writer who is able to effectively do so has (in the words of Sinéad McCoole) 'a golden key to a golden door.'[5]

Topics for Further Study

While this study has established the potential for television to effectively commemorate historical events, there exists potential for a wealth of research branching out from it. The research undertaken here was specific not only to Ireland, but to the commemorations of the Easter Rising. As discussed, the Rising was a complicated event with a complicated legacy, which raised a number of questions surrounding how it should be commemorated and where the focus of remembrances should lie. The commemorations of the Rising could be compared to the commemorations of similarly complex events in other countries. The similarities or differences could provide insight into cultural differences in processing difficult histories. Such research could also examine the ways in which commemorations are used to inspire debate or create consensus.

Within Ireland, commemorations of other, less divisive events could be compared to the Easter Rising commemorations. The centenary of the Rising sought to present a variety of viewpoints and interpretations, but would that be true of a historical event

[5] McCoole, Sinéad, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 26 June 2023

whose legacy was not contested? Would a commonly celebrated event encourage the same level of scrutiny? The answers to these questions could encourage further discussion regarding the influence that public opinion on an event has on how commemorations are handled. Such exploration would raise questions on the manner in which history is taught and handled in a commemorative context, but also in general.

Another potential area of investigation is how television programmes that are associated with a commemoration specific to one country are viewed abroad. Bríona Nic Dhiarmada explained how successful a documentary about the Easter Rising was in South America.[6] Many countries there have gone through their own anti-imperialist struggles and can relate to the major themes of the Irish story, even though the details are very different. Television can easily be viewed all over the world and has the potential to expose people to a culture and history that they had no previous knowledge of in a way that is entertaining enough to draw their attention. By creating these cross-cultural connections, television content can inspire people outside of the target demographic to learn more about the history being presented. While there is already historical programming available internationally, commemorations resonate in a different way by not only presenting the material, but explicitly connecting it to the emotions it stirs in people.

Conclusion

Television has the potential to be a highly effective vehicle for commemoration, but only if the programming created for a commemoration is thoughtful, accurate, and designed to engage audiences in deeper conversation around the event being commemorated. Watching television is a part of daily life for audiences across Ireland, so historical programming provides an opportunity for the past to be brought to life onscreen in a medium that is familiar and comfortable for audiences. Additionally, Irish television

[6] Nic Dhiarmada, Bríona, interview, conducted by Katherine Palumbo, 24 May 2022

viewing has always had a social component and, even in the modern era of watching alone on a personal device, discussion of television content both in person and online has become a part of the overall experience of a series. In the case of the Easter Rising commemorations, it was only natural that RTÉ, the Irish national broadcaster, was determined to be the best medium for 1916 commemorations in both 1966 and 2016. The programmes broadcast on RTÉ as part of the commemorative events created a shared experience for audiences both in Ireland and abroad, bringing people together to reflect on a formative event in the nation's history. While each set of programmes approached the topic in a different manner, all of the commemorative content shared the goal of meeting the expectations set forth in the Initial Statement of the Advisory Group. These included historical accuracy, representation of diverse viewpoints, and encouragement of audience engagement with the history of the Easter Rising. By analysing the strengths and weaknesses of these programmes, one can see the myriad ways in which the unique aspects of television make it an effective medium for commemoration.

Final Thoughts

In 2019, the Central Statistics Office reported that ninety-six percent of Irish households owned a television.[7] This percentage did not account for access to television content on computers, smartphones, and tablets. The ubiquitous nature of television makes it an ideal way to disseminate information to the general public. It is therefore logical that television would be used to engage people around the country in national commemorative events, such as the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising. At the conclusion of this project, ample evidence has been presented that television can be an effective vehicle for commemoration by bringing historical events to life in a way that can engage a wide audience, creating a shared national experience. As demonstrated by the

[7] 'Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) Report on Household Amenities and Access to Services 2004-2019,' *Central Statistics Office*, 12 February 2021

commemoration of the Easter Rising through RTÉ programming, there are a number of ways to approach this goal, but each can be successful when historical accuracy, the presentation of a variety of viewpoints, and encouragement of reflection and discussion are valued by creators. The creation of such content provides benefits to both the fields of history and television. From a historical perspective, understanding of the past can be brought to larger audiences in a manner that engages them on an emotional level as well as an intellectual one. By producing such thoughtful commemorative content, television can be a powerfully effective vehicle for the commemoration of historical events, inviting audiences into the larger conversation surrounding not only the past, but its impact on the present.

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The Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations

The Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations was established by the Taoiseach in 2011 and meets regularly in the Department of the Taoiseach. Its role was to advise the Government on historical matters relating to the Decade of Centenaries, and to consult widely with academic, community and voluntary groups and members of the public to ensure that significant events are commemorated accurately, proportionately and appropriately in tone. The group is non-partisan and composed of independent members from around the country.

Chair - Dr Maurice Manning

Dr Manning is Chancellor of the National University of Ireland. He is a former T.D. and Senator, and was President of the Irish Human Rights Commission from 2002 until 2012. He has written several books on Irish politics, and lectured in politics at UCD from 1966 to 2002.

Vice-Chair - Dr Martin Mansergh

Dr Mansergh was a T.D. for Tipperary South from 2007 to 2011, and Minister of State for OPW and the Arts between 2008 and 2011. He was a member of the Council of State from 2004 to 2011. He was a Senator from 2002 to 2007, and previous to that NI Special Adviser to three Taoisigh, having been a diplomat. He was co-recipient of the 1994 Tipperary Peace Prize with Fr Alex Reid and Rev. Roy Magee; author of *The Legacy of History for Making Peace in Ireland* (2003); and *Irish Times* columnist 2003–6. In 2018, he was elected member of the Royal Irish Academy.

Dr Sandra Collins

Dr Collins is the University Librarian at University College Dublin.
Originally a mathematician, she has worked in digital innovation and cultural heritage over 25 years in the public and private sectors.

She was previously the Director of the National Library of Ireland, the founding Director of the Digital Repository of Ireland in the Royal Irish Academy, and a Scientific Programme Manager in Science Foundation Ireland.

She is the Chair of the Consortium of National and University Libraries (CONUL), a member of the Advisory Forum to the Irish Government's National Conversation on Research, the Board of the Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI), and the Council of the Research Data Alliance (RDA).

Professor Mary Daly

Professor Daly is President of the Royal Irish Academy. She graduated from UCD with a double-first in History and Economics and a research masters in History, which secured an NUI Travelling Studentship. Her doctoral research was carried out at Nuffield College, Oxford. She has been a member of the UCD Faculty since 1973, and has also held visiting positions at Harvard and Boston College. Her teaching and research have concentrated on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ireland. She has written eight books, and edited/co-authored five books and numerous articles. Mary has also played an active role outside UCD, as a member of the National Archives Advisory Council and the Irish Manuscripts Commission. Secretary of the Royal Irish Academy 2000–2004, she was vice-chair of the Academy's Working Group on Higher Education, whose report was published in July 2005.

Francis Devine

Francis Devine, a retired tutor and author, is a former President of the Irish Labour History Society. He is the author of *Organising History: A Centenary of SIPTU* (Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 2009) and a Trustee of the Working Class Movement Library, Manchester. Currently an Executive Member of the Musicians' Union of Ireland, he is completing *Cultivating a Trade Union Culture: A History of the Medical Laboratory Scientists' Association, 1961–2011* and *Communicating the Union: A History of the Communications Workers' Union, 1904–2012*.

Gabriel Doherty

Gabriel Doherty is a lecturer in the Department of History, University College Cork. He received his BA in Modern History from Oxford University, having studied at Magdalen College between 1986 and 1989, and an MSc in History from University College Galway. He has edited a number of books of essays on twentieth century Irish history, most recently *The Home Rule crisis, 1912-14* (Cork, 2014).

Dr Anne Dolan

Dr Dolan is Associate Professor of Modern Irish History at Trinity College Dublin. Educated at UCD and Cambridge, she is author of *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: History and Memory 1923-2000* and, with William Murphy, *Michael Collins: the Man and the Revolution*. With Cormac O'Malley she has co-edited *'No Surrender Here!': the Civil War Papers of Ernie O'Malley 1922-1924*, and she is currently co-editing a multi-volume edition of the O'Malley notebooks with Dr Eve Morrison for the Irish Manuscripts Commission and the UCD Archives and Digital Library..

Professor Diarmuid Ferriter

Professor Ferriter is Professor of Modern Irish History at UCD.
His books include *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (2004); *Judging Dev: A Reassessment of the life and legacy of Eamon de Valera* (2007); *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (2009); *Ambiguous Republic: Ireland in the 1970s* (2012)*; A Nation and not a Rabble: The Irish Revolution 1913-23* (2015); *On The Edge: Ireland's Offshore Islands, A Modern History* (2018) and *The Border: The Weight of a Century of Anglo-Irish Relations* (2019).
He is a regular television and radio broadcaster and a weekly columnist with the Irish Times. In 2019 he was elected a member of the Royal Irish Academy.

Dr Mary Harris

Dr Harris is originally from Cork and studied history, Irish and Spanish at University College Cork. She completed her MA in medieval Irish literature at UCC and her doctorate in history at the University of Cambridge. From 1992-1996 she taught Irish Studies at the University of North London. She joined the History Department at NUI Galway in 1996, where her teaching has focussed on nineteenth and twentieth-century Ireland, in particular on church-state relations, political ideologies, and the Northern Ireland conflict. Her publications include *The Catholic Church and the Foundation of the Northern Irish State* (Cork, 1993).

Dr Leeann Lane

Dr Lane is a graduate of University College Cork and Boston College. She is a lecturer in the School of History and Geography, Dublin City University.
She is author of *Rosamond Jacob. Third Person Singular* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2010) and *Dorothy Macardle* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2019). She is currently working on a biography of Mary MacSwiney.

Commandant Stephen Mac Eoin

Commandant Mac Eoin was enlisted into the Army as an Officer Cadet in 1999. Attending University under the Army's USAC scheme, he was awarded a double First in French and History from NUI, Galway (2006) and later an MA in Archives Management from UCD (2008).

As both archivist and Army Officer, he has been actively involved in heritage and commemoration projects within the Defence Forces since 2007, most recently serving as Officer in Charge (Director) of the Military Archives. A member of the National Archives Advisory Council, he has led the delivery of several key archival projects informing recent historiography, including notably the digitisation of the Bureau of Military History (1913-1921) Collection and served for an extended period on the Interdepartmental Committee overseeing the phased release of the Military Service Pensions Collection.

From 2015 to 2016, he was seconded to the Ireland 2016 team in the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht as the Defence Forces liaison officer. He is a regular contributor to TV and radio documentaries and has been a spokesperson for Defence Forces heritage and commemoration matters for many years.

Commandant Mac Eoin has completed four tours of duty overseas as a peacekeeper in both command and staff appointments, including Kosovo; Chad; Lebanon and the Congo and served for one year as exchange instructor at the French St Cyr Military Academy.

Dr Sinéad McCoole

Dr McCoole has written extensively on modern Irish History.

Her books include *Hazel, A Life of Lady Lavery* (1996, 2014), *Guns and Chiffon* (1997, 2000), *No Ordinary Women* (2003, 2008, 2015), *Easter Widows* (2014) and *Leaving the Ladies* (2019).
She has published educational tools including the *Researcher's Handbook* (2000) and a study of child prisoners in Ireland *Hard Lessons* (2001).
Her work has spanned the domains of academic research and public history. A curator of exhibitions on Irish history and Irish art in both Ireland and the US, Sinéad has worked for museum designers, book publishers multi-media companies, national cultural institutions, and in the public and civil service.
Dr McCoole holds a University College Dublin BA (Hons) History and History of Art (1990), University College Dublin MA Modern Irish History (1992) and was awarded a DLitt by publication (2019) by the National University of Ireland.

Dr William Murphy

Dr Murphy is an Associate Professor at the School of History and Geography, Dublin City University.
A historian of modern Ireland, his work on the Irish revolution has addressed several aspects of the period. He is the author of *Political Imprisonment and the Irish, 1912-1921* (Oxford, 2014) and editor of *Darrell Figgis, A Chronical of Jails* (Dublin, 2010). He is co-author, with Anne Dolan, of *Michael Collins: the man and the revolution* (Cork, 2018), while he has written on the relationship of sport and leisure to the politics of revolution and on suffragist protest during the period. He contributed several chapters to the landmark *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2017).

Professor Eunan O'Halpin

Professor O'Halpin is Bank of Ireland Professor of Contemporary Irish History and Director of the Centre for Contemporary Irish History at Trinity College Dublin.
He was previously Professor of Government at Dublin City University (1998–2000). Educated at UCD and Cambridge, he has written widely on aspects of twentieth-century Irish and British history and politics, including *Spying on Ireland: British Intelligence and Irish Neutrality during the Second World War* (Oxford, 2008).

He is a Member of the Royal Irish Academy and a Fellow of Trinity College Dublin. Professor O'Halpin is Director of the M.Phil in Modern Irish History, and was (July 2005–December 2007) Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) in the School of Histories and Humanities. He is a member (2005–12) of the Board of Trinity College, and chairman (2006–) of the Library and Information Policy Committee of the Board.

He is a member of the Department of Justice Archives Advisory Group, a member and former chairman of the Royal Irish Academy National Committee for the Study of International Affairs and its National Committee for History, and a member of its Irish Constitution project board.

He is a joint editor of the Royal Irish Academy 'Documents on Irish Foreign Policy' series, and a member of the advisory board of the *Historical Journal* and of the International Board of 20th Century British History.

Dr Éamon Phoenix

Dr Éamon Phoenix was a greatly valued member of the Expert Advisory Group since its inception in 2012, until his death in November 2022.

Dr Phoenix was Principal Lecturer in History and Head of Lifelong Learning at Stranmillis University College, Queen's University Belfast.

He was the author of a number of books on modern Irish history, including 'Conflicts in the North of Ireland 1900-2000' and 'Northern Nationalism 1890-1940'.

He wrote the daily 'On This Day' column for the Irish News and was a regular broadcaster.

Dr Phoenix designed and chaired the lecture series organised by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council/Heritage Lottery, 'Remembering the Future'.

He was a member of the National Famine Committee and the Nomadic Project Board and a regular speaker at cross-community events on the Decade of Centenaries 1912-1923.

Dr Phoenix was a historian of great integrity and empathy, who made an enormous contribution to the study of Irish history, and a skilled communicator whose life was dedicated to building bridges between communities.

INITIAL STATEMENT
BY ADVISORY GROUP
ON CENTENARY
COMMEMORATIONS

The announcement of the establishment of this Group stated that the first objective would be the preparation of "An overview statement to inform the development and delivery of the commemorative programme for the period 2012–2016".

The advisory group is, first and foremost, a collection of individual professional historians with individual research interests, interpretations and institutional affiliations. What unites us is a desire to make a contribution to meaningful and informed commemoration in the form of advice to the government on official commemorative events.

We do this in a spirit of public service and completely independently of any political views, agendas or influence. While serving on this advisory group, we will all be involved individually in historical research and in the dissemination of our findings, and making individual contributions to debates around commemoration. Any ideas or views that we express in that personal professional capacity should not be taken as representing the views of the Advisory Group. We see our advice as being particularly relevant under the following headings:

Context

The coming years see the centenary anniversaries of some of the most significant events in the history of modern Ireland and of the United Kingdom, and equally importantly in the history of the modern world. The decade saw the emergence both of an independent Irish State and of Northern Ireland with a devolved government within the UK. The commemorative programme should illustrate how events in Ireland were rooted in continuing traditions and also were part of the wider international story. A comprehensive commemorative programme should not only address the key events in Ireland but also enhance the understanding of the wider United Kingdom, European and world context in which they took place.

The commemoration will be measured and reflective, and will be informed by a full acknowledgement of 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. There must be full acknowledgement of the multiple identities and traditions which are part of the overall story and of the different ideals and sacrifices associated with them. Official events must within reason be inclusive and non-partisan, but the State should not be expected to be neutral about its own existence. The aim should be to broaden sympathies, without having to abandon loyalties, and in particular recognising the value of ideals and sacrifices, including their cost.

The decade of commemorations recalls some of the most significant events in the history of modern Ireland and the modern world: a decade of unprecedented violence, death, destruction and forced resettlement, but also the exercise of national self-determination resulting in major changes in government and political boundaries.

Throughout the coming decade it is important not to forget the bloodshed and the deep antagonisms of these years. While few eyewitnesses survive, the memories remain vivid in some communities and families, and commemorations may revive painful memories of loss or dispossession.

We must also acknowledge that events such as the formation of the Ulster and later the Irish Volunteers and the gunrunning in Larne and Howth, culminating in the Easter Rising, represented a direct challenge to constitutionalism and the rule of law, even though all have received, arguably, retrospective democratic validation; the foundation of the Government of Northern Ireland and of the Irish Free State took place against the background not only of a major electoral shift and new models of self-government but also of armed actions, both official and unofficial, and involuntary migrations of minority groups.

During the coming commemorations we should reflect on all these issues, and use the occasion to extend our understanding of the historical context. We should also be conscious that on this island we have a common history but not a common memory of these shaping events. Some of the landmark events of the years 1912–22 have a strong appeal to one community or place, not to another. Heritages are complex, multiple, sometimes overlapping, sometimes very much at variance — these differences cannot be ignored. It is important to acknowledge and understand these differences, and to respect divergent traditions.

Commemoration should not ignore differences and divisions. The goal of inclusiveness is best achieved, not by trying for an enforced common interest or universal participation in commemorations for events such as the 1916 Rising or the opening of the parliament in Northern Ireland, but by encouraging multiple and plural commemorations which remember the past while ensuring, as far as possible, that the commemoration does not re-ignite old tensions.

It is important to bear in mind that Ireland is not alone in having to come to terms with bitter memories and deep divisions resulting from the wars and revolutions of the years 1912–22; many parts of Europe — especially on the eastern and southern peripheries — will have to confront the legacies of even more traumatic events.

While avoiding any sense of triumphalism, we should also recall the significant achievements of these years: an independent and democratic Irish state; universal suffrage for women and men; the transfer of land to those who farmed it; a judiciary and senior public service that was representative of the majority population; and the creation of international organisations such as the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation, which sought to extend the rights of citizens and workers and promote international peace and understanding, organisations in which the new Irish state played its part.

Authenticity and proportionality

As the national commemorative programme will be comprised of official events and the complementary initiatives of state and local authorities, institutions, national associations and community groups in Ireland and abroad, the Group will provide advice to ensure that the general development of the programme and the provision of official support are directed towards commemorations which are historically authentic, relating to events, issues and processes of significance.

While the professional, sectoral and particular interests of diverse groups will give rise to an intense pattern of commemorative events in the coming years, it is recognised that official initiatives should be restricted in number and relate to the key events or developments in any year.

Shared heritage

The Advisory Group is mindful that the Centenary anniversary programme relates to a time of division in Ireland on issues of identity and allegiance and ultimately of state formation. With confidence in the increasing public interest and the greater capacity today to explore and address the history of the period, the Group will liaise with appropriate groups of all traditions in formulating its advice to government on possible events.

Whatever the challenges that may arise in developing commemorative arrangements, there should be no attempt to contrive a historical or retrospective consensus about the contemporary impact and legacy of divisive events. Commemorative events should reflect or explore history with a true integrity, and the particular arrangements for each event should enable the acknowledgement by different traditions, without recrimination, of a shared history. Reflecting the shared heritage of Great Britain and Ireland, the commemorative programme should include events throughout Ireland, in Britain and at the principal centres of the Irish abroad.

Thematic issues

The Group is conscious that any event-based approach might not address major thematic issues. The AG will advise on appropriate themes and suggest ways in which they may best be approached. This will provide an opportunity to highlight new and ongoing research and perspectives, and act as a reminder of the huge broadening of the frameworks for interpreting the events of 1912–22 that has occurred in recent decades, with a focus no longer exclusively on political but also on social, cultural, labour and women's history.

Research, scholarship and accessibility

The AG is of the strong view that the opportunity to encourage scholarship and its dissemination at national and local level must be used as fully as possible, with particular emphasis on archival development, the involvement of national cultural institutions, institutions of learning and the Department of Education. There needs to be an emphasis on accessibility and digitisation of source material, both in Ireland and in Britain, both during the commemoration period and as a legacy of it.

A key element of th commemorative programme will be provided by the national cultural institutions that hold the records, artefacts and material most relevant to the decade under consideration — principally the National Archives, the National Library and the National Museum in Ireland, the National Museums of Northern Ireland and the Public Record Office in Northern Ireland, as well as other British museums. The particular consideration of Government is necessary to ensure that their tremendous potential is achieved in the coming years, and intergovernmental cooperation will be needed to ensure that all relevant historical records held by archival and other institutions throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom are made available for historical research. The Group will seek to encourage original research at local and national level, at all times acknowledging the multiple identities and traditions which are part of the history of the island of Ireland and Irish people worldwide. We are also conscious that we have a responsibility towards ensuring that a younger generation of students are familiar with the events of this decade and believe that history at all levels of education needs to be a core part of the curricula.

Consultation

The Advisory Group will consult widely with scholars, universities, educational and cultural bodies, local historical associations and committees, and are happy to receive suggestions and ideas from these as well as from individuals. The role of the group should be to advise on and, where possible, anticipate issues likely to arise, to identify gaps in programmes that may need to be filled, and to be alert to any serious distortions that may be taking place, beyond reasonable differences in historical interpretation.

Appendix 1 — The Group's goals in relation to archives:

1. The Group will encourage all repositories in Ireland to identify collections containing material that is relevant to key events in this decade of commemorations. While many collections are already widely known, and their relevance is easily identified, there are collections of letters, diaries, photographs etc. that may add significantly to our knowledge of the Great War or the 1916 Rising, which are only known to the responsible librarian or archivist.
2. Although resources are limited, repositories in Ireland are encouraged to give priority to those that are relevant to the decade of commemoration in the listing of collections or digitisation.
3. Many libraries and archives outside Ireland also hold material that is relevant, and it is vital to connect with these and to create digital links to these holdings. This should be done by creating a commemoration portal, which can be accessed and searched.
4. The Group will seek to make the on-line Dictionary of Irish Biography — an essential source for this decade of commemorations and for all aspects of Ireland's history and culture — available to all secondary schools. This can be done for a modest sum.
5. In order to make this campaign a success it will be essential to make contact with librarians and archivists, especially the county librarians, and the group may set up a subcommittee to oversee this.
6. Long-established local newspapers should be contacted with a view to accessing archives. While some are available on-line, others should be encouraged to revisit their archive and to reproduce editions published at key dates. To make this archives exercise a reality, the Committee shall endeavour to secure funding for the creation of an archives portal, and to recruit a researcher whose job would be to contact repositories and identify relevant collections that they might hold.

Appendix 2 — Events with which the state may be associated in terms of public commemoration:

The items below constitute only a very limited selection of events, organisations and processes which may take turns on the centennial roundabout between now and 2023, and are put forward purely to aid discussion.

Legal and constitutional:

1912 Home Rule Bill.
1919 January, Constitution of Dáil Éireann .
1920 Government of Ireland Act.
1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty.
1922 Establishment of the National Army.
1922 Free State Constitution.
1922 Foundation of An Garda Síochána.
1924 Courts Act.

Social:

1923 Land Act

Economic and communications:

1919 June, initiation of transatlantic air travel.

Political and military:

1913 Foundation of Ulster Volunteer Force.
1913 Dublin Lockout.
1913 Irish Volunteers founded.
1913 Irish Citizen Army founded.
1914 Larne gunrunning.
1914 Howth gunrunning.
1914 August, First World War.
1915 Casement brigade formed, Germany.
1915 Gallipoli campaign and Irish losses.
1916 Easter Rising in Dublin.
1916 First Battle of the Somme.
1917 Sinn Féin ard fheis.
1918 Sinking of the Leinster — potential capstone to Ireland and the First World War reflections.
1918 General election with new franchise including women.
1919 First meeting of Dáil Éireann.
1919 Soloheadbeg ambush.
1919 Ireland and Versailles.
1920 Death of Terence MacSwiney.
1920 Execution of Kevin Barry.
1920 Burning of Cork.
1920 Informal Irish/Soviet recognition.
1921 Northern Ireland government and parliament.
1921 Truce.
1921 Treaty.
1922 June, destruction of the Public Record Office and outbreak of Civil War.
1922 Free State Constitution, including equal voting rights for women.
1923 IRA 'Dump arms' order, effectively ending Civil War.
1923 Ireland joins the League of Nations

MEMBERSHIP OF THE ADVISORY GROUP ON CENTENARY COMMEMORATIONS

- Dr. Maurice Manning (Chairman)
- Dr. Martin Mansergh
- Professor Mary Daly
- Dr. Mary Harris
- Gabriel Doherty
- Dr. Eamon Phoenix
- Professor Eunan O'Halpin
- Professor Diarmuid Ferriter
- Ms. Sinead McCoole
- Mr. Francis Devine
- Dr. Leeann Lane

Appendix C: Programme Information on *Insurrection*

RTÉ Airdate: 10-17 April, 1966
Funding provided by RTÉ

Directors: Michael Garvey & Louis Lentin
Writer: Hugh Leonard

Main Cast:
Ray McAnally……..Newsanchor
Maurice O'Doherty…….Newscaster
Eoin O'Súilleabháin……Padraic Pearse
Ronnie Walsh…….James Connolly
Jim Norton……..…Tom Clarke

Programme summary:

Insurrection tells the story of the Easter Rising in eight half-hour episodes. Each is presented as a news report, with studio segments anchoring 'on the street' interviews and cuts to the action of the Rising. It begins with a report on the First World War being quickly followed by a report that Irish Volunteer activity has been cancelled for Easter Sunday. The series then follows the events of Easter Week, highlighting rebel activity and British response while mewsanchor Ray McAnally provided context on an in-studio map. The military occurrences of the rebellion are the primary focus of the series until episode seven, which culminates in the surrender. The final episode then jumps forward in time to 12 May, and centres around the final executions of the Rising's leaders and the aftermath. While McAnally had reacted to the ongoing Rising with confusion, then professional detachment, his demeanour in this episode is noticeably different. He emphasises James Connolly being wounded and Sean MacDermott being disabled from a childhood illness and questions the necessity of their executions. He then confronts John Maxwell, demanding to know why such harsh sentences were condoned and referring to British soldiers' actions as 'murders.' The final scene of the episode sees McAnally asking the audience what freedom is and declaring that 'the insurrection is over. Or is it?'

Appendix D: Programme Information on *1916: The Irish Rebellion*

RTÉ Airdate: 10, 17, & 24 February, 2016
Funding provided by University of Notre Dame, RTÉ

Directors: Ruán Magan & Pat Collins
Writers: Bríona Nic Dhiarmada & Ruán Magan
Narrator: Liam Neeson

Programme Summary:

1916: The Irish Rebellion consists of three hour-long episodes. The first, 'Awakening' establishes the context in which the Easter Rising occurred. It briefly summarises the history of colonialism in Ireland from 1170 until the early 1910s, placing the Rising in a larger context of Irish independence struggles. It also introduces the people who will be most prominent during the Rising and the ideologies that brought them to the nationalist movement. Context for the time at which the Rising took place includes a discussion of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the fears of Irishmen being conscripted into the First World War. Since the context is provided in the first episode, the second ('Insurrection') is focused entirely on the events between the sinking of the German supply ship *Aud* and the surrender. A large portion of the episode consists of recollections from Rising veterans and witnesses, both in the form of written accounts and the video interviews recorded in the 1960s. While the tactics and military aspects of the Rising are presented, there is far greater focus on the personal experience of the people in Dublin at the time. The third episode, 'When Myth and History Rhyme' initially covers the immediate aftermath of the Rising. The executions of the leaders are discussed, as well as the experiences of those imprisoned for their role (actual or suspected) in the rebellion. The final section of this episode is dedicated to the more global effects of the Rising, including the impact it had on other British colonies, such as India, in inspiring their independence movements. The series concludes by questioning the legacy of the Easter Rising, with academics discussing the impact of the event on later political violence and questioning what it means in a contemporary context. No definitive answer is given to these questions, and instead the programme ends on an interview with Bulmer Hobson recorded in the 1960s. He declares that the mythology of the Rising is likely to live on despite historical reanalysis of the event in the future.

Appendix E: Programme Information on *Rebellion*

RTÉ Airdate: 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 January 2016
Funding provided by RTÉ

Director: Aku Louhimies
Writer: Colin Teevan

Main Cast:
Charlie Murphy…….Elizabeth Butler
Ruth Bradley…….Frances O'Flaherty
Sarah Greene……May Lacy
Brían Gleeson……..Jimmy Mahon
Michael Ford-Fitzgerald….Harry Butler

Programme summary:

Rebellion follows three young women living in 1916 Dublin. Main protagonist Elizabeth comes from a wealthy family and is engaged to marry an officer in the British Army. However, she is also a member of the Irish Citizen Army and romantically involved with fellow ICA member Jimmy. Another woman, Frances, is a member of Cumann na mBan and an instructor at St. Enda's school, where she prepares the students to participate in a militant uprising. Their friend May is employed as a secretary at Dublin Castle and discovers she is pregnant as a result of an affair with her married employer. The series depicts how each of these women experiences Easter Week, with Elizabeth joining the garrison at Dublin Castle/City Hall, Frances moves from fighting on Northumberland Road to organising intelligence gathering, and May is sent away by her lover, passing the week in his country house with his wife. Meanwhile, Jimmy's brother is home on leave from the First World War and finds himself grappling between his sense of duty to the empire and seeing the desperate, impoverished condition in which his family lives. The series follows their experiences through Easter Week and after, with the final episode portraying the characters coping with the failure of the Rising and the legal consequences for themselves. The series leaves all of its plot lines open-ended, likely in anticipation of the follow-up series *Resistance*, which continues the story of Jimmy and Elizabeth's brother Harry fighting in the War of Independence. *Resistance* was released in 2019.

Appendix F: Programme Information on *Centenary*

RTÉ Airdate: 26 March, 2016 (broadcast live from Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, Dublin)
Funding provided by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Director & Writer: Cilian Fennell

Featured Performers:
Sibéal Ní Chasaide
Iarla Ó Lionáird
Imelda May
Seo Linn

Programme summary:

Centenary is a 90-minute concert, consisting of eighteen segments representing the course of twentieth-century Irish history:

'Awakening,' 'Mo Ghile Mear,' and 'Cúchulainn' represent the resurgence of interest in Gaelic culture in the early 1900s, presented though an intepretive dance, a choral performance, and an acrobatic blend of martial arts and dance.

'Protesting' sees performers recreate a pre-Rising Dublin street, with soldiers, workers rights activists, suffragettes, and Irish language activists representing the social issues that led to discontent in 1910s Ireland.

'Foggy Dew' and 'Mise Éire' portray the Easter Rising, with barricades constructed across the stage and the actors from the 'Protesting' segment taking the roles of rebels behind them. Notably, this segment involves very little movement, with the actors remaining still as the singer performs 'The Foggy Dew.' 'Mise Éire portrays the aftermath of the fighting, with flames being projected onto the GPO set and a dancer with a white flag representing Elizabeth O'Farrell.

'Captivity,' 'Executions' and 'Grieving' all depict the sense of loss following the Rising as participants were imprisoned and executed, and those on both sides, as well as civilians, buried loved ones. These segments were filmed at Kilmainham Gaol and in the Garden of Remembrance in Dublin. They feature close-ups of singers performing and the statuary in the Garden, keeping the focus on personal expressions of emotion.

‘Turbulence’ represented the War of Independence and Civil War through an instrumental musical performance, with newsreel footage from both of those events projected on a screen behind the performers. There is no dialogue or on-screen text in this segment.

‘Foundation’ features the tricolour being raised over each of the provinces, while people within Ireland and members of the diaspora read out the Proclamation, highlighting the diversity of modern Irish people

‘Building’ had performers acting as miners and builders to represent the construction and progress of the 1930s, while newsreel footage of the building of the dam at Ardnacrusha was projected behind them.

‘Emigration and Renewal’ begins with couples dancing, then the men put on coats and pick up suitcases to represent emigration. The women are left alone and sorrowful. Renewal is demonstrated by Irish music being played by more modern instruments while women performed an updated, looser form of step dancing. This demonstrates how Irish traditions lived on in new forms among the emigrant population and their descendants.

‘It Ain’t Easy… Being Green’ featured compiled newsreel footage referring to the difficulties of life in Ireland between the 1960s and 1980s. The issues featured in the segment included partition in the North, poverty, and gender inequality. To avoid an entirely pessimistic view, the clips are selected to show progress over time. The video ends on an image of Irish President Mary McAleese and Queen Elizabeth I of Britain laying wreaths at the Garden of Remembrance together.

‘You Raise Me Up’ was also a video montage, highlighting the social awareness and charitable contributions of Irish people to society. Imagery included food drives, Special Olympics games, and mental health charities, showing how people remain committed to helping one another in modern Ireland. Immediately following it was ‘One,’ in which Colm Wilkinson sang onstage, but was accompanied by an audio track of many people harmonising. A screen behind him showed the people whose voices were heard, connecting to ‘Foundation’ in its demonstration of the diversity of modern Ireland.

While not considered its own segment in the programme, the next portion of the show was a speech from President Michael D. Higgins in which he paid tribute to the history of

Irish arts, music, and poetry both at the time of the Rising and in the contemporary era. This led into the final segment, ‘Music Makers,’ in which Irish language rock band Seo Linn performed AE O’Shaughnessy’s 1873 poem ‘We Are the Music Makers,’ set to an original melody that incorporated modern arrangements as well as traditional Irish instruments. The performance also included step dancers in modern clothing, continuing the link between tradition and contemporary sensibilities.