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Vivid Faces review by John Banville

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**Moral Lepers**

**John Banville**

*Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890-1923* by [R.F. Foster](https://www.lrb.co.uk/search?author=Foster,+R.F.)  
Allen Lane, 433 pp, £10.99, May 2015, ISBN 978 0 241 95424 9

The Irish Rising of 1916 would almost certainly have failed, like the many previous rebellions in Irish history, had not the British authorities, already knee-deep in the quagmire of the Great War, made the grave miscalculation of executing 16 of the rebel leaders, thus granting them the martyrdom that many of them had sought. Indeed, even the victims of that ‘blood sacrifice’, as it came to be considered, might have been consigned harmlessly to what the historian and journalist Tim Pat Coogan used to call the ‘pantechnicon’ of Irish heroes, but for the fact that in the period immediately following the Rising, most of Europe entered a critical period of revolutionary change. There was the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, and in 1918 Woodrow Wilson, though hardly a firebrand, issued the principles of a new world order of which national self-determination would be a key component. The following January, an assembly of Irish MPs, elected to Westminster on the abstentionist ticket, met in Dublin to found the second Irish Republic; the first had been proclaimed by the leaders of the Rising in Dublin on Easter Monday 1916, and had lasted, at least in the minds of its signatories, for five days before the rebellion was crushed.

Yet as Roy Foster implies, the founding of a republic was not as clear-cut a goal for the precursors of the men of 1916, or even for the men, and women, of the War of Independence that broke out in 1919, as later nationalist piety would insist. It is startling to read, in Charles Townshend’s fine study, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence*, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) leader, John O’Leary who, in Yeats’s poem, shared his grave with the corpse of ‘romantic Ireland’, observing that the Brotherhood’s ‘propagandist work was … entirely separatist with practically no reference to Republicanism’. Similarly, and just as surprisingly, Townshend quotes Michael Collins, who had fought in 1916 and three years later became president of the IRB Supreme Council, insisting that ‘the cause was not the Irish Republic’ but ‘liberation from English occupation’.[​](https://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n14/john-banville/moral-lepers#fn-asterisk) Certainly it ‘did not change the relationship between one class of Irishmen and another’, according to the historian of Sinn Féin Michael Laffan, quoted by Diarmaid Ferriter in his recent book *A Nation and Not a Rabble: The Irish Revolution 1913-23*.[​†](https://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n14/john-banville/moral-lepers#fn-dagger) ‘Its impact was nationalist and political,’ Laffan insisted, ‘not social and economic.’ Furthermore, as Ferriter himself observes, at least some of the rebels were as self-interested as they were patriotic, and used the revolution ‘as a useful cloak for the settling of scores that had little to do with ideas of nationalism or “the nation”’. In fact, Foster, in his introduction to *Vivid Faces*, questions whether the Rising and the War of Independence together constituted a revolution at all, ‘in the generally accepted meaning of the word’.

Faced with such a question, those of us who enjoyed, or more likely suffered, a traditional Irish Catholic education, will recall that our history teachers never spoke of the 1916 ‘revolution’ but exclusively of ‘the Rising’, as of a holy event, something akin to the Resurrection; no doubt the word ‘revolution’ smacked too much of Bolshevist anarchy and godlessness. The insurrectionists of 1916 and the subsequent War of Independence tended strongly towards political, social and religious conservatism. As Kevin O’Higgins, a minister in the first Irish government, observed, ‘we were probably the most conservative-minded revolutionaries who ever put through a successful revolution.’ Towards the end of his short life – he was assassinated by the IRA in 1927 – O’Higgins had toyed with the idea of instituting a dual monarchy as a way of ending partition. Astonishingly, the notion had first been floated by Patrick Pearse himself: he had suggested inviting Prince Joachim, younger son of Kaiser Wilhelm II, to be King of Ireland. It is fascinating to think that German might now be one of Ireland’s official languages, along with English and Irish. How complicated are the affairs of even the smallest nations.

Roy Foster is one of the finest contemporary Irish historians. He is regarded, with venom by his detractors, as a leading ‘revisionist’, and his *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, published in 1988, provoked much muttering and some loud yells in the nationalist ranks. He studied at Trinity College, Dublin, where a major influence was the legendary Anglo-Irish historian F.S.L. Lyons, whose work he adverts to frequently, and whose name is invoked in the opening lines of *Vivid Faces.* Foster took over the project of writing W.B. Yeats’s authorised biography, on which Lyons had been working for ten years but left unwritten at the time of his premature death in 1983. Foster’s two-volume *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, at once magisterial and subtle, was warmly received in general but caused annoyance to some left-leaning critics, who considered Foster’s treatment of Yeats’s unappetising and sometimes poisonous politics over-indulgent, and, again, provoked nationalist wrath for … well, as so often, it was not quite clear what it was they were wrathful about, unless it was the fact that Foster is a Protestant Irishman who lives and works in England.

https://rev.lrb.co.uk/lg.php?bannerid=0&campaignid=0&zoneid=55&loc=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lrb.co.uk%2Fv37%2Fn14%2Fjohn-banville%2Fmoral-lepers&referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lrb.co.uk%2Flogin%3Fhref%3D%2Fv37%2Fn14%2Fjohn-banville%2Fmoral-lepers&cb=ca406d7e15In his new book Foster acknowledges that the period between the 1916 Rising and the end of the Civil War in 1923 ‘has been closely excavated’, but points out that what might be called the pre-revolutionary period, the quarter-century between the death in 1891 of Charles Stewart Parnell, the doomed founder and leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and 1916, deserves a deeper investigation, ‘at the personal level of individual lives’, than has yet been carried out. He is rightly wary of first-hand accounts written after the dust of revolution had more or less settled: ‘the traumatic split and civil war that followed the Treaty [with Britain] in 1921 entailed upon survivors the necessity of gathering material to prove their side was the right one, and their actions consistent with the principles of the revolution.’ Therefore his aim, he writes, is not to consider just those who were to become leading revolutionaries: ‘Rather, I am attempting to characterise the worlds of students, actors, writers, teachers, civil servants; often from comfortable middle-class backgrounds, and often spending part of their lives working in Britain.’ Using newly available material in the Bureau of Military History, and the archives of University College, Dublin, he has trawled through diaries, letters, journals and unpublished autobiographies to come up with an elegant, sharply revealing and, one might say, revolutionary account of a hitherto largely overlooked aspect of the social history of Ireland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Particularly bright and clear is the light he shines on the role of women before and during the years of insurrection, a role largely written out of the official histories; for this service alone the book is invaluable.

What strikes one first and most forcibly in the personal testimonies that Foster has unearthed is the note of romantic fervour and longing that sounds all the way through them. The pre-revolution radicals, especially those living and working in Dublin, were a new breed of Irish activists, ‘vaguely conscious, even at the time’, Foster writes, ‘that their lives reflected a larger reality’. Foster takes the title of his book from the opening lines of Yeats’s ‘Easter 1916’:

I have met them at close of day  
Coming with vivid faces  
From counter or desk among grey  
Eighteenth-century houses.

The poem’s repeated refrain, ‘All changed, changed utterly:/A terrible beauty is born,’ expresses a recognition that is frequently misunderstood. The poet is not celebrating a radical new turn in Irish affairs brought about by the Rising that will transform the dull lives of shop assistants and petty clerks. The emphasis is on the word ‘terrible’ in its most cataclysmic sense. What the poem is acknowledging is that the world of privilege and aristocratic hauteur into which Yeats had been born – or into which he liked to pretend he had been born – was ending, and that a new, democratic order was coming into being in Ireland, which he would characterise in his late poem ‘The Statues’ as ‘this filthy modern tide’ on which ‘we Irish’ are thrown ‘and by its formless spawning fury wrecked’. It could be argued, and Foster largely does argue, that it was precisely from the overlordship of this privileged world, supported by and dependent on British rule in Ireland, that the Irish pre-revolutionaries sought to free themselves and their country. Later the battle turned nasty, as battles tend to do. In the War of Independence, the Irish Republican Army, which developed from the Irish Volunteers, insisted it was at war with Britain, and certainly it was fighting British forces in Ireland; but it was the great houses of the Ascendancy that it attacked and burned.

As the war went on – there were three distinct conflicts: the 1916 Rising, the War of Independence three years later, followed by the year-long Civil War that began in 1922 – the bitterness deepened and attitudes hardened; as Yeats wrote in his great poem from 1923, ‘Meditations in time of civil war’, We had fed the heart on fantasies,  
The heart’s grown brutal from the fare.

It had not always been so, for there was true idealism among even the toughest-minded nationalists. Foster quotes Liam Mellows, who took part in all three conflicts and was among the many anti-Treaty fighters executed by the Free State government during the Civil War: ‘We do not seek to make this country a materially great country at the expense of its honour … we would rather have the people of Ireland eking out a poor existence on the soil, as long as they possessed their souls, their minds, their honour.’ Foster quotes too a passage from the 1902 diary of Terence MacSwiney, who would die on hunger strike, in which MacSwiney proudly declares himself an extremist, and goes on to remark that for him ‘the notion of a righteous war of liberation was a desideratum from early youth … supplying a romantic counterpoint’ to the life he led ‘working as a clerk and studying at night-school’. MacSwiney’s widow, Muriel, was implacable, writing after the fighting was over: ‘I shall spend my life not, as up to this, working for the complete independence of Ireland’s Republic but also working for the destruction & downfall of England & of every single English person I come across. The English people are to me now a plague of moral lepers.’

Such ferocity was almost unheard of among the turn-of-the-century Irish radicals whose mild and formless aspirations drove the swelling tide of revolution. Reading of them now, one is inevitably reminded of the young Russians of the same period and their excited dabblings in what their counterparts in the 1960s would call ‘alternative lifestyles’. Foster cites ‘feminism, socialism, anti-imperialism, anti-vivisectionism’ as beliefs impelling the revolutionary enthusiasm of early 20th-century Ireland’s young, and not so young: it is mildly surprising to hear of the somewhat shadowy Arthur Griffith (b.1871), as agile a survivor as Talleyrand himself, conducting semi-clandestine political meetings in the Irish Farm and Produce Company restaurant in Dublin’s city centre; one does not readily associate organic and whole-food concerns with the founder of the movement that would eventually become Sinn Féin.

https://rev.lrb.co.uk/lg.php?bannerid=4860&campaignid=1413&zoneid=6&loc=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lrb.co.uk%2Fv37%2Fn14%2Fjohn-banville%2Fmoral-lepers&referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lrb.co.uk%2Flogin%3Fhref%3D%2Fv37%2Fn14%2Fjohn-banville%2Fmoral-lepers&cb=7f6874114eThere was also a strong secular theme to the thought and writings of a number of figures in the pre-1916 period. Among these was the remarkable Cork nationalist P.S. O’Hegarty, who worked in England in the Post Office but used his spare time, of which he had much (‘I have never yet discovered any civil service work that I couldn’t do with one tenth of my brain and in about a third of the time the ordinary civil servant takes’) to turn himself into a formidable journalist. He was one of the few Irish radicals to declare himself firmly and unapologetically anti-clerical, which, he wrote, ‘really means that we are insisting for the nation as a whole and for every individual in it that the Church should confine itself to such matters as come within its province, and that secular matters remain secular’. Surprisingly, even Patrick Pearse could be anti-clerical, in the days before he came to identify himself with the Christian concept of transcendent blood-sacrifice and cast himself as the chief sacrificial victim.

However, all signs of even the most tentative apostasy were swept away by the wind of war. As the 1916 fighting began, Foster writes,

the atmosphere of elation, and the conquest of fear, was sustained by an intensely religious atmosphere. Before going out to storm the city, whole battalions of Volunteers had taken Communion, in a spirit of solemn exaltation. During the occupation of the GPO the Rosary was said communally every night, and priests were on hand to hear confessions, despite the Church’s extremely ambiguous view of the whole venture … This confounding of Catholicism with the rebel cause would be of immense importance as the war gathered momentum in the ensuing months.

Indeed, it remained of immense importance through the ensuing decades. Eamon de Valera, one of the few 1916 leaders to survive the Rising – his American citizenship saved him from the firing squad – recognised the importance of the Church’s influence, especially among working-class mothers, and used it with cunning and adroitness as a means of binding the people and stifling intellectual revolt. When he won political power after the Civil War (which his side had lost), de Valera moved swiftly to establish himself as Father of the Nation not only in a secular but in a quasi-religious sense. For this he needed the backing of the Church, which by now had abandoned its disapproval of the revolution, recognising the potential for accruing power that de Valera and Fianna Fáil, the new party he founded in 1926, were offering. As de Valera told an election rally in 1917, ‘the priests know me and are behind me.’ Later, when with many misgivings the former gunmen had taken up parliamentary politics – Séan Lemass, a cofounder of Fianna Fáil, described the party as ‘slightly constitutional’ – it was noted that whenever he mounted political platforms he was surrounded by a ‘sombre bodyguard of priests’. In his own eyes, however, ‘Dev’, as he came to be popularly known, judged himself too fine for mere priesthood: he told a correspondent in 1922 that he felt he had been meant to be ‘a bishop, rather than the leader of a revolution’. To a large extent, indeed, he sought to be not only the leader of the nation but its embodiment. In the Dáil, on 6 January 1922, the day before the assembly approved the Anglo-Irish Treaty that ended the War of Independence but led directly to the Civil War, he declared that ‘whenever I wanted to know what the Irish people wanted I had only to examine my own heart and it told me straight off what the Irish people wanted.’

No doubt de Valera had studied Patrick Pearse closely and learned from him the lesson that to be an inspirational leader one must transform oneself into a symbol. Pearse, however, was the kind of emotional extremist that de Valera could never be. Foster describes Pearse as ‘a fascinating and divisive figure … charismatic, inefficient and driven by complex personal urges’ (no doubt a delicate reference to Pearse’s confused sexuality), a revolutionary who came late to the revolution and therefore had to be all the more violent in word and action. In 1913 he declared it would be better that ‘Dublin should be laid in ruins’ than go on living in contentment under British rule; in 1916 such ruination almost came to pass. Of the five hundred or so people who died in the Rising – it is impossible to arrive at an exact number – three hundred were civilians, and among those, as the broadcaster and writer Joe Duffy will document in *Children of the Rising*, to be published in the autumn, forty were children under the age of 16, the youngest just over two. The smoke of history tends to obscure such casualties – ‘collateral damage’ – yet one cannot but wonder if the achievement of ‘freedom’ and self-rule were worth even one of those deaths. Of course, to pose such a question is to place oneself among what Michael Collins contemptuously dismissed as ‘the forces of moderation’, or what the IRA used to call the ‘slobbering moderates’.

The machinations that led to the Rising are intricate and fascinating, often dismayingly so. In September 1914, a month after Britain declared war on Germany, the Supreme Council of the IRB met in Dublin and decided to stage a rebellion and to seek German support and weapons. Germany havered, though, and by 1916 the seven-member Military Council within the IRB, of which Pearse was a leading member, decided to go ahead and occupy the GPO by force of arms and declare a republic. The Military Council, largely a law unto itself, was the moving force – ‘force’ is the vital word here – of militarism within the drive towards insurrection. The Irish Parliamentary Party, under John Redmond, had been working steadily for decades to secure Home Rule: in fact it had succeeded in having the Home Rule Act passed in the British Parliament in September 1914, but the outbreak of war and the violent opposition of the Ulster Unionists prevented its implementation.https://rev.lrb.co.uk/lg.php?bannerid=0&campaignid=0&zoneid=55&loc=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lrb.co.uk%2Fv37%2Fn14%2Fjohn-banville%2Fmoral-lepers&referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lrb.co.uk%2Flogin%3Fhref%3D%2Fv37%2Fn14%2Fjohn-banville%2Fmoral-lepers&cb=2d1a16c7fa

In any case, Pearse and the romantic revolutionaries around him had no interest in Home Rule and saw armed force as the only sure way to win full independence. Pearse ordered three days of parades and military manoeuvres as a ruse to disguise the Military Council’s true intentions not only from the British authorities but from some of the revolutionary leaders too. Eoin MacNeill, chief of staff of the Irish Volunteers, a splinter group of the IRB, countermanded the order to go to battle on Easter Sunday, with the result that the Rising was confined almost exclusively to Dublin city. At the same time, Roger Casement, one of the greatest Irishmen of his time, returned from a failed recruitment drive in Germany with the specific intention of preventing the fighting. It could be said that the Military Council under Pearse stole the revolution – stole the secular revolution which the ‘vivid faces’ had dreamed of – and established the physical force tradition in Irish politics that is still alive today, especially in Northern Ireland and among certain diehard republicans in the South. Foster remarks on the ‘cult of guns’ that ‘decisively launched the drift to radicalism’, and he is surely right. In that fateful year of 1914, as weapons were being primed all over Europe, the revolutionary newspaper the *Irish Volunteer* declared: ‘The man who has once handled a rifle and is not smitten with the desire to own one is not an Irishman.’

But Pearse and his fellow dreamers were to be traduced in their turn. In every revolution the little foxes, or rather the big wolves, lurk in the undergrowth, waiting to pounce. At the head of his penultimate chapter, ‘Reckoning’, Foster attaches a quotation from Vassily Grossman’s novel *Life and Fate* that is horribly apt to the period in Ireland after the War of Independence:

The hide was being flayed off the still living body of the Revolution so that a new age could slip into it; as for the red, bloody meat, the steaming innards – they were being thrown on to the scrapheap. The new age needed only the hide of the revolution – and this was being flayed off people who were still alive. Those who then slipped into it spoke the language of the Revolution and mimicked its gestures, but their brains, lungs, livers and eyes were utterly different.

The 1916 Rising was led by romantics – ‘poets, or they wouldn’t have run us into such idiocy’, according to Cesca Trench, an early radical who was appalled when the actual fighting started – and was defeated by a regular army, but the War of Independence that broke out in January 1919 was fought by an altogether different breed, on both sides. In 1919 Churchill, then secretary of state for war, set up the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) Reserve Force, soon to be nicknamed the Black and Tans, to support the already established RIC. They were a tough bunch. Many of those who volunteered had served in the trenches in France and were battle-hardened and embittered. They committed numerous atrocities in Ireland, and were particularly assiduous in carrying out reprisals against the civilian population in response to IRA attacks. In the poem ‘Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen’ Yeats wrote:

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare  
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery  
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,  
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;  
The night can sweat with terror as before  
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,  
And planned to bring the world under a rule,  
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

On the rebel side, too, all had changed, changed utterly. In 1916 the fighting had been done almost exclusively by urbanites, but in the War of Independence most of the volunteers came from rural areas, and much of the war took place along country roads and across bogs and bare mountainsides. Foster quotes Ernie O’Malley, a gunman with a literary bent: ‘Simple country boys, simple in that they were not sophisticated, had found they possessed organising and administrative ability. They had made themselves respected by their own people and, more difficult still, by those of their own class.’

As the war intensified, however, Yeats’s dragon-days grew increasingly inflamed, the IRA and the Black and Tans vying with each other in cruelty and ruthlessness. Writing in 1924, P.S. O’Hegarty recalled the way ‘the first shootings stirred and shocked the public conscience,’ but very soon that conscience ‘grew to accept it as the natural order of things’. Although he held some distinctly questionable views (he was an unrelenting misogynist), O’Hegarty saw clearly the terrible damage that had been done to the country’s moral sense by successive waves of violence since 1916. He was particularly critical of the nationalist side, his rhetoric rising at times to Yeatsian levels:

We devised certain ‘bloody instructions’ to use against the British. We adopted political assassination as a principle; we devised the ambush; we encouraged women to forget their sex and play at gunmen; we turned the whole thoughts and passions of a generation upon blood and revenge and death; we placed gunmen, mostly half-educated and totally inexperienced, as dictators with powers of life and death over large areas. We derided the Moral Law and said there was no law but the law of force. And the Moral Law answered us. Every devilish thing we did against the British went its full circle and then boomeranged and smote us ten-fold; and the cumulative effect of the whole of it was a general moral weakening and a general degradation and a general cynicism and disbelief in either virtue or decency, in goodness or uprightness or honesty.

De Valera, who, except for a couple of interregnums, ruled Ireland from 1932 until 1959, when he resigned and was elected president, had seen the effects of violence at first hand, and made it his task to pacify the people. He set out to do this not by encouraging reconciliation – to this day Ireland is plagued by ‘civil war politics’ – but by imposing social, moral and religious restrictions that would act as a universal straitjacket on the people. Again he called on the Church to aid him in what amounted to a totalitarian campaign to mould an Ireland to match the one that he saw nestling there when he looked into his founder’s heart. The result was, for many, a disaster. The bishops were handed almost complete power; as it was said, any politician who dared to question the Church’s hegemony could expect a ‘belt of the crosier’ – in many cases a crippling blow. The Church was charged with providing and administering free health and free education: a monumental task, given the country’s parlous financial state, but one carried out by countless nuns and Christian Brothers with, in many cases, selfless devotion, energy and even love.\*

However, we have only to look at the history of the 20th century to see the truth of the dictum that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Arrogance and complacency among churchmen was a mark of Irish life from the 1930s, when de Valera’s newly written constitution ensured the ‘special position’ of the Catholic Church, right up to the end of the 1990s, when allegations of widespread child sex abuse in schools, convents and correctional institutions for the young began to flood our newspapers and even our courts. There was, besides, practically unchecked corruption in business, in politics, in financial affairs. This sorry and shameful tale has been too often and too loudly told in recent times to need reiterating here. It may be that we have learned something from the error of our ways. We have faced up to our post-crash debts and are repaying them as best we can; our role in United Nations peacekeeping campaigns is too seldom remarked but is a matter for justified pride; and the recent yes vote in the gay marriage referendum was at once a splendid augury for the future – the role of young voters in the campaign was remarkable – and perhaps an apology, however belated, for past intolerance.https://rev.lrb.co.uk/lg.php?bannerid=0&campaignid=0&zoneid=6&loc=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lrb.co.uk%2Fv37%2Fn14%2Fjohn-banville%2Fmoral-lepers&referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lrb.co.uk%2Flogin%3Fhref%3D%2Fv37%2Fn14%2Fjohn-banville%2Fmoral-lepers&cb=1f883ef6c1

‘We were all to blame,’ Gerry Adams is fond of saying these days, referring to all manner of atrocities, from mass slaughter to the covering up of child abuse; and, however reluctantly, one must agree with him. What the pre-1916 vivid-faced idealists would have made of ‘Dev’s Ireland’ and the other Irelands that succeeded it, is not hard to guess. All revolutions get hijacked, or fail, or both. Somehow, the people endure. Foster cites Richard Mulcahy, one of the chief military leaders in the War of Independence, who was later to become bitterly disillusioned, but who wrote of the war years: ‘The fundamental and traditional character of the people stood fast and constructive in spite of the drama, the indiscipline that drama makes up, and the chancers who are nurtured in its atmosphere, and whose operations disintegrate the natural solid foundations of a people.’

Against that, we do well to remember Bulmer Hobson, an important and now unjustly forgotten 1916 activist, who along with MacNeill and Casement tried to prevent the armed rebellion from taking place. Writing to a friend in 1956, he observed wistfully of the revolution that ‘the phoenix of our youth has fluttered to earth such a miserable old hen.’ Although many in contemporary Ireland would profoundly disagree with them, we should leave the last words to Roy Foster’s mentor and friend F.S.L. Lyons, quoted at the opening of his book. The revolutionary era in Ireland embodied, Lyons wrote, ‘an anarchy in the mind and in the heart, an anarchy which forbade not just unity of territories, but also “unity of being”, an anarchy that sprang from the collision within a small and intimate island of seemingly irreconcilable cultures, unable to live together or to live apart, caught inextricably in the web of their tragic history.’ That was then, and the anarchs of those days have passed on. Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus famously complained that history was a nightmare from which he was trying to awake; perhaps, in Ireland, we are at last rising up and rubbing our eyes.

**Letters**

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John Banville omits a key figure from his discussion of the Easter Rising: James Connolly, one of the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation and founder of the Citizen Army and the Irish Socialist Republican Party ([*LRB*, 16 July](https://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n14/john-banville/moral-lepers)). Connolly was well aware of the squalid living conditions in Dublin at the time (its slums were among the poorest in Western Europe) and had a more internationalist outlook on the upcoming rising than Patrick Pearse and Joseph Plunkett. He was instrumental in the insertion of the clauses in the Proclamation that referred to ‘religious and civil liberty’ and to the importance of pursuing the ‘happiness and prosperity of the whole nation’, knowing that the removal of British forces alone would not bring radical social and economic change. As Banville rightly points out, the republic that emerged from these years was an insular clerical state that survived on a cocktail of silence and denial. It dealt with rebels and dissenters in its own particular way.

**Robin O’Malley**  
London SE4