

**"THERE ARE THINGS THAT CAN NEVER BE UNDONE":  
CULTURAL TRAUMA IN LIA MILLS' *FALLEN***

**"HÁ COISAS QUE NUNCA PODEM SER DESFEITAS":  
TRAUMA CULTURAL EM *FALLEN*, DE LIA MILLS**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper will consider the intertwining of cultural memory and trauma in the literary representation of the Great War and the Easter Rising in *Fallen* (2014), by Lia Mills. The story is told by a young woman called Katie Crilly, whose twin brother Liam is preparing to join the British forces in the First World War. Katie's narrative moves around the city of Dublin, its monuments and the impressions of those around her. The novel depicts how the violence of war and revolution impacts individuals and the collectivity, and Mills' portrait of the early twentieth century draws on grief, trauma and guilt. As Nuala Johnson (1999) states, memory is both individual and collective, never fixed or immutable. Memory is also a means of transgressing dominant discourses about the past. Drawing on the concepts of cultural trauma by Piotr Sztompka (2000) and Jeffrey Alexander (2004), as well as on Nuala Johnson's (1999) and Brigit Neumann's (2008) works on cultural memory and the representation/commemoration of conflicts, this paper will explore how cultural memory impacts representation of the past in the novel, and how it challenges dominant narratives of the Great War and the Easter Rising.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural trauma. Memory. Historical fiction. Easter Rising. World War I.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo examinará o entrelaçamento de memória e trauma cultural na representação literária da Primeira Guerra Mundial e do Levante de Páscoa em *Fallen* (2014), de Lia Mills. A história é contada por uma jovem mulher chamada Katie Crilly, cujo irmão gêmeo Liam está se preparando para se juntar às forças britânicas na Primeira Guerra Mundial. A narrativa de Katie se concentra na cidade de Dublin, seus monumentos e as impressões das pessoas à sua volta. O romance retrata como a violência da guerra e da revolução impacta indivíduos e coletividade, e a representação do início do século feita por Mills explora o luto, o trauma e a culpa. Conforme Nuala Johnson (1999) afirma, a memória é tanto individual quanto coletiva, nunca fixa ou imutável. A memória é também um meio de transgredir discursos dominantes sobre o passado. Utilizando os conceitos de trauma cultural de Piotr Sztompka (2000) e Jeffrey Alexander (2004), assim como as obras de Nuala Johnson (1999) e Brigit Neumann (2008) sobre memória cultural e a representação/celebração de conflitos, este artigo analisará como a memória cultural influencia a representação do passado no romance e como a obra desafia narrativas dominantes da Grande Guerra e do Levante de Páscoa.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Trauma cultural. Memória. Ficção histórica. Levante de Páscoa. Primeira Guerra Mundial.

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## Introduction

Lia Mills' *Fallen* (2014) was chosen as the 2016 "Dublin and Belfast: Two Cities, One Book"<sup>2</sup> due to its historical themes: the Great War and the Easter Rising in Dublin. The Easter Rising was a nationalist insurrection during the Easter Week, April 1916, in Ireland. The armed rebellion was organized by a branch of the secret organization Irish Republican Brotherhood (later Irish Republican Army) named Irish Volunteers, who seized important buildings across Dublin and proclaimed the Irish Republic. Within some days, the rebellion was suppressed by the British Army and the leaders of the insurrection were arrested and executed without trial. The Easter Rising became a landmark in Irish history and has been represented as a watershed in the establishment of Irish independence.

The narrator of *Fallen* is a young woman named Katie Crilly, whose twin brother Liam has enlisted to fight in World War I. The Crilly family lives the war through Liam's letters and the violence of war has a great impact on the characters. Katie's narration is touched by grief, trauma and guilt as she tries to make sense of her brother's dedication to such a violent conflict and the implications of the Easter Rising in her life and the city where she lives.

This paper<sup>3</sup> will consider the relation between cultural memory and trauma in the literary representation of the Great War and the Easter Rising in *Fallen*. I will attempt to demonstrate that both historical events are portrayed in the novel as injuries to the "cultural tissue" (SZTOMPKA, 2000) of Irish society. Finally, I aim to show that Lia Mills' work is a challenge to dominant discourses of the Great War and the Easter Rising in Ireland.

## Cultural Trauma: An Overview

Jeffrey Alexander (2004) contends that the word "trauma" has become an ordinary concept in the Western world. "Trauma" is used to refer to impressive changes or events that alter people's lives; individuals attribute the adjective "traumatic" to experiences such as robberies, car accidents or the death of beloved ones. Although the term has become quite common these days, Alexander emphasizes that trauma is a scientific and empirical concept that can mobilize political and social action as wells as individuals and the collectivity.

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2. The "Dublin: One City, One Book" is a cultural initiative by public Dubliner libraries that recommends a book with links to the Irish capital to be read and discussed during a whole year. In 2016, Belfast joined the initiative due to the Centenary of the Easter Rising and the cultural event was named "Dublin: Two Cities, One Book".

3. A shorter version of this paper was originally presented at IASIL 2016 - "Change" in Cork, Ireland, in July 2016.

Alexander (2004, p. 1) works with the concept of cultural trauma. He defines it as the representation of a sudden event which “leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways”. Alexander’s focus is not on psychological trauma, which affects the individual psyche; on the contrary, he is concerned with what Piotr Sztompka (2000) calls a shock that affects “the cultural tissue” of a society (p. 450).

According to the lay theory of trauma, this is an event that occur naturally to an individual or collectivity, shattering the senses of order, security, human connection, and love (ALEXANDER, 2004, p. 2-3). Becoming traumatized is, thus, a natural reaction to instability and sudden change. Alexander (2004) divides lay trauma theory into two currents: the Enlightenment and the psychoanalytic lines of thought. The Enlightenment line regards trauma as a rational reaction to unexpected change. Hence, the responses to trauma are direct and aim to solve the problem. The psychoanalytical current, on the other hand, intermingles collective attitudes to traumatic events and studies on the psychological defense mechanisms. This current regard repression as the natural response to traumatic events. The implications of the traumatic event are apprehended by the unconscious, thus ‘healing’ or ‘coping’ with trauma occurs within the self (ALEXANDER, 2004, p. 5). According to Alexander, a major contribution to the psychoanalytical current of lay trauma has been made by Cathy Caruth, who defines trauma as “the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind” (CARUTH, 2005, p. 2). For Caruth, thus, trauma has a repetitive aspect that makes memory return repeatedly to the unconscious. This is a consequence of an unexpected event that prevents the mind from fully understanding it. Once one suffers a traumatic experience, one cannot assimilate it completely; trauma remains unknown and haunts the individual.

Alexander’s perspective, which I adopt as a theoretical framework in this paper, posits that both the Enlightenment and the psychological currents have a naturalistic aspect that prevent trauma from being mediated (ALEXANDER, 2000, p. 9). Both lines of thought see trauma as a concept which simply *exists* (my emphasis). For Alexander (2004) and Roy Eyerman (2011), trauma is rather a social construct, a “meaning struggle where individual and collective actors attempt to define a situation by imposing a particular interpretation on it” (EYERMAN, 2011, p. 456). Therefore, an event becomes culturally traumatic when it affects collective identity. In Alexander’s words,

identity involves a cultural reference. Only if the patterned meanings of the collectivity are abruptly dislodged is traumatic status attributed to an event. It is the meanings that provide the sense of shock and fear, not the events in themselves. Whether or not the structures of meaning are destabilized and shocked is not the result of cultural classification. This cultural process is deeply affected by power structures and by the contingent skills of reflexive social agents. (ALEXANDER, 2004, p. 10).

In this view, an event becomes traumatic in a process of signification or, as Alexander (2004) names it, a “spiral of signification”: this process depends on a carrier group, an audience or situation, a cultural classification and an institutional arena. The carrier group is the agent that articulates the process of representation with the public- audience by using the cultural resources available. To receive the adjective “traumatic” an event must become a master narrative that answers four questions: what happened to the collectivity? Which group was affected? “To what extent do the members of the audience for trauma representation experience an identity with the immediate victimized group?” (ALEXANDER, 2004, p. 13), and who was the perpetrator? The cultural resources that characterize trauma exist within the institutional arena that mediates representation; they can be religious, aesthetic, legal, scientific, mass media, or bureaucratic.

Drawing on Alexander’s contentions, a key aspect of cultural trauma theory is the issue of agency and representation. For Sztompka (2000), cultural trauma is “a specific pathology of the agency”; in the author’s view, agency is “a complex, synthetic quality of human collectivity allowing for its creative self-transformation” (p. 449). Trauma in Sztompka’s perspective is a social change which is sudden and imposed on the collectivity. To be classified as traumatic an event must present four characteristics: it must have a particular *temporal quality* (it is abrupt), *substance and scope* (it is radical and profound), a specific *origin* (it is imposed from the outside) and a *mental frame* (it is perceived as unexpected and shocking) (SZTOMPKA, 2000, p. 452, author’s italics).

Consequently, Sztompka (2000) argues that cultural trauma is more likely to happen when a culture is somehow disorganized, displaced, or incoherent, causing instability and polarization - trauma depends on “cultural disorientation” (p. 453) Sztompka emphasizes that disorientation *per se* does not always become trauma; instead, to be considered traumatic, social changes must be “perceived and experienced as problems, as something troubling or painful that demands healing” (p. 455). Change must mobilize a society in all its instances: intellectually, morally and artistically.

The Easter Rising was not originally portrayed as traumatic by the Irish nationalist discourse. On the contrary, the Rebellion was represented throughout the twentieth century as the result of centuries of struggle for independence from Britain. In David George Boyce's view, Irish nationalism was grounded on the senses of "race, religion, a strong sense of unity and integrity" (BOYCE, 1995, p. 19), and the casualties during the Easter Rising were the necessary sacrifice for freedom.

An alternative perspective to the nationalist narrative has been brought by the historical revisionist movement in the 1930s. The revisionists understand that the nationalist narrative is retrograde and blind to the consequences of the Easter Rising. The book *Modern Ireland* (1988), by the historian Roy Foster, is considered a landmark of the revisionist movement, offering a counternarrative to the nationalist discourse and exposing the nationalist obsession with myths and violent confrontation. Revisionism also influenced literature, and historical novels such as Roddy Doyle's (1958) *A Star Called Henry* (1999) and Sebastian Barry's (1955) *A Long Long Way* (2005), to mention only a few, challenge the representation of the leaders of the Easter Rising as heroes and sanctified men.

Whereas the 1916 Rebellion has been represented and discussed since its occurrence, the Great War has not received the same attention by the Irish intellectual elite. According to Nuala Johnson (1999), the Rising influenced recruitment and further public remembrance of both war and revolution (p. 141). Later, the Rising would be remembered in various monuments and ceremonies, while the Great War would be partially set aside. The Irish participation in the War was frequently ignored or depleted by nationalist master narratives in the twentieth century – as Diarmaid Ferriter (2010) writes, some files from the Bureau of Military History about the war years in Ireland were only fully released in 2003, following a campaign for transparency. Historical revisionism collaborated in a re-examination of Irish history, society and values, arriving at the conclusion that "blaming outside forces" or ignoring relevant moments of Irish history "was no longer credible" (FERRITER 2010).

This reassessment of the Easter Rising and the Great War has inevitably exposed wounds to the Irish collective psyche that were previously ignored. The Irish participation in the War could not be left out of the debates on Irish history, and the opening of archives has also influenced fictional works, as the already mentioned *A Long Long Way* and the object of this study, *Fallen*. The shift in interpretation of the two important events of Irish history discussed here exemplify what Alexander (2000) describes as "spiral of signification": the classification of events as "traumatic" depends on the carrier group and the cultural resources

used in representation. In this paper, I argue that Mills' *Fallen* challenges the nationalist narrative that praises the Rising and ignores the Great War. The novel offers an alternative reading of those events which focuses on the ordinary people affected by the conflicts and the collective memory of them.

### Cultural Trauma in *Fallen*

The narrative of *Fallen* begins with Katie's recollections of the day her brother Liam announced to her that he was going to join the British forces in the war. Both the protagonist-narrator and her brother are nationalists, but Katie is against war, while Liam follows John Redmond's appeal for the Irish to fight along the British.<sup>4</sup> The other chapters present more recollections about Katie's family, her inner conflicts and the movements relating to the war and revolution. *Fallen* is what Birgit Neumann (2008) calls a "fiction of memory", a term that refers both to non-referential narratives which represent the processes of memory, and individual or collective stories that seek to understand who we are. The category "fictions of memory" can also include narratives which (re)construct the past in the present (p. 334). Mills' novel is a fiction of memory due to its literary construction of the Irish cultural memory of the War and the Easter Rising in the present which draws on current interpretations of past events.

For Neumann, fictions of memory reveal that our ability to remember is selective and intentional (p. 333). Especially when it comes to collective memory, remembering is not involuntary; according to the author, there is always selection and editing of the current discourse as well as a combination of what is remembered and forgotten. Thus, literary narratives of memory employ discursive devices that explore the functioning of memory and offer new perspectives about the past. These perspectives may influence readers and challenge dominant discourses (p. 334-5).

The selection of what is remembered and the tensions between the fictional narrative and dominant narratives are very clear in Mills' book. The author writes about the polemic Irish participation in the war. As it was already mentioned here, whilst much has been written about the Easter Rising, in the twentieth-century there was relative silence about the Irish soldiers who fought

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4. John Edward Redmond (1856 - 1918) was the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party and MP in the British House of Commons. He aimed at a conciliatory solution for the Irish Home Rule question, and urged Irish nationalists to join the British forces in World War I. Redmond believed that, by helping the British in the war, the Irish would ensure the legitimacy of their fight for independence from Britain.



alongside the British ones. In *Fallen*, the lives of the soldiers are remembered in Liam's life, and although Katie's perspective does not allow us to know directly the horrors of war, it shows us the dramas of Dublin families that were affected by the European conflict. Her pain joins the suffering of other families who lost "brother, son, father, loving and loved" (idem, p. 57-8), and grief becomes both individual and collective:

Grief made fools of us all. There was shock in it, but there could hardly be surprise. A young man goes off to war – what do you expect of him? What did we think would happen? For me, belief in a personal, all-knowing, all-seeing God had already become impossible in the face of what was happening on the Continent. There had been shocking casualties in the Dublin regiments alone. [...] Every second person on Sackville Street wore a black armband, or a cuff. (MILLS, 2014, p. 53).

Here, the novel portrays the effects of the war as a collective reality. Katie understands that soldiers frequently die in battlefields, but the shock of a young man dying in his prime leaves a deep mark in his family. Given that many families lost at least one relative in the war, grief is represented in the novel as a communal fact to the Irish, as the description of people wearing black armbands and cuffs demonstrate. Unlike the nationalist narrative often claims, *Fallen* asserts that the Great War was not a foreign tragedy.

The attempts to silence the implications of the World War I in Ireland exemplify Sztompka's (2000) and Alexander's (2004) theorizations on cultural trauma as a construct. The changes in interpretation indicate what Alexander (2004) writes on the perception of a traumatic event: that it is deeply related to issues of identity which are not permanent or immune to revision:

'Experiencing trauma' can be understood as a sociological process that defines a painful injury to the collectivity, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility, and distributes the ideal and material consequences. Insofar as traumas are so experienced, and thus imagined and represented, the collective identity will become significantly revised. This identity revision means that there will be a searching re-remembering of the collective past, for memory is not only social and fluid but deeply connected to the contemporary sense of the self. Identities are continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by reconstructing the collectivity's earlier life. (ALEXANDER, 2004, p. 22).

One of the instruments that enables Mills to revise the war and the revolution and how these events might have affected the Irish psyche is collective memory. In *Fallen*, it is recorded everywhere: in letters, objects, and monuments. The protagonist helps the fictional author Dorothy Colclough to write a book about the monuments of Dublin. Besides learning about Irish history, Katie discovers what Jay Winter (2004) writes about historical monuments: that they are “physical, emotional, and artistic artefacts” that help survivors and further generations “to understand what had happened both to their lives and to those who had died in the war” (WINTER, 2014, p. 8). Katie also learns that in Dublin there is only one monument dedicated to an ordinary person, the one to Constable Sheahan, a police officer who saved a family from a decaying building. This discovery is relevant to the plot: few ordinary people figure at official narratives. It is perhaps one of the reasons that impelled Mills to write about such important events of Irish history from the perspective of ordinary characters. This is also significant regarding the reality of the war, for many soldiers remained anonymous in history books. As Hubie Wilson remarks in the novel, “there’s never been a monument to an ordinary soldier” (MILLS, 2014, p. 116).

The revision of the impact of past events is discussed by Birgit Neumann (2008), who understands that the relation between individual memory and identity causes a tension between what is remembered and who remembers it. There is also a temporal tension: the reconciliation between past and present and the actual moment of narration. For Neumann, this process results in a diachronic and narrative identity which establishes a dialogue between the past “I” and the present “I” (p. 336-7). These tensions happen because the present of remembering is never set aside (it is the present “I” that remembers), and although the past is recalled, the present of the narrative is very clear. Consequently, Neumann states that fictions of memory intertwine memory and the present of narration, creating a process of narrative mediation (p. 337). The themes and the structure of Mills’ novel therefore reveal much about the present of its composition and publication. Mills’ tools, namely, perspective narration, the use of letters and other literary devices not only work on historical documents, but also on popular tales, family stories and the collective imaginary. There might be a tension between history books and the story in *Fallen*, but this tension, as Birgit Neumann puts it, aims to establish a dialogue between past and present.

Besides dialoguing with history, the theme of the novel reveals itself as an ideological choice. In Johnson’s words (2001), working with memory is a form of challenging dominant narratives (p. 5). Writing about the Great War



and the Easter Rising can be a way of telling a different story, a plot that considers many aspects which are usually ignored or forgotten by official discourses. According to Billig (1990),

ideology itself will be a form of social memory, in as much as it constitutes what collectively is remembered and also what is forgotten or what aspects of society's history continue to be commemorated and what are relegated to the unread archives. In this way, memory will be both a part of ideology, as well as being a process by which ideology, and thereby the power relations of society, are reproduced. (BILLIG, 1990, p. 60).

Mills' ideological choices can be found on the construction of her woman narrator, her decision of not directly depicting the war or the revolution and the portrait of the collective sentiment towards the conflicts. Thus, Mills can offer a powerful insight on the impacts of historical events on the collective psyche nowadays. The author seems to understand that, as Johnson (1999) contends, the Rising is a competitive narrative of the Great War (p. 141).

Johnson (1999) compares the maneuvers of the Easter Week of 1916 to a play: it was staged on the streets, and like a common play, it had its main stage in the center: the General Post Office (p. 143)<sup>5</sup>. Johnson also mentions that the dramatic character of the Rising is due to its leaders, mostly literary men who were not soldiers with formal training (p. 144). The protagonist of the novel analyzed here also compares the Rising to a play, but unlike the usual dramas, people in Dublin were not its audience: they were its actors:

A young man came up behind her. Little more than a boy, really. Short and skinny he wore the dark green coat of the Citizens' Army, with a bandolier slung across his chest. A wide-brimmed hat jammed low on his forehead shadowed his freckled face. I looked again. That really was a gun in his hands, muzzle half-raised in our direction.

'Yiz have to quit the park.'

'Are you from the theatre?' I asked him.

He cleared his throat and tried again. 'We're taking the part. In the name of the Republic. Yiz have to leave.' (MILLS, 2014, p. 102).

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5. The General Post Office (GPO) is the administrative center of the Irish postal system since its establishment in 1818. Due to its central location in Dublin, the GPO was chosen by the 1916 rebels as the main operational building in Easter Week. The leader of the insurrection, Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), read the Proclamation of the Irish Republic in front of the GPO on Monday, 24 April.

The traumatic aspect of the Rising is portrayed in the novel through references to the noise of bomb shells, the imposition of curfews and crowded hospitals. The actions of the Volunteers, however, are not portrayed with exactness; everything happens outside and most of the time the characters of the novel do not know what goes on. Katie mentions that “something enormous was happening, and we were trapped inside it, like one of those boxes, waiting to be released into the next event, the next drama” (MILLS, 2014, p. 193- 4). Johnson (1999) reminds us that the Rising allowed people to bear witness to the movements instead of hearing or reading about them in the newspapers. Yet, according to Johnson, the population of Dublin also witnessed violence both during and after the rebellion, which was frequently ignored by nationalist master narratives. Katie only faces the effects of the Rising when she goes to the streets and to the hospital to work as a voluntary nurse.

When it comes to wars and revolutions, cultural memory is also entangled by trauma. In *Fallen*, such events are unexpected and represent deep social changes that affect not only those who are in the battlefields but also their families and fellow citizens. When Liam dies, Katie’s family must deal with bereavement. Throughout the narrative Katie struggles to find a “language of mourning” (a term created by Winter, 2014) to represent the loss of a beloved one and make sense of his departure. She says:

Since he died, I’d run out many times, in my imagination, to save him. To save the both of us. From his bed, in this very room, I’d woken to a dark so terribly fractured by noise that I sprang from the tangle of sheets, his name ringing in my ears. I’d come back to myself, shivering, my bare feet cold on the wooden floor. [...] Sometimes, in a waking dream, I caught the fatal bullet myself, or stumbled from the battlefield, his arm heavy on my neck, his breath hoarse at my ear, begging for water. [...] I tried to see him, along with thousands of other men, ‘in action’. Every one of them someone’s brother, son, father; loving and loved; trying to kill men just like themselves. Trying even harder not to be killed. ... I tried to call up the smells, cordite, lyddite, dynamite, the lethal gas that entered the war as Liam left it. I knew the words people used to describe them: acrid, bitter, burnt – but how far could words be trusted, when there was so much cant about?” (MILLS, 2014, p. 57).

Katie wishes to represent trauma in words by trying to experience Liam’s struggle in the war. Imagination is also one of the instruments she uses to bring her brother back to life. She claims that his death “destroyed a deeper faith. It cracked the bedrock of my mind” (MILLS, 2014, p. 53). In *Unclaimed Experiences*

*ce: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth (1995) she suggests that literature is a relevant tool which enables the working through of trauma, for it is a belated experience that can only be represented later on. Caruth writes that the impact of trauma “lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time” (CARUTH, 1995, p. 9). Drawing on Freud, Caruth argues that trauma manifests itself with reenactments of the traumatic event in nightmares or flashbacks that lack cohesion and resist verbal representation. In the quote above, Katie struggles to find an adequate form of expressing her traumatic experience. She recurs to her imagination to prevent her brother’s death. She also wishes to reproduce through her senses the odors and terrifying moments her brother might have experienced on the front. Try as she may, Katie cannot recreate Liam’s experience but words cannot be trusted to represent trauma.

In the novel, trauma is akin to guilt. Some characters of the novel regret their actions towards the dead of the war, but the past cannot be changed. Katie regrets not supporting her brother’s decision to join the war, but she realizes that he will not come back anymore. She understands that “there are things that can never be undone, thresholds to be crossed in one direction only.” (MILLS, 2014, p. 272) Therefore, only by telling his and her story she can bring Liam back to life.

*Fallen* exposes that guilt not only is related to not saying things; it is also about letting an atrocious war to continue. Katie wonders how people can keep their routine with so much going on outside. She wonders:

I couldn’t imagine returning to a life without these strange, delirious nights, or quite believe that other people lived them too. How does no one blush when they use their hands to prepare food, write letters, open doors? How do they hide their wild undernature, their inventive nocturnal selves, put on their clothes and go out about their business? (MILLS, 2014, p. 273).

This reflection reminds the reader of the closeness of wars in modernity. The novel also exposes the banality of violence during the Easter Week of 1916, when the citizens of Dublin saw themselves both as the protagonists of a rebellion against the empire and as victims of an urban armed conflict. Similarly to the Great War, which was fought near urban centers, the Rising was a city rebellion that involved Dubliners in unprecedented ways.

There is a chapter for every day of the Easter Week of 1916 in the novel. Each day Katie gets closer to her friend May’s nephew and former British captain Hubie Wilson. A man wounded in action, Wilson has traumas of his own and he

feels by some means responsible for Katie's brother Liam going to action earlier in the war. Guilt is what unites Wilson and Katie: it is "something left undone, a thing that might have saved him [Liam]", says she (MILLS, 2014, p. 187). Thus, the Rising is also a moment of liberation for Katie; in her relationship to Hubie she has the opportunity to feel like a woman, with rights and desires of her own, someone her family would never let her be. *Fallen* puts people like Katie in the spotlight, people who would never have their voices heard. As Anne Enright puts it about the post-Celtic Tiger novels, *Fallen* has a "confidence in female voices" which breaks silences "about the real lives of women" (JORDAN, 2015).

The union between Katie and Hubie could also be read as a union between colonizer and colonized: he, a former British soldier, represents the presence of the colonizer in Ireland; she, an Irish nationalist girl, is the colonized, and their relationship demonstrates the complexity of the relations between Britain and Ireland. In *Fallen*, nothing is as simple as binaries of Empire *versus* Ireland, nationalists *versus* imperialists.

Similarly to the Rising that ends with uncertainty about Ireland's future, *Fallen* ends with no solution or traditional ending; there is no explanation on the Rising, no hint about the rebels, no account of Katie's family. There is uncertainty in Dublin and there is uncertainty in Katie's life:

A breeze sounded in my ear, *choose*. Somewhere, someone wept, as well someone should. I wished for rain, to wash away the smoke and murderous grime of the coming day. Going down the steps after him, I breasted the smutty fog as swans breast water. There was the full span of my foot, there my weight and there the solid ground. (MILLS, 2014, p. 276).

Although the ground is "solid" and the movement on the floor makes her feel all her weight, Katie does not provide an answer to the questions on her future or Ireland's. The novel seems to leave it for the reader to reflect upon the implications of war and revolution in Katie's life as well as the signification of both events for contemporary Ireland.

## Conclusion

While the Easter Rising and the Great War have been represented in different ways in Irish literature, I have aimed in this article to offer a reading of Mills' *Fallen* as a product of cultural memory and trauma. I have shown how contemporary reassessments of past events can impact present individual and

collective recollections. Moreover, I have contended that collective memory and trauma can influence how the past is told and represented these days. Further research could examine how cultural memory and trauma influence contemporary literary representations of the Easter Rising, World War I and other early twentieth-century events in Ireland. Such a study may offer important insights on how individuals and whole societies make sense of the past in the present.

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