



HOPE AGAINST HOPE BY SHEENA WILKINSON: A CONTEXTUAL FRAMING

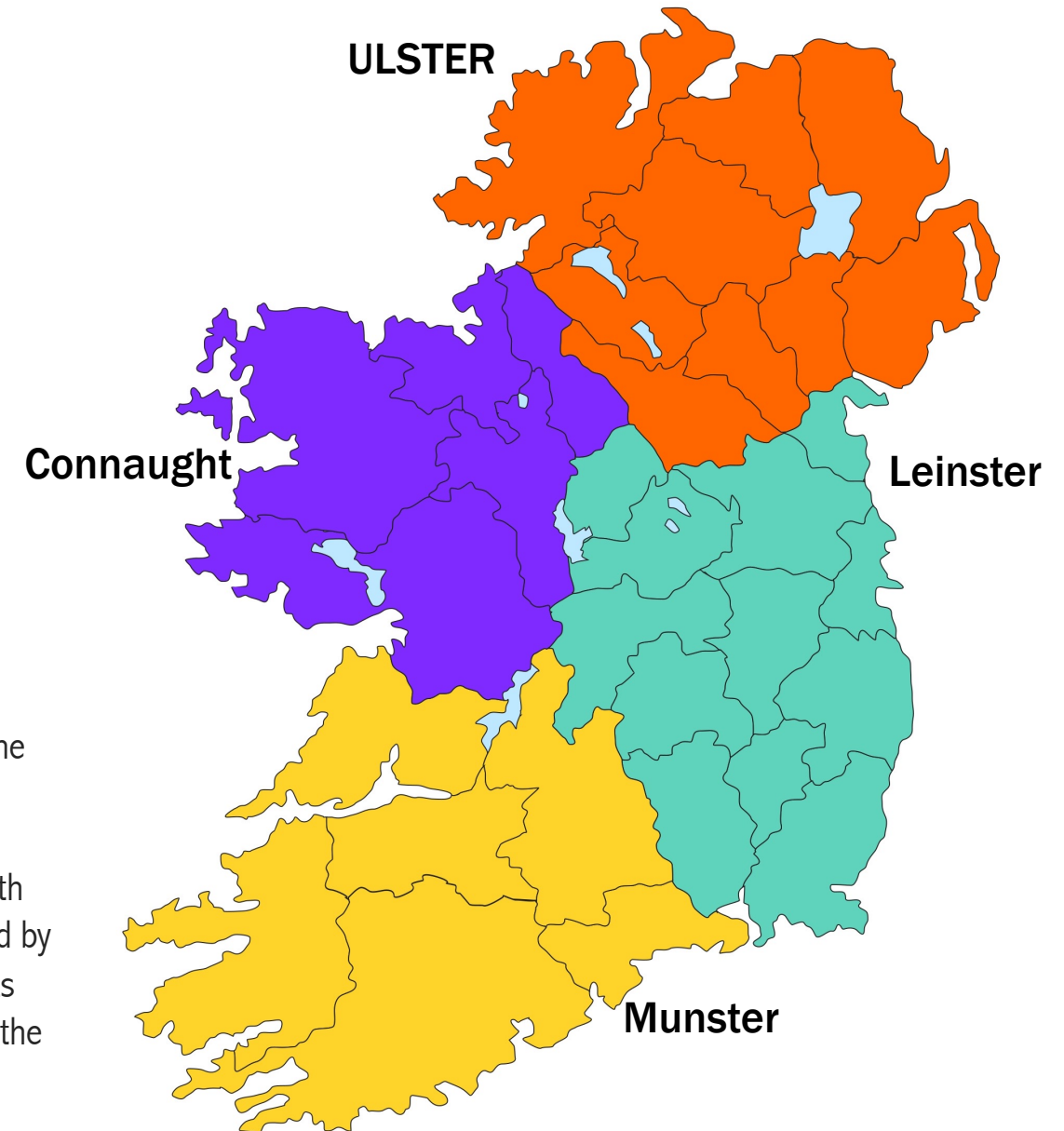
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IRELAND IN 1921: FRAMING

The event known as the [Flight of the Earls](#)—when Gaelic lords of Ulster fled in 1607—left the region open and vulnerable to English and Scottish settlement. Under the Stuart monarchs, starting with James I, land ownership in Ulster was transferred from native Ulster Catholics to mostly Scottish Presbyterians, as well as some English Protestants, over the course of the 17th century. It's true that most of Ireland was occupied and to varying degrees planted and seized by British landowners and aristocrats over the course of the 17th century. But in the south, it was mostly English Anglican Protestants who had a lot more in common with Catholicism, and with the Catholic peasantry, than did these Calvinist Presbyterians of Ulster.

Stewart Weaver, University of Rochester

<https://www.rochester.edu/newscenter/partition-of-ireland-explained-477342/>



IRELAND IN 1921: FRAMING

1800: Act of Union

Ireland is brought under the British crown with Scotland, Wales and England.

1828: Agitation for Catholic Emancipation

Daniel O'Connell is elected to Parliament to represent County Clare. He cannot take his seat as a Catholic due to decades of restrictions on Catholic worship, political participation and property rights since the Penal Laws and various 'Relief' acts in the late 1700s.

1829: Catholic Relief Acts.

O'Connell is re-elected and takes his seat as the first Catholic Member of Parliament.



This poster from 1910 shows the Irish nationalist leader, John Redmond, who had been pressing the Liberal Party Government to pass the Home Rule Bill, giving self-government for Ireland. Catalogue ref: COPY 1/353

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/irish-partition/irish-partition-source-one/>

IRELAND IN 1921: FRAMING

1858 to 1924: Irish Republican Brotherhood, secret oath-bound organization committed to an independent Ireland.

1886: Charles Stewart Parnell [Leader of the Home Rule League and the Irish Parliamentary Party] convinces William Gladstone [Prime Minister of Britain] to introduce the First Irish Home Rule Bill.

1892 & 1912: Second and Third Home Rule Bills are introduced to Parliament with increasing tensions amidst proposals for partition.

1912: Formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force to agitate against the prospect of home rule through paramilitary force.

1914: Estimated 200,000 volunteers from the island of Ireland fight for Britain in World War I

1916: Easter Rising

1919 to 1921: War for Irish Independence

1921: Anglo-Irish Treaty and Partition of Ireland December 1921, establishes the 6 counties of Northern Ireland and the 26 counties of the Free State

HOPE AGAINST HOPE

FREE WRITE: Take Ten Minutes to Collect Your Thoughts

What are the most striking features in Hope Against Hope for you as a reader?

Where do you see inroads for your students?

What thematic threads are you most curious about exploring yourself or discussing today?

HOPE AGAINST HOPE: INROADS

Let's consider a few thematic threads that lend themselves to iterations of 'then & now,' 'here & there.' These are themes that can open up features of this novel to issues that might be pertinent to your students ...

HOPE AGAINST HOPE: WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE

‘I see. And what can you contribute to Helen’s Hope? If we let you stay.’

I gulped. ‘Contribute?’

‘Yes, Polly, this is a community. A community which, I don’t mind telling you, exists under some pressure. Especially at the moment. Tensions in the city are high and yesterday – well, you saw how close it got. Some people are very suspicious of us – people who don’t approve of what we stand for – tolerance and acceptance. People who can’t understand living together without men ... We want Helen’s Hope to be a safe haven for young women. A beacon of hope in uncertain times. So far all I know of you is that you are – shall we say impetuous? I need to know I can trust you to be steady and reliable’ [Wilkinson 51].

HOPE AGAINST HOPE: WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE



Rita Duffy *Segregation*, The Crawford Gallery, Cork, Ireland.

HOPE AGAINST HOPE: LABOR

As soon as Ivy started sewing she seemed transformed. Her fingers were swift and sure as she pulled the fabric through and turned the wheel, while her foot trundled the pedal under her bench in a steady confident rhythm. The other girls were doing the same [Wilkinson, 54].

‘Have you ever been in a real factory?’

I shook my head dumbly.

‘... A hundred times as big,’ she said. ‘A thousand times as noisy. And the damp and the dust.’ She held out her left hand and I saw with a jolt that the top of her wee finger was missing. ‘I caught that on a loom when I was thirteen,’ she said. ‘My ma died of TB from years in the linen mills, coughing her lungs up every morning. This’ — she gestured back at the low brick factory building, whose door was open to the sunny morning — ‘is like a pretend factory. You don’t know you’re born’ [Wilkinson, 58].

HOPE AGAINST HOPE: ILLNESS

'My Mammy died of that flu,' I said. It was the first personal thing I'd told anyone at Helen's Hope.

Maggie nodded. 'It was desperate. My uncle died of it too. Helen was only sixteen,' she went on. 'Cassie'd been her teacher. She says always remembers Helen talking about a future when people in Ireland could live together without fighting about religion. That's why the hostel is called Helen's Hope. In tribute to her.'

I thought about all the fighting there had been and now Ireland being carved up, and wondered what Helen would think about that [Wilkinson, 66].

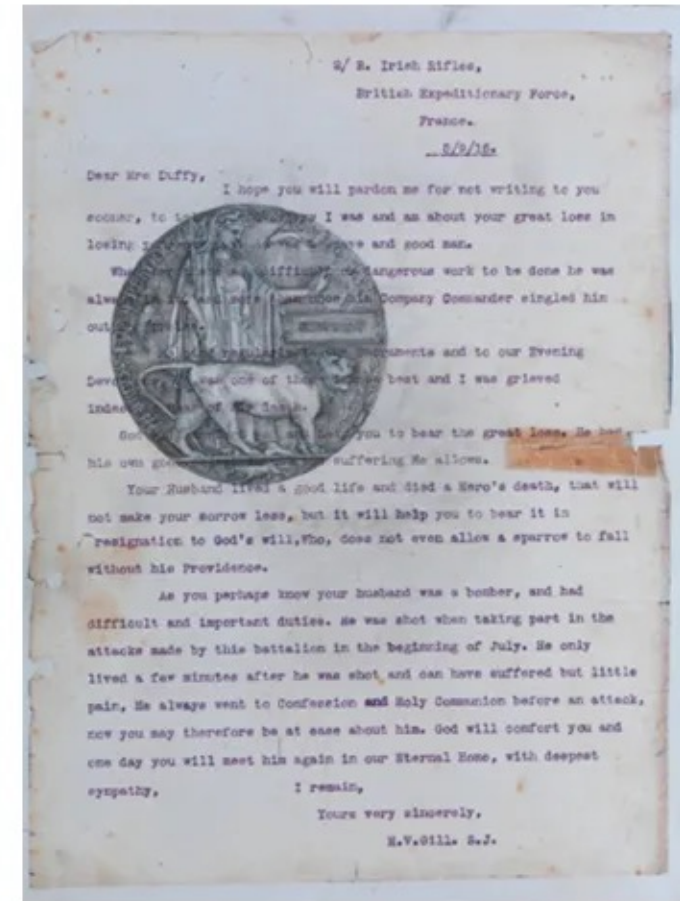
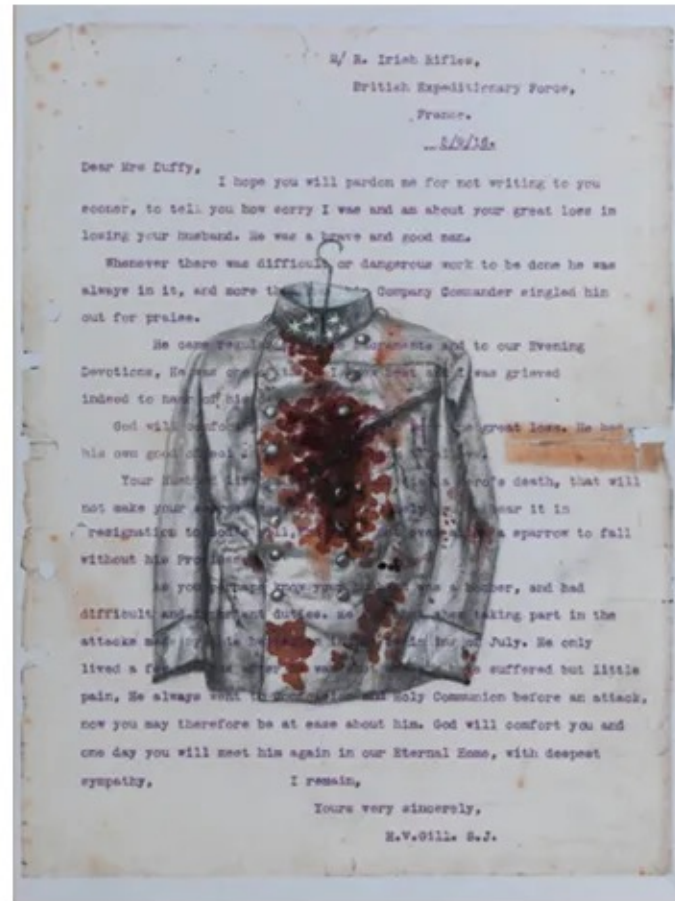
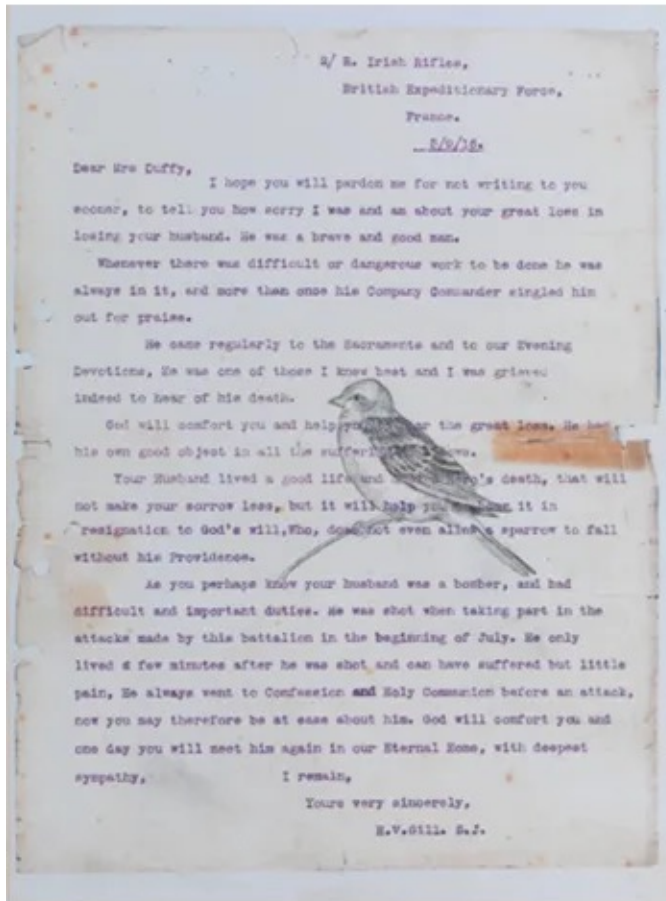
HOPE AGAINST HOPE: WORLD WAR I

I'd never heard Sandy laugh before. I suppose he was handsome enough if you overlooked the fact that one of his eyes was obviously blind. And of course people would overlook that: it meant he had been a soldier and been wounded. Not like Leo who had come out without a scratch. He was luckier than Maggie's auntie's sweetheart and his brother, killed together at the Somme. Luckier than the men who had marched on the shipyard. Or the men they'd chased from their jobs [Wilkinson 66].

British Recruitment Poster, Imperial War Museum



HOPE AGAINST HOPE: WORLD WAR I



HOPE AGAINST HOPE: DIVISION ... & SOLIDARITY

‘No, she has a point,’ Scottie said. ‘Ivy, you know the ethos of Helen’s Hope.’ She went on, as if quoting, ‘Helen’s Hope is a community founded on the principles of non-sectarianism and co-operation. We seek to work for peace and harmony. That being so, it’s against our philosophy to promote anything which might incite bigotry or division.’

Some of the girls, me included, were looking at her dully. She went on, ‘There was an order placed this week’ — Ivy look triumphant — ‘from a local — well, organization. Asking for some union flags. Naturally we were unable to accept it.’

‘Why not?’ Ivy demanded.

“No flags or emblems,” said a new voice from the back of the room. Everyone turned round and there was Stella. She still looked very pale, but she was dressed and looked as determined as ever. My heart gave the same little skip it used to do when I saw Flora [Wilkinson, 70].

HOPE AGAINST HOPE: DIVISION ... & SOLIDARITY



HOPE AGAINST HOPE: SUFFRAGE

'Even before the present troubles, some people were suspicious of us. People who don't think Catholics and Protestants should live together, and moreover don't like the idea of women living independently of men.'

'I know,' I said. 'Stella's always saying that. And I'm really sorry. But they were horrible. They said disgusting things about Catherine.'

'I understand.' She leaned forward, resting her chin on her hand, and looked friendlier. 'When I was your age I was a suffragette. I went to rallies, carried banners, interrupted public meetings shouting out "Votes for Women." I was called all sorts of things. A hoyden, a disgrace to womanhood. I was told I'd never find a husband — well, that was true!' She smiled, as if she didn't mind that at all. 'So I know what it's like to be abused in the street, but —'

'... But, Polly, you have to rise above it. Things in the city are so tense right now. The election is only two days away ...' [Wilkinson, 108].

SOURCES:

<https://ritaduffystudio.com/>

<https://www.rochester.edu/newscenter/partition-of-ireland-explained-477342/>

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/irish-partition/irish-partition-source-one/>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/irelands-role-in-the-first-world-war>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/why-men-of-ireland-volunteered-to-fight-in-the-first-world-war>

Deeper Period Reading:

Roy Foster's Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland: 1890 to 1923, W.W. Norton & Co., 2015.

Robert Kee Ireland: A History, Little Brown, New Edition 2003.

Declan Kibert Inventing Ireland, Vintage, 1996.

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