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Lucy McDiarmid

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THE AVIAN RISING: YEATS, MULDOON, AND OTHERS

Lucy McDiarmid

I. SKYLARKS RISING

The birds of 1916 are ubiquitous. Casement heard them on Banna Strand. In a passage that has become famous, his most eloquent prose ever, Casement wrote his sister,

When I landed in Ireland that morning (about 3 am) swamped and swimming ashore on an unknown strand, I was happy for the first time for over a year. Although I knew that this fate waited on me, I was for one brief spell happy and smiling once more. I cannot tell you what I felt. The sand hills were full of skylarks rising in the dawn, the first I had heard in years—the first sound I heard through the surf was their song as I waded through the breakers and they kept rising all the time up to the old rath at Currahane where I stayed and sent the others on and all round were primroses and wild violets and the singing of the skylarks in the air and I was back in Ireland again.¹

At Trinity College, Elsie Mahaffy, the Provost's daughter, recorded the presence of birds in the garden every day of Easter week, including the day the British Army shelled Liberty Hall: "...and in the garden all the birds who had sung and warbled sweetly through all the previous noises, became mute, huddling together in terrified clusters."² And Commandant W. J. Brennan-Whitmore of the Irish Volunteers, as eloquent as Casement and Mahaffy, noted the gulls during a vigil on the roof of his North Earl Street command post:

Until I stood on the rooftops after midnight I never realised what uneasy birds seagulls were. They seemed to have no settled regime of repose, like the other members of the feathered tribes, but kept on wheeling, dipping and rising throughout the darkening hours, calling continuously to one another with their shrill cries.³

Standing on the roof at midnight, Brennan-Whitmore, too, must have felt "uneasy," with his own "regime of repose" unsettled and disturbed. Mahaffy, a firm Unionist who despised the rebels, seemed somehow able to imagine the feelings of the "terrified" birds." Casement writes "I cannot tell you what I felt," and then—to tell what he felt—describes the skylarks "rising in the dawn." For these

witnesses to different moments of the Easter Rising, imputing feelings to birds offered a form of emotional release.

In a more complex expressive mode, poems about 1916 allude intertextually to other bird-poems or native Irish birds to interpret the Rising. The first line of Francis Ledwidge's "Thomas McDonagh" (*sic*) alludes to MacDonagh's translation of "An Bonnán Buí" ("The Yellow Bittern") by Cathal Buí Mac Giolla Ghunna:

He shall not hear the bittern cry
In the wild sky, where he is lain,
Nor voices of the sweeter birds,
Above the wailing of the rain.⁴

The west of Ireland birds in Yeats's "Easter, 1916," unlike the rebels, participate in the "living stream," busily engaged in courtship activities: "The long-legged moor-hens dive / And hens to moor-cocks call..." And one of the newest Rising poems, Paul Muldoon's "1916: The Eoghan Rua Variations," invokes the anonymous 12th-century Middle-English debate poem "The Owl and the Nightingale" as well as Yeats's birds to construct an avian version of 1916.⁵

Muldoon's poem was commissioned by New York University's Glucksman Ireland House, and it is one of the longest of the commemorative poems published in 2016. The title and the epigraph direct readers to Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin, the 18th-century poet and author of the beautiful quatrain that forms Muldoon's poem's epigraph:

*Do threascair an saol is shéid an ghaoth mar small.
Alastrann, Caesar, 's an méid sin a bhí 'na bpáirt;
tá an Teamhair 'na féar, is féach an Traoi mar tá,
is na Sasanaigh féin do bhféidir go bhfaighidís bás*

The whole world is laid waste. Cinders flying through the air.
Caesar and Alexander and their battle-throngs.
There's hardly a trace of Tara. Troy's barely there.
The English themselves will shortly be moving along.⁶

Each of the poem's nine stanzas ends with a different English translation of the quatrain, a quasi-apocalyptic vision of imperial dissolution not unlike the "Falling towers" passage in *The Waste Land*: "Now the world's been brought low. The wind's heavy with soot" or "The wind blows ash now the world's completely destroyed" or "The air tastes of grit. The world offers no safe berth" (13, 14, 20).

Although Yeats is never quoted directly, he, too, is present as a source. Typically Yeatsian words are used in the eighth stanza—"From a burst sand-bag a skein of sand / winds as it's unwound"—and in a larger, subtler way, the entire poem engages in conversation with Yeats: it revises Yeats's birds; not all of them, but the politicized birds. The flirtatious moor-hen and moor-cock of "Easter, 1916" stand as a rebuke to the revolutionaries who have "Hearts with one purpose alone" and seem "enchanted to a stone." In "The Stare's Nest by My Window," the sixth section of "Meditations in Time of Civil War," the "mother birds" nurture and the bees build, while human beings, the Republicans and the Free-Staters, kill one another:

The bees build in the crevices
Of loosening masonry, and there
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare. (*VP* 424)

The end of a much earlier poem, "To a Wealthy Man who promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures," urges a gift to the Gallery because it will furnish "the right twigs for an eagle's nest" (*VP* 288). In the Yeats examples cited, birds—especially in their nest-building capacities—offer a model and exemplar for humans.

In Muldoon's poem, however, birds stand in for humans: the poem is framed as "a dispute / between a starch-shirt cuckoo / and a meadow pipit." The Rising itself is represented as a nest, a provisional home for the Irish in which their future is incubating, but a nest which the British will occupy, as the cuckoo lays its eggs in the meadow pipit's nest. The Rising therefore constitutes a stage in the reproductive process; the rebels who created it are closer to Yeats's moor-hens and moor-cocks, and not the slightest bit stone-like. Moreover, in typically Muldoonian self-reference, the poem itself forms a nest: it is constructed in such a way that it embodies, in its poetics, the characteristics of a nest. The identification of the Rising and the poem with the meadow pipit's nest suggests both a life-giving impulse as a source of the Rising and the vulnerability of the republic which it hopes to engender.

The speaker of Yeats's "Easter, 1916" is famously ambivalent, and Muldoon's is also, though in a different way. His poem's vision is not easy to define politically. The speaker—not necessarily Muldoon himself—appears to be commenting on the Rising in real time: he (the masculine pronoun is used advisedly) is "en route from Drumcondra / to the GPO," and he seems to have close-up views, in the present tense, of some of the major players. The first-person pronouns associate Muldoon's speaker with the rebels: "On Stephen's Green we got a whiff

of that chlorine gas...”; and “For ourselves, there’s a dearth / of humour.” But it would be wrong to label him militant, and grand, heroic gestures are never mentioned. Ineffective gestures, however, accumulate: the rebels “founder” in a “general morass,” and the firing pin of a rifle sticks. MacDonagh, commandant at Jacob’s Biscuits, appears distracted from the military situation: he is “tapping out some rhythmic verse on a biscuit tin.” And “we ourselves,” writes the speaker-rebel, “meet brute strength with brute / determination.” The repeated Eoghan Rua lines contribute an elegiac tone to every stanza. At the very least, it can be said that the revision of Yeats, the poem’s argument or “dispute,” resides in the speaker’s sympathy for the rebels. They are “bound / by honor alone,” and the enjambment suggests that the binding is not tight enough.⁷

II. THE MEADOW PIPIT’S NEST

The poem’s sympathy is indicated in the opening lines by the route the speaker is walking. Yeats’s speaker in “Easter, 1916” meets the future rebels “at close of day” on the streets of Dublin and, passing “them,” utters “polite meaningless words” before going on to joke about them in comfort with his friends “Around the fire at the club...” But Muldoon’s speaker is one of “them.” He is on his way to join the Rising (approaching it from the north): “On Easter Monday I was still en route / from Drumcondra to the GPO...” The first stanza also echoes the beginning of “The Owl and the Nightingale”:

I was in a valley in springtime; in a very secluded corner, I heard an owl and a nightingale holding a great debate... The nightingale began the argument in the corner of a clearing, and perched on a beautiful branch—there was plenty of blossom around it—in an impenetrable hedge, with reeds and green sedge growing through it.⁸

On Easter Monday I was still en route
 from Drumcondra to the GPO when I overheard a dispute
 between a starch-shirt cuckoo
 and a meadow pipit, the pipit singing even as it flew
 between its perch on a wicker-covered carboy
 and the nest it had improvised near a clump of gorse...
 from strands of linen spun by Henry Joy
 and the mane of a stalking horse.
 The cuckoo that had shouldered out the hoi polloi
 showing not a hint of remorse...(13)

The Irish meadow pipit is a small, brown, streaked “ground bird,” preferring bogs, “rough pastures and uplands.” Its call is a “rapid vist-vist-vist” that sounds

when it is “alarmed or flushed from cover.” It resembles the skylarks that Casement heard on Banna Strand. The Irish cuckoo breeds in “open areas which hold their main Irish host species,” the meadow pipit.⁹ The choice of bird species places sympathy on the small, vulnerable, native bird, “singing even as it flew” (not unlike the poets in the Rising) and not the larger bird that occupies the pipit’s nest (and “shouldered out” the people).¹⁰

The nest that Muldoon’s meadow pipit has “improvised near a clump of gorse” is central to the poem’s meaning. It is a nest that has been made “from strands of linen spun by Henry Joy / and the mane of a stalking horse.” In other words, the “nest” or provisional home, the Rising with its garrisons, was constructed from the inspiration of the 1798 rebellion, and it “stalks” by means of concealing its real intentions.¹¹ In the final stanza, Muldoon refers again to the nest:

Those who can’t afford a uniform may wear a blue armband
from which the meadow pipit filches a single strand
to bind its nest. The rest of us are bound
by honor alone. The English pound
the GPO while we ourselves meet brute strength with brute
determination. The pipit interweaves wondrous blue
and that workaday sandbag jute.

The “wondrous blue” is no doubt “St Patrick’s blue,” the official national color of Ireland. The idealism of the rebels’ notion of an independent nation is reinforced—as the GPO was during the Rising—at the practical level with sandbags, made of the coarse fiber called jute.

In all these details, and in the rest of the final stanza—in, as Matthew Campbell has written in another context, the “virtuoso control of a poetic form which consistently draws attention to itself”—Muldoon gives hints about the structure of his poem.¹² The mention of the nest in the first and last stanzas, as well as the words “first” and “last,” informs his readers how to understand the poem:

That the O’Rahilly was the last to know of the impending to-do
but first to execute
the plan of attack is ever so slightly skewed.

Those lines and the final Eoghan Rua variation (“For the English, perhaps, their time will come around”), insist on the connection between the beginning and the end of the poem; the poem has “come around.” The primary shaping feature is the rhyme scheme, which interweaves the stanzas in the same way the pipit “interweaves” strands of different kinds to make its nest. The rhyme scheme of

each stanza is the same—AABB, CDCDCD, ABAB—and is thus woven in to itself at the same time as it leads out to the next stanza, whose lines both connect and move the poem forward. The second stanza rhymes CCDD, EFEFEF, CDCD. The rhymes at the beginning of each stanza connect it with the *middle* of the previous one, creating a stabler, more tightly bound structure than connections at bottom and top would make.¹³ The C and D rhymes of the final stanza (brute, blue, just, to-do, execute, skewed) connect that stanza with the A and B rhymes of the first: route, dispute, cuckoo, flew). The complex pattern thus interweaves the successive stanzas to one another as well as the last to the first.

In fact the poem itself is configured like a nest, the shape of its nine stanzas “ever so slightly skewed” but almost symmetrically arranged around the central fifth stanza. Visualized in this form, with the first four stanzas and the last four spreading up on either side of the fifth, the poem looks like a nest; and just as the meadow pipit’s nest is “on the ground hidden in dense vegetation,” so the fifth stanza rests (as the Irish Citizen Army under Commandant Michael Mallin and Constance Markievicz did briefly) in Stephen’s Green: it begins, “I’ve watched Countess Markievicz striding through the oaks.”¹⁴ A later line in the same stanza refers to the “general morass / in which we founder,” and the word “morass,” whose first meaning is “an area of muddy or boggy ground,” evokes the bogs preferred by the meadow pipit, where this “ground bird” rests. The fifth stanza’s allusions to Cawnpore hints at Mallin’s spell with the British Army in India (though he was not at the Siege of Cawnpore).

A look at the stanzas ranged around and framing the fifth stanza shows connections that reinforce the symmetry. The first and ninth stanzas both talk explicitly about the woven nest (“improvised” from “strands of linen spun by Henry Joy / and the man of a stalking horse” in the first, and “The pipit interweaves wondrous blue / and that workaday sandbag jute” in the ninth). The second and eighth stanzas both mention the *Asgard* and the Howth gun-running and focus on weapons and tools. The third and the seventh both use the phrase “On Stephen’s Green” and integrate two quotations from rebel Protestants into the poetry (from Casement in the third, from Markievicz in the seventh). The fourth and sixth stanzas have no such obvious connections, but there’s a subtler one. The fourth stanza mentions what Plunkett is doing, and the sixth mentions what MacDonagh is doing: as I discuss in *At Home in the Revolution: what women said and did in 1916*, MacDonagh and Plunkett were sending messages to one another between Jacob’s and the GPO during Easter Week.¹⁵ The final such message was never delivered because the GPO was inaccessible, so in a sense there is a connection *manqué* between the two stanzas.

But as the final stanza says, describing both the Rising itself and the poem, the “plan” is “ever so slightly skewed.” As befits a poem that embodies the

characteristics of a bird's nest and of the Rising's garrisons, the structure is not perfectly symmetrical. The phrase "On Stephen's Green" appears in three stanzas, the sixth as well as the third and the fifth; The O'Rahilly darts in and out of the poem, appearing in stanzas two, four, and nine; the phrase "shaking from stem to stern" is used of Casement's submarine in stanza three and the meadow pipit's nest in stanza six; and the bird's nest is mentioned implicitly in six when the meadow pipit "pointed to the shell / of the cuckoo's egg she'd been condemned / to billet."¹⁶ The "men with a hand / on the tiller" of the *Asgard*, said in the poem to be "familiar with Tory Sound," were actually from Gola Island, not Tory Island, as Muldoon knows well; but "Tory" is echoed in the word "Troy" of the Eoghan Rua quatrain. Finally, the rhyme "skewed" doesn't quite rhyme perfectly with its fellow B-rhymes "blue" and "to-do."

III THE YELLOW BITTERN

Intertextuality may function as argument, as homage, or as confirmation of a continuing tradition. The avian intertextuality of 2016 poems, like that of 1916 poems, is especially complex, and two poets of 1916, Ledwidge and Yeats, feature prominently. Bernard O'Donoghue's "Migration," published in his 2016 volume *The Seasons of Cullen Church*, invokes Ledwidge's "The Blackbirds" (later published as "Lament for the Poets: 1916"), in which Ledwidge writes,

I heard the Poor Old Woman say:
 "At break of day the fowler came,
 And took my blackbirds from their songs..."¹⁷

Echoing these lines in homage, O'Donoghue mentions the migratory blackbirds from "the North Sea and Baltic" and memorializes Ledwidge as Ledwidge memorialized the 1916 poets who died in the Rising: "The fowler came at break of day, and took him / from his song."¹⁸ O'Donoghue's enjambment is as witty as any of Muldoon's, separating Ledwidge "from his song." His alliteration links the poets and birds: "back road," "blackbirds," "battalions," and "Baltic."

The nest in "1916: The Eoghan Rua Variations" forms part of a dispute with Yeats, who is glancingly alluded to a number of times. The bird's nest reappears in the text of Muldoon's anthem "100 Years a Nation," but there it functions as an homage that also situates the text in a literary tradition. Imagining an improved Ireland of the future, Muldoon writes, "from a ruined nest / the starling builds afresh." The "stare" at Yeats's window, as his note makes clear, is a starling, and here Muldoon deliberately invokes that poem (*VP* 424, 827). In the Ireland imagined in the anthem, birds constitute a central feature of an environmentally pure and peaceful older Ireland and of the future Ireland, where

birdsong is audible because there is no war. They appear in Irish and in English in a chorus read by the narrator and sung by the adult chorus and the children's chorus: "is fearr linn ceol binn na n-éan," "we'd sooner the music of birds."

Another bird also appears in "100 Years a Nation," the yellow bittern.¹⁹ The yellow bittern features several times: it appears at the beginning in the pre-colonial era of "Finn and his men": "a yellow bittern booms once more." Much later, in a time of rebellion, other sounds accompany the bittern's note:

we heard not just the bittern boom
but mortar detonations
smoke rising in a ragged plume
the flags the conflagration
the bloody wave the bloody spume
from which might spring a nation (32)

In post-Celtic-Tiger time, the bittern will reappear:

the bittern booms once more
music of the birds
by turf bank and sea shore
that we choose to take
the higher ground
is bound to be a trait that perseveres
one hundred years,
one hundred years,
one hundred years a nation (38)

The return of the bittern marks an especially pertinent indication of the ideal Irish future because few bitterns are left in Ireland. "The bittern was a common bird in Ireland until the mid-19th century," notes the National Museum of Ireland, but they "became rarer in Ireland and stopped breeding here in the 1840s" when "bogs and marshes were drained for agricultural purposes" and the "harvesting of reeds" affected the ecological balance necessary for their habitat. However, as the National Museum says, and as Muldoon's anthem predicts, "a few sightings of bitterns in recent years" suggest they may be coming back.²⁰

The yellow bittern is associated with more than just an Irish "higher ground." Because of the literary history of this bird, to mention it is to invoke Ledwidge, who elegized Thomas MacDonagh, who translated Mac Giolla Ghunna's "An Bonnán Buí." Through birds with poetic histories, Muldoon's anthem invites into his imagined future Ireland some of the great Irish poets of the past. However glancingly, their songs are mixed in with those of the birds.

And invoking the yellow bittern, Muldoon may also be associated with two of the poet-revolutionaries of 1916 and with another prose account of the Rising.²¹ A hidden message of the Rising, known only through the pension application and witness statements of a young girl, informs us of the last message sent by MacDonagh to Joseph Plunkett. On Friday, 28 April, MacDonagh in the garrison at Jacob's sent a message to Plunkett in the GPO. The message was never delivered, because the fifteen-year-old girl to whom it was given, Mary McLoughlin, never made it to the post office. She was "taken into custody" by a British soldier and brought to stay with the family of another soldier. The undelivered message was a verbal one: when she met MacDonagh, "He would not give me any message except to say, if I got back to Plunkett in the G.P.O., the words 'Yellow Bittern.'"²²

McLoughlin makes no comment about the mysterious, two-word message, and it seems unlikely she recognized the reference: her witness statement does not mention that she knew Irish or MacDonagh's poems. She says "the words," not "the reference" or "the title." The allusion is so recondite that few Irish people at the time would have understood it. This message is one of the most oblique expressions of emotion on record for 1916. To those who recognise it, it is richly suggestive and moving.

"The yellow bittern" is of course MacDonagh's English translation of "An Bonnán Buí," alluded to in Ledwidge's opening lines: "He shall not hear the bittern cry / In the wild sky, where he is lain..." No doubt MacDonagh had discussed the poem in Irish and his own translation with Plunkett, who was also a poet. The two men had met when MacDonagh was hired to tutor Plunkett in Irish; they became close friends, worked together at the Irish Theatre Company, and married sisters, Muriel Gifford and Grace Gifford.

What exactly was the meaning of this undelivered message for which Mary McLoughlin was the conduit? Fortunately she remembered the message thirty-eight years later and delivered it to future readers of the pension applications in the Military Service Pensions Collection and of the witness statements of the Bureau of Military History.²³ The message could refer to the bird itself or to the whole poem. If to the former, it was an oblique way of sending the sad message that MacDonagh and Plunkett were soon to be dead, like the yellow bittern of the poem:

The yellow bittern that never broke out
 In a drinking bout, might as well have drunk;
 His bones are thrown on a naked stone
 Where he lived alone like a hermit monk.
 O yellow bittern! I pity your lot,
 Though they say that a sot like myself is curst—

I was sober a while, but I'll drink and be wise
For I fear I should die in the end of thirst.

Maybe MacDonagh was thinking of this passage:

Oh! if I had known you were near your death,
While my breath held out I'd have run to you
Till a splash from the Lake of the Son of the Bird
Your soul would have stirred and waked anew.²⁴

And if the allusion was to the whole poem, it conveyed the brief narrative of someone who knew that he himself would soon be dead, like the bird he sees, and he'd like a drink ("Come, son of my soul, and drain your cup, / You'll get no sup when your life is past"), in fact a large drink: "a dram won't stop our thirst this night."

Either way, the message would have been a gesture of friendship, a reminder of their intimacy and love for one another, their common love of the Irish language and of poetry, and an acknowledgement of the fate they were both likely to meet soon. To invoke it at all is to catch the tone of the poem, its elegant, wry, witty, elegiac attitude to the bird's death, and to affirm comradeship with a man who was soon, though only for a few hours, to become MacDonagh's brother-in-law. According to the biography of Plunkett by his grand-niece Honor Ó Brolcháin, Plunkett never saw MacDonagh after the surrender. Plunkett's brother Jack said that while he and Joe were "sitting on the floor of that disgusting gymnasium in Richmond Barracks," Joe "was worrying a lot about Tomás M[a]cDonagh." Although MacDonagh had also been brought to Richmond Barracks, "Joe didn't know he was there. They had not seen each other since the previous Sunday and it is almost certain that they did not see or speak to each other again."²⁵ So the message remained undelivered and uninterpreted, its affection and wit preserved only by the dutiful though uncomprehending Mary McLoughlin.

Like the skylarks, the birds in the Provost's garden, the Dublin gulls, the starling, the meadow pipit, the cuckoo, and the blackbirds, the yellow bittern features in an Irish cultural imaginary that crosses from landscape to textscape, from prose to poetry, and from poem to poem. Seen in the sky or the garden or outside the window, the birds are carriers of emotion, inscribed in Irish political and literary history.

Acknowledgments

NLI 13,600 (Roger Casement's letter of 25 July 1916 to his sister Mrs Nina Newman) is quoted Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

TCD, MARL, MS 2074 (Elsie Mahaffy's "The Irish Rebellion") is quoted with the permission of the Board of Trinity College Dublin.

I am grateful to Matthew Campbell and Hugh Haughton for reading this essay, for giving me excellent advice, and for telling me about many other modern Irish poetic birds.

Notes

1. NLI 13,600 (copy) as quoted in Séamas Ó Síocháin, *Roger Casement: Imperialist, Rebel, Revolutionary* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2007), 440, n. 4, 609.
2. TCD, MARL, MS 2074, Mahaffy, "The Irish Rebellion," 36r.
3. W. J. Brennan-Whitmore, *Dublin Burning: The Easter Rising from Behind the Barricades* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996), 74.
4. *The Complete Poems of Francis Ledwidge* (New York: Brentano's, 1919), 206.
5. There are many medieval bird-debate poems, most of them mentioning a bird's "perch." For the complete text of "The Owl and the Nightingale" in the Middle English, see <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cme;idno=OwLC>, from the print source published by Cambridge University Press in 1922. For a translation into Modern English, see *The Owl and the Nightingale* (London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A.ix [C], ff. 233ra–246ra Oxford, Jesus College MS 29 [J], ff. 156ra–168vb) at <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/~wpwt/trans/owl/owltrans.htm>.
For an analysis of Yeats's birds, see Nicholas Grene, *Yeats's Poetic Codes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 104–129. For comments on Muldoon's birds, see Matthew Campbell, 'Muldoon's Remains,' in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, ed. Tim Kendall and Peter McDonald (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 170–188. For the particular comments on birds, see 181–183. Countless birds appear in Muldoon's poems from the earliest work to the present; this essay looks specifically at those in "1916: The Eoghan Rua Variations" and the text of the anthem "100 Years a Nation." Both of those commissioned 2016 works, as well as others, are published in Paul Muldoon, *Rising to the Rising* (Loughcrew, Oldcastle, Co Meath: Gallery Press, 2016). I am grateful to Paul Muldoon for letting me see the proofs of this book. Muldoon also comments on Yeats's birds in his essay on "All Souls' Night" in *The End of the Poem* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 3–28.
6. *Rising to the Rising*, 13, 15. All future parenthetical page references to Muldoon's 2016 poems will be to this edition.
7. Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's poem "fota an Bháis" invokes Yeats as a conversational equal with reference to his poem on The O'Rahilly: "B'fhíor gach ní adúirt Yeats" ("Every word that Yeats wrote was true," as Ní Dhomhnaill translated that line in an email message of 6 April 2016). For the complete text, see *A Poet's Rising* (Dublin: Irish Writers Centre, 2016), unnumbered pages.
8. Wessex Parallel WebTexts, "The Owl and the Nightingale" translation, <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/~wpwt/trans/owl/owltrans.htm>
9. Information about the meadow pipit and the cuckoo is taken from three websites:
"Cuckoo" and "Meadow Pipit," BirdWarch Ireland
<http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/IrelandsBirds/Cuckoos/Cuckoo/tabid/1096/Default.aspx>
<http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/IrelandsBirds/PipitsWagtails/MeadowPipit/tabid/1036/Default.aspx>
"Meadow Pipit," Irelandseye.com, http://www.irelandseye.com/aarticles/travel/nature/birds/small_ground_birds/meadow_pipit/meadow_pipit.htm
"Meadow Pipit," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meadow_pipit

10. There are rough functional, though not ornithological, similarities between the nightingale and the meadow pipit, because both are associated in their poems with song, and between the owl and the cuckoo, because both are associated with strength and aggression. For interpretations of the nightingale and the owl, see "Introduction," J. W. H. Atkins, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1922), xi–xc. Online via the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/owlandnightingal00atkiuoft>
11. A "stalking horse" is "a screen traditionally made in the shape of a horse behind which a hunter may stay concealed when stalking prey. Later, a false pretext concealing someone's real intentions" (www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O214-stalkinghorse.html).
12. Matthew Campbell, "Muldoon's Remains," 179.
13. For a recent discussion of Muldoon's elaborate rhymes in other poems, see Matthew Campbell, "The Irish Longing for Rhyme," in *After Ireland: Essays on Contemporary Irish Poetry*, eds. Jefferson Holdridge and Brian O Conchubhair (Wake Forest University Press, forthcoming 2016). The elaborate rhyme scheme of "1916: The Eoghan Rua Variations" are reminiscent of (though not identical to) that in Muldoon's elegy for Seamus Heaney, "Cuthbert and the Otters," *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 3–12. Campbell has suggested to me that the 14-line stanzas here are shaped like sonnets with the sestet in the middle.
14. "Meadow Pipit," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meadow_pipit
15. 175–177. See also <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0934.pdf#page=3> and following, in which Mary McLoughlin describes carrying messages between Plunkett and MacDonagh.
16. The word "nest" appears in the sixth stanza, but not directly in reference to the meadow pipit: "As a dead horse's belly swells / it pushes a sniper out of his nest."
17. *The Complete Poems of Francis Ledwidge*, 209–210.
18. Bernard O'Donoghue, "Migration," *The Seasons of Cullen Church* (London: Faber & Faber, 2016), 10. Hugh Haughton pointed out to me that O'Donoghue's poem belongs in this essay. Haughton was also the source of much avian poetic lore, such as the importance of birds for First World War poets: Isaac Rosenberg's "Returning," Edward Thomas's "The Thrush," and his "I Never Saw That Land Before," as well as Michael Longley's homage, "Edward Thomas's War Diary."
19. The bittern also appears in Muldoon's "Boon," *Mules* (Winston-Salem, NC: Wake Forest University Press, 1977), 32–33 and in "Yarrow," *The Annals of Chile* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 188, among other poems.
20. "Great Bitterns in Ireland," National Museum of Ireland: [http://www.museum.ie/The-Collections/Documentation-Discoveries/November-2014-\(1\)/Great-Bitterns-in-Ireland](http://www.museum.ie/The-Collections/Documentation-Discoveries/November-2014-(1)/Great-Bitterns-in-Ireland).
21. The paragraphs discussing Mary McLoughlin's undelivered message are taken from Lucy McDiarmid, "Emotions in 1916," *At Home in the Revolution: what women said and did in 1916* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2015), 175–77.
22. BMH, WS 934 (McLoughlin, Mary), 4.
23. She also remembered it in 1938 when she was interviewed for a military service pension application: IE/MA, MSP 34REF15389 (McLoughlin, Mary), Sworn statement before the Advisory Committee, 4 February 1938, 5.
24. Both quotations are from MacDonagh's translation, which can be found at Poem Hunter <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-yellow-bittern/>.
25. Honor Ó Brolcháin, *Joseph Plunkett* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2012), 398.