

KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN

und Materialien

ERFOLG
GARANTIERT !



Interpretation zu
Roddy Doyle

A Star Called Henry
(in englischer Sprache)

C. Bange Verlag

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1.2 Historical context¹

Background to the conflict

In the second half of the nineteenth century, new groups began to form in Ireland. Their aim was to rid the country of British supremacy which had existed there for centuries. These groups originated in the predominantly Catholic provinces of Leinster, Munster and Connaught. In the Northern province of Ulster, where the majority of the population were Protestant, it was hoped that British supremacy would continue. The reasons for this were historical. When King Henry VIII (1491–1547) denounced the Catholic faith in the first half of the sixteenth century (because the Pope had refused to grant him his divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Arragon) and created his **own Protestant State Church** – the Anglican Church –, it triggered a backlash in the **traditionally Catholic Ireland**. So, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, (Protestant) British settlers were sent to Ireland by Henry's successors to the throne to break down this resistance. The

Ireland's religious split

new Protestant citizens established themselves as the dominant force in the province of Ulster in particular. It was this policy of settlement that eventually led to both the confessional and political division of Ireland.

At the end of the nineteenth century, which for Ireland had been a time of great material poverty (half of the population had perished in the great famine of the 1840s and many had emigrated to the US), **Nationalism** – as was the case in many of the countries of Europe – also reached its peak in Ireland. The more the nation defined itself as a Catholic country, the more the Protestant North felt excluded and pushed into the arms of Britain.

One of the leaders of the new national movement was the printer and journalist, **Arthur Griffith** (1872–1922), who tried to revive

¹ See also Maurer

the cultural heritage of Ireland as an independent entity, and who also promoted a new political approach towards Britain. He wanted the Irish delegates in the London Parliament in Westminster to give up their seats and set up a new Irish parliament in Dublin instead. Furthermore, he wanted Ireland to be turned into a separate, viable economic entity. To push through his political goals, Griffith founded his own party in 1905 and gave it the Gaelic name of *Sinn Féin*, meaning 'we ourselves'. The Irish Socialist Republican Party, which had already been founded by **James Connolly** (1868–1916) in 1896 as the party of the Irish workers' movement, became the second most important party after Sinn Féin.

In Britain, too, efforts had long been made to grant the overwhelming majority of people of Ireland their wish for independence. Both in 1886 and in 1893, the British Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898), had put forward respective legislative proposals to Parliament, but without success. The third '**Home Rule**' proposal of 1912 envisioned that the Irish would be responsible for domestic matters and that foreign affairs would be decided upon by the British Empire. This proposal was welcomed in Ireland by the majority, but opposed by the Northern Protestant 'Unionists'. Tension between the two sides grew. Both parties had been building up private armies since 1911. 1913 saw the official founding of the *Ulster Volunteer Force* on the one side and of the *Irish Citizen Army* on the other. The nationalists were supported financially by Irish who had emigrated to America in the nineteenth century.

Britain's Ireland policy

The Easter Rising of 1916

Shortly after the outbreak of the First World War in September 1914, the British monarch signed the legislation on 'Home Rule', which was only to come into effect, however, after the end of the war. The Irish delegates to Westminster had achieved their goal, but paradoxically at the expense of their own political influence. They had fulfilled their mission without Ireland moving any closer to actual

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independence. The armed militia in the country pushed for a more rapid solution. The nationalists also saw a historic chance to rid themselves of British supremacy while Britain was involved in the Great War (in which 200,000 Irish volunteers, of whom 60,000 lost their lives, were also defending the Empire under the British flag.). One of the major advocates for a rebellion was **Patrick Pearse** (1879–1916), who since 1915 had been the leader of the *Gaelic League*, an association founded by Irish academics to safeguard the native cultural heritage and which in the course of a few years had developed into a national movement. Pearse was a barrister but above all a writer, an educator and prophet of a new Ireland. In his writings, he linked the Catholic idea of salvation with the demand for an altruistic commitment to the national cause, even to the point of personal sacrifice.

Eventually, the diverse national powers united in a loose coalition: the Catholics, the Socialists around the work leaders James Connolly and James Larkin (1874–1947), the Fernier and the supporters of the Gaelic League. Concrete plans for the rebellion were formed; financial support came from America, arms came from Germany. The highly symbolic day of **Easter Sunday 1916** was chosen: **The resurrection of the Irish nation** was to take place on the day of resurrection of the Saviour. However, due to inadequate organisation and logistical mishaps, nothing actually happened on Easter Sunday – the ship with the largest arms and ammunition supply landed too early, aroused suspicion and was about to be investigated by

The siege of the
General Post Office

the British when the captain decided to dump the entire load into the sea. It was not until Easter Monday that the General Post Office in Dublin and other places of strategic importance were occupied. **Around 1600 insurgents** participated. Their chances of succeeding were hopeless from the start despite the fact that the British were preoccupied with the war and only had limited forces available to suppress the rebellion.

It was on Easter Monday, too, that Patrick Pearse read out the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, declaring Ireland's right to self-

determination and guaranteeing religious and civic freedom, as well as equal rights and opportunities for all of its citizens. The new republic claimed to represent the whole country – a claim which the Unionists considered presumptuous and, had the rebellion been successful, may well have led to the outbreak of Civil War. However, the rebellion was not successful. Although the insurgents managed to defend some of their occupied buildings for a week, they were forced to capitulate. At the end of the rebellion, there were 450 dead and 2,614 wounded, most of them civilians. 3500 people had been arrested and the majority disappeared into British prisons without trial. 170 insurgents were convicted by a war tribunal of whom 90 were condemned to death. 15 of these were executed between 3 and 12 May.

The Road to Civil War

From the British perspective, the Easter Rising was a cowardly attempt to stab the empire in the back in its hour of weakness and need. This seemed to justify and render imperative punishments which were tough in the extreme. However, despite losing the armed battle for the time being, the militant Irish nationalists had managed to win over the minds of the people, the political opinion of the majority of the Irish population, which had certainly not been the case up until that time. The British occupying power had shown themselves to be the oppressors that the Irish nationalists had always claimed they were. Any suspicions people had had about the leaders of the Easter Rising vanished and they were now regarded as martyrs, as surviving heroes of the independence movement. The Parliamentary Party lost any remaining influence; 'Home Rule' was now regarded as an insufficient compromise. More and more people began to trust Sinn Féin. Éamon de Valera (1882–1975), who was born in America as the son of an Irish mother and a Spanish father, who had been condemned to death but was then pardoned after the Easter Rising, became a luminary of the party. It was thanks to him that support for the Irish cause increased in America.

1.2 Historical context

In the run-up to the **1918 elections**, plans of the British government emerged which foresaw the introduction of conscription, previously made compulsory in England and Scotland in 1916, in Ireland as well. This news caused panic and, together with the change in voting rights (women over 30 and men who were not the head of a household were allowed to vote for the first time, leading to a sudden rise

Reshuffle of party majorities

in the number of voters from 700,000 to 1.9 million), led to a dramatic reshuffle of party majorities: The Parliamentary Party lost 72 of their 78 seats and Sinn Féin received 73 seats (as opposed to their previous seven mandates). But the Unionists also gained eight seats (from 18 to 26 seats). Political polarisation intensified.

Sinn Féin's delegates kept their election promise and refused to go to London, establishing their own parliament in Dublin instead (**Dáil Éireann**). The delegates of the other parties did not participate in this move and hence the political division of Ireland. De Valera was nominated President of Ireland, and quickly became accepted in Ireland, although, with the exception of the International Socialists, he was not recognised by other foreign powers at this time. The former *Irish volunteers* became the **Irish Republican Army (IRA)**, the semi-official army of the new Republic. On the other side were the British State Police, *The Royal Irish Constabulary*, whose presence remained and was even stocked up by veterans of World War I, by the soon to be feared Auxiliaries, and by the Black and Tans (a reference to the troops' uniforms which were made out of a selection of police and military uniform pieces randomly stitched together). Both sides fought hard against each other.

After the end of World War I, the Irish question was also placed on the agenda of the Paris peace negotiations. The USA argued in favour of the right of smaller nations to self-determination, too, and pushed for Irish independence. Britain gave in and passed the *Government of Ireland Act* in December 1920, which foresaw the separation of Ire-

Division of Ireland and Civil War

land into two independent states: into a smaller state in the North, whereby the borders were determined so as to create a pro-British Unionist majority; and into a larger Catholic state in the South.