



## 1921: The Great Novel of the Irish Civil War

*Morgan Llywelyn*

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The Irish fight for independence is one of the most captivating tales of the twentieth century. Morgan Llywelyn, the acclaimed historical writer of books like *Lion of Ireland*, *Bard* and *The Horse Goddess*, is the writer born to bring this epic battle to life. Having created an entire body of work chronicling the Celts and Ireland, she now turns to recent Irish history to create a multivolume saga: *The Irish Century*.

*1921* tells the story of the Irish War of Independence and the heartbreaking civil war that followed. Henry Mooney, a reporter for the *Clare Champion* and the *Irish Bulletin*, is a self-described "moderate nationalist" who struggles to see the truth in the news of the day, and to report it fairly. Lacking more radical Republican beliefs of his dear friends Ned Halloran and Sile Duffy, Henry reports the political--and later, bloody--actions of his fellow Irishman from the ashes of the failed 1916 Rising to the creation of the Irish Free State to the tragic and wide-ranging battles of the Irish Civil War.

Meanwhile, Henry feels the impact of these history-changing events in his own personal life. His friendship with Ned falters when their political beliefs diverge, and an unexpected tragedy leaves them further apart than ever. Henry struggles with his passion for a well-bred Protestant Anglo-Irish woman, Ella Rutledge, and as he dutifully reports the events in the political battle for independence, he comes to realize that the Irish struggle for freedom will leave no life untouched--and no Irish citizen with a dry eye or an untroubled heart.

## 1921: The Great Novel of the Irish Civil War Details

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## From Reader Review 1921: The Great Novel of the Irish Civil War for online ebook

### David Anderson says

Picks up right where 1916 left off with much the same cast of characters, although the main hook pulling you into the course of history this time is the journalist Henry Mooney rather than Ned Halloran. Even more gripping and, of course, tragic than 1916 as you watch events spiral inevitably towards Partition and the resulting Irish Civil War, with former brothers-in-arms becoming bitter enemies. I like the way in which, with each novel, rather than using a preface to set the stage, she simply provides a Dramatis Personae, a biographical cast listing of all the fictional and nonfictional figures that appear in this particular timeline, and the end each novel has source notes and a bibliography for the historical events and quotes of the historical characters involved.

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### Roisin Dubh says

This series of 5 books covers the history of Ireland from the 1916 Rising through the Good Friday Agreement, following one Republican family

These works of historical fiction are so well researched that this Republican family could have been any Republican family. Her facts are spot on and she blends historical figures with fictional characters so that they flow together effortlessly in way that makes the books extremely readable. She blends these people without distorting the events and actions of the historical figures.

I highly recommend this series of books whether you are a student of Irish history in the 20th century or just looking for an entertaining read that will also educate you on the history of 20th century in Ireland. You will learn of the history of this beautiful island with even realising you are being taught.

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### Billy says

A turgid read about events in Ireland following the Easter Uprising in 1916 up to independence in 1921 and the ensuing civil war.

To follow this historic tumult, the author uses the device of a journalist who covers the unrest, as freelance writer, as newspaper correspondent and as essayist for an illegal republican samizdat. Obviously, this gives him a plausible reason to rush to-and-fro, following the action where it is. Unfortunately, the author must have felt not enough history could be passed along from that point of view, so every page or so, an omniscient narrator drops in to tell you about the latest outrage against Irish civilians happening somewhere else in the country. You realize how intrusive and deadening this is when the narrator then announces the ascension of Hitler (yes, Hitler) as leader of a tiny political party with fewer than a hundred people, a development hardly noticed in Germany and one that certainly had no bearing whatsoever on the political strife in Ireland. It's a true object lesson from Creative Writing 101 in the power of showing versus telling and how telling instead of showing grinds the story to a standstill.

If you are wholly unaware of the Irish Civil War, this book does offer some instruction and you do get to

meet key historic figures like Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera. The rest of the cast of characters are as two-dimensional stock as they come. The journalist has a romance with a beautiful women who is not only of higher social station but is also a Protestant! Pity this turned out to be such a snoozer of a novel.

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### **Tom Garland says**

Loved Morgan Llywelyn's novel 1916 story of the Irish Rebellion and subsequent Civil War in 1921. Great history and great fiction.

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### **D.L. Gardner says**

I found this somewhat dry. Well researched, but read more like a history book than a novel.

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### **Marty Greenwell says**

I really like historical fiction, especially about history that I am unaware of. The Irish fight for a republic and the resulting civil war between the Irish brothers and sisters who thought only a bit differently. I was presented with good fictional characters, especially Henry Mooney and his "little" (not so little in spirit) Ursula or as he called her "Little Business". How Henry the journalist wove his way in and out of the five years between 1918 and 1923 and the supporting cast of real people who because of the treachery, mostly died.

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### **Douglas Hayes says**

When I began reading about Irish history in the last few months (in preparation for our trip there) I was not only curious about the Irish people and their story - I also felt positively confused about what I thought I knew.

From my childhood to now, the only knowledge of the Irish I was confident about was that St. Patrick was Irish (which he wasn't), they are all red-haired and angry folks (which they aren't), they are only all a about drinking and frivolity (which has only a grain of truth), they like to fight for no apparent reason (hardly true of anyone), they are so shallow minded that they happily fight and terrorize Protestants for no better reason than they are not Catholics (which is wholly wrong), and they are a generally uneducated and backward people (which is a stereotype unworthy of such a noble race).

Morgan Llywelyn's books have been most helpful as a means of filling in the emotional gaps that are often left when finished with a typical Irish history. Empathy is an important virtue for understanding any individual person or any people. While I'm still very confused about much of modern Irish history - I now care deeply about the people for the sake of their history. I care about their concerns, their struggles through the centuries and their hopes for the future. My prayer is that God will raise them up from the ashes to a newness of life beyond their greatest longings.

Above all - this book help me to feel the weight of brother-brother hatred, and how horrifying it can be to

have to choose between the ideals that stir your to action and the love you truly have for your brothers. The subject of this book the struggle for Irish independence from the British after centuries of domination, oppression and injustices. And yet - The Irish were not yet ready for the responsibility of godly freedom. For in their pursuit of it, they were torn asunder with a very un-Irish hostility to one another.

I look forward to the next in the series!

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### **Amanda says**

A tragic, and almost, inconceivable period of Irish history.

Once again, Llywelyn sucks you in and transports you into the lives of the brave men and women of Ireland. She puts such detail, passion and truth into this novel that you feel a kinship with the cause and a brief understanding for how things went so terribly wrong...In the whirlwind that brought on the Irish Civil War, Llywelyn tries to show both sides of the story in equal measure. There is a raw honesty in her writing, which brings the period into the light of day so that no stone is left unturned.

I appreciated the way in which this Irish history was layed at my feet. I am not knowledgable on the subject matter that Lylwelyn discussed and presented but I still followed along and became enamored with the characters and setting. I have a new found respect, sympathy, and understanding for what the Irish people have been through.

I cannot reconcile in my head how brothers in arms could become so divided so quickly. I will probably never be able to grasp that horrific truth. It was one thing to read about the struggle of the Irish against the all-encompassing British control. It is another entirely to have the situation turn on its head and become a war among friends and neighbours. It was a heartbreaking tale, a heartbreaking truth.

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The characters were further developed in this installement of the century series. I very much enjoyed Henry's unbiased perspective throughout the turmoil. I could understand his reasoning and tempermeant more so than Ned's. Therefore, I found myself enjoying this novel even more than the first.

Although, I missed the idealism, high standards, and unshakeable truth of men like Padraic Pearse in this second book. Of course this was not the author's choice, rather the dictates of history. I could feel the struggle to maintain this idealism from the people that survived the 1916 Easter Rising. Some succeeded, others did not. Actually, I think that most lost it in the end, which isn't surprising given the circumstances. But I felt, through her words, this struggle to maintain ones dignity and morales, although I do not know what really happened during that time. Obviously, many lost themselves during this historical period, since they were able to kill their own country men in this way. A horrible tragedy, but one others hopefully learn from.

I am very much looking froward to continuing on with this series and learning more about the history of Ireland. I'm starting book three today!

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### **J.S. Dunn says**

Llywelyn's Century series is a departure from her usual fantasy novels. Having now read selectively in this series, have been pleasantly surprised. Thankfully this is not the usual sanitized version of the Rising and aftermath nor is it partisan.

Though most of the characters are a bit flat, the author throws in plot twists commensurate with what was happening in the new Republic and tells the wider story in a fairly evenhanded manner. All the novels read to date from 1921 forward throw in lots of factoids, usually without being tedious though some of the dialogue info-dump is tedious.

Overall, this series is a good intro to 20th century Irish politics for readers who have not themselves read primary source nonfiction, history, and the biographies and memoirs of those who were there as written by and about the likes of :

Kathleen Clarke, Countess Markiewitz, Michael Collins, Ernie O'Malley, Dan Breen, and many others. If you like this series, the original material awaits your discovery.

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### **Katrina says**

Just like Llywelyn's *1916*, *1921* starts off slow and took me a bit to get into but once I did, wow... Things moved quickly. I thought Llywelyn did a much better job of explaining the politics in this book than she did in *1916* and it's a lot to cover so that was nice. I was a little taken aback of this book focusing on Henry rather than Ned because I felt a bit unsatisfied of where *1916* left off with certain characters. However, it turned out okay in the end and I can't wait to read the next book!

Once again, two major spoilers  
(view spoiler)

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### **Erin says**

The Irish struggle for independence from the British was something I have always wanted to learn more about. I knew a little that I had read in books and of course what I'd heard about the "terrorists" of the IRA growing up, but after reading this series of books I am appalled (at some points my stomach literally hurt) at what Britain got away with doing to another nation in a modern age. This series not only makes me fiercely proud of my Irish heritage but it also makes me wonder if we are really so civilized and advanced as we think we are.

This series opens with "1916: The Easter Rising", continues on to "1921", "1949", "1972" and ends with "1999". It follows the Hallorans, as they struggle through the tumultuous times. This added story was interesting and helped tie together the "real world" events, however the real world events were so engrossing, to me at least, that I often felt that the story of the Hallorans simply got in the way. Also, the Halloran of "1949", Ursula, was not very bright or likeable so at times it was almost irritating enough to make me put down the book and simply pick up an encyclopedia. I feel that Llywelyn, usually such a smooth writer, really missed a great chance with Ursula because the character does have a very interesting story but she is simply not well written. Ursula's son, Barry, in the further books is also a difficult character like in some respects and so is distracting. I also wish Llywelyn had given more detail to the end. So much build-up, give books worth, and then it's just over. It was a let down.

However, this was a great series and I recommend it to everyone I know now, whether they are Irish or not. The world needs to know Ireland's story, they are a strong, admirable people and they deserve to be recognized.

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## **Bob Price says**

*1921* picks up the story where *1916* leaves off. Ned Halloran is happy with his wife Seile and their adopted daughter Precious and life seems to be on the upswing.

Until politics gets in the way and Ned's life falls apart, along with all of Ireland.

Llywelyn changes focus in this next book. While Ned is a major character in the beginning part of the book, the author shifts her attention to Harry, Ned's partner and friend from the first book.

Along with Ned, Harry finds his life in upheaval as the events of the early 20th Century unfold in Ireland. Harry finds himself in love with a Protestant woman and winds up covering the emerging Irish civil war from both sides. As Ireland descends into madness, we see Harry's certainty evaporate and we anguish along with his struggles.

What makes *1921* good is that the plot's action parallel's the Irish history it's meant to portray. At times somewhat predictable, the reader finds themselves immersed in a land filled with heroes and villains...who often change places in the course of the narrative.

Llywelyn's writing is very clear and her characterization of the historical characters is very three dimensional. We can feel the frustration of Michael Collins or the idealism of DeValera and gain some insight into these larger than life characters.

The reader may not know much of Irish history and this book will help them understand what happened in the wake of Independence and why Ireland has been a land of struggle for so long.

This is a great book for lovers of historical fiction and those who frankly just like a good story.

Grade: B

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## **Jim says**

### **Good historical story**

I found myself getting a bit overdone with the details. Sometimes it read like a history textbook but as it was all fairly new to me I was able to get through it. Worth reading.

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## **Julia says**

This is a history book with a fictional character to tie it together. I couldn't take it in large sections because the history all ran together.

The main character is a journalist, which gives the author the opportunity to emphasize his ties to different figures: Michael Collins, Eamon de Valera, Tom Barry,...

Very depressing with the amount of death and violence, but that's because that's what really happened, not because the author was trying to titillate people with violence.

I need to take a break before going on to 1949: A Novel of the Irish Free State which is the next in the series.

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## **Paula Dembeck says**

This is the second book in Llywelyn's ambitious Irish Century Series. And where the first book 1916 was Ned Halloran's story, this second book is Henry Mooney's story.

In the Rising, Ned had suffered a head wound and been saved when Henry smuggled him away from the battle scene using a forged press pass. But Ned is still recovering, has recurrent dizzy spells and cannot work. Henry organizes for Sile, Ned and Precious to be housed with his cousin Louise to keep them out of sight until things cool down.

Henry gradually and unconsciously develops feelings for Sile which he refuses to acknowledge. It causes a great rift in his relationship with Ned, one that cannot be breached. But Henry finally meets a woman of his own, Ella Rutledge a widow of Irish-Anglo ancestry who is also a Protestant. There are many barriers to their relationship including class, money, religion and politics. All of them cause both Henry and Ella much grief.

The years following 1916 were a period of intense and sustained effort to regain Irish independence and many worked voluntarily to achieve it. The majority had not stood with the rebels in the Easter Rising, their apathy bred from years of subservience. But the Irish soul was reborn when they saw the Irish flag fly over the post office in Dublin, read the proclamation that claimed the country belonged to the Irish people and saw courageous men and women die for the cause. It laid down a fertile ground for the continued struggle. Away from Dublin in the rural areas, nationalist volunteers now called the IRA (The Irish National Army), openly expressed opinions that disagreed with the British establishment. They considered themselves patriots, although Britain, convinced of its God-given right to rule, considered them traitors. Following the Rising, the British had savagely executed the leaders and deported over two thousand Republicans without a trial. They shut down the presses, instituted strict censorship and raided private homes, arresting whoever they pleased. They interrupted harmless social gatherings and dispersed citizens at gunpoint. They set up networks of spies and paid informers to betray their neighbours. Still, the Irish refused to accept British rule and fought back any way they could.

Three figures play a major part in the next years of political jockeying: Lloyd George the British Prime Minister; Eamon de Valera the first President of the Dail (the Assembly) and the first President of the Irish Republic; and Michael Collins, the chairman of the Provisional Government of the Irish Free State.

Lloyd George, an experienced and astute politician, used every means possible to consolidate the British position, including giving the northern counties more parliamentary seats and sending over arms and vigilante squads to create fear and havoc. Eventually, he was able to manoeuvre an Irish delegation into accepting The Irish Free State. It was not what the Irish wanted, but Michael Collins eventually saw that it might be a transitional step towards independence and, in the face of an all-out war they would lose, tried to bring the Irish together to accept some form of peace. The Treaty gave Ireland a greater degree of autonomy than it had known since the beginning of the British occupation years ago. But not all agreed with Collins and many Republicans felt betrayed.

When Collins was assassinated, the country was once more thrown into violence. Civil War erupted with the Free State Army holding the towns and the Republican Army controlling the countryside. Men were ambushed and slaughtered and all common decency seemed swept away. Each side accused the other of barbarous behavior, as fact and fiction merged. Eventually the Republicans were forced to give up their arms, but stayed determined to fight on through the Sinn Fein organization.

The text is hard to follow at times. It is awash in so many details that it is difficult to keep everyone straight as splinter groups form and later splinter once more. The list of characters at the beginning is certainly helpful, but continually flipping pages to check or confirm impressions, interrupts the flow of the narrative.

Llywelyn describes the bands of roving men assassinating those who oppose their views. If they could not find the man they were looking for they executed a family member, often in front of their terrified children. Each atrocity on one side was repeated by the opposing side as violence continued to spiral out of control. Brutal deeds were committed on both sides. No one was safe. Even children and woman were shot. During these pages of intricate detailed history, the fictional novel lags and the reader leaves the interesting story, until it resurfaces near the conclusion of the novel. For the most part, it is why this book failed me.

Where Llywelyn has done well though, is in detailing Henry's changing political views and sharing his philosophy as a journalist. Henry was at heart an idealist and a patriot but he absolutely abhorred violence. He came to see though, how without it, progress may never have been achieved. He was also an honourable man. The reader appreciates how he treats others, his manners, his kind and caring attitude towards Sile, Ursula (aka Precious and Little Business) and Ella as well as his devotion to his profession. Henry felt strongly about his role as a journalist, determined to record the true facts about the events he saw. He knew years down the road, memories would fade or modify the truth and he wanted a straight and honest record of what had happened. He put himself in harm's way to get those facts and he was always fair in his writing, able to give both sides an equal and fair hearing.

Llywelyn brings her story to a close as Henry and Ned confront one another, but Ned cannot take the final step to forgiveness. Meanwhile the author paints an interesting portrait of Ursula, who is growing up quickly and has become a warrior for the republic. So Llywelyn has quietly dropped the thread for the reader to pick up in the next volume which I am determined to get through. But now I need a reprieve. This is not easy reading and at times it is tough to get through it. I think the novel could have been improved by highlighting the fiction more and reducing some of the historical details. There are pages that read like a history book instead of a piece of historical fiction.

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