The first two decades of Irish independence were fraught and the formation of the post-imperial state was a continual controversy. The conditional perception of what Ireland was, should, or might be coincided with a revolution in the arts. Now-forgotten cultures flared and disappeared, little magazines, cabaret clubs, riots and theatres erupting in a fluctuating public sphere. Nicholas Allen reads the crisis of Irish independence as formative of newly experimental relations between novels, poems, paintings, artists and audiences. The conditional, unfinished spaces of the modernist artwork were an unfinished civil war. In connecting these texts and times, Allen locates Joyce, Beckett, Jack and W. B. Yeats in the disputes surrounding the Irish state after 1922. With its interdisciplinary perspective on artists and contexts, this book is a major contribution to the study of Irish culture of the 1920s and 30s and of modernism’s histories.

Nicholas Allen is Moore Institute Professor at the National University of Ireland, Galway.
Christmas card by Cormac O’Malley sent from Ernie O’Malley to Jack B. Yeats. Image from the papers of Ernie O’Malley, University College Dublin.
MODERNISM, IRELAND
AND CIVIL WAR

NICHOLAS ALLEN
To Chloe, Patrick and Cormac
'Miss Costello said to me: “You haven’t a good word to say for anyone but the failures”. I thought that was quite the nicest thing anyone had said to me for a long time’.

Samuel Beckett to Thomas MacGreevy, 8th September 1935
(Trinity College Dublin MS 10402/80).

‘… the darkness does not lift but yet becomes heavier as I think how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no memory is never heard, never described or passed on’.

W. G. Sebald, Austerlitz.
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