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Patrick Pearse and the politics of redemption: The mind of the Easter Rising, 1916

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The American University, 1989

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PATRICK PEARSE AND THE POLITICS OF REDEMPTION:

THE MIND OF THE EASTER RISING, 1916

by

Seán Farrell Moran

submitted to the

Faculty of the College of Arts and Science of The American University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

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ABSTRACT

Previous historical analysis of Patrick Pearse and his participation in Dublin’s Easter Rising of 1916 has failed to explain how it was that Pearse came to have such an unlikely role. This dissertation considers Pearse’s life psychoanalytically within the context of contemporary Irish nationalism to explain how he became the spokesman for the most violent forces within the nationalist movement.

An examination of Pearse’s psychological development, his speeches, poetry, and political writings and his careers as an important Irish journalist, educator, and artist, reveals that he was unprepared for adulthood. He sought to resolve this crisis in some type of resolute act that would redeem himself as a person. In the search for psychological resolution Pearse spoke to his culture and time. His personal quest coincided with the failure of the Gaelic Revival, constitutional politics, and the Irish Republican tradition to bring forth Ireland’s independence from Great Britain and her culture. Failure to realize independence
led many Irish nationalists to embrace a theology of violence through which self-immolation, violence, and defeat could be justified. It was Pearse’s identification and articulation of that theology in mythic terms which mobilized republicans into a doomed insurrection that promised eternal victory over the enemy.

Pearse’s achievement has had a lasting impact on the course of subsequent Irish politics. Pearse has been enshrined as an Irish patriot and his theological legacy has continued to provide both motivation and justification to generations of members of the Irish Republican Army. His contribution to that history should not, however, eclipse the fact that Pearse brought to Irish politics concerns which were not limited to Ireland. Patrick Pearse was not a parochial enigma: like many of his generation, he was deeply concerned that the modern age’s culture of reason as represented by Britain was a threat to Irish values and culture. By embracing the subjectivity of myth over the dictates of reason and pragmatism, Pearse came to articulate the Irish rejection of modernity at a critical moment in European history.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would like to express my gratitude to The American University Office of Graduate Affairs, and my colleagues in the History and Political Science Department of Montgomery College, for their encouragement. I thank my family in Ireland, Patrick and Nancy Farrell of Bailieborough and Captain James Kelly and his wife Sheila for their insights on contemporary events in Ireland. I must also recognize my
debts to my former colleagues on the staffs of Chestnut Lodge Hospital and the Mental Health Care Unit of Georgetown University Hospital.

As I complete this work I cannot help but remember my parents Peter and Marilayne Moran who gave me my love for history, Edward A. MacDowell who gave me a love of ideas, and JoAnne Munger who convinced me that I should pursue a scholar's life.

Lastly, I dedicate this to my long suffering wife, occasional typist, and fellow redhead Julie Gilroy Moran who has helped and encouraged me through good times and bad ones alike.
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CHAPTER I

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE HISTORICAL EVENT

Patrick Pearse was one of the people least likely to become one of Ireland's greatest national heroes. Since his execution at the hands of a British firing squad in 1916, he has generally been mishandled by historians, most of whom wished to see him raised to sainthood or cast off as strange and frivolous. Despite scholarship of considerable insight, Pearse's personality has remained elusive and difficult to understand. Because he has proven to be so enigmatic, the question of how Patrick Pearse came to be a violent revolutionary and to play a critical role in Dublin's Easter Rising of 1916 has yet to be answered.

It is the argument of this dissertation that Patrick Pearse was exactly the right man at exactly the right moment in his country's history. Because of his background and the course of his personal development, Pearse was ready and able to address the major political issue of his time. This does not mean that Pearse was saintly, original, or profound; rather, his personal life and a great historical event were wholly intertwined. He has become a national hero because his personal life and Irish political life met
at a point where each was going through a profound crisis; the solution which Pearse sought and found for his personal life was to be the same solution that proved to be a critical event which changed Irish history—the Easter Rising of 1916. This coincidence has led to Pearse’s enshrinement as a hero and has been the source of his unique standing in the history of his country. Without such a coincidence, it is unlikely that Patrick Pearse ever would have played such a role.

The historical literature on Pearse has failed to draw the critical connections between Pearse the man and the occurrence of the Rising. Although considerable work has been done on both Pearse and the Rising, none of it seems to have taken an approach which helps us really to understand how such an improbable figure came to play a major role in such an extraordinary event. The improbability that Pearse would ever play the kind of role that he eventually did has been generally noted; and by all accounts the unusual event and the improbable figure are interrelated. The question is, how are Pearse and the Rising related and what is the significance of that relationship? How did this man get caught up in such an event when nothing in his life would seem to indicate that he would have? And in what ways was the Rising influenced by his participation?

These questions have not been answered in the historical literature on either Pearse or the Rising. This
is not to fault the source material. Pearse published extensively in his brief life; as he was a poet, a dramatist, an essayist, and a journalist, Pearse’s writings are considerable and varied. Nearly all of his writings and major public addresses are collected in several volumes edited by Desmond Ryan.¹ This work was originally published in the period from 1917 to 1922, and several volumes have been reprinted relatively recently. Pearse’s personal correspondence has been collected in several places in Ireland, with the majority of it resting in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin. Seamas O Buachalla has edited a book of Pearse letters² as well as a collection of Pearse’s writings about education.³ The various members of the Pearse family all have papers collected in the National Library,⁴ as do Pearse’s immediate contemporaries who were of some renown. Some of the Pearse family papers reside at the Board of Works in Dublin, as well as at the University College Library, Dublin.


⁴Pearse Family Papers, National Library Dublin.
Pearse's never-completed autobiography has been edited by his younger sister, Mary Brigid Pearse, in a single volume, with lengthy reminiscences from the rest of the Pearse family and former friends. This is a most useful work, but the possibility of his sister's selective omissions and a problem in dating the autobiographical fragment mean that caution needs to be exercised in relying on it.

The Gaelic League's Minutes Books are useful because of Pearse's long involvement with the organization and all of the pertinent minute books are located in the National Library. Pearse's newspaper writings from 1900 onward are all readily accessible.

The primary source material is almost all located in Dublin and publication of the most important part of that material has continued down to the present. Moreover, there


6The Home-Life of Padraig Pearse contains an extended fragment of Pearse's planned autobiography. It also contains several essays and remembrances by Pearse family members and close friends that were written in the early 1930s. For the rest of this paper these pieces will be referred to by their respective authors. Patrick Pearse's autobiographical writings will be dealt with more extensively at a later point, but it is necessary to comment on Pearse's relatively sincere writing style--exhibited by his poem "Little Lad of the Tricks," which, Pearse was shocked to find, was read by his friends as being homoerotic. We can assume Pearse's sincerity in the writing of his autobiography despite the problems in the dating of the work. As to the editing done to it by his sister, the original documents demonstrate that she altered the autobiography only incidentally.
seem to be no major gaps in this material that could radically alter the emerging picture of Patrick Pearse. The problem in understanding Pearse, then, does not appear to be a technical one having to do with the primary sources. The reason why Pearse has remained an elusive figure is more likely a result of the kinds of approaches used by those who have written about him.

The writing on Pearse and his part in the Rising falls into several categories. The first consists of those works which are general studies of the Irish history of this period, several of which stand out. Without equal in the field of recent Irish history, F. S. L. Lyons' *Ireland Since the Famine*\(^7\) is the most detailed and well-documented work on the subject. For the period in question, it is far better than J. C. Beckett's *The Making of Modern Ireland*,\(^8\) an older work which is very good on Irish political history before 1800 and less so on Irish politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has been superseded by R. F. Foster's recent *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*.\(^9\) More to the point are Robert Kee's first two volumes of *The Green Flag: That Most Distressful Country* and *The Bold Fenian

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Men.10 Eminently readable, Kee’s work has moments of great insight along with first-rate documentation from contemporary journalistic sources. Of less usefulness, but worth consulting, are: A History of Ireland by Edmund Curtis; The Course of Irish History by T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin; The Modernization of Irish Society, 1848-1918 by Joseph Lee; Pauric Travers’s Settlements and Divisions: Ireland, 1870-1922; Dermot Keogh’s Twentieth Century Ireland; and P. S. O’Hegarty’s A History of Ireland Under the Act of Union.11 Except for Kee and Lyons, all of these works are far too general for real consideration as sources on Pearse. Curtis, Lee, and Beckett look at Pearse and the Easter Rising in the context of Ireland’s political development towards the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921.

Because of the sheer amount of space they have devoted to Pearse, both Kee and Lyons must be separated from the other general histories. Both of these histories have


looked at Pearse from what could generally be called a political point of view. Although each sees Pearse as a unique person, that uniqueness is never sufficiently analyzed and discussed in a way that makes it possible to explain his role. Perhaps it is the political interest, from which both writers have come to the subject of the Rising, that led Lyons to comment that the Rising continued to remain too big an event, with too great a change ensuing from it, to be entirely understood as yet. Lyons made this assertion, while admitting that in order to understand the Rising we must understand Pearse.

Explaining Pearse from the political point of view is a temptation that has lured not only Kee and Lyons; most of the serious historical scholarship about Pearse has also been done in this vein. This has been true of the large contribution to the Rising literature made by F. X. Martin. Co-author of a biography of Eoin MacNeill, Martin has edited two collections of essays—one on the Volunteers and the other entitled Leaders and Men of the Easter Rising, Dublin 1916. But most of his work has been in periodicals; his most important essays are "1916—Myth, Fact, and Mystery"


13 Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 334.

and "The 1916 Rising—Coup d'état or Bloody Protest?" Martin’s interests are not primarily with Pearse, and he has tended to minimize Pearse’s role, perhaps a reflection of his interest in MacNeill and the Volunteers.

Other writers with primarily political interests have chosen to downgrade Pearse in the process of emphasizing one of the other main characters in the Rising. An example is George Boyce’s *Nationalism in Ireland*, which gives James Connolly the crucial role in 1916. Boyce believes that Connolly, whose early position was roughly that of an anarcho-syndicalist, moved towards nationalism in order to radicalize the nationalists and the Volunteers. While Boyce’s argument that Connolly moved self-consciously towards nationalism is convincing, it scarcely needs repeating. Connolly did so partly because it was tactically necessary and partly because, if he did not, the socialist revolution he wished for would never occur. More importantly, Boyce overlooks the despair that Connolly felt over the war in Europe and failure of British unions to support the Great Strike of 1913 in Dublin. The fact was that his anarcho-syndicalist ideology had to be abandoned in

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17 Ibid., 63.
favor of nationalism if Connolly was to have an broader influence in Irish politics.

In part, Connolly's change of philosophy was due to the influence of the IRB. One of the major issues that has yet to be addressed is the relationship of Pearse to Connolly and how it was possible that Connolly, a seemingly rational, pragmatic labor agitator and organizer, ever got involved with someone like Pearse.

Leon O'Broin's history of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, *The Revolutionary Underground*, fails to find any special significance in Pearse because O'Broin has an evolutionary view of the Rising. He believes that the Rising was a result of a developmental political process, inevitable and irresistible, more of a problem of logistics and timing than representative of any deeper phenomenon, and that Pearse was just one of several important individuals who were all responsible for the Rising. The same assumption holds true for Nicholas Mansergh's *The Irish Question 1840-1921*; Eric Struass's *Irish Nationalism and British Democracy*; Sean Cronin's *Irish Nationalism: Its Roots and Ideology*; Charles Townsend's *Political Violence in Ireland*; and Lawrence McCaffrey's *The Irish Question, 1800- *

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18Ibid., 65-7.

Perhaps most characteristic of this approach is George Dangerfield's *The Damnable Question: A Study in Anglo-Irish Relations*. This is a curious work in that the period before 1912 is only minimally covered at best, with the author accepting many of the grossest simplifications as valid conclusions. For most of the book, Dangerfield looks at the issue of Anglo-Irish relations as one of rights and wrongs, policies, injustices, electoral reform, and so forth. With regard to the Rising, his concentration on the Irish Parliamentary Party and its demise at the hands of Tory resistance to Home Rule, offers no insight into the less rational factors at work in Irish politics at the time.

Despite Dangerfield’s implied purpose of illuminating the sources of more recent unrest in Ulster, his book neglects the issue of the developing mystique surrounding violence in Ireland. Dangerfield’s exclusive interest in politics betrays a liberal faith in constitutionalism to the exclusion of other factors. Thus the questions about spiritual, religious, or psychological phenomena within the


context of Irish nationalism are never raised.

The spiritual and mystical aspects of the Rising that Pearse consciously articulated are treated in several volumes of material of dubious value. Among them are two of the major biographies of Pearse. Louis Le Roux’s *Patrick H. Pearse*²² is an attempt to cast Pearse in the mold of a saint. Le Roux was the first to do extensive investigative work in the primary sources, but his book is marred by its excessively worshipful tone. Le Roux is considerably less useful than the work of Desmond Ryan, a former student of Pearse’s at St. Enda’s School, whose book, *The Man Called Pearse*,²³ is uncritical and sentimental, even though it is helpful in an evocative sense.

One might well call this the hagiographic school, and Irish historical writing has a considerable share of it. Yet even these books are somewhat useful because of the proximity of Ryan and Le Roux to the time of the Rising, and Ryan in particular has valuable evidence to offer. *The Man Called Pearse*, if used in conjunction with Ryan’s *Remembering Sion*,²⁴ a book of the author’s reminiscences, can be fruitful. These are all works that set out to


establish Pearse as a martyr, and their greatest usefulness lies in their historical influence in regard to his image as a religious and patriotic martyr. A more recent biography is Hedley McCay's *Padraic Pearse: A New Biography*.\(^{25}\)

McCay's is a narrative biography which makes occasional attempts at psychological insight into Pearse's personality. He frequently makes the fatal error of relying exclusively on Le Roux and Ryan, and fails to argue any kind of thesis.

Contrary to the hagiographers, there are some revisionist works by historians seeking to temper the Pearse myth. J. J. Horgan's *From Parnell to Pearse*\(^{26}\) is in this vein. But of much greater importance is an article by the Jesuit Francis Shaw: "The Canon of Irish History--A Challenge," published in *Studies* (Summer 1972), is a wholesale assault on the political ideology Pearse exemplified.\(^{27}\)

Shaw argues that Pearse's political ideas were unoriginal and derivative; as such they offered nothing new, nor were they profound.\(^{28}\) But what Shaw objects to most strenuously is the effect that Pearse had in making the

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\(^{26}\)J. J. Horgan, *From Parnell to Pearse* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1948).


\(^{28}\)Ibid., 121.
Republican legacy of violence monopolize the nationalist vision of a united Ireland. Shaw argues that Pearse's impact has proven deleterious to the nationalist movement. To Shaw, Pearse's supposed piety and courage have corrupted the Irish nationalist movement, which has embraced the myth of Pearse uncritically. The result has been that Irish nationalists now have a vision that has fixed on the Easter Rising and its tactics. Even though Shaw's observations about Pearse's religious ideas are very valuable, the problem with his analysis is that it fails to do anything more than attack the work of Pearse's hagiographers. Shaw's position within the church is notable here because his heaviest attacks fall on Pearse's "heretical" and "unorthodox" views of Catholic faith. Even though Shaw's is the most important revisionist view of Pearse and his legacy, it cannot deny the importance of Pearse in the nationalist tradition. With the exception of his analysis of Pearse's heterodoxy, Shaw fails to illuminate why the myth of Pearse has had such an enormous impact on the nationalist vision.

Another important revisionist is Conor Cruise O'Brien. If one can call the Irish "liberal" constitutional view a revisionist one, then O'Brien's is revisionist.

29 Ibid., 122ff.

believes that Home Rule was going to be granted at the end of the war, and that the Easter Rising was unnecessary. Pearse and the Anglo-Irish War of 1919–1921, according to O’Brien, have left the mystique of the gunman as the predominant political legacy. The main problem with this point of view is that the gunman mystique was alive long before 1916, and the Rising occurred within a tradition of political violence in Ireland which had received its greatest boost from British citizens who were determined to resist Home Rule.

The last category are those we can call interpretative works, the majority of which have attempted to see Pearse within some larger context. Generally, this literature has depicted Pearse as a representative type subject to forces beyond his immediate control or consciousness. These studies tend to be dissatisfied with the kind of work done by someone like Dangerfield, who looks at the Rising as an inevitable result of failure to change or reform the political system.

Patrick O’Farrell’s Ireland’s English Question and William Irwin Thompson’s The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, 1916 are brilliant works, both of which, while not about Pearse alone, concentrate on him as a critical figure.

O’Farrell’s thesis states that the problem between Ireland and England lies in the distorted picture each country has of the other, and this lack of understanding of the motivations and reasons for the other’s way of seeing things has led to an intense mutual antagonism; the relationship between the two countries is no quasi-colonial one but, in reality, a kind of protracted war in which the parties no longer understand the issues.

O’Farrell believes that, in the Irish case, a cosmological view became entrenched which saw England as secular, materialistic, and unethical as opposed to Ireland’s spiritual and moral values. This Irish view was diametrically opposed to that of the English, who could not help seeing the "Irish problem" as primarily a political one with no larger connotations. While the Irish saw their struggle as a spiritual battle for the truth, the English saw it as a strategic and logistical question which they have a moral responsibility to settle fairly. The Irish have, accordingly, moved the conflict to a place far removed from the political realm. For the Irish, O’Farrell claims, the battle has been over the salvation of "holy" Ireland against "pagan" England, and because of that view, Ireland’s conception of national salvation has become eschatological and millenarian in nature. The consequence of this development has been that Irish nationalism grew to be couched in chiliastic terms based on the "truth" which
"sinful" Britain could not, and would never be able to, know.

Patrick Pearse's greatest achievement, according to O'Farrell was to articulate this sense of the cosmic hope of Irish nationalism. By openly positing the problem as a spiritual one, Pearse could speak for the millenialist dream which had set itself into the political and public subconscious. By the death either of himself or of his generation, Pearse lived out a sacrificial role he both desired and was needed to fill, in order that the millennium might come about.

_Ireland's English Question_ acts as a corrective to the conventional historical views which see the Anglo-Irish problem as an essentially political one. The problem with O'Farrell's thesis is that he sees Irish identity as a solely Catholic one. This discounts the Protestant backgrounds of many of the Irish national martyrs and avoids the question of the hostility or indifference which not only the Church, but the population as well, usually felt towards the revolutionaries, a seeming contradiction to his schema which asserts that massive public support developed in favor of each act of insurrection. O'Farrell has in effect fixed Ireland in stone especially when he discusses present-day Ireland. Although he has righted the balance in Irish history, he has gone too far and not given the political and economic factors their due. Thus the current political
Anglo-Irish discussions of a very real and pragmatic nature seem to belie the thrust of his thesis that the religious dimension is an impossible hurdle between Ireland and England.

Thompson’s book is primarily a work of literary criticism concerned with what Thompson believes is the problem of Pearse’s artistic inability to express adequately what he felt or desired. Thompson sees Pearse as one of several Irish artists who, faced with the failure of their imaginations to render a first-rate artistic creation, were forced to create an artistic vision in the world of politics. The transference of their feelings of failure, along with their maudlin Romanticism, led to a desperate need either to create or to destroy.

Thompson’s view has great significance for this thesis, but he overestimates the imaginative influences at work on Pearse. While Pearse’s personal despair over his artistic failure plays an important role in his movement toward political action, he also faced deeper personal problems that both affected both his life and writing and helped make political action of any kind very compelling. Thompson makes little mention of this, and his failure to do so does not help us understand how Pearse could influence others who were not struggling over the question of artistic failure themselves.

Somewhere between Thompson and O’Farrell, Pearse as a
human being and the world he lived in still need to be tied together. Probably the single most important work on Pearse, Ruth Dudley Edwards' *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure*,\(^{32}\) comes as close as any book, yet it fails as well in the same way as Thompson and O'Farrell. This is not to say that Edwards' biography is neither thorough nor critical; it is a very good biography which was considered to be a revisionistic work when it was published. And given the primary sources currently available, it is both exhaustive and insightful.

What Edwards failed to do is to show us why Pearse became personally committed to the use of force. Edwards maintains that Pearse's sense of failure led him to the Rising. Obviously convinced by the financial and professional determinism of Thompson's thesis, Edwards still fails to present Pearse as subject to the kinds of forces or emotional stress that would make him go out on a suicidal mission. Suddenly Pearse is there at the General Post Office on Easter Monday, 1916, and we are not really sure why he is there. We do know that he faced grave financial difficulties, but we are not given the connection between the political act and his life. Nor do we really know what he accomplished and why.

**Failure** is that Edwards has insisted on looking at Pearse's life from a totally rationalistic viewpoint. She gives the reader the important data and attempts to demonstrate the logical connections between events and the motivations which guided Pearse’s life. This kind of commitment to rational analysis would be fine when the connections are rational and readily understandable. When Edwards has subjects to deal with which are logical, her analysis is impeccable. The major problem that Pearse presents historically is not so rational, however, and any attempt to explain his participation in the Rising, along with his obsession with death and salvation, which takes a rational approach is doomed to ultimate failure. Why was it that Pearse came to consider death and violence desirable and beneficial? Why did he become a major political figure when nothing in his past indicated that he had either a proclivity or desire for political leadership? Edwards, as well as Thompson, believes that Pearse’s political and military involvement was a result of his growing sense of artistic and personal failure. This still fails to explain why Pearse resorted to these desperate solutions instead of other, more reasonable ones.

The rationalistic bias, which mars most of the serious historical work on Pearse, prevents his role in the events surrounding the Easter Rising from being understood. Even though Pearse’s increasing sense of personal failure played
an undeniable part in his emotional outlook in the period in question, it was arguably less than that shared by the other two "Easter Rising Poets," Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Mary Plunkett. If failure was the major cause of Pearse’s self-destructiveness, it is an inadequate explanation for the hard-bitten political and military pragmatists such as James Connolly and the young Michael Collins, both of whose participation in a self-consciously suicidal mission seems incongruous.

What needs answering is how it was that Pearse, the least unlikely person to lead a military revolution, a shy and usually retiring individual, a person of few if any political abilities, came to be the public spokesman for the radical politics of his day. Not only did he become an important rhetorician for Irish republicanism, but he also helped lead nineteen hundred people into a hopeless struggle. The fact is that Pearse spoke to a time and a society which understood him. His irrational ideas became the clarion call for many Irishmen, even when practically everyone who responded on Easter Monday, 1916, was sure that it meant death and defeat. This kind of response and the ideology which led men to do such an irrational thing are not explainable with a conventional, nationalistic historical approach.

By and large the literature on Patrick Pearse has failed. While it has helped us know him, and has helped us
to know the Ireland in which he lived, the reasons why he, as a person, with all his hopes, aspirations, and fears wanted to die as a sacrifice for Ireland has yet to be explained. The mistake made by those who have written about Pearse’s participation in events is the assumption that human motivation is always conscious, always freely made, and always rationally conceived. This simply is not the case, especially with Pearse. The recognition that Pearse had an obvious "obsession with death" fails to illuminate how or why it existed. Likewise the historical effect of a person so afflicted is unlikely to be discerned by merely recounting what occurred after his death. What is required is a different approach to the analysis of the individual and his relationship to events in history. O’Farrell has perhaps given a clue to the solving of the mystery when he says that Irish historical development has been determined by Great Britain. This statement implies that the course which Ireland’s development has taken has not been one which has necessarily been one of choice.

It is odd that the historical literature on Pearse has so readily accepted him at face value. This man, full of deep conflict and unresolved contradictions, played a decisive role in his nation’s history, and yet his complex personality has not been openly and honestly discussed. Edwards has done considerable service in this regard, but she fails to explain the contradictions of the man and seems
to have resigned herself to this fact. That resignation seems to be true of most of the commentators on Pearse; and therefore the work of the revisionists has stood alone in bravely confronting the reputation of a courageous national hero.

Both the failure of Pearse's admirers to make him other than a mythic figure and the revisionist attack on his political legacy are the result of an unwillingness to consider Pearse in light of the forces which molded him. As Ireland's course has been undeniably influenced by Great Britain, so also was Pearse's personal development shaped by larger forces. The man who came out on Easter Monday to lead a group of men in the opening battle of a revolution was not there accidentally.

This is not to suggest that Pearse was solely the creature of his environment. But it is to suggest that such self-destructive behavior could not have imagined and espoused with such vigor if Pearse had acted solely from conscious political motivations. Patrick Pearse was an unusual individual and he was recognized as such by his contemporaries; but he did not seem to be the kind of man to kill himself leading troops into a doomed cause. It is because his acts were irrational and drew an equally irrational response from men who were wholly unlike him that the historian is forced to consider a different approach. What is required is a methodological approach that
recognizes human decisions as complex phenomena which are neither wholly determined by forces from without nor freely chosen from within. The moral and ethical values involved in any choice cannot be adequately explained by a wholesale acceptance of the individual as either a free moral agent or a puppet. Only a methodology that taps the reservoir of modern social science has a chance of explaining what needs explanation—the psychological makeup of the individual who acts in an historic event.

For the historian there are problems in using psychology to interpret the data of a person’s life historically. The main problem is the question of an a priori psychological construction being placed over that person’s life story. This problem is compounded by the variety of psychological theories and the kind of arbitrary choice among them this multiplicity implies.

This kind of problem is important but is manageable if historians are willing to look at their subjects with an open mind. No one approach can possibly deal with the myriad forces in any person’s life history, just as no one therapeutic approach has a universal applicability to living people in therapy. But the historian can look at the individual as an adult, at the kind of person he became; the historian can search for patterns in the subject’s habits, dreams, and actions. Then the historian can look back over the course of that person’s life to see if those patterns
have the sort of precedents that modern psychiatry or psychology would expect for that kind of adult behavior. The credibility of this approach is based on the consistency with which one finds certain patterns of behavior, as well as the kind of critical events which psychiatry or psychology tells us will invariably have connections to certain classes of behavior.

The methodology used in this case is based on Neo-Freudian modifications of classical Freudian psychoanalysis. This thesis does so with faith in the "scientific" insight that psychoanalysis has given about human beings, their conflicts, hopes, aspirations, and fears. This approach to Pearse as an analytical subject through two differing, but related, analytical schools of thought reveals a great deal.

The first of these is the so-called "ego-psychology" school of psychiatry, practiced by Heinz Hartmann, Ernst Kris, Paul Lowenstein, and others. Ego-analysis is a modification of the Freudian emphasis on instinctual drives as the primary motivation in the human personality. Its emphasis is on the ego and its attempts to deal with intrapsychic conflict. Analytically, the ego mediates between the demands of our instincts, the demands of society and reality. What the ego manufactures are compromises between the various competing forces in the personality to help people adapt to reality while still meeting their instinctual needs. Ego-analysis gives more attention than
does classical analysis to the defensive operations of the ego in terms of the individual’s maturation towards rational thought. It concerns itself with the defensive operation of the ego, as opposed to classical analysis which emphasized the instinctual forces that compelled the individual.

The second, and the school of thought most heavily relied on in this analysis of Pearse, is the so-called "developmental" analytical school of Erik Erikson. It emphasizes the psychosocial development of the individual in terms of the social relations and social reality faced by that individual at various points in his development. Stages in a person’s development are punctuated by the resolution of "phase-specific" psychological conflicts, and those resolutions propel the individual forward in maturity and growth. Irresolution of any one conflict can be identified and treated analytically according to the psychosocial issues that are known to manifest themselves at the period when the specific conflict first emerges. An advantage of the Eriksonian model for historians is that it can be applied in a point-by-point way to every stage in the life of a person, freeing the historian from an absolute dependence on information about infancy that classical psychoanalysis demands.

The choice of this approach has been made because of the flexibility which the Eriksonian and "ego-psychology" models allow. On the one hand, the ego-analytical school
leaves room for a certain measure of free will, rescuing the individual from the cold determinism of his instincts. On the other, the developmental approach allows an analysis of the individual throughout his development and not just in early childhood. The assumptions behind the developmental approach allow the adult some exercise of will and creativity. For the purpose of this study, the Eriksonian model will be prevalent although the ego-analytical approach should be kept in mind because it, too, has heavily influenced the formulation of this thesis.

It is important to note the weaknesses in this psycho-historical approach and the problems presented by it. The developmental school has yet to deal with the problem of cultural diversity. Obviously people in different cultures are going to develop at different rates of growth. The danger in the developmental approach lies in its presumption of cultural uniformity. Development seem obviously influenced by one's culture to a great degree.

It is precisely this criticism which is at the heart of R. D. Laing's criticism of modern psychiatry. In works such as The Divided Self, Laing argues that the concept of normality is obviously culturally determined, as is the concept of madness or abnormality. Both concepts are in a constant state of flux and evolution. The idea that human

development is fixed in a schematic system fails to recognize that normality is at best the accommodation of the majority to the prevailing system of values. This so-called "existential-analytical" school would criticize the developmental model of growth on the grounds that it is not only a behavior, but that it fails to take into account that the society in which a certain individual lives might well be mad. In a society which is mad, the "mad" individual might well be healthy because his madness represents a defensive shell erected by his ego in response to the widely shared pathology around him. Because of this possibility, systems like Erikson's are incapable of helping us determine what is or is not normal development.

It seems particularly important that the historian be careful not to judge the behavior of an individual without placing him within his cultural and social milieu. Such attempts as Erich Fromm's *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* and *Escape from Freedom* are attempts to take such kinds of historical factors into account. In fact the school of psychoanalytic thought of which Fromm was a member, the "Washington Cultural School," has emphasized the therapeutic need to deal with the individual in the context of the world in which he lives.

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Thus the context of any individual's life is of critical importance in coming to understand his resolution of psychosocial conflict as well as inner psychological conflicts. The question of how normal Pearse's society was is not irrelevant; neither is the question of how much the people around him helped determine the choices he both faced and made.

Another issue of equally great importance to any consideration of Pearse is the problem of several stages that were coincidentally unresolved at the same time. Erikson believes that an individual's failure to resolve any one crisis means that he will remain fixed at the unresolved level of development. The individual would then be controlled by the issues before him at the crisis he failed to resolve, and would be unable to move onward to face a new set of psychological tasks. In the case of Pearse this scenario did not reveal itself so clearly. It would appear that Pearse only partially resolved several conflicts; thus he partially progressed on a variety of levels while failing to mature as an adult. He was forced to be an adult and lived at times quite successfully, despite his obvious immaturity. No single unresolved conflict seems adequate to explain his immature personality which had some degree of success as an adult.

Despite these problems, the developmental model has the greatest potential for understanding Pearse's life and
times. Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther* took Martin Luther as a subject for analysis in order to explain his role in the historical events at the beginning of the Reformation. It did so by looking at what Erikson believed was the determining crisis in Luther's psychosocial development and how it was resolved. Erikson's emphasis on Luther's "identity crisis" is not sufficient on its own for explaining anyone like Pearse. Pearse will be shown to manifest a pattern of unresolved crises that perhaps hindered his personal development and left him emotionally, intellectually, and sexually unprepared for adulthood. No one conflict was the source of that lack of preparation. Because of this lack of adequate psychosocial preparation, Pearse was led to a desperate conflict between his need to act as a free, autonomous adult and his immaturity. His arrested personality, which demanded security and gratification, was increasingly unable to protect him from the conflicts which he had avoided.

In his psychological search for a resolution of this conflict, Pearse manifested an ever-increasing preoccupation with death and violence. It was this search for a resolution of his personal crisis that confronted the arrested development of Irish politics between 1912 and 1916. In the period when Irish hopes of establishing Home

Rule in Ireland were suspended because of potential violence in Ulster and a world war on the continent, Pearse's rhetoric offered a clear-cut resolution. That resolution—one of self-destruction, violence, and conscious self-sacrifice—spoke to a people who had expanded themselves on a variety of approaches to the "Irish problem," only to come up short repeatedly. His personal resolution met their need and redirected the course of Irish nationalism.

In a larger sense, Pearse's act was not that of a parochial man in the obscure place that Ireland usually occupies in European history. In an era of vast bloodletting, with millions of human beings dying for ill-defined things, the lives of Pearse and his comrades were sacrificed for what were relatively clear ideals within a long history of similar events. His chiliastic vision, and the rhetoric he used to help realize it, were not without parallels in Europe, nor was his narcissistic self-indulgence without precedence.

By looking at Pearse as a human being whose motivations were both complex and unique, yet paradoxically were shared by many men of his age, we can arrive at a view of him which neither raises him on high nor seeks to degrade what his countrymen would usually regard as his courage. If we look at him as a man, Patrick Pearse might retain some of his historical "greatness," while gaining some of the humanity which has so long been denied him.
CHAPTER II
THE MAKING OF A NATIONAL HERO

Much of the historical writing about Patrick Pearse's early life has tended to look into his childhood uncritically and with an eye towards sanctifying the child who was later to become a sainted martyr of the Easter Rising of 1916. But like all men, Pearse was once a boy, and the story of that boy's life does have a considerable impact on the ending of the adult's life. In that child the man who follows will bear a striking resemblance to himself as a youth in many ways; so much so, that he was never to grow free of his childhood dependency on his home.

Patrick Pearse's parents came from two different countries; but more importantly they came together with different experiences, values, and aspirations. His father, James Pierce, was born in London in 1839, and eventually, in 1892, changed the family name to the "more Irish" form—Pearse.1 His family were artisans, and James eventually was to follow in their footsteps. Initially, however, it appears that poverty bedeviled the family to the point that James and his two brothers moved to Birmingham in search of

1McCay, Padraic Pearse, 16.
work while he was still a young boy. At the age of eight, James took a job at a chain-making factory, the first of many marginal jobs he was to take and dislike; but he was a stubborn and self-motivated individual who was determined to make something of himself in the world. This determination fueled his fierce appetite for learning, and he became a fairly well-educated man in spite of the economic hurdles he faced.2

One of his main interests was art, and his decision to become a stonecarver probably followed a series of evening drawing classes.3 At that time it was a respectable and potentially lucrative trade, what with the substantial business created by the Gothic revival in architecture, with its emphasis on detail and ornamentation, and the steady market in Victorian funerary decoration. Pearse chose eventually to emigrate to Ireland to take advantage of what was a recent boom in Catholic church building.4 He settled in Dublin within a community of largely Anglo-Irish artisans, who, it appears, fully accepted him.5

By the mid-1870s, James Pearse not only was firmly established in the trade with a partnership of his own, but

2Edwards, Pearse, 1.
3Ibid.
4McCay, Padraic Pearse, 12.
also was the father of a daughter and son. While he was still young, he had married Emily Fox. His feelings about her after her death at the age of thirty in 1876 reveal that the marriage had experienced considerable difficulties, with James bitterly blaming her for the death through "neglect" of one of their infant children. Emily’s death, along with a burgeoning business and children to be tended demanded a mother at home, and James soon married a girl who worked at his local stationer's shop around the corner.

This woman, who was later to become Patrick Pearse’s mother, Margaret Brady, was by all accounts a simple though attractive girl of nineteen when she caught James Pearse’s eye. Originally her family was from County Meath, but they had been forced to move to Dublin during the potato famine of the 1840s. Her father, from whom the future patriot was to get his name, was later able to buy land, but at the time of her meeting with James, she and her family were living in a North Dublin tenement house.

When they married, James was thirty-seven and she a mere twenty. The difference in ages was substantial, almost as great as the differences between them in temperament and attitude. By 1877 he was a respected practitioner of his

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7Barrett MSS, Lennon to Sighle Barrett, 14 May 1958.
8Edwards, Pearse, 5.
craft with a successful business. But there is evidence to suggest that James Pearse had objectives different from mere craftsmanship in mind. He now was advertising himself as a "sculptor," and while there was some truth to the claim, most of his work fell into the category of carving as opposed to that of a true sculptor. He was well read, having developed a diverse and varied set of interests, and expressed himself well if unimaginatively in writing. This was not the case with Margaret whose writing was that of a less than sophisticated hand, overly sentimental and almost without punctuation; indeed her writing betrays a maudlin romanticism and emotional immaturity that confirm that her gifts were considerably less intellectual than those of her husband. She was affectionate, loyal, and open-hearted, while he, especially in later years, was somewhat reserved and distant. Though their economic backgrounds were similar, there is no doubt that James had inherited the English craftsman's fierce sense of pride and independence that could often come across as an air of superiority, especially in regard to those of a working-class background such as the Bradys. But a far greater difference than that of age, education or character stood between them--the

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9 Edwards maintains that the distinction between artisan and artist at this time was a minor one. She believes that James Pearse's claim to an artistic title was merely a device used to advertise his abilities. The debate about this issue was a considerable one at the time and one in which James's own position is highly significant. For a further discussion on these pages, see pp. 51-54.
question of religion.

At the time of his marriage to Margaret Brady, James Pearse was a Catholic; in retrospect, his coming to the church seems more than a little suspect. His parents had been Freethinkers or Unitarians, and James seems to have converted in 1870 out of fear of being denied work because of his religious opinions. Nothing in his past indicates that he had religious inclinations. In fact, his youth was marked by a firm denial of the validity of organized religion, legend having it that he rejected Christianity while a child because it could not respond adequately to his precocious questions. He basically seems to have been a skeptic of the serious intellectual type. When Catholic artisans wanted to know why he, a non-Catholic, was being given Church commissions, James seems to have realized the financial necessity of conversion, and he brought his family into the Roman Catholic fold with him.

Thus he and his family were received, with the sincerity of his motives attested to by the local parish priest. But later actions and changes in his thinking laid open to question the depth of James's original

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10Edwards, Pearse, 2.
11Ibid., 1.
12Ibid.
spiritual commitment, or at least the extent to which it affected him. In any case it would seem that his less than orthodox religious upbringing might have caused him no minor hurdles in coming "around" to the peculiarly Calvinistic brand of Irish Catholicism.

Margaret's faith, on the other hand, had by all accounts the trademarks of the simple, pietistic, unquestioning, and devout believer. Letters between James and Margaret, especially those written during their courtship, show that James was not above teasing his future bride's less rigorous thinking and emotional religious enthusiasm. In the years to follow, as James began to drift back towards reclaiming his heritage by emotionally and intellectually affiliating himself with the English Radicals and espousing a kind of dogmatic skepticism, Margaret was quietly yet resolutely to resist. Probably the most obvious bone of contention in this regard would have been the raising of their children, where she undoubtedly was determined to keep them within the faith in which she had been raised and believed in so absolutely.

Perhaps these differences between them, seen more objectively by her family than by Margaret, were part of the reason for their wish to delay the wedding. As some historians have pointed out, the reason for the desired delay was most likely because her family felt very uncomfortable about having a wedding so soon after the death
of James's first wife—less than a year earlier. In an age of elaborate funeral observation with strict customs governing the proper social conventions regarding mourning and grief, the planning of what was a hasty marriage must have been slightly scandalous to the conventional Bradys.\textsuperscript{14} The more liberal James, while no doubt cognizant of these feelings, probably saw this issue as less important; besides, the business and children could not wait for long.

Despite family reservations, Margaret Brady married James Pearse, and within a short period bore three of their four children. A girl, named Margaret after her mother, was born in 1877; Patrick (given the middle name Henry) was born two years later; and a second son, Willie, followed in 1881. Not long afterward the two children from James's previous marriage were married and out of the home, with the son, James Vincent, moving to England. Thus the new family had the house to itself and thrived, like the stone-carving business to which it was attached.

Born in 1879, Patrick was reportedly bright, serious and, like his father, self-motivated. By his own account he was a healthy child; but his stepsister Mary Emily, fifteen years old at Patrick's birth, later wrote that he had been shy from his earliest years and was to become more so as he

\textsuperscript{14}Edwards, \textit{Pearse}, 4.
grew older. At home he rarely dealt with adult visitors. Patrick later recorded that his parents, and in particular his father, seem to have had few personal friends. But the fact that home and business were in the same place suggests that at least on a formal basis the young boy had to deal with visitors on occasion. His withdrawn demeanor seems to have greatly worn off by late adolescence, even though Patrick was to be shy and socially awkward all of his life. He grew up, then, a homebody, much more open around his siblings and mother than with others, with few friends other than his relatives. In the neighborhood in which the Pearses lived at the time, these qualities might have seemed commendable, especially to a mother of high Catholic principles, because their house on Great Brunswick Street was within a few blocks of some of Dublin's notorious red-light districts. To the bright and self-conscious Patrick, his home remained a safe and secure refuge in which he was continually able, perhaps forced, to amuse himself. In that house he was able to avoid the realities of the world that stood just outside his neighborhood.

From the beginning it was likely that the rhythm of the house was determined by the activities of the business,

15 Mary Emily Pearse, untitled work, in Mary Brigid Pearse, Home-Life, 22.
16 Patrick Pearse, "My Childhood and Youth," in Mary Brigid Pearse, Home-Life, 22.
17 Edwards, Pearse, 13.
occasional vacations at Margaret's uncle's farm, the children's schooling, and the normal religious obligations of an Irish-Catholic family. As is so often the case, Patrick's elder sister, Margaret, emerges as a bit of a boss, and at times she must have been trying to her younger brothers. Another girl, Mary Brigid, was to come along two years after Willie; these younger children lived forever in the shadows of their more assertive and imaginative siblings. Willie especially emerged as a sensitive and extremely gentle personality who developed an intensely close relationship with his brother. Later in life after her brothers had been put to death, Mary Brigid emerged as a somewhat neurotic sycophant, dwelling and living on her deceased brothers' fame.

Several qualities stand out regarding Patrick as a youth. One was his extraordinary capacity for fantasy. He reveled in it constantly, usually seeing himself as a great Gaelic hero of the past, alive again and saving others from distress. This seems to have gone on into early adolescence—not so unusual perhaps—but Patrick's unusually vivid memory of this habit seems significant. Secondly, he would often dress up in the clothes of women or beggars, usually with Willie, complete with make-up; and with the help of a sister or female cousin, they would go out and

\[18\] Patrick Pearse, "My Childhood," 20.
roam the streets.19

A close reading of this practice is disturbing given that the Pearse family lived for most of Patrick's early life at 27 Great Brunswick Street in an area sandwiched between perhaps the two most notorious red-light districts in Dublin. To the north, just across the Liffey River and past the Customs House, lay the world-famous "Monto" district, centered along what was then Mecklenburgh Street. In the 1880s Monto was infamous because of its vice trade which catered to the whims of sailors from the quayside and soldiers from the army barracks just up the street. To the immediate southwest of Westland Row lay Grafton Street. In the 1870s Grafton Street was world-famous for prostitution; some fifteen hundred prostitutes lining the street in front of some of Dublin's most fancy shops. Within a one-mile radius of the Pearse home and the Westland Row School where the boys went to school, several thousand prostitutes made a living on the streets and in the innumerable brothels which filled local neighborhoods.20

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19 This practice of dressing up in female clothes and wandering in the street is testified to by both of Pearse's sisters and appears to have been confirmed by his female cousin. See Mary Brigid Pearse, Home-Life, 40-42; Margaret Pearse, "Patrick and Willie Pearse," Capuchin Annual (1943), 87. While Ruth Dudley Edwards notes that Pearse dressed in disguise, her discussion of him is not analytical. See Edwards, Pearse, 8-9.

Despite legislative attempts to allow the police greater latitude in cracking down on illicit activity, there appears to have been little or no decline in the numbers of prostitutes during the last decades of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{21} In an environment such as this the frequent wanderings of boys dressed as women suggests that Patrick had to be have been aware of this world.

This is not to suggest that Pearse engaged in the sexual perversion of conscious transvestitism; however, given the character of these areas and the prevailing moral climate, he could easily have been propositioned at a time when the age of consent was a mere thirteen. The availability of child-prostitutes in Dublin could not have been much less different from other large British cities of the day where the phenomenon was extensive.\textsuperscript{22} His cousin related that Pearse dressed in his elder sister's clothes and went with her to Amiens Street,\textsuperscript{23} a trip which took them into the very heart of Monto. It is hard to believe, especially since Patrick continued this practice until he was in his teens, that these expeditions were entirely innocent. While the boy's intention was probably innocent,\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{23}Mary Brigid Pearse, \textit{Home-Life}, 41.
the surroundings were most assuredly not. For a boy as withdrawn and obviously immature as Patrick, no doubt the disguises furnished him the opportunity to participate surreptitiously in a world he was not allowed to experience. The fact that the sights to greet him were often perverse and fascinating makes his behavior all that more understandable.24

Patrick's social immaturity mirrored his overwhelming sexual immaturity. His relationships with women were as distant as those he had known in his voyeuristic trips into the red-light districts. He idealized women without knowing them.

Young Patrick seems to have had a zealous devotion to the serving of his religious obligations, especially when it came to the question of indulgences. He is known to have played the role of an acolyte25 and took special delight in May Devotions before the altar of the Virgin.26 One of the few traumas we know of from his childhood is recorded by his sister Mary Brigid who remembers him running into the house one day with blood streaming down his face. It seems that Patrick, overanxious to get to church, jumped from a tram


25 Mary Brigid Pearse, Home-Life, 50.

26 Ibid., 52-3.
while it was still moving, fell, and severely cut his face, and was distressed that he had missed a holy day of obligation.27

This religious devotion joined hands with his delight in fantasy on more than one occasion, with the result that he wrote and "produced" plays with himself cast as a priest complete with the giving of sacraments and blessings to his cooperative and approving brother and sisters.28 In fact, this writing and producing of family dramas was one of the major diversions of his youth. One of Patrick’s favorite plays was Macbeth, and the children produced it often with Patrick in the title role and Mary Brigid cast as Lady Macbeth;29 one time when Willie had the lead role, Patrick cheerfully ruined the scene.30 He also loved reciting songs and other readings of a patriotic nature, more than once giving interpretations of pieces his father had on occasion given before at the few parties given by the Pearses.31

Patrick’s sensitivity was exacerbated by his lack of self-assurance. There are grounds to believe that he was self-conscious about his looks because a cast in his left

27Ibid., 53.
28Ibid., 50-52.
29Ibid., 47.
30Ibid., 48.
eye led him always to pose for pictures with his right profile. And it appears that he always avoided rough sports and horseplay, emerging as somewhat effeminate. Instead of the usual games of boys his age, he chose less physical and more cerebral games such as draughts. But he played occasional games of football and hurling, on one occasion punching someone who was laughing at him. It is likely that his skills were poor, and his humiliation at having those shortcomings pointed out publicly must have been keen indeed. On more than one occasion he challenged adults toe-to-toe when he thought that they were being unfair to him, but especially to others. His sister records that Patrick had his share of fights, and she thought that he found them intoxicating as tests of his ability to meet danger. With the history we have so far, it is not difficult to see why he enjoyed these confrontations—his sister was probably right, he did look at these incidents as opportunities to test himself. One can imagine that he was taunted frequently about the shyness that his family found so appealing. In his need to be sure of himself, he could

32 Edwards, Pearse, 24.
33 McCay, Padraic Pearse, 11.
34 Ibid.
36 Mary Brigid Pearse, Home-Life, 59.
not give any ground to anyone.

Several things in his manner probably did not help his sense of security. There is some indication that later in life he had to learn to overcome a pronounced stammer in order to speak in public; perhaps this accounts for the peculiar "pistol-like" and "jerky" delivery he had when talking. And to add insult to injury, he had to wear spectacles as a child; one can imagine it was a source of occasional discomfort, as with all children. Roger Casement was to later observe that Pearse, as an adult, seemed physically awkward and had a "curious heavy gait." We do not know of any employment held by Patrick as a youth, and there is nothing to indicate that he worked in his father's shop.

He also was extremely afraid of the dark and suffered from frequent nightmares that required adult comforting to assuage his fears. The chances of that kind of comfort having been supplied by his father were unlikely. Patrick's relationships with his parents were marked by widely differing levels of devotion and interaction. While his

38 Ibid.
39 Edwards, Pearse, 24.
mother was loving and doting to the point of excess, Patrick's adult memories of his father are remarkably vague, as if he could not remember much about him because he hardly knew him. His sisters relate little about their father, and his absence in the family's collective memory is striking—in death Patrick dominated the Pearse women's memory of the family with hardly a mention made of his father. From the description Patrick gives, his father seems wholly absorbed in his business, visiting the family only when necessary during the day.

My father came up to our room [the family room over the shop] only once or twice in the day, and at evening. He was big, with broad shoulders that were a little round. He was very silent, and spoke only once or twice during the course of the meal; breaking some reverie to say something kind to my mother or something funny to one of us.41

James Pearse's relationship to his family might have been entirely normal for a Victorian father. What is obvious from this passage is the sense that the father seemed indefinite and unreal to Patrick, a problem later compounded by his father's death when Patrick was twenty. What did impress itself upon Patrick as a boy, in fact his earliest childhood memory, was the sound and sight of his father's workshop downstairs,42 where imagination and will overcame and transformed lifeless stone and shaped it into living things. The kind of carving done in the shop

42Mary Brigid Pearse, Home-Life, 82-83.
doubtless impressed itself as well into his subconscious; statues of the bleeding Savior, the Virgin, tombstones, angels, and the like, which out of necessity dealt with the spiritual and seemed perhaps more than a little macabre to a young boy. For Patrick, his father was not only a God-like figure—the creator and potential destroyer of his existence—but also evidently able to create entire universes, the kind that only existed in Patrick's fantasy.43

In The Home-Life of Patrick Pearse, which contains fragments of Patrick's unfinished autobiography, and in later writings by his two sisters, the father's distance from the family becomes obvious. For example, the only story we have of Patrick and his father together comes from Mary Brigid. This story is about one of the occasional family lantern shows put on by James Pearse for friends of the family and the children, and featuring Patrick as narrator. Even years later his sister was to recognize the pressure to please his father that Patrick felt on these occasions.

By the time Patrick was a young boy the significant differences between his parents had begun to take a toll that resulted in an increasingly melancholic youth. In 1879 James Pearse was forty, and the large age difference between his two sets of children makes it understandable that he

43See Appendix.
left the childrearing to his younger and more energetic wife. Shortly after Patrick was born, a letter written by

44 The birth intervals of the Pearse children raise significant questions about the relationship between James and Margaret and the possible cause of their future estrangement. Within eight years, Margaret gave birth to four children, all of them approximately two years apart. After the birth of the last daughter, Mary Brigid, the couple had no more children despite Margaret’s being only twenty-seven years old. Even though James was in his mid-forties by this time, the failure to have more children must be regarded as abnormal in the absence of some proof of impotence or infertility. In the context of Catholic Ireland, especially so in the 1890s, the provability of voluntary contraception seems unlikely. It is highly doubtful that Margaret, a woman of relatively little education and of devout Catholic principles, would have pursued or allowed such a course of action. For James, however, it is very likely that contraception was not the moral issue it would have been for his wife.

Claiming to be an admirer of Charles Bradlaugh (Hedley McCay, with no supporting evidence, claims that James Pearse and Bradlaugh were friends; see Padraic Pearse, 6), James would have been keenly aware that Bradlaugh and Annie Besant had been put on trial for their distribution of sex education and birth control information in 1877. It is likely, given the different positions held by James and Margaret, that any discussion of the issue of birth control would have sharpened the differences between them. Certainly the Besant and Bradlaugh affair caught the attention of those Dubliners who wished that their rather provincial capital was not nearly so isolated from the mainstream of life in London, and everything points to James responding in a similar fashion.

It is likely that the Pearses came to some kind of peaceful coexistence on this issue; but it is unlikely that Margaret ever would have given in to James. It is possible that her difficult delivery of Willie might have been a factor that led to abstinence (see Appendix). Thus one could infer that as time went by the Pearses’ physical relationship, because of inability, fear of pregnancy, or ideological differences, grew colder and that their sexual relationship was probably unsatisfactory to them both. The possible personal repercussions would have been frustration, anger, disappointment, and a sense of self-vindication on both sides.

The likelihood of James choosing to control his family’s size makes even more sense in the general intellectual and economic climate of Liberal Britain where
Margaret to her husband indicates that a major falling out between them had already taken place.

... [N]othing will ease me now but death alone and only for me poor little ones I would be freely satisfied to go if my peace was made with God Almighty ... I hope you are not angry with me about this afair [sic] ... to live knowing you are not fond enough to be jealous I wish to God I had that to say to you if so I would think less of this afair [sic] ... .

Whatever caused this "afair," the problems in the relationship had deep origins; as Ruth Dudley Edwards has pointed out, after this incident James increasingly retreated into his self-education and Margaret into the raising of the family.

There is evidence that James Pearse's claims to "sculptor" were occasionally realized. At his death, his achievements were noted in the Irish press, especially the sculpture on the front of the Bank of Ireland. But the

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both an intellectual and economic justification for birth control seems to have overtaken the middle classes at this time. That, in addition to a desire to see at least one son all the way through school, furnishes substantial reason for James Pearse to limit his family's size. See J. A. Banks, _Prosperity and Parenthood: A Study of Family Planning Among the Victorian Middle Classes_ (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), for the most important analysis of contraception and birth control in the late Victorian period; and for a revised update of the first book's argument, along with a statistical look at the issues of income and aspiration in conjunction with birth control, see J. A. Banks, _Victorian Values: Secularism and the Size of Families_ (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

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45 James Pearse Papers, Letter from Margaret Pearse to James Pearse, 16 Sept. n.d., National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

46 Edwards, _Pearse_, 8.
stock in trade of his business was assuredly in ornamental and decorative carving, not necessarily the stuff of the artist. There is no doubt that James's artistic achievements had merit, but most of his time had to be spent on the details of carving, often repetitively, and his continued claim to the title of "sculptor" represents wishful thinking. Whether he was frustrated about this we cannot be sure; but we can say that his insistence on the loftier title is curious, especially if, as Edwards maintains, there was only a semantic difference between a carver and a sculptor. Why did he call himself a sculptor? The answer looks as if it lay in his own notions of class, where he had come from, and where and what he wanted to be.

A conflict seems to have presented itself here: James considered himself to be an artist despite the fact that his work usually filled some more pragmatic function. In other words, he usually did not create original works of art to be admired on their own merit but carved instead those things which primarily served a decorative function. He was a typical artisan, well within the Liberal-Radical tradition. It is likely that James with his background was familiar with the "socio-aesthetic" criticism of Ruskin and William Morris. That would help to explain how James saw his craft as art serving a social and moral function. Nonetheless, 47

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47Ibid., 5.
James lived at a time when the debate on this issue was especially lively, and he could not have been ignorant of the significance of his adoption of the artistic title, in an era when strict aestheticism had emerged to challenge Ruskin and Morris. James's claim to the artist label was a just one that reflected his belief that his craft was a noble and creative one. Nonetheless his subject and personality seemed to be at odds. His work centered on religious themes, yet he seems to have exhibited few religious sensibilities, although his library was full of comparative religious studies.48

To some extent this wishful thinking about his artistic position was a reflection of his concern not to return to the poverty he had known. From poverty he had come, and he always remembered it; as he frequently told his children, he had been born in two rooms and a garrett, and, "You must not forget the garrett."49

The fact that the memory of that admonition stuck in the minds of his children indicates that James's background had great importance both for him and for them. James's attitudes about his past and the desire he had to improve himself indicate that he did not think of himself as a working man but as somewhat better and different. This attitude is symptomatic of that part of the working class

48Ibid., 1.

49DeBarra Papers, cited by Edwards, Pearse, 1.
described by several historians as the "labor aristocracy" of the Late Victorian period.\textsuperscript{50} Having grown out of and away from the poverty and drudgery he had known as a youth, James was prepared to take credit for his accomplishments. His skilled trade and his sophisticated level of education had come together to establish within him the "self-reverence" which characterized the emerging middle-class labor aristocrat during the last decades of the century.\textsuperscript{51}

Because of his sense of achievement, James had come to see himself in contrast to the kind of worker he had once been. Hand in hand with his sense of accomplishment grew a desire wholly typical of the labor aristocracy: to improve, not only his own station in life, but also that of his children.\textsuperscript{52} Their improvement was a confirmation and validation of his own life.

There is little doubt that this kind of attitude would have been a course of conflict between him and his wife. While his whole experience seemed to confirm the validity of individual initiative and free will, Margaret clung to the deterministic moralism of Irish Catholicism and her romantic


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 22.
views of Irish nationalism. James had overcome the odds through skill, pugnacity, and knowledge to secure and improve his status. His artistic claims were, in effect, attempts to better himself still further. Later on, when Patrick turned towards choosing a legal career, it is evident that this choice was not so much his as his father's made for the fulfillment of James's desire for self-improvement.

What is obvious is that as time went on James moved intellectually more and more towards a position held by English Radicals of the day. One effect of this is revealed in his papers: the slow loss of whatever existed of his Catholic enthusiasm. Another was the development of a political appetite during what was one of Ireland's most stimulating political ages, the era of Parnell. James was a staunch supporter of the Parnellite cause, enough on one to react with fury to a published attack upon it by a Fellow of Trinity College Dublin in 1886. Out of his own pocket, he published a reply entitled "England's Duty to Ireland as Plain to a Loyal Irish Roman Catholic." The twenty-thousand-word pamphlet argued for giving Irishmen their constitutional rights with fair representation in Parliament. This was certainly not the position of political Radicalism, but rather an unimaginative and predictable Liberal of the day. James stressed his belief

53Edwards, Pearse, 11.
that, while Ireland was not entitled to any kind of separate national existence, nevertheless it was, and should be, fully an equal member of the United Kingdom. There is agreement among commentators that the tone of this pamphlet was sincere but stentorian, and one draws the conclusion that the James Pearse who emerges out of these pages was "a formidable if somewhat pompous individual." What also emerges is a father whose ideological conclusions about Irish nationalism are considerably different from those found in the tales that Patrick dreamed for himself.

This kind of self-possessed seriousness led James Pearse to publish a second pamphlet in 1888, this one in the form of a fictitious dialogue between James's new idol, the Radical M.P. Charles Bradlaugh, and Henry Hyndman of the Social Democratic Federation. In this tract, "Bradlaugh" argues against the use of force and the idea of class warfare in favor of democracy and private-ownership of property with state control and regulation of the economy.

Such intellectual and political changes on the part of a husband would be likely to disturb the orthodox Irish Catholic mother and force her to shelter her young children from any potentially harmful effects on their faith. It appears that this was indeed to be the case, and Margaret did so with the assistance of her Aunt Margaret. A small,

54Thornley, "Patrick Pearse and the Pearse Family," 338.
dark woman, she is described as usually dressed in black (a color later to be favored by Patrick), and she played a considerable part in the raising of the Pearse children at this time. Pearse was later to refer to her as "Auntie Margaret," describing her as "my dear fosterer and teacher."

At Auntie Margaret's knee the children heard gilded tales of Wolf Tone, Robert Emmet, John Mitchel, and the Fenians, especially about O'Donovan Rossa—later to be the subject of a Pearse eulogy that was one of the most important speeches in Irish history. Her advanced age must have given her an air of great wisdom to the children, and Pearse unquestioningly believed her tales of the potato famine, the rebellions of 1848 and 1867, even her accounts of eyewitnesses she had met who supposedly knew the beloved Tone and Emmet. In addition she also told tales of relatives who fought and died in 1798.

Pearse's mother and aunt obviously both came to have a special feeling for him, and they were to argue on at least one occasion over the right to nurse him, his aunt arguing that Patrick and she were closer. As an indication of

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55Patrick Pearse, "My Childhood," 23.
56Ibid., 12.
57Ibid., 29.
58Ibid., 28.
59Ibid., 12.
just how close he felt towards his aunt, he later recalled suffering a prolonged and severe bout of scarlatina, his only memory of which was his aunt at his bedside, singing rebel songs.60 Pearse later credited her as being the source of his appreciation of the Fenians.61 His mother and aunt adored him, and they came to represent in his mind the incarnation of love and accessibility. His emotional experience with them was wholly different in spirit and tone from that with his too distant father. An equally important inheritance from them was Patrick’s romantic Irish Catholic nationalism that tended to be unexamined and intensely emotional, feeding his life of fantasy.62 One must also

60Ibid., 28.

61An Claidheamh Soluis, 19 May 1906.

62For an analysis of the role of fantasy in childhood, see Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), pp. 3-45. If one can accept Bettelheim’s definition of the fairy tale as a story, told repeatedly and rooted in reality with characters from everyday life, it appears that the patriotic tales Patrick heard from his mother and his aunt fit this definition. Where these tales differ is in their negative and despairing endings; Bettelheim says that fairy tales traditionally end in triumph and optimism.

He thinks that these kinds of stories serve to order for the child a disordered and threatening universe by elaborating fantasy. The content of the fairy tale fits the unconscious fantasy, thus enabling the child to cope with the content of this real struggle—in essence a form of self-analysis. These tales present not only good but also bad things which exist in life and must be accommodated and overcome. Significantly, the child’s reaction to the story is one of identification with a heroic figure, not because that figure is good but because the figure rouses within him feelings of sympathy and pathos (p. 9).

Both Patrick’s mother and his aunt supplied him with a treasure trove of stories in which the characters were
wonder about the inevitable confusion that must have taken place early in Patrick’s life as he attempted to deal with three older females—a mother, sister, and aunt—all having noble; but they were doomed to defeat in spite of the righteousness of their cause. Because of the overwhelming odds against them, they went down to a death which was preordained and understood, but embraced nonetheless. In the end, the stories exalted the deaths of the hero as long as the hero died well.

In what was the critical period in the child’s life for his first efforts to grasp the nature of the human condition and to find meaning in the face of that condition, Patrick was receiving a uniquely pessimistic image of the "good" presented to him on an almost daily basis. Central in the content of fairy tales and fantasy is the adult world which waits to be appropriated by the child’s diligence, courage, and cunning. Once it is controlled by that child, he is secure in his abilities and power. The question is to what extent was Patrick, living a life of constant fantasy which had a negative vision of life and the world, able to be secure in his own abilities and freedom? His fantasy world held no security or reassurance. It offered only condolence, fame, and defeat. If he had been secure in his real world, the world of fantasy would have receded. Bettleheim warns, "the more insecure a man is in himself and his place in the immediate world, the more he withdraws into himself because of fear, or moves outward to conquer for conquest’s sake." See The Uses, 51.

In a house where he would never be a boss, where he was isolated and later protected from his father’s ways, where his whole life was dominated by women whom he was never going to have the opportunity to relate to as a man, Patrick’s feelings of inadequacy were virtually assured. See Erik Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle (New York: Norton, 1979), 78-87; cf. Erikson, Childhood and Society, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1963) and R. D. Laing, The Divided Self, esp. chap. 3 on "Ontological Insecurity." In the most important stage of the development of the child’s new sense of individual initiative, say between four and six, Patrick had to find his own way of initiating in order to succeed. The only success open to him was in his own fertile imagination, where he could overcome the obstacles and ambivalence within him. See as well Jean Piaget, The Child’s Concept of the World (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929) for discussion of the child’s animistic relationship to the inanimate world; and for an analysis of the nightmare and its relationship to fantasy see Ernest Jones, On the Nightmare (Hogarth Press, 1931; reprinted 1949).
the same name. He was to feel obligated and attached to many a Margaret—all of whom loved him, doted over him, and in the end worshipped him. At the same time that his father increasingly drew away from interaction with his son, Patrick received female attention in abundance. While his father, who could not have been blind to the influences at work on his son, sought to convince others of the validity of his atheistic and materialistic faith in the noble ideals of democracy and business, the women in Patrick’s life emphasized a vastly different view of the world.

Patrick went to the Westland Row Christian Brothers School for his intermediate schooling, primarily because it had a reputation for getting good examination results. Regardless of Patrick’s early academic achievements, which were respectable, the net result of the educational style of this school was to force Pearse within himself, and he became ever more introspective and less socially competent. This inwardness reached its peak in his early adolescent years, at precisely the time when a young person’s search for his own identity confronts the harsh realities of the academic need to prepare for the future. It was undoubtedly the kind of education that his father would have died for, and James would have seen it as most practical and useful, rigorous enough to help further the family name, by preparing his son for university.

63 Edwards, Pease, 12.
It is interesting to note that Pearse was later to become the greatest and most effective critic of the teaching he had experienced as a child. Its goal-oriented curriculum with an emphasis on by-rote memorization, the recitation of long passages, and strict, even cruel discipline was in Pearse’s mind horribly dispiriting for students. In his essay on Irish education, The Murder Machine, published as a pamphlet in 1916, he argued persuasively that the contemporary Irish educational system, based on an English model, was purposely designed to destroy the will of Irish children; in effect it created "willing slaves." In its place he advocated a more humane system, with an attempt made to talk to the boys rather than to punish them for transgressions. He argued with equal conviction that there was a critical need to stimulate boys with a more interesting and diverse curriculum, based as often as possible on native Irish texts and achievements, as opposed to the English ones. Even though the system was being heavily criticized by many of Pearse’s contemporaries, his vision of an "indigenous" Irish form of schooling was unique. It was to be through a rejection of the old system that the national dream would then be realized: by tapping the natural creativity and spontaneity of the child, Irish culture would be saved from the English.

What is important to consider is the kind of child he

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64 Patrick Pearse, Political Writings and Speeches, 16.
was and how difficult the regimentation of this kind of schooling had for him. Patrick deeply felt the tension he was later to write about so knowingly, between his childlike desire to "know" absolutely, incorporating the world around him into his life, and the school system which was in charge of preparing him for adulthood and getting him through examinations; hence it is not surprising that although he did fairly well in school the pressures of it seem to have influenced him to an unusually high degree. His only victory over that system was due to his indefatigable imagination, and it consisted of an absolute immersion in Irish language and literature; indeed, the legends of heroic deeds and romantic love, along with his ability to imagine himself into that past, had a vividness and satisfaction that were never to be satisfied in memorizing Ovid or Milton.

He graduated in 1896, and Pearse had apparently identified his overwhelmingly main intellectual interest as Gaelic studies. In the fall of that year, he had joined the young Gaelic League under Douglas Hyde's leadership, and he was apparently proficient enough in the language to get a quasi-teaching position in Irish at his old alma mater, the Westland Row School. He planned to sit two years later for the matriculation examination for the Royal University,

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65 Edwards, Pearse, 12.
though his results on the preparatory examination were unremarkable.\textsuperscript{66} Because of the abundance of time on his hands and the intensity of his interest in the subject, Patrick with a few friends founded a literary society to consider weekly subjects in Gaelic literature. He was elected president, and, as Edwards has shown, most of the programs of this grandiosely titled "New Irish Literary Society" centered on his, or his sister Margaret's, work.\textsuperscript{67} This kind of concentration was quickly to yield rewards—Patrick published papers that had been given at some of these meetings in the early part of 1898.\textsuperscript{68} In addition, he made great strides in the Gaelic League, even though he was yet in his teens, and both he and the fledgling Literary Society received regular attention in official Gaelic League publications.

In 1898 he passed his matriculation examination with first class honors in Irish, but little else of extraordinary note.\textsuperscript{69} He was also co-opted onto the Gaelic League Executive Council that year at the age of nineteen. Thereafter he was to enter the Royal University and King's Inns to study law. But he concentrated more on the things

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{67}Ibid., 17.
He loved. His schedule was relatively free, as the University was little more than an examining body, and he had few responsibilities regarding classes and the like.

One wonders how deep his desire was to enter university and prepare for a legal career, for nothing in his life suggests that this particular student at this time would ever have chosen to study law. One might argue to the contrary that here was a person on considerable creative talent who, although withdrawn and self-conscious, had overcome some of his biggest handicaps when presented with a subject that interested him. The study of Gaelic, augmenting his lifelong love of Irish history and culture, had released him from many of those fears which had held him back as a child, and it was because of this that he approached the subject with the passion of a zealot. But less romantic subjects could barely sustain his interest. Can one believe that Patrick was interested in studying law and had come to that decision freely? Most assuredly the answer lies with his father.

Patrick was the eldest son of the Pearse family. His brother Willie, two years younger, was not up to an arduous University degree, although he showed some of his father's ability with stone. In fact, Willie was only very good at being a follower of his brother, a following which Patrick took on gladly. At one point, Willie became a vegetarian
just because his older brother had done so.\textsuperscript{70} It was obvious to everyone that Willie's future lay in other places than a regular University education. Patrick represented the family investment and hope for the future.

To an artisan like James Pearse, the bar represented a giant step in education, prestige, and money. To see a son practice at the bar could, furthermore, be a manifestation of his own diligence and ability. James Pearse knew Patrick only secondhand, anyone could see, and should have foreseen, the unlikelihood of Patrick's success at the bar. In fact, although he fared well lecturing before his own Literary Society, Pearse was stiff and boring before his fellow students at the University and King's Inns debating societies.\textsuperscript{71}

More is at issue here than merely a father and son who did not see eye-to-eye on the proper vocation for the son, even if it was one which the father has worked and saved and prepared to pay for. After a lifetime of relative neglect, Pearse's father came back into Patrick's life attempting to mold his son's life to his own desires. James seems to have given no consideration to Patrick's relative strengths and weaknesses nor shown any feeling for what he might have wanted for himself. Nothing indicates that Patrick would

\textsuperscript{70}Mary Brigid Pearse, \textit{Home-Life}, 93-94.

\textsuperscript{71}Pearse was to try only one case as a barrister and he lost it. See Edwards, \textit{Pearse}, 48.
have willingly taken this path, although there is no evidence that a verbal disagreement of any kind ever transpired between the two of them about his career. It is unlikely that Patrick would have rebelled openly against the reserved and somewhat mysterious figure who came up to the family room only once or twice a day. Most likely the family and Patrick had assumed such a career since he had been born, and the goal had become reified into a prevailing and unquestionable principle.

Here, James Pearse sought to manipulate the boy at a very critical phase of his development without having won the right to be heard. The father was ready to interject himself into his son's future, partially out of that normal parental phenomenon of fulfilling oneself through the success of a child—a kind of success he had been denied. At a crossing of important phases in both their lives—Patrick was nineteen and his father fifty-nine, the future opening for one and starting to close for the other—Patrick was forced to choose, and his choice seems to have been made subconsciously. Later on, when Patrick failed to pursue his legal career, it was ostensibly to serve in his deceased father's place as head of the family firm; however, it seems that his real motives were desire to write, teach, and proselytize for Gaelic Irish culture. It had been the pursuit that had seemed to free his tongue and heart and
could save him from a vocation which would have inhibited him.

Patrick muddled through law with little enthusiasm, and James Pearse died suddenly in 1900 while visiting in Birmingham. According to the historical literature, James's death had an oddly incidental and anticlimactic impact on the lives of his family. Edwards points out that, within a week, Patrick was back in full swing at school and involved again with the Gaelic League. The silence of the family, and of the biographers, is testimony to the ambivalent emotions which the death of the father stirred probably because of his distance from their emotional lives.

Some time later Patrick was to write of his father with more than a bit of sadness: "If ever in an Irish church you find, amid a wilderness of bad sculpture, something good and true and lovingly finished, you may be sure that it was carved by my father or by one of his pupils." Patrick here recognized that what his father wanted to be thought of and had aspired to was more likely to be hidden and forgotten than remembered.

Like any young man, Patrick looked to his father for approval and guidance, but for some reason Patrick never received a steady diet of approval from his increasingly inaccessible father. It seems that the genesis of this lack

72 Ibid., 46-47.
73 De Barra Papers, Fragment of Pearse Autobiography.
of approval arose from James’s and Margaret’s disaffection. Perhaps Patrick’s mother was determined to make her favorite child what her husband had proved not to be, and James resented the fact. The boy was to bear the burden of a situation entirely out of his hands. It is obvious that either because of Patrick’s lack of ability, Willie became the heir presumptive to the business.

Moreover, Patrick’s overwhelming interest in things Irish seems to have been a reaction against his father. Throughout his life, he rebelled in his own way against English manners, English schooling, English art, and English rule. Even though James had supported Parnell, his political point of view remained distinctly British, and he spoke of himself as an Englishman. His father’s ties to England were more than superficial: in the late 1880s he thought of returning to Birmingham because of a business interest he had inherited there. To the rest of the family whose whole focus was in Ireland the thought of leaving must have been unsettling.

The emotional chasm which had developed between James and Patrick meant that the only way the son could ever establish any kind of identity was in reaction to what his father stood for and seemed to be. His father’s death led not only to a sense of regret and loss, but also to an abatement of his difficult yet critical need to establish

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74 Edwards, Pearse, 11.
his own sense of autonomy and self-confidence. Late adolescence is the critical phase in the development of an autonomous identity able to assert itself confidently. With this sense of freedom from dependency and restriction, the individual also needs a sense of values and morals in order to decide freely and consistently.\(^7^5\) Adulthood assumes a certain amount of functional resolution of every individual's psychosocial arrangement. This resolution integrates the past identifications and fantasies which had once ordered life, and by doing so, resolves the sources of conflict which spurred or hindered the individual's growth. In this way the individual moves from childhood to adulthood without those conflicts that inhibit the adult sense of identity, security, and self-worth.\(^7^6\)

For Pearse these were difficult issues not only at twenty, but also later on when he was to articulate a political and spiritual position that demanded moral choices with a great cost to himself and others. From a developmental point of view, Pearse was never to leave the lap of his mother where the fantasies and morals of his youth were not forced to encompass an ever-widening world view. In Eriksonian terms, he never resolved the issue of autonomy versus guilt and shame that characterizes the

\(^7^5\)Erikson, \textit{Young Man Luther}, 14-15.

\(^7^6\)Ibid.
second stage of development. He never was forced to do so because he had been driven to her by his father's unilateral withdrawal of attention; hence, he never went through the necessary breakup of the child's relationship with his mother. Although sandwiched between an elder sister and two younger siblings, Patrick remained, even over his eldest sister, the family favorite; and when his mother was inattentive, the magical Auntie Margaret was often there to fulfill his needs.

Because of their obsessive devotion to Patrick, along with his understandable rejection of his father and his father's ways, Patrick over-identified with the women of his childhood. Almost as if in parody, he became the paragon of all Irish Catholic sons. This lack of male identity is the source of his expeditions in female dress through the streets of Dublin. It is also partially responsible for his excessive love for the boys at St. Enda's School less than a decade later: by being sensitive and open to the needs of boys, he not only rejected his father, but also sought to be a bit of a mother.

Young Patrick Pearse suffered from an overwhelming dependency on those he loved most, and in his adulthood we shall see in him an ever-increasing expression of nostalgia and fantasy as his needs for that kind of serenity increased. Forced to act without a wholly developed sense

77 Erikson, Identity, 129.
of his ability to do so, he retreated and sought the past everywhere—in his religion, in his writing, even in his politics.

In a real sense, Patrick Pearse was held back from being a free man. Held back by both his fear of the outside and the responsibility incumbent in that world, he was in effect denied the means to break free psychologically. Thus it was to be that he looked obsessively towards the past in the attempt to make something of his life in the all-too-complex present in which he lived.

Because he adored his mother, he was wholly dependent upon her and the rest of the family for support and for the sense that he was doing all right. But existing in tension with this need for safety was the normal adult need to establish himself in an independent way. Thus, in the end, he faced the future needing to forget what he came to see as an idyllic childhood. His conflict was not only that of a mama’s boy. It was and is the fundamental struggle of every individual to establish his own sense of himself. For Patrick Pearse the death of his father meant the loss of the one person who could cultivate that sense. It was to lead to Pearse’s unsuccessful search for identity and freedom and finally resulted in his denial of the present for the future and the past.

The marriage of James Pearse and Margaret Brady suffered problems which might have been anticipated in a
marriage of their day. Yet the immature young man of 1900, who emerged as a national hero in 1916, faced some extraordinary difficulties in finding himself within the conflicts of that union. However, Patrick was able to recognize that source of conflict within himself lay in his own relationship to the different characters who had created him. He wrote in his Autobiography:

For the present, I have said enough to indicate that when my father and mother married there came together two very widely remote traditions—English and Gaelic . . . . And these two traditions worked in me, and, prised together by a certain fire proper to myself—but nursed by that fostering of which I have spoken—made me that strange thing I am.\(^78\)

That strange creature desired both to be safe and to escape, to retire to that same place where his dreams were sufficient and to fulfill his normal human desire to break free. Freedom for Pearse meant a sense of breaking loose from the conflicting emotions which held him captive in the same way he had once done as a child, through heroic activity and adventure. Pearse was never given a firm foundation in which he could freely make life a choice of adventurous acts. Instead he emerged from childhood deeply ambivalent about making his own way in life. He later described this conflict in the terms he knew best: "The woman in us loves to sit by our own fireside; the man in us urges us forth on divine adventures."\(^79\)

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\(^{78}\)Patrick Pearse, "My Childhood," 11.

\(^{79}\)Ibid.
The major issue for Patrick Pearse at the age of twenty was whether or not he would practice law. Left with the responsibility for a family of siblings and mother to feed, he needed to make some kind of a living, but his interest in Gaelic was still too unlikely to make a substantial living. His inheritance provided him the opportunity to pursue that interest while abandoning his legal career. It also allowed him to await with disastrous results the days when he would be forced to choose adventure or the fireside.
CHAPTER III

THE STATE OF IRELAND

The Cultural Movement

In a speech in 1899, Standish O'Grady made a powerful prophecy about the future course of Irish history. Speaking before a group of literary colleagues he said,

We have now a literary movement, it is not very important; it will be followed by a political movement, that will not be very important; then must come a military movement, that will be important indeed.¹

With amazing prescience, O'Grady had correctly forecast the outline of the next quarter of a century of public history in Ireland. What was not knowable then, and would only become apparent in 1916, was the extent to which some men would eventually feel the need to act decisively in order to rectify the failures of the movements O'Grady had foreseen.

At the turn of the century, Ireland was in the midst of one of the most surprising and important cultural upheavals of modern times. The Celtic Revival was the artistic manifestation of an Irish search for a national and cultural identity. It held forth the promise of

establishing that identity through reviving interest in pre-English Ireland—in the myths and folklore of the ancient Celtic past. Many believed that by emphasizing the mythic past, models for present-day Ireland, including a sense of nationality and race, could be found that would one day serve as the basis of a newly resurrected Irish nation. The collection of young artists and intellectuals who gathered around the leaders of this movement had in mind the "salvation" of Ireland as a nation, instead of its destruction by England and its culture.²

There were two main facets of the Celtic Revival; one, most forcefully and clearly articulated by the Gaelic League, emphasized the Irish language, stressing the native language and customs as the root of national identity; the second was an aesthetic movement which attempted to reinterpret the past in the art of the present. The first part had been articulated in a paper entitled "On the Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland" by Douglas Hyde in 1892, given before a meeting of the National Literary Society, which he and William Butler Yeats had founded earlier that year.³ The views and goals outlined in Hyde's paper were soon to become those of Hyde's Gaelic League, established in 1893. Although not wholly original, Hyde's argument urged the rejection of English culture and the

²Kee, The Bold Fenian Men, 133.
³Ibid.
embracing of a modern Irish culture based on the Irish language. Most importantly, Hyde wanted to rejuvenate the language itself, teaching it to everyone, in order to make accessible the non-English forms of ancient Ireland's culture and values as a way to establish a distinctly Irish cultural identity. Following the revival in language came a great variety of native "Irish" expressions, not the least of which were literature, poetry, athletics, even the wearing of Irish tweed over "English second-hand trousers."

But although the ultimate cultural contributions of the Celtic Revival were important, substantial disagreement would arise over the proper way to go about achieving its goals.

Sharp differences in emphasis and philosophy created difficulties from the beginning. Leading proponents of the language movement, such as Hyde and the writer and poet Charles Gavan Duffy, preferred fostering the study of the Anglo-Irish literature of the nineteenth century, such as the works of Davis and Moore. Yeats, whose book The Celtic Twilight, published in 1893, gave the artistic half of the revival its name, wanted to resurrect the old Celtic mythic cycles and tales in new artistic forms, especially through drama and poetry. Yeats had gone so far as to help to

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4 An Claidheamh Soluis, cited by Kee, 136.

5 An excellent analysis of the various factions and developments in the cultural movement can be found in Malcolm Brown, The Politics of Irish Literature, 5th ed.
establish the Irish National Theater in 1897, soon to be known as the Abbey Theater, to enable the staging of this new artistic expression of Irish nationalism. This disagreement between the two halves of the Revival was substantial. Hyde wanted to resurrect the language because he believed that the daily use of the language was the key to any cultural renewal of the nation. He felt that this resurrection of the language would only happen when the language was learned and spoken within a modern context.\(^6\) Yeats saw the national revival developing only after the essence of the nation's culture had been resurrected and re-understood, and he used the language as a way to open up the mythic culture both intellectually and emotionally in order that it might serve that revival. Yeats's use and need of the language were less absolute; he saw it more as a tool to use in order to understand the past, rather than a goal in and of itself. Moreover, Yeats believed that the past had distinct advantages in presenting positive models, instead of the "noble failures" of Tone and Emmet who were the modern models for the Young Ireland movement in the 1840s.\(^7\)

In 1901 debate between the revivalists and those arguing for the need of more imaginative political


\(^7\)Kee, *Bold Fenian Men*, 138.
leadership, Yeats argued against the idea that Ireland's salvation was going to be a political one complete with a messiah. It was his conviction, and by implication the conviction of those who were in the forefront of the Celtic Revival, that salvation for Ireland would be artistic and that only through an artistic revival would a national idea strong enough to "save" Ireland eventually emerge. Only after that revival would a political solution be possible.

The eventual political significance of the Celtic Revival was that it gave artistic expression of the nationalist idea. The foundations for this work had been laid by the Young Ireland movement in the 1840s;\(^8\) but most of it was new, and the Revival was to have a special role in raising public awareness of the value of Ireland's own indigenous cultural heritage. The results of the artistic movement were mixed; no one should overestimate the numbers of people who were directly influenced by, or could even understand, what Yeats or Hyde meant at the time.\(^9\) The number of those who were literate in Irish was even fewer than the number of those who could speak the language.\(^10\)

Much of the debate in the Gaelic League over fine points of grammar and style seemed to overlook an essential fact: there was not a very large group for its members to address.

\(^8\) Thompson, \textit{Imagination of an Insurrection}, 50-51.


\(^10\) Ibid., 139-40.
Even though the League grew from fifty-eight branches in 1897 to nine hundred branches by 1905 and a membership of around 100,000, its solely middle class membership forced the League to fight frequently against accusations of snobbery.\textsuperscript{11}

As William Irwin Thompson has pointed out, the average man in the street was far less likely to respond to the simplistic and grossly romanticized style of nationalism presented in publications like \textit{The Nation} than to articles written by Yeats for \textit{Dublin University Review}.\textsuperscript{12} The Revivalists basically preached to the converted, failing to recognize that the biggest hurdle in the hoped-for national revival was the ignorance and hostility of the very people they wished to save. The Ireland that they believed in was an unreal one, and it served their interests.

\textldots\textsuperscript{13} The revivalists sought in Ireland the kind of dignity and kind of wealth that the industrialized world, the modern world had lost; the Ireland they loved had an enormous West Coast and no northeast corner.

In order to achieve their goals, the Revivalists had to be prepared to do more than write poetry and produce plays. All of the many parts of this movement were, especially in the early stages, very optimistic about their

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 135-36.

\textsuperscript{12}Thompson, \textit{Imagination}, 14.

chances of success, an enthusiasm that was to suffer substantially when their ideas often received a less than jubilant public response. From the beginning, they made the mistake of believing that other men would be moved intellectually to the same extent that they had been themselves; with this assumption went the conviction that those who were thus enlightened would feel exactly the same conviction as the Revivalists had come to feel.

Behind the naivete displayed by most of the Revivalists lurked a set of assumptions that had also come into existence unexamined. These a priori ideas were to become matters of faith and led to endless arguments over points of dogma in order to determine the canons of the new orthodoxy of all believers. One such idea, which was almost universally accepted, was that of the "Irish Race."

At the time, and not only in Ireland, many people believed that race was the determining principle in any nation. The Revivalists' conception of race was somewhat unusual in that they defined the Irish race in contradiction to other races, especially the English. One of the more formidable explorers of the questions of Ireland's racial identity was the journalist D. P. Moran. Editor of the Leader, Moran argued forcefully from its pages, beginning about 1900, that the idea of an Irish nation was ridiculous without the revival of its own language. In order to restore Ireland over and against England, it was necessary
to revive the language—the Irish race’s one distinctive mark of uniqueness. Without such a movement the national idea was a farce, as was the idea of an Irish race. Moran helped determine the schema in the search for an Irish national identity. It began by identifying those characteristics which were undesirable in other races and then defined one’s own race in contrast to the previously identified characteristics; thus, the Irish race was often defined on the basis of what the Anglo-Saxon race was not.

The goal of most of the Revivalists was to restore the Irish race to its proper place by discovering and resurrecting those qualities, institutions, and customs that were most Irish or "most racial, most smacking of the soil." Behind this attempt was the implied belief that the Irish race was, despite persecution, one of the greatest of all races, able to bear witness to a nobler and more humane set of values. Thus an imperative existed to determine orthodoxy, with innumerable digressions attempting to resolve grammatical accuracy and legitimacy in customs—in other words, to identify "Irish" Ireland versus all "false" Irelands.

This kind of doggedly illogical thought might have indicated the kinds of dogmatism and mysticism to emerge in future manifestations of Irish nationalism. The absolute

14 Kee, Bold Fenian Men, 136.

15 Cited in Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 228.
faith placed in certain ideas, such as the nobility of the Irish peasant, an Irish race, and a "Golden Age" of Gaelic greatness could not have withstood probing analysis. But such analysis was not immediately forthcoming, and these ideas soon became reified into absolute matters of faith which brooked no disagreement or dissension. This ideological inflexibility in Irish nationalism helped lead to the alienation of some of Ireland's greatest artists.

In the end, neither the linguistic nor the artistic revival had an audience that was large enough to make a great social or political difference. In general its constituency was small and privileged. No one ever made a connection between what was desired or hoped and what was actually to be. Despite these problems, the Celtic Revival had a serious impact on many younger intellectuals of the next generation, and some of these people eventually made a considerably different kind of statement. Partially because of what they had learned from the inspiration of the cultural movement, they were determined to bring about a concrete affirmation of the national idea through some kind of action.

Since the fall of Parnell, the nationalists had spent a decade in the new enthusiasms; but small meetings, literary banquets, and a lonely reading of books were not enough. The intellectuals longed to address themselves to the multitude; they were in flight from "The Decadence" and
the solipsism of the Aesthetic Movement, and they longed to give their individual excitement a collective intensity.\textsuperscript{16}

Eventually the cultural movement came up bankrupt in the face of reality; as Pearse was to say in late 1913, "the Gaelic League as the Gaelic League is a spent Force . . . the vital work to be done in the new Ireland . . . will not be done so much by the Gaelic League as by men and movements that have sprung from [it] or have received from the Gaelic League a new baptism and a new life of grace."\textsuperscript{17}

The possibility for politicization of the movement had always been there, and Hyde in particular had always been careful to keep the Gaelic League out of the political arena. He lost this fight in 1915, when he was eased out of the organization he had helped to found because he would not allow it to join with the forces of direct political action. By 1915, many people had come to believe that force was probably inevitable and necessary; any man who believed the things that Hyde espoused was in no position to deny others their own a priori notions about the national idea. At the root of the cultural revival existed a desperate desire to believe absolutely and without question. It was a legacy on which others were quickly to build.

\textsuperscript{16}Thompson, \textit{Imagination}, 57.

\textsuperscript{17}Padraic H. Pearse, \textit{Political Writings and Speeches}, 91-92.
The Political Movement

Standish O'Grady's prediction that there would be a political movement to follow the cultural one reveals a great deal about the depressed state of Irish politics at the turn of the century. In 1899, the major political topic of discussion was the same as it had been in Ireland for nearly seventy years—Home Rule. After Home Rule had become the major factor in British politics during the 1880s, there was every reason to expect it to remain in the forefront during the next decade. With the political demise of Charles Stewart Parnell and the once great Nationalist Party divided into contending factions, this was not to be the case. The inability to find leadership acceptable to all segments of the party led to a decline in the party's influence for most of the decade after Parnell's death in 1891, and hope of attaining Home Rule in the 1890s waned.18

This decline was not solely the result of party disorganization and internecine strife. Part of the credit for calming the troubled waters of Home Rule must go to Conservatives who had begun, even before Parnell's death, to see reform as a way to "... rob Home Rule of its strength by disemboweling the social causes which fed it ...". In order to maintain the constitutional incorporation of Ireland within Great Britain, some Liberals joined with Conservatives under the "Unionist" banner in 1886. Through a strategy of gradual acquiescence and occasional initiation, the Unionists, in concert with the Conservative Party, brought forth agrarian and social reforms with the intention of using them as a way to blunt the Irish sense of grievance. On the whole the strategy proved to be a success; Home Rule, furthermore, had lost much of its momentum and had become merely "a cause of routine orthodoxy," without which the Irish political world could


The continual failure of the political process to arrive at a pragmatic solution to the problem arose because of the inability to reconcile the non-rational forces arranged on each side of the issue. People such as Pearse seemed to assume that a solution would never be found that recognized what he and others like him felt—a fact that was directly to influence the thinking of the rebels of 1916.

19George D. Boyce, Nationalism in Ireland, 261.
20Kee, Bold Fenian Men, 111.
21Ibid., 109.
not exist. The issue of Home Rule had become a given in Irish politics.

In 1900, the Irish Nationalist Party at Westminster reunited under the leadership of John Redmond and his deputy-chief, John Dillon. The Parliamentary Party's hope was once again tied to the fortunes of the Liberal Party's performance at the polls, with the added advantage of a cultural revival to rely on for support. Once the Liberals were back in power and needed Irish support to keep control of the government, the nationalists could revive the "militant constitutionalism" which had served the cause of Home Rule so well under Parnell.

The first opportunity for the Nationalists to exploit their strategic position arose in 1907. Attempting to mollify both the Nationalists and the opposition, the Liberals offered a devolution scheme instead of a true Home Rule measure. It sought to give Ireland its own Council of administrative control, with final approval over its actions resting in London. In a striking display of party unity, the Nationalists rallied behind Redmond in rejecting the Irish Council Bill of 1907, and the result was to increase the solid Home Rule sentiment supporting the Party in Parliament.

It was not until 1910 that such an opportunity presented itself again, when the Liberals' thin margin in the House of Commons meant that they were dependent upon
Nationalist support in order to stay in power. Redmond received from the Liberals a guarantee of a Home Rule Bill, even though its passage would aggravate the constitutional crisis which the Government already faced over the issue of veto power in the House of Lords.

The final failure of this Home Rule Bill was not nearly so important as the side effects that it caused. For one thing, it played a role in the formulation of the Parliament Act of 1911 which established a procedure for overcoming any future vetoes by the House of Lords; second, it flushed out belligerent anti-Home Rule resistance. After stalling Home Rule for decades, the Unionists were not surprising anyone by resisting Home Rule, but the ominous way in which they resisted was to alter Ireland's political climate considerably. At a large rally at Craigavon House outside Belfast on 23 September 1911, Unionists under the leadership of Edward Carson and James Craig threatened "extra-constitutional resistance" in Ulster to any Home Rule Bill which forced all of Ireland to come under its sway.22

At this point the Nationalists were not the only party representing Irish nationalists in the political arena. Running concurrent with these developments was the rise of a political alternative to Home Rule. Although it was not to be the only new movement, Sinn Fein was to be the most

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important: it was eventually to overcome the Nationalists and became the political party of Irish nationalism before the end of the next decade.

Why alternatives arose at this time is not altogether clear. Disillusionment or dissatisfaction seems to have set in among some of those who had supported Home Rule and the Irish Parliamentary Party and neither succeeded in winning any kind of independent status for Ireland. Additionally, the Celtic Revival had influenced many of those who wished to place the spiritual and intellectual inspiration of a separate Irish nation and culture within a political framework. Home Rule would not provide the kind of independence that could satisfy these separatists, as it smacked too much of compromise. The continued defeat of Home Rule, together with a new political party and an ideological position stressing Irish self-reliance, led many politicians to consider more assertive political action.

Sinn Fein was largely the result of the political thinking of Arthur Griffith. Griffith was a nationalist who had been heavily influenced by the cultural separatism of the cultural revivalists and the political separatism of the Fenians. While Griffith did not espouse either the revolutionary doctrines or the violent tactics of the

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Republicans, he was a strict Separatist and claimed that the Sinn Fein Party accepted "... the nationalism of '98, '48 & '67 as the true nationalism of Ireland."25

In the beginning, his ideas were disseminated largely through the periodical United Irishmen. Like his first organization Cumman na nGaedheal (established in 1900), it espoused a commitment to the practice of massive civil disobedience and economic non-cooperation. Through passive resistance, Griffith proposed to disrupt British rule in Ireland and then render it unworkable through continual disruption. Cumman na nGaedheal was not an immediate success, although it had some following, but it provided Griffith with a forum for his ideas.

Whatever else could be said about Griffith, one could never accuse him of being unimaginative or parochial in his approach to the national problem. In a book published in 1904 entitled The Resurrection of Hungary, Griffith expanded upon an idea he had brought before Cummann na nGaedheal two years earlier. He argued that Ireland should declare herself politically and economically free from Great Britain, withdraw from Parliament, and then act as if it were, indeed, a free and separate state. He based this idea on his rather quixotic reading of the Hungarian Dual Monarchy established in the 1860s. His model was entirely original and affected enough people's thinking to be

instrumental in the founding of a political party—Sinn Fein—in 1907. Sinn Fein represented a clear-cut middle ground between the parliamentarians committed to Home Rule and the advocates of physical-force separatism.

The "Hungarian Policy" was as uniquely systematic in its approach as it was unorthodox.²⁶ For one thing Griffith included considerable detail about the possible economic problems that could face Ireland if it were committed to the path he had laid out. For another, he envisioned a constitutional monarchy as Ireland's model government, complete with a parliament, all to be brought about by unilateral withdrawal from the Union with Britain. Griffith's uniqueness was, however, a major problem as well; the Hungarian model was just too exotic to command many Irishmen's attention while Home Rule still had a hope of passage. Because of this, Sinn Fein was destined to remain a political obscurity—interesting, but relatively unimportant for several years. Sinn Fein was not to be a success until 1918, when it represented the sole political alternative to the Redmondites. At its pre-1916 height, Sinn Fein never numbered more than 150 chapters, most of which were in the Dublin area.²⁷ The rural areas remained relatively unresponsive to Sinn Fein's calls for support.

²⁶Ibid., 252-53.

and the party lost its only serious election attempt in 1908.\textsuperscript{28}

Despite Griffith's innovative approach, the Irish Parliamentary party remained the only broadly-based political movement that captured the majority of the people's attention between 1890 and 1910. For much of that time, the Parliamentary Party was divided, disorganized, and, in effect, leaderless. Sinn Fein remained weak, narrow in its base of support, and unable to gain ground over its enfeebled opposition. The most powerful alternative to the Nationalist program had relatively little impact on the political events of those years. When it was finally able to claim success in 1918, it did so not only because of the total collapse of its opposition, but also because of its successful retention of its integrity, its connections to the Celtic Revival, and its inheritance of the separatist tradition resurrected by the physical-force men of 1916.

Both the cultural and political movements operated in a vacuum. The Gaelic League and Sinn Fein were both overwhelmingly bourgeois; in terms of class, neither represented a clear-cut alternative to Redmond's Parliamentary Party. With his opposition commanding only narrow support, Redmond's party was the sole political force

\textsuperscript{28}Although Sinn Fein ran what seems to have been a strong candidate, the Parliament Party candidate beat Sinn Fein by nearly a three-to-one margin in North Leitrim. See Kee, \textit{Bold Fenian Men}, 158-60.
to have widespread credibility at this time. Behind the scenes, however, a much more important alternative to either the cultural or political movements was developing: many individuals—mostly younger than the generations of Hyde, Griffith, Redmond and Yeats—were moving towards more concrete forms of action. Influenced by the revival, struck by the uniqueness of Sinn Fein, and bored with the politics of Redmond, they were to emerge in late 1913 committed to the idea of some kind of resolute action to affirm an independent Irish identity. By and large, they had become dissatisfied with the political status quo, and from their position outside of it they became the prime movers of their age.

What had transpired were two failures: that of the Celtic Revival, which had not done anything more than heighten people's awareness of their cultural heritage; and that of Home Rule, which had been neither independent enough nor easily deliverable. A critical division had appeared, a division between those who were separatists and those who were committed to the constitutional process and system. It was no mere difference of class or style, but one of profoundly different moral commitments; one side was determined to bring about a change no matter what the cost because the cause was right.

In truth the difference between the rival parties was temperamental. It was in this respect the difference between the Feuillants and the Jacobins in the French Revolution, the difference between those who believed in
the expediency of Burke and those who gave uncompromising allegiance to the ideology of a theocratic conception. In Ireland this division, which finally resulted in civil war, was obscured during the first decade of the century.\textsuperscript{29}

The criticism leveled against parliamentarians was aimed at both their commitment to the constitutional process and to Home Rule, and it had been long in developing. In 1901, the Mayor of Limerick, anticipating what was to develop, wrote:

\begin{quote}
. . . Any man in Ireland worth his salt today will spit upon the words constitutional agitation. The war clouds hang over China. France is uneasy, no man knows what Germany may do, and in it all the opportunity for Ireland to strike will surely come. See that you are prepared for the emergency and well prepared, for it is going to be a death struggle.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

What had developed was a gradual dissatisfaction with the nature of the discourse on Ireland’s future.

Although Sinn Fein represented an alternative, it had failed for a variety of reasons. Its programs were perhaps too novel in the Irish context. Its lack of support, and the class-bound nature of the support it did have, were serious problems that needed to be overcome. Thus it suffered the same weaknesses inherent in the Celtic Revival. Both Sinn Fein and the Revival suffered a critical inability to amalgamate the long-simmering tradition of Republican

\textsuperscript{29} Mansergh, The Irish Question, 249.

sentiment with the Catholic heritage of Ireland. Neither the Cultural Revival nor Sinn Fein had any particular problems with the church, although in both cases there was heavy Anglo-Irish support, but both failed to make the Catholic sense of grievance against England an integral part of their approaches. The Home Rulers got Catholic support by virtue of a long-standing relationship to the Church that went back to Daniel O'Connell. Sinn Fein and the Revival both failed to garner clerical support and suffered because of it.

In order to succeed, political movements in Ireland needed to merge together the cultural and religious sentiments at work in the political process, in a manner similar to that of Daniel O'Connell's Emancipation campaigns in the late 1820s. By taking up the banner of the rebels of the 1798 Uprising, and that of Catholic Ireland, together with an apparent commitment (however rhetorical) to go to the limit in terms of resistance to Britain, O'Connell became the embodiment of a movement and succeeded in gaining his initial objectives. But when O'Connell turned to advocate repeal of the Act of Union in the late 1830s and 1840s, he lost control of the nationalist movement because he was popularly perceived to have backed away from

31 For an excellent discussion of Irish Republicanism and Catholicism, see O'Farrell, Ireland's English Question, 223-46.

32 Ibid., 107-14.
confronting the English in the way he had promised. Of course Repeal died as an issue when O'Connell revealed himself to be no revolutionary when he chose not to confront the authorities at a monster rally scheduled at Clontarf. The Famine merely sealed the fate of a movement which had already lost its battle with integrity.  

Although Home Rule and the Irish Parliamentary Party seemed heirs to O'Connell's mantle and support, they too were unwilling to go to the limit in attempting to gain their objective. There was, furthermore, considerable sentiment that wanted much more than Home Rule. Men were emerging who were prepared to attain, by any means, a separate and equal Irish nation and identity. They were committed to leading the way in demonstrating their oneness with the Celtic tradition and the Catholic faith for the nation. This emergence of large numbers of these men forced Irish politics into new channels of thought and action. Their emergence meant the resurrection of the violent Republican tradition of Wolf Tone and the Fenians, along with the cultural and spiritual heritage of Ireland. It was time for the military movement.

The Resurrection of the Military Movement

Tom Clarke and the Irish Republican Brotherhood

Few would have realized in 1908 that the return of Thomas Clarke to Dublin would turn out to be one of the critical moments in Irish history. A small, quiet, and unprepossessing man, Clarke looked more to be a retired Fenian come home after decades of imprisonment and exile than the future inspiration of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. But that was indeed to be the case—Clarke helped to resurrect and to lead the moribund IRB. In fact, it was the very reason he had come back to Ireland from America.\(^2^4\)

Clarke was born in England to a career British army officer and an Irish Catholic mother. He nearly entered the army at his father’s behest,\(^2^5\) but he chose instead to spend a lifetime in service to a sworn enemy of the British Army. Because of his IRB activities, Clarke was to end up spending fifteen years in British prison, and the long harsh imprisonment that he suffered hardened his anti-British resolve into fanatical hatred. It was his special zeal that led IRB men in Ireland to recall him from his self-imposed exile in America in order to rejuvenate the organization.


\(^{2^5}\)Ibid., 14.
It was this sense of absolute commitment along with his single-minded integrity which led an Ulster Quaker named Bulmer Hobson to meet with John Devoy—head of Clan na Gael, the American group which financially supported the IRB—in 1907 with the intention of bringing Clarke back. His prison experience had changed his life profoundly and had made him the perfect man for what they had in mind. Tom Clarke himself wrote that the horrors of his convict cell had changed his life forever.

What had burned into his soul was something akin to Miltonic hate, unconquerable will, and a study of revenge, and most certainly a courage never to submit or yield until the flame of insurrection and flash of rifles rounded off the tragic integrity of his life.

The IRB also needed to find a trustworthy go-between to link them and their American supporters in Clan na Gael. Thus, when the little man with the quiet demeanor, piercing eyes, and large mustache set up a tobacco shop on what is now 25A Parnell Street in central Dublin, a most unusual man with a most important role to play in Ireland’s future had indeed arrived.

In the early 1900s, the state of health of the once powerful IRB was poor at best. By every estimation it had

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36 O’Broin, Revolutionary Underground, 141.
37 Le Roux, Tom Clarke, 14.
39 Ward, Ireland, 24.
seen its numbers diminish substantially since its glory days thirty-five years earlier. Part of this decline in strength, sharpest in the 1890s, came about largely because of lackluster and complacent leadership. Another critical factor in its decline was the generally favorable state of the Irish economy in the last decade of the century.\footnote{Le Roux, \textit{Tom Clarke}, 213.} But the slow death of the IRB had started long before 1900, and the organization bore few signs of life by 1907.\footnote{Kevin B. Nowlan, "Tom Clarke, MacDermott, and the I.R.B." in \textit{Leaders and Men of the Easter Rising}, ed. F. X. Martin, 110-111.} These factors, compounded by the IRB's need to maintain secrecy and selectivity, had had the net effect of killing the organization off.

It is not surprising that the IRB have entered the twentieth-century in a condition resembling the trance of death itself. Its membership was said to be so small that it would scarcely have filled a large-sized concert hall.\footnote{Ibid.}

As with any movement that depended on the emotional conviction of its membership, the IRB's original vision, which had inspired its founders to extraordinary sacrifice, had failed to sustain itself the leadership of the succeeding generations. This appears to have been especially true in the face of an improving economic situation and the Government's commitment to some measure of social reform. At the same time that the organization had...
to face the obstacle of "good times," it also had to deal with an old opponent—the Church. Not only had the Church long since banned membership in the IRB because it was a secret society, but it had also consistently supported the constitutional efforts of the Nationalist Party at Westminster. On top of these obstacles was the emergence of a militant and highly organized labor movement in both Dublin and Belfast, which appears to have taken a large part of the IRB's traditional constituency.

The IRB was small and seemed to be getting smaller, with little reason to suspect it would expand anytime in the immediately foreseeable future. It had become so insignificant and ineffectual that Diarmuid Lynch related he did not even know of its existence until he was told about it by Sean T. O'Ceallaigh in 1908. Even the British, who

43 Dangerfield, Damnable Question, 94.


45 Lynch maintained that the IRB's early support came from evicted tenant farmers forced to move to the cities for work. He claims that this newly urbanized group, with a strong sense of grievance and deprivation, joined the IRB out of the lack of alternatives. With the organization of Irish workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the IRB lost members of this group to the labour movement. Thus in 1913 the Irish Citizen Army benefited from former IRB members swelling its ranks.

This analysis seems superficial. The IRB's leadership was overwhelmingly drawn from the ranks of the educated middle-class and its members would have only gone to a movement with a strong nationalist point of view. The early Irish labour movement was not within the mainstream of Irish nationalism and was only brought into it when Connolly "converted" to it after the Great Strike of 1913. See
had ample reason to suspect Clarke's sudden reappearance in Dublin, dismissed both Clarke and his shop as "safe" and saw the IRB as negligible in influence, power, and activity.

All of this was to change, and Tom Clarke was the major reason for the changes that were to come. Although his organizational ability was minimal, he had an unusual gift for picking young talented men, and inspiring them to do the organizational work that was needed if the IRB was ever to regain its vitality. His greatest gift to the "physical-force" movement was to bring into the organization young men eager to work and to be inspired by his charisma and his absolute faith in the rightness of the cause.46

Thus Clarke was to draw into the IRB men of outstanding ability, such as Denis McCullogh, Sean MacDiarmida, and P. S. O'Hegarty along with already committed separatists like Bulmer Hobson and John MacBride, who quickly rebuilt the organization and almost as quickly replaced the old Republican leadership. With his connections in America, a significant infusion of Clan na Gael money, and the "Young Turks" of his tobacco shop, Clarke was in a position to make his presence known; not surprisingly, he and his cadre effectually took over the IRB's Supreme Council by 1911.47


46Ibid., 20.

47Dangerfield, Damnable Question, 99.
Perhaps of even greater importance in relation to the future was the successful infiltration of other nationalist groups by members of the newly resurrected IRB. Typically, they entered and quickly rose to positions of leadership and responsibility where they could influence the making of policy. This infiltration took place in all kinds of groups, regardless of their ideology; for example, Sinn Fein was heavily penetrated by the IRB, despite Griffith’s anti-Republican bias. This infiltration also took place regardless of the success or popularity of the movements in question.

This strategy of infiltration and subversion became critically important later in 1916. It seems to have worked largely because of Clarke’s unique ability to get a hold of men, mostly of an impressionable age, who were willing to sacrifice a great deal in both his and the IRB’s behalf. In effect he had inspired a new generation to embrace the old republican tradition of physical force in behalf of an Irish nation; "... for the younger members of the IRB he was the incarnation of Ireland, militant, suffering, unbroken and unbreakable." Clarke was so loved and idolized by these men that he was honored, under Pearse’s orders, by being the first to enter the General Post Office in 1916, and the

48 Ward, Ireland, 24.
50 Ibid., 111-13.
first to sign the Proclamation of the Republic (also written by Pearse).\textsuperscript{51}

One must not overestimate the contribution of the IRB to politics in the pre-Rising period. Its operations and successes were largely hidden and surreptitious, and most people failed to notice any of the comings and goings at Clarke's shop. In order for the IRB to accomplish anything more than stage violent protest actions, it was necessary to have a very different political climate than that which existed before 1912. The initiation of another Home Rule bill in the spring of 1912 provided the kind of crisis which the IRB needed. Rapidly escalating through a series of stages, the Home Rule crisis of 1912-1914 brought out greater numbers than ever before who appeared to be committed to the possible use of overt force.

The Home Rule Crisis of 1912-1914

The passage of the Parliament Act of 1911 had assured Home Rule's eventual passage over the objection of the House of Lords. But the fervor of Unionist resistance had taken a most ominous turn in September of that year when two leading Unionists, Edward Carson and James Craig, faced with the probable passage of Home Rule, called for the organization of popular Unionist support. By activating the Orange Lodges and Unionist Clubs of Ulster in anticipation of the

\textsuperscript{51}David Thornley, "Patrick Pearse," Studies (Spring, 1966), 12-13.
need for massive civil and military resistance to prevent Home Rule, they had successfully called to life the possibility of conflict between the Protestants of the North and the Catholics of the South. They were playing the "Orange Card," a tactic first identified by Lord Randolph Churchill in 1885. It was not a tactic which appealed solely to Ulstermen; Carson had been born in Dublin to a mother from Galway and a father from Scotland. Nevertheless, the critical problem was the imbalance of Ireland’s religious populations and the concentration of a large minority of Protestants in the northeast province of Ulster—the reason for the intense anti-Home Rule sentiment in that part of the island.

In the minds of Unionists, the Liberal government’s Home Rule Bill of 1912 contained no provisions recognizing their intense desire to remain a part of Great Britain. The Liberals, under the leadership of Prime Minister H. H. Asquith, appeared unresponsive to their plight. At a pro-Union rally at Blenheim Palace in July 1912, the recently chosen Conservative Party head Andrew Bonar Law (an Ulsterman), sitting at the dais with both Carson and F. E. Smith (the future Lord Birkenhead), claimed in a remarkably inflammatory speech that the Protestants had a constitutional right to resist Home Rule. He implied that

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53 Stewart, *Ulster Crisis*, 40.
Home Rule could only come about through a "corrupt parliamentary bargain" and would represent a deprivation of Ulster Protestants' birthright as British subjects. Because of this, "... they would be justified in resisting such an attempt by all means in their power, including force."\(^{54}\)

It was clear at this point that resistance to Irish Home Rule was hardening, and Asquith implied to both sides that his government could support a scheme that partitioned Ireland along religious lines. This gerrymander satisfied neither side. By January of the following year, however, Carson and the Unionists seemed to accept partition if it included a nine-county Ulster remaining as part of the United Kingdom. Even though Asquith was to reject the Unionist proposal, it was at this point that he seems to have settled on partition as the only realistic compromise.

Both Asquith and Redmond feared the armed mobilization of Unionist support in Ulster. In September 1912, these fears were realized when Carson led a vast crowd in Belfast to sign a "Solemn League and Covenant" which bound its 400,000 signers to resist Home Rule at all costs.\(^{55}\) The Ulster Unionist Council went so far as to establish its own anti-Home Rule militia, the Ulster Volunteer Force, in January 1913. Within six months, the Government believed, the Ulster Volunteers numbered in excess of ninety thousand

\(^{54}\)Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 303.

Both Liberal and Nationalist leaders had become convinced of the possibility of a "worst case" scenario, and the government quickly became committed to the idea of a six-county partition compromise in November 1913, telling Redmond he had either to take it or leave it. Redmond accepted Asquith's terms two months later.

The Ulster Crisis played a vital role in the development of popular acceptance of the possibility of violence over the Irish question. Only a short time earlier, any kind of massive public outburst would have been inconceivable. Constitutional politicians held sway over the political arena in the conventional way, with some interest in the cultural expressions of nationalism, but there was no hint of the rapid change in public attitudes that was to come.

Until the Ulster Crisis of 1912-1914, Redmond's tactics appeared to have both time and inevitability on their side. By actively suppressing such options to its political hegemony as Sinn Fein, the Parliamentary Party seemed to grow in power at the expense of its opposition. But Redmond's very commitment to the constitutional process

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56 Ibid., 70-71.
57 Kee, Bold Fenian Men, 183-85.
58 McCartney, "Sinn Fein Movement," 42.
combined with his acceptance of the partition compromise, damaged both his and his party's integrity. In effect the Nationalists rendered disreputable the process by which they had operated, thus creating the climate which made other kinds of action possible or even necessary. In accepting partition and seeming to refuse to stand up to the Unionist threat, the Party was widely perceived to have abandoned its banner of "pure nationalism" in favor of peace, Liberal support, and the maintenance of its own political supremacy among Irish voters. The resulting lack of confidence in the Party, promoted by clever infiltration and subversion by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, led to what had hitherto been an unimaginable mobilization of pro-Nationalist support.

In July 1913, Michael O’Rahilly, the editor of the Gaelic League periodical An Claidheamh Soluis, contacted Eoin MacNeill, a Professor of Early Irish History at University College, Dublin. O’Rahilly suggested that MacNeill write an analysis of the current political

60 Mansergh, Irish Question, 44-45.
61 Bulmer Hobson, A Short History of the Irish Volunteers (Dublin: O’Laughlin, Murphy and Boland, Ltd., 1917), 13.
62 Kee, Bold Fenian Men, 201.
63 Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 320. Dangerfield maintains in The Damnable Question, p. 97, that Hobson was the one who approached MacNeill. This is unlikely as Hobson denied any personal acquaintance with MacNeill at the time and O’Rahilly was a major figure in Gaelic circles.
situation. MacNeill's paper was published on November 1, 1913, and entitled "The North Began." Even though MacNeill had been a well-known supporter of Redmond and a political moderate, his analysis argued that the mobilization of Unionists in Ulster provided a model for the nationalists to emulate. Within the month a committee—meeting under MacNeill's leadership—approved a plan to set up a pro-Nationalist militia along the same lines as the UVF. This Provisional Committee, with Hobson, The O'Rahilly (as he was known), and MacNeill as executive officers, formally established the Irish Volunteer Force on November 25. By July its membership numbered somewhere around seventy-five thousand.

Several factors account for this change in the temperament of Irish nationalism. The long and arduous fight for Home Rule had not borne fruit, and for more than a few people, any kind of positive action was preferable to

64 Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 32.

65 Although reports in the Westmeath Independent claimed that a new Volunteer movement had been established in Athlone, and had organized nearly 5,000 men in a march on October 22, 1913, there seems to be room for suspicion about this so-called "Midland Volunteer Force." F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne argue persuasively that these numbers were inflated if not wholly fabricated. By citing British intelligence reports made by eyewitnesses on the scene they have estimated the number of marchers to have been only fifty-four men with twenty-two rifles. The incident suggests a "left" wing propaganda ploy of the physical force nationalists. See The Scholar Revolutionary (Dublin: Harper and Row, Inc., 1975), 123ff.

66 Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 323.
inaction continued on behalf of Irish nationalism. Another factor was the fear that Orange resistance of Home Rule would result in an incomplete realization of the nationalist dream. Not to be underestimated was the seemingly contradictory sense of satisfaction and inspiration some Nationalists felt at seeing Unionists take up arms against England.67

Despite the obvious changes in Nationalist willingness to agitate aggressively on behalf of their cause, the Irish Volunteers should not be considered a radical group by any means. On the contrary, those who joined the Volunteers were overwhelmingly supporters of Redmond, and if anything, they were out to show their support for Home Rule.68 But, unknown to the public and most of the Volunteers membership, the membership of the Provisional Committee had a disproportionately high representation of radicals with ties to the IRB.69

Out of a total of thirty members on the Volunteer executive body, fully twelve were IRB men.70 In fact, The O' Rahilly and Hobson were both members of Clarke's inner circle, and the course of events suggests that, from the

67Ibid., 321.
69Kee, Bold Fenian Men, 204.
70Ibid.
very outset, the Volunteers were engineered into existence by the Republicans. MacNeill furnished the IRB with a well-respected and widely known name behind which the IRB could bring together various unsuspecting nationalist factions under Republican influence and control. MacNeill was duped into being the leader of an organization a substantial part of whose membership had far more radical ideology than his own; his tragedy lay in his belief that he was in charge, never realizing until it was too late the size and aims of the forces arrayed against him. His suspicious concern about the radical leadership was justifiable, however; he and Roger Casement found the more radical members of the Provisional Committee "untrustworthy" types--especially Patrick Pearse.

At this stage, the IRB was not the only group totally committed to the use of force. In August 1913, transport workers went on a massive strike in Dublin. It was to lead to a long, bitter, and violent confrontation between the owners and the workers. The most important aspect of this strike was the founding of an "Irish Citizens Army" under the leadership of James Connolly, a Scots-born Socialist. With protection of the workers its prime objective, the ICA emerged as an effective and cohesive force by the end of the

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71 Martin and Byrne, Scholar Revolutionary, 158.
72 Ibid., 133-35.
73 Kee, Bold Fenian Men, 212.
strike in January 1914.

One cause of the owner's defeat of the strikers was a sudden desertion from the ranks of the ICA. Sean O'Casey, the secretary of the ICA at the time, credits this to the Volunteers who stripped away members of the labor organization.74 He was particularly suspicious of the nationalism of the Volunteers, with their ties to the Irish Parliamentary Party, and he bitterly criticized its leadership as being both too bourgeois and too heavily supported by the same owners against whom the transport workers had struck only months before.75 The Irish Citizen Army was to settle down to a small but highly committed number by mid-1914; but most of its members had embraced Irish nationalism over socialist internationalism. So many had left for the ranks of the Volunteers that James Stephens


75 O'Casey's history of the ICA is very biased. His personal dislike of Connolly and Connolly's rise to power within the movement, in effect replacing not only James Larkin but also O'Casey, is the dominant theme of the book. He also distrusted nationalism which Connolly fostered in the Irish labor movement. This ideological dispute prompted O'Casey eventually to quit the ICA. In his writing he attacked those who were drifting to nationalism. "Many, no doubt, preferred Caithlin Ni Hoolihan in a respectable dress than a Caithlin in a garb of a working woman. Many also realized that the governing body of the Volunteers was eminently influential, and that the ban which was over the Citizen Army, like a dark cloud, because of its arterial connection with the Transport Union, was not chosen as a shelter, when they could radiantly enjoy the National halo that glittered around the whole structure of the National Volunteers" (see O'Casey, *Story of the Irish Citizen Army*, 9).
was later to call the ICA "the most deserted from force in the world."  

It was James Connolly who was to articulate the argument that, in Ireland, the national cause was wholly indistinguishable from the class struggle. His most immediate problem was the tiny size of the Irish proletariat and the fact that it was still as much concerned with the struggle for Irish national identity as with its own position vis-a-vis the modes of production. He wrote in July 1913 that:  

... the movements of Ireland for freedom could not and can not be divorced from the world-wide movements of the world's democracy. The Irish question is a part of the social question, the desire of the Irish people to control their own destinies is a part of the desire of the workers to forge political weapons for their own enfranchisement as a class.  

Thus Connolly had come to hold a position not dissimilar from that held by men of the IRB.  

With these developments, there was definite resistance to the Volunteers from any in the Irish Parliamentary Party. The formation of the Volunteers was a seemingly spontaneous event, for which the Party could in no way take any credit, and it had brought in a new group of leaders that had moved

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78 Ibid., 169.
to the forefront of popular political action.\textsuperscript{79} The Party leadership never appreciated the extent to which the movement towards direct action was out of its hands. That movement had received inspiration from the Unionists and had been engineered by the IRB. The failures which had dogged nationalists in the cultural and political movement had allowed many to be led to more assertive and confrontational politics. An example had been set on the streets of Dublin during the Great Strike, enough so that Padraic Colum was to credit the ICA as the real inspiration for the Volunteers.\textsuperscript{80} This assessment may give the Citizens Army too much credit, but, as O'Casey had claimed, a large number of ICA members, fresh from the street battles in Dublin during the fall of 1913, took their experience and conviction to the Volunteers. An undeniable connection would accordingly seem to exist between the two groups.

For the leadership of the IRB, there can be no doubt that these were exciting times with a great deal of anticipation and satisfaction. But they needed to make a critical connection between themselves and the less committed factions of the Volunteers. To make those groups come even closer toward the IRB's point of view, a man was needed to articulate the necessity of action—a man whose

\textsuperscript{79}\textit{Hobson}, \textit{Volunteers}, 15.

integrity was beyond reproach and who had, in some way, participated in and could speak to all of the major segments of the political and cultural movements. His seeming integrity would enable him to speak for them in a way which made action, no matter how violent or desperate, attractive to the rest of the country. And, finally, he had to be a man who personally felt an intense need to act, in order that those who followed the IRB would be assured of the rightness of their decision. The IRB found the man they were looking for in Patrick Pearse.
CHAPTER IV
IRELAND AND THE POLITICS OF REDEMPTION

A tradition of violence in Irish politics is hardly remarkable. The antagonistic relationship between Britain and Ireland fostered a physical-force movement committed to overthrowing the perceived oppressor. However, as is the case with many questions in Irish history, the tradition of violence has psychodynamics which more conventional historical approaches fail to reveal.

The development of a republican tradition committed to violent revolution is usually explained in evolutionary terms, with each stage in the tradition's development seen as an increasing commitment on the part of revolutionaries to the use of violence. Historically, it is true that in the Irish case the politics of violence have evolved in terms of organization and perhaps ideology and have always produced factions that were committed to the use of physical force. What has made Irish politics unique is the extent to which violence has been raised to the level of myth. This myth has been reaffirmed in the periodic rededication of individuals to violence and death as a form of self-immolation which could bring redemption to both the
This theme of sacrificial death has deep roots in Irish consciousness. Ireland's eighth-century epic tale, the Táin Bó Cúalnge (The Cattle-Raid of Cooley), has as its hero the great and precocious warrior CúChulainn. CúChulainn is a semi-divine being who has been conceived through the union of supernatural and human beings. His prowess at warfare far exceeds that of his contemporaries and is matched by his moral integrity. Like Homer's Achilles, CúChulainn has a fatal flaw, and it is exploited by his enemies. At the end of the Táin, he dies so that Ulster might survive, suffering death at the hands of those more devious than he. What stands out for the modern reader, besides the story of CúChulainn's sacrifice, is the extraordinary level of carnage related in the myth.

Random violence appears to have been common in post-Reformation Ireland and even before that time, when many early visitors considered it to be a distinctive Irish trait. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, agrarian violence was commonplace.¹ Terroristic organizations such as "The Defenders," "Whiteboys," "Ribbonmen," and "Peep O'Day Boys" pervaded the Irish countryside by the late 1700s,² especially in areas of

²By an Irish Parliament Act of 1765, people who went by night in parties of five or more, committing crimes of
extensive agricultural enclosure. Not only did these agrarian terrorists receive widespread support from the common people, but they even had martyrs whose graves became sites of religious and nationalist pilgrimage. Commenting on the ineffectiveness of attempting to control violence through mass executions of Defenders, one English official admitted that the policy had led to the exact opposite result from that intended:

Defenderism puzzles me now more and more; but it certainly grows more and more alarming daily, as the effect of the executions seems to be at an end and there is an enthusiasm in defying punishment.4

The British attempt to suppress violence led to the Irish exaltation of those who suffered punishment. It was this exaltation of violence that was to prove so

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agrarian violence, were made liable to death. This law was to have lapsed in 1767, but was prolonged instead and saw the addendum ten years later of a whole list of new and similar misdemeanors as capital offenses. See Lecky, 126-27. Whiteboy disturbances were especially common in the 1760s, with much of the attention being directed at the issue of the tithe rates. Especially in the more remote rural areas, clergymen became the subject of threatened hangings. See ibid., 129, 214-15. A wonderfully vivid story that captures the terror and romance of these kinds of groups is William Carleton’s short story, "Wildgoose Lodge," written much later in the 1850s but showing the author’s familiarity with such experiences. See William Carleton, Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry, 4 vols. (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971). The volumes were originally published in 1853.


4Quoted in Kee, That Most Distressful Country, 59.
consistently bewildering to the British.\textsuperscript{5} Despite attempts to downplay and discredit the rebels, their appeal proved to be impossible to eradicate. Some of this popular support was most certainly a result of British misrule, but the hold that violence had in the popular imagination was profound even in the face of the frequent ineptitude of its adherents.

Men like Emmet, Theobald Wolfe Tone, and the "Manchester Martyrs" were failures by any standard; yet their commitment to violence in the face of overwhelming odds and inevitable defeat led to their enshrinement as heroic figures despite their failure. If anything, their failure helped them to become national saints. Because they took action in an impossible situation, they were seen to be sacrificing themselves for the sake of Ireland.

Part of the British inability to understand the deep appeal of this self-sacrifice was the fact that Britain was not able to appreciate the psychological appeal which it had for Irish Catholics. A modern industrialized society, such as Victorian Britain, found the whole idea of blood sacrifice and martyrdom difficult to grasp. Thus the inherent meaning of violence and sacrifice, which was obvious to Catholic Ireland, remained alien and obscure to

\textsuperscript{5}In fact, the Ribbon Lodges were the prime sources for Fenian recruiting in the 1860s and 1870s. See D. George Boyce, \textit{Nationalism}, 178-79.
the British.6

Because of their religious heritage, the Irish understanding of freedom and victory could be spiritualized as an eternal and ultimate state attainable after death. Only in the realm of the transcendent could the Irish hope for some ultimate beatific experience and vision of freedom. This particularly Catholic understanding of the role of death had precedents back to the Táin and formed a central motif in the Irish mythos. CúChulainn died on behalf of his "homeland" pure, guileless, and morally superior to his conquerors. He was defeated only because, like Jesus Christ, he allowed himself to be. In so doing, CúChulainn, like Jesus, took on the role of the "child-hero redeemer" whose death gains him immortality and redeems those who are to learn from his example. This idea of the martyr dying for Ireland became a central motif in Republican thinking and was certainly to play a critical part in the Easter Rising of 1916.

But the personal motivation for self-sacrifice had to be more compelling than purely abstract or theological reasons. Individuals would sacrifice themselves consciously only on behalf of a cause that was worthy of the ultimate price. What was required, then, was a concept of the nation that struck a chord deep enough in the psyche of the

6See O'Farrell Ireland's English Question, especially chapter one for the differences between Catholic Ireland and Protestant England.
individual to motivate him to consider violence and death as desirable.

Ernest Jones has identified problems in the Irish national identity which might be the source of this kind of concept of the nation. In a 1922 essay "The Island of Ireland: A Psycho-Analytical Contribution to Political Psychology," Jones identified the cause of Ireland's rancor towards Great Britain to the Irish people's peculiar thinking of Ireland as an "island home."?

Jones observed that, almost without fail, island peoples manifested psychological complexes attached to the idea of the "island home" which were "those of woman, virgin mother and womb, all of which fuse in the central complex of the womb of the virgin mother." Isolated and untrammeled, the island has a psychological significance of the mother as virgin. This virgin image is a fundamental constituent in the Oedipal complex of the son who cherishes the fiction of his mother's virginity in order to repudiate his father—the main obstacle in the son's way towards sexual union with the mother.

Jones offers considerable evidence to support this

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8 Ibid., 98.
9 Ibid.
association of the virgin mother and the island in Western thought, finding this theme common in both literature and dreams. Because of the prevalence of the island in fantasy, Jones believes that it is no accident that island peoples tend to see the homeland in feminine terms. Thus he found it no accident that one of Britain's allegorical representations is the feminine figure of Britannia. This is no less true for Ireland which has a host of feminine representations: Caithlin Ni Houlihan, Roisin Dubh (the little black Rose), Shan Van Vocht (Old woman), Dark Rosaleen, and Deirdre of the Sorrows. While it is true that island nations often have masculine representations as well as feminine, Jones's analysis of the Irish tendency to represent Ireland as a woman is consistent with both Irish literature and nationalist thought. There are obvious limitations to the Jones thesis, not the least of which are the numerous cases where the masculine image has been used to represent island nations. But Jones's analysis of Ireland seems to be borne out by the nearly exclusive use of feminine allegory in Irish nationalist literature.

The tradition of feminine representation in Irish mythology dates from the Táin and pre-Norman Ireland, but it can most clearly be seen in the Gaelic poetry of the

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10Ibid., 98-99.
11Ibid., 99.
12Ibid., 102.
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The peculiar combination of erotic attraction to the suppressed nation in female form can be seen in the first three verses of the poem "The Redeemer's Son" by the poet Aogan O'Rathaille (1675-1729).

A Bitter vision I beheld
   in bed as I lay weary:
a maiden whose name was Eire
   coming toward me riding
with eyes of green hair curled and thick,
   fair her waist and brows,
declaring he was on his way
   -- her loved one Mac an Cheannai.
Her mouth so sweet, her voice so mild,
   I love her maiden dearly,
Wife to Brian, acclaimed of heroes
   -- her troubles are my ruin!
Crushed cruelly under alien flails
   my fair-haired slim kinswoman:
She's a dried branch that pleasant queen,
till he come, her Mac an Cheannai.

Hundreds hurt for love of her.
   -- her smooth skin -- in soft passion:
kingly children, sons of Mile,
   champions, wrathful dragons.
Her face, her countenance, is dead,
   in weariness declining
and nowhere is there relief,
till he come, her Mac an Cheannai.13

The famous Irish nationalist song, "The Little Black Rose," was taken from an anonymous folk poem of the late eighteenth century entitled "Roisin Dubh." The last two verses capture the idea that, at least for the individual, redemption can come out of service to Ireland.

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If I had six horses I would plough against the hill --
I'd make Roisin Dubh my Gospel in the middle of Mass --
I'd kiss the young girl who would grant me her maidenhead
and do deed behind the lios with my Roisin Dubh!

The Erne will be strong in flood, the hills be torn,
the ocean be all red waves, the sky all blood
every mountain valley and bog in Ireland will shake
one day, before she shall perish, my Roisin Dubh.14

The tendency toward feminine allegory was one that was
heavily emphasized by the artists of the Young Ireland
movement of the 1840s. The Young Irelanders were precursors
to the Revivalists in attempting to use old Gaelic themes as
the basis of a nationalist literary revival. The writing of
such men as Thomas Davis (1814-1845) and James Clarence
Mangan (1803-1849) later proved to be very influential for
the Gaelic League writers of Pearse's era.15 Mangan's most
famous poem, "Dark Rosaleen," has all of the themes that
Jones emphasized in his analysis of Ireland's "island-home"
mentality. Ireland is cast not only in the figure of Dark
Rosaleen but also as a virgin whose cause demands violent
action as confirmation of one's devotion.

"Dark Rosaleen"

O my Dark Rosaleen,
Do not sigh, do not weep!
The priests are on the ocean green,
They march along the Deep.
There's wine . . . from the royal Pope
Upon the ocean green;
And Spanish ale shall give you hope,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!

14 Ibid., 308.

15 Thompson, Imagination of an Insurrection, 38.
Shall glad your heart, shall give you hope,
Shall give you health, and help, and hope
My Dark Rosaleen.

Over hills and through dales
Have I roamed for your sake;
All yesterday I sailed with sails
On river and on lake.
The Erne . . . at its highest flood
I dashed across unseen,
For there was lightning in my blood,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!
Oh! there was lightning in my blood,
Red lightning lightened through my blood,
My Dark Rosaleen!

All day long in unrest
To and fro do I move,
The very soul within my breast
Is wasted for you, love!
The heart . . . in my bosom faints
To think of you, my Queen,
My life of life, my saint of saints,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!
To hear your sweet and sad complaints,
My life, my love, my saint of saints,
My Dark Rosaleen!

Woe and pain, pain and woe,
Are my lot night and noon,
To see your bright face clouded so,
Like to the mournful moon.
But yet . . . will I rear your throne
Again in golden sheen;
‘Tis you shall reign, shall reign alone,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!
‘Tis you shall have the golden throne,
‘Tis you shall reign, and reign alone,
My Dark Rosaleen!

Over dews, over sands
Will I fly for your weal;
Your holy delicate white hands
Shall girdle me with steel.
At home . . . in your emerald bowers,
From morning’s dawn till e’en,
You’ll pray for me, my flower of flowers,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!
You’ll think of me through Daylight’s hours,
My virgin flower, my flower of flowers,
   My Dark Rosaleen!

I could scale the blue air,
   I could plough the high hills,
Oh, I could kneel all night in prayer,
   To heal your many ills
And one . . . beamy smile from you
   Would float like light between
My toils and me, my own, my true,
   My Dark Rosaleen!
   My fond Rosaleen!
Would give me life and soul anew,
A second life, a soul anew,
   My Dark Rosaleen!

O! the Erne shall run red,
   With redundance of blood,
The earth shall rock beneath our tread,
   And flames wrap hill and wood,
And gun-peal, and slogan cry,
   Wake many a glen serene,
Ere you shall fade, ere you shall die,
   My Dark Rosaleen!
   My own Rosaleen!
The Judgement Hour must first be nigh,
Ere you fade, ere you die,
   My Dark Rosaleen!16

Even the more conservative poets of the same generation as
Mangan succumbed to the feminine allegory for the nation.

Sir Aubrey De Vere (1814-1902) was an intimate friend of
Tennyson, Carlyle, and Wordsworth, and his work betrays the
influence of the British Romantic poets, as well as the
medieval eroticism which was later used to great effect in
the poetry of Patrick Pearse and Joseph Plunkett.

"Song"

The little Black Rose shall be red at last!
   What made it black but the East wind dry,

16Brendan Kennelly, ed., The Penguin Book of Irish
And the tear of the widow that fell on it fast?
   It shall redden the hills when June is nigh!

The Silk of the Kine shall rest at last!
   What drove her forth but the dragon-fly?
In the golden vale she shall feed full fast
   With her mild gold horn, and her slow dark eye.

The wounded wood-dove lies dead at last:
   The pine long-bleeding, it shall not die!
   -- This song is secret. Mine ear it pass'd
   In a wind o'er the stone plain of Athenry.\textsuperscript{17}

By the late nineteenth century the allegorical use of the feminine figure had become established as a literary convention in nationalist thought. Fanny Parnell (1854-1882), a sister of Charles Stewart Parnell, spoke of Ireland as being feminine in her poem "After Death." In the last verse, speaking of the future, Parnell sees her country glorified after a war of liberation.

'Let me join with you the jubilant procession,
   Let me chant with you her story;
Then, contended, I shall go back to the shamrocks,
   Now mine eyes have seen her glory.'\textsuperscript{18}

Yeats wrote a play, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, that had as its protagonist an old woman cast as the spirit of Ireland. This woman draws young men to her—men who abandon all for her, including their brides on their wedding nights. These themes of femininity, violation, violence, and redemption become the central themes of the major poets of the Easter Rising.

These themes were not limited to literary works.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 218.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 277.
Popular nationalist songs from the sixteenth century on have resorted to the same imagery. A popular song of the late eighteenth century had as a chorus:

Midst danger, wounds and slaughter,  
Erin's green fields its soil shall be, 
Her tyrants' blood its water.19 

The extent to which the imagery had been accepted in the popular culture can be seen in the plays of Seán O'Casey. A sometimes bitter critic of the revolutionary tradition and a socialist, O'Casey is known for his dramatic verisimilitude. He employed the colloquial language of his period and invariably his characters described Ireland as an oppressed female.

This image of Ireland's national spirit as a woman calling her sons to fight in her behalf has played a direct role in making violence endemic to Irish national politics. Many men have become national heroes, even though their real accomplishments were negligible, because of their commitment to violence. Failure to align oneself with the politics of violence, no matter how reasonable the objections to its use, has cost some of Ireland's greatest politicians wholehearted admiration from Irish posterity. The degree to which violence has become the standard of political validation can be clearly illustrated through a comparison of the reputations of the two most important Irish politicians of the nineteenth century.

19Quoted in Kee, That Most Distressful Country, 145.
In 1829 Daniel O’Connell was the best known, most powerful, and most popular man in Ireland. Through his tactics of extra-Parliamentary agitation, he had won the most important constitutional victory of his day—the emancipation of Catholic voters. This victory led not only to a seat in Parliament but also to leadership of a substantial bloc of M. P.s with which O’Connell could pursue his next great crusade, the Repeal of the Act of Union between England and Ireland. Nonetheless, the crusade for Repeal was to fail disastrously, despite O’Connell’s successful mobilization of even greater agitation than that which had developed in support of Emancipation.

The major reason why Emancipation succeeded where Repeal failed was because, in the first case, the Government did not challenge O’Connell’s implied willingness to unleash the forces of violence. The perception that O’Connell was willing to side with the physical-force nationalists brought out even greater numbers to clamor for Repeal. In 1843, "Monster" Repeal rallies of upwards of three-quarters of a million people encouraged O’Connell to emphasize violence even more than he had during the Emancipation campaign. In October, however, when the greatest rally of them all was planned to take place at Clontarf, the Government called his bluff. Believing that he faced determined and armed

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Government opposition to the Clontarf meeting, O’Connell called it off. The net result was massive disaffection from the cause, as well as the eventual diminution of O’Connell’s power. The critical difference between the two campaigns was the belief in Britain that, if O’Connell was not given Emancipation, the forces of revolution would be let loose; in the Repeal campaign, the Government never considered giving in. Instead, it chose to force O’Connell’s hand, and he backed down. At the time his withdrawal was the wisest decision, and massive public support railed to O’Connell as a result, even from some of the most radical elements in the Repeal movement. But although he was to remain the most important Irish politician of his day, his voice never enjoyed the kind of following that it had had before the debacle at Clontarf. O’Connell’s choice not to confront the Government directly on the battlefield led to the fragmentation of his support and the disaffection of the Young Ireland nationalists who argued for a more aggressive course in the fight for Repeal. This dissatisfaction led the Young Irelanders to act in a disastrous rising in 1848 which assured their place in the nationalist mythos.

Charles Stewart Parnell was to fight for an equally elusive political prize after his takeover of the Irish Nationalists in Parliament in 1878. Parnell’s rapid ascent to leadership of the Irish party took place in a period of

\[21\text{Kee, } \textit{That Most Distressful Country}, 240-55.\]
extensive agrarian violence. The poor state of Irish agriculture in the 1870s had led to increasingly widespread outbreaks of "Ribbonism," with houseburnings, animal mutilations, and retributive attacks on landlords. The chaotic rural situation was manipulated brilliantly by Parnell who indicated his vague support for the violent tactics. With his position on violence seemingly made clear, he sought, through parliamentary obstruction on the floor of the House of Commons, to bring pressure on the Government on behalf of Home Rule for Ireland. Despite many setbacks, Parnell's threat of massive violence as a consequence of the failure to win Home Rule united nationalist support behind him; and throughout the 1870s and 1880s, he used the agitation over the land issue to great political advantage.  

Parnell lost the North Kilkenny by-election, and this defeat was followed by two more electoral defeats that marked these campaigns as Parnell's last hurrah. Setting aside the issue of his loss of political control, these campaigns were still critically important because Parnell,  

Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 261-80 passim.
out of desperation, made an appeal of the "hillside men" (the IRB), indicating that if Home Rule were not eventually granted, he would be forced to endorse their violent political tactics. This appeal failed to win him the elections in question, and the defeats, in addition to the public revelation of involvement in an adulterous relationship with a married woman, Kitty O’Shea, led to his fall from power. Within a year of his departure from the political scene, Parnell died a disgrace to many of his countrymen.

Because his career ended abruptly and because the appeal of the "hillside men" never was to be tested, the debate on how committed Parnell was about using force is moot. F. S. L. Lyons, his leading biographer, believes that Parnell’s appeal to the "hillside men" was just another one of his brilliant tactical moves that unfortunately failed.

But Parnell’s threatened use of violence, because it survived unchallenged, allowed him to be enshrined in the nationalist pantheon in ways that were denied to O’Connell.

Parnell has become a martyr for Ireland because he professed a willingness to side with the revolutionary tradition of violence. In Ireland, opinions held for or against him became a litmus test of one’s political

23Freeman’s Journal, 22 December 1890.

ideology. Because he was perceived to have been better than his peers, Parnell was seen as having succumbed to his enemies only as a result of their treachery. Because many people believed that he was betrayed by his party and the Church, his motivations and tactics remained unquestioned by die-hard nationalists. For the generation of 1916, Parnell was to remain the pivotal figure in the determination of one's political allegiances.

Acceptance of the myth of Parnell's fall also meant an acceptance of his tactics, and the myth continued despite the fact that he had failed to deliver Home Rule. By any standard O'Connell was a far more successful politician—Parnell won nothing nearly so significant as Catholic Emancipation. What established Parnell as a mythic figure was the nature and means of his failure, the self-destructive consequences of his relationship with Mrs. O'Shea, and his betrayal at the hands of the Irish Church. More than anything else, Parnell became a mythic figure because he was willing to resort to violence. His enduring fame has had little to do with his success or lack of it. What he had that O'Connell had not were the credentials of an Irish nationalist martyr. Herbert Howarth has commented on the making of Parnell's martyrdom:

The Irish committed the crucial act of killing their prophet, and the guilt, the desire to purify the guilt, the belief that his gift sanctified, the belief that
sacrifice assures rebirth, gave them irresistible vigour in the next generation.\(^{25}\n
Parnell's popular appeal has actually less importance than the way he legitimated revolutionary violence for the public. It marked him as the only "unfallen" parliamentarian in Irish history--without sin because he had never refuted outright the use of violence. Because he did not shrink from the politics of violence, he gave its usage more authority and credibility than it had ever had before.

Howarth's statement about Parnell is highly significant for its linking together of his advocacy of violence and the problem of guilt. Brigid Brophy has identified guilt as a critical factor in the appeal of violence on behalf of one's country.\(^ {26}\) She believes that it is guilt that motivates men towards this kind of violence out of a sense of obligation to their country or a leader.\(^ {27}\) The appeal of any kind of real gain from the exercise of violence--freedom, for example--is impotent in comparison to the overwhelming power of guilt.\(^ {28}\) Brophy maintains that guilt, as with all motivations, is not one-sided; while failure to meet an obligation might appear to be the source

\(^{25}\text{Herbert Howarth, The Irish Writers 1880-1890 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), 4-5.}\n
\(^{26}\text{Brigid Brophy, Black Ship to Hell (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1952).}\n
\(^{27}\text{Ibid., 39.}\n
\(^{28}\text{Ibid.}\)
of guilt, in reality the soldier's personal Oedipal conflict, and the guilt that it invariably brings upon the child who wishes his father out of the way, is the source of all guilt. Brophy thinks all men share this deep sense of guilt; thus, the appeal of patriotism is universal because it taps a giant reservoir of human emotions and psychological needs.

Brophy maintains that equally powerful is the sense of inadequacy that a child feels before a seemingly omnipotent father. Because the male child knows he is guilty of wishing his father's death, he fears the possible retribution which he believes might have befallen the women around him—castration. To compensate for his fear of this fate, he begins to see that perhaps a woman's lot in life is not so bad and that it could even be desirable. Along with his emotional compensation goes a certain fascination with the female sense of sexual pleasure, and he begins to speculate what it would be like to experience it in a similar way. Brophy maintains that combat would be intolerable without making its results, the possible penetration of one's own body, attractive; thus, the attraction of violence lies in one's potential homoerotic experience of penetration.²⁹

To many Irishmen, whose culture and country seem to have been effectively castrated by another country, the

²⁹Ibid., 49.
allure of retributive violence on Ireland's behalf could be strong. Because Ireland happens to be an island, whose indigenous culture has been conquered and supplanted by another, the representation of Ireland in the mind of some of its people happened to reflect their subconscious feelings about it as a womb; Ireland's conquest has often been represented in nationalistic thinking as being both a literal and an allegorical rape/castration by Britain.

But the odds against any kind of real victory over Ireland's oppressor were overwhelmingly unfavorable, a reality which could not rationally be denied, as Ireland was but a fraction as strong as England. Even though Ireland's spirit and cause were obviously justified, the chances that her oppressor could be overcome were minimal. The problem was that the inevitability of failure did nothing to halt the psychological imperative to go forth. The only answer was to win the conflict on a cosmic level above the plane of certain defeat. In that way, the actual outcome of the conflict was inevitable, whatever the setbacks in the political struggle. By making the conflict between Britain and Ireland a transcendent one, failure could become success, ineptitude and folly could become virtues, and the shedding of one's blood could be both an act of atonement and a testimony of one's faithfulness. This transformation of failure was critically necessary to the Irish in the face of their inability to do their duty and right the wrong done
to their country.30

On a less cosmic level, violence can serve to attest to the moral legitimacy of one’s cause. Not only is violence an attempt to deny one’s helplessness, but it also serves to ease the individual’s guilt. Instead of accepting the reality of inadequacy before the father, one seeks to overcome him by drawing from him the violence that justifies violence as a response. Because the weapons of death happen to be those which are able to pierce the body, violence can fulfill the human desire for sexual penetration and union. Death can thus be eroticized into a desirable experience which has the potential to beautify the individual, and it allows in death what has been denied and repressed in life—union with one’s sexual object.

The process of eroticization makes death something which can be desired legitimately on its own. In death, failure and forbidden fruit are both transformed into timeless and acceptable things; consequently, the seeming reversal of categories that exists throughout in the Irish tradition of nationalist violence, where it is sufferers and failures who end up being glorified, is rectified. In this process, the sufferer as winner is no longer a contradiction—his work has been completed in death. For the failure

30 Since service in behalf of the cause of Irish freedom has almost always led to defeat and death, one must ask to what extent choosing the politics of violence within the Irish context represents a suicidal choice. For more on this subject see chapter 8 below.
who goes to the gallows or to the torture chamber, the victory has been won beyond the constraints of reality. Because victory is ultimately assured, violence can become a creative act that accomplishes in dying what cannot be accomplished in life.

In the eroticization of death which marks the Irish Republican tradition, the critical factor is the self-conscious courtship of violence and self-destruction. Parnell's relationship with a married woman is too obvious an example to be ignored as a manifestation of his courtship of failure. It had to be clear to Parnell, whose political instincts were superb, that the public disclosure of his relationship with Mrs. O'Shea could ruin his career. His death only a short time after he fell from power because of his liaison with Mrs. O'Shea had elements of being a subintentioned suicide. It is unlikely that a society such as Ireland could have begun to see Parnell as a heroic figure unless he had in some way effected his destruction, or seemed to have done so. In the Irish nationalist cosmology, accidental death and natural death have been insufficient causes for the making of heroes.

The extent to which this tradition of eroticized and spiritualized violence has been passed on is remarkable. The so-called "Manchester Marytrs" of 1867, three men who botched the rescue of two Fenians from prison, were hanged

31F. S. L. Lyons, Parnell, 596-603.
for the killing of a policeman in the attempt, and they became heroic models for the republicans after them. A mock funeral, held in their honor in Dublin’s Glasnevin Cemetery, drew upwards of 60,000 people. T. D. Sullivan took Michael Larkin’s last speech from the dock and made it into a popular song:

... "God save Ireland," said they all
"Whether on the scaffold high, or the battlefield we die,
Oh, what matter when for Erin dear we fall?"

Although Sullivan’s lyrics bungled Larkin’s actual speech, these verses soon became the rebel song that was identified with the IRB for the next generation to follow. Ironically Sullivan had been on the leading figures in the moral-force camp which had heavily criticized the advocates of violence. Once again the execution of Irishmen committed to the use of violent means overcame ideological differences between groups which normally had widely antagonistic points of view. More important still was the precedent that the song set for the usually inept Fenians. Malcolm Brown has commented that Sullivan’s song "... threw a shadow of the death mystique over the whole Fenian movement, subduing its [heretofore] cheerful activism under a lugubrious pall."

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32 Malcolm Brown, Politics of Irish Literature, 211.
33 Ibid., 212
34 Ibid.
35 Brown makes an interesting observation when he claims that Sullivan’s family was interested in necrology. See
The raising of the Fenians' failures to the level of myth meant that both they and their methods became fixed in a large segment of the Irish public mind as ends that were worthy of pursuit. This widespread acceptance occurred at the same time that the republican nationalists accepted failures as legitimate forms of victory within their ideological cosmology.

Brown is correct when he says that, until the "Manchester Martyrs," the IRB had been pragmatic when it came to the use of force and that the Fenians had not generally been susceptible to the "lost cause" mystique which had grown around people like Tone and Emmet. But the IRB exploited the mystique of the lost cause when it was to their advantage; they not only came to believe in it but also based their recruitment on it. The lost cause gave moral validity to the IRB's tactics and served as an ennobling explanation for their defeats and their tactics.

Not long after the deaths of the "Manchester Martyrs" factions of the IRB split off into purely terrorist organizations whose goals were ill-defined except in using violence for its own sake. For example, on May 6 1882, the most famous assassinations in Irish history took place in Phoenix Park when several artisans slashed to death in broad daylight both the Chief Secretary and Undersecretary for

ibid., Politics, 213.

36Ibid., 241-42.
Ireland. The organization claiming responsibility for the murders was a new group calling itself the Invincibles.\textsuperscript{37} The Invincibles soon disappeared under criminal prosecution, but their existence, along with the tactics they employed, set a precedent. After the Invincibles, Irish nationalism came to resemble violent anarchist movements in Europe, which used terrorist violence as a legitimate expression of political dissension.

This merger of life and death in the Irish revolutionary tradition was to reach its highest artistic articulation in the poetry of the Easter rebels of 1916. Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Mary Plunkett, both of whom were bona fide poets of some ability, wrote of death in the service of Ireland as the source of life. Pearse’s work has ultimately had the greatest influence of the Rising poets and will be discussed in some detail later, but Plunkett and MacDonagh’s work merits consideration as expressions of the eroticization of death which had captured much of the Irish republican imagination in the twentieth century.

A wiry and highly eccentric man, Plunkett carried the erotic image of death to near-hysterical heights in his poetic works. At times his writing was loaded with allegories of love, death, and mystical union with God. One of Plunkett’s earlier poems, "I See His Blood Upon the

"I See His Blood Upon the Rose"

I see his blood upon the rose
And in the stars the glory of his eyes,
His body gleams amid eternal snows,
His tears fall from the skies.

I see his face in every flower;
The thunder and the singing of the birds
Are but his voice—and carven by his power
Rocks are his written words.

All pathways by his feet are worn,
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,
His cross is every tree.  

Plunkett identified the source of his inspiration as the Fenians of 1867. The Irish people's rejection of the Fenians, as well as the disastrous Fenian failure in the Rising of 1867, was, to Plunkett, akin to the trials and humiliations of Christ. In Plunkett's mind, it was the Fenians' sacrifice that had to be the source of the revolutionary vision which guided the rebels. The Fenians' failure gave life to him and his fellow revolutionaries.

"1867"

All our best ye have branded
When the people were choosing them,
When 'twas Death they demanded
Ye laughed! Ye were losing them.
But the blood that ye spilt in the night
Crieth loudly to God,
And their name hath the strength and the might
Of a sword for the sod.

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In the days of our doom and our dread
Ye were cruel and callous,
Grim Death with our fighters ye fed
Through the jaws of the gallows;
But a blasting and blight was the fee
For which ye had bartered them,
And we smite with the sword that from ye
We had gained when ye martyred them!\(^\text{39}\)

To Plunkett, the tradition was life-giving and it was
sustained by the deaths of those who died serving it. Thus
the failure of the Fenians was the source of the successful
passing on of the tradition to later generations because the
death of its martyrs had occurred in service to the holy
cause. This was to be the theme that Patrick Pearse pursued
in his speeches and in his writing throughout 1915 and early
1916. Nonetheless Plunkett’s was to be the voice that
raised the cause and made it not only a religious faith but
also made Ireland’s freedom an object of sexual desire.
Unattainable in life, it could only be had in death, through
the union of its adherents with the idea of the nation in an
allegory of sexual abandonment. Plunkett identified the
driving force in Irish republicanism as a sexual one.

"The Little Black Rose Shall Be Red at Last

Because we share our sorrows and our joys
And all your dear and intimate thoughts are mine
We shall not fear the trumpets and the noise
Of battle, for we know our dreams divine,
And when my heart is pillowed on your heart
And ebb and flowing of their passionate flood
Shall beat in concord love through every part
Of brain and body—when at last the blood
O’erleaps the final barrier to find
Only one source wherein to spend its strength.

\(^\text{39}\)Ibid., 198.
And we two lovers, long but one in mind
And soul, are made one only flesh at length;
Praise God if this my blood fulfills the doom
When you, dark rose, shall redden into bloom.40

Plunkett's vision of his body's blood passing into the soil of Ireland is an erotic one which equates his blood with life-producing semen, impregnating the flesh of a female Ireland.

Desmond Ryan has claimed that Plunkett was deeply affected by his enthusiastic study of the Christian mystical poets such as Tauler and St. John of the Cross.41 If that is so, and Plunkett's imagery seems to confirm it, then his poetry was another expression of a proud tradition in Christian mysticism which has traditionally used the allegory of sexual union in describing death and has looked at sexual orgasm as a metaphor for spiritual revelation. Thompson has recognized this fact and says that Plunkett's personal problem was not whether he articulated a respectable mystical tradition but rather his desire to live out a mystical vision in his life.42 No doubt Plunkett's health played a great part in this. By 1916 he was dying from consumption; but there is a sense in which Plunkett had, by 1916, already lived a life of adventure, seeking the experience he had written about.

40Ibid., 201.
41Desmond Ryan quoted in Thompson, Imagination, 134.
42Ibid., 138.
Thomas MacDonagh, who in retrospect appears to have had the most artistic potential of the Easter Rising poets, was less obsessed with the theme of death than either Plunkett or Pearse. But Thompson believes that MacDonagh’s work is highly significant because it expresses the voice of the second-rate melancholic, whose artistic inability to express his pedestrian feelings led him to despair, then to revolution. He also believes that all three of the Easter Rising Poets were incapable of sustaining an original vision in their work, and the realization of that failure led them to despair and to consider living out a vision which their poetic voices were incapable of articulating. If so, that sense of failure led MacDonagh to consider death as a way of expressing what he could not express in his poetry. He recreated the image of the holy prophet who speaks a truth that is not recognized in his own land but who will one day see it triumph over all opposition.

"The Poet Saint"

Sphere thee in Confidence
Singing God’s Word
Led by His Providence,
Grit with his Sword;

Bartering all for Faith,
Following e’er
That others deem a wraith,
Fleeting and fair.

44Ibid., 135-39.
"Walk thou no ample way  
Wisdom do the mark;  
Seek thou where Folly's day  
Setteth to dark.

"Darkness in Clarity  
Wisdom doth find,  
Folly in Charity  
Doubting the Kind,

"Folly in Piety,  
Folly in Trust,  
Heav'n in Satiety,  
Death in Death's dust.

"Though from the dust shalt rise  
Over all Fame,  
Angels of Paradise  
Singing thy name."45

It would be far simpler to look at this process of the eroticization of death after the Easter 1916 Rising through an analysis of the development of the Irish Republican Army. A link had been established, in the person of Thomas Clarke, between the future rebels who came out in 1916 and the republican tradition of violence. Clarke had been sentenced to life imprisonment in the early 1880s for his role in one of the Fenians' dynamite campaigns used to terrorize the British, only to be released in 1898 in a general amnesty marking Tone's rising a century earlier.46 He went to America and continued to work for the IRB. Inspired anew, Clarke returned to Ireland in 1907 and brought with him the peculiarly single-minded mentality and faith of the political exile. He thus not only represented the most

45Ryan, Poets of 1916, 146.
46Kee, Bold Fenian Men, 129.
destructive forces at work in Irish nationalism but also served to bring the tradition, replete with its mythic foundations, to a new generation.

With the Rising all these strands were to come together in Patrick Pearse. His conscious equation of Ireland's cause with a holy crusade, along with his stress on the emotional, sexual, and psychic resolution open to those who chose to fight in behalf of that cause, coalesced the various forced at work in the physical-force movement of his day. The legacy he left behind him was soon to become that which carried the tradition onwards for generations after his death. Pearse sanctified physical-force nationalism, and in doing so his life work became a part of the tradition of Irish nationalist violence that had been bestowed upon him by Clarke. Pearse succeeded far beyond what anyone could have expected, and in the process made violence and death deeply moving spiritual experiences which had the potential to free not only Ireland but human beings as well. For the IRB and, as we shall see, for Pearse also, death became the medium of personal and national redemption with eschatological and apocalyptic implications.
CHAPTER V
PEARSE 1900-1912: THE MAKING OF A NATIONAL HERO

Journalist and Educator

James Pearse's death in 1900 presented Patrick both with a dilemma and an opportunity. The question of his career loomed before him, all the more complicated by his family's decision to have him run the business.¹ That obligation, however, concealed a hidden blessing, for the estate of James Pearse was considerable and offered security against Patrick's need to find an independent niche in life. The family business was thriving, and at James's death his was the largest firm of its type in the city.² The firm's need of Patrick's attention would allow him to forego any firm commitment to a career and to indulge his pet pastimes of Gaelic and writing. What could not have been foreseen was the effect that this moratorium would have on his life; not only did it allow Patrick to follow his interests, it had the additional effect of further stalling his search for an autonomous identity. As a result, Pearse was led to desperate attempts to forge that identity and ultimately to

¹Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 46.
²Ibid., 48.

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an overwhelming need for action as a way of garnering approval and acceptance.

His father's estate was of a healthy size, valued at £1,470.17s.6d, but most of it was tied up in the business. While Patrick had little artistic skill, Willie had shown some talent, and in 1900 he was about to embark on his last year at the Metropolitan School of Art. Because of the likelihood that Willie would eventually assume leadership of the firm, the family decided that Patrick should take over the business until Willie finished his studies abroad. At the time there was every expectation that Patrick would mind the store while pursuing his legal education and career, but his changing of the firm's title from "James Pearse" to "Pearse and Sons" might have signified that Patrick was more interested in actual participation than he had originally indicated. He started to identify himself in his new commercial capacity as "Patrick H. Pearse, Sculptor."

Although the family mantle had been placed on his shoulders, Patrick did not inherit either his father's business acumen or artistic skills. Patrick had no skill at

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3Public Record Office of Ireland, Doblin, Calendar of Wills and Probate.

4Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 46.

5McCay, Patrick Pearse, 18.

6Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 46.

7Ibid.
the stonecarver's craft and his adoption of the title "Sculptor" was most fanciful. One must wonder if the family settlement was agreeable to all parties involved, but it is unlikely, given Willie's subservience to Patrick and the devotion of the women of the family, that any conscious disagreement took place. Actually, Willie was the de facto inheritor of his father's skill, an interesting potential source of conflict between Willie and Patrick. The prospective dependence of the family on the business should have caused some concern as Willie was experiencing academic difficulties, barely passing his preparatory examination and failing two subjects as well.

In more than one sense, the continued relationship between Patrick and his family was disturbing. While living in Dublin at this time was not inexpensive, it was the very time of Patrick's life when he should have been moving away from his family. Instead of asserting some kind of independence, he was being redrawn into his family, away from the possibility of meeting and knowing others--away from autonomy. His enthusiastic acceptance of these developments indicates how unable he was to put distance between himself and his ever-protective relatives. Encouraged to depend on them, he foreclosed any opportunity to depend on others.

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8 See Appendix.
9 Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, 16.
Not coincidentally, he and Willie became even more inseparable at this time. The business was now being looked upon as another joint production of theirs. They took vacations together, studied Gaelic together, and exchanged confidences. There are reports that when they spoke to each other, they often did so in a kind of infantile baby talk. As Edwards has pointed out, they seemed oblivious to the fact that this proved disturbing to others who found that image hard to reconcile with the tediously grave Pearse whom they usually saw.10

Patrick went back to university to further his legal studies, and he continued his heavy involvement in the Gaelic League. In June 1901, he took his finals and passed them both, while taking a degree in modern languages and law. Once again, his results were respectable, though hardly outstanding, with a second-class honors.11

Immediately upon graduation Pearse started to show how little enthusiasm he had for his prospective career as a barrister; yet he was proud of his title.12 Despite his dislike of the law, he had his name recorded on Gaelic League memoranda and publications as "Patrick Pearse, B.A. B.L.," thus exposing the love of titles which followed him

10Ibid., 46.
11Porter, P. H. Pearse, 40.
12Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 47.
the rest of his life.\textsuperscript{13}

He continued to teach Irish classes for University College. The family firm was doing well and its continued success mitigated his need to mind it very closely; Pearse therefore chose to pursue the one thing about which he was enthusiastic and confident—Gaelic. He had risen quickly in the brief period of his League membership, and he had established himself in Dublin's Gaelic circles with his presence on the Publications Committee.

He parlayed this position to his advantage in 1903. After contributing many articles throughout 1902 to \textit{An Claidheamh Soluis} (the official publication of the Gaelic League), he applied for the job of chief editor of the paper. He got this job in February, 1903, and in the process displayed considerable talent in lobbying for support on his behalf.\textsuperscript{14} By getting the editorship of the paper, he had won the use of an important organ for continuing to concentrate on his love of Irish literature. Now he could get paid to do what he had been best at in his youth—fantasizing about the Irish past. His successful landing of the editorship seems a little out of character until one remembers the somewhat esoteric interests he had and what a small world the Gaelic League really was. When he was interested in something, Pearse could demonstrate

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 48.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 58-63.}
social skills one would never have thought he possessed, and his gifts in Irish were considerable, although he had somewhat prematurely come to regard himself as an authority. His early writings reveal that he viewed himself to be a valuable addition to the field, confident in his interpretative positions on the various language and literary controversies that swirled through the Cultural Revival at that time.

Before being chosen to edit An Claidheamh Soluis, he had gone on assignment to the Gaeltacht in Connaught to write what was to become a ten-part series on the remnants of native traditional Irish life. He wrote about the Irish peasants' way of life with no hint of understanding the difficult hardships which they had to endure. He grossly idealized the family with whom he stayed, representing them as examples of pure Gaelic life, finding it incomprehensible why these kinds of people were choosing to emigrate from the West of Ireland. His attitude about emigration indicates his inability to empathize with the hardships which caused these people to leave land which had been in their families for years. Later, he was to write that the emigrant "... is a traitor to the Irish State ... ."16

This lack of insight characterized the way Pearse looked at those around him; although he could be sympathetic

15Ibid., 52.

16An Claidheamh Soluis 18 July 1903.
and often displayed kindness towards others, there is little
to indicate that he ever had any sense of empathy towards
them. Even though he would always leap to the defense of
others who seemed to be unjustly treated,\textsuperscript{17} he remained
isolated and apart from people's everyday needs. He was, if
anything, vain and self-righteous. He worked compulsively,
neither smoked nor drank, and strongly disapproved of
swearing.\textsuperscript{18} All in all Pearse was a most intolerant and
unsympathetic young man. His priggishness, combined with
his inability to communicate empathy, might account for his
singleminded sense of himself and his future that many of
his early acquaintances remembered as his most distinctive
characteristic.\textsuperscript{19}

Part of Pearse's vanity and egotism was obviously
attributable to his basic social inadequacy: the self-
righteousness and intolerance were a mask to hide his sense
of inferiority. The other part was a result of having to
operate with all of his emotional deficiencies in a world of
adults. In the case of his campaign to get the editor's job
at An Claidheamh Soluis, he demonstrated an ability to move
in adult circles. But his inadequacies really outweighed
his abilities, and the rewards of the adult world were not
\textsuperscript{17}Mary Brigid Pearse, \textit{Home-Life}, 59.
\textsuperscript{18}Edwards, \textit{Patrick Pearse}, 24.
\textsuperscript{19}Patrick Pearse Papers, Letter from Mary Hayden to
Pearse, n.d.
so readily forthcoming and fulfilling as those at home had
been in childhood. In the seemingly unconditional love of
his mother, approval had come readily and steadily. Even
though he was making a name for himself through his work on
the paper, he was forced to confront the issue of his lack
of maturity.

His immaturity was never more obvious than in the
early days of his editorship. He immediately undertook an
expansion of An Claidheamh Soluis with no consideration of
the possible ramifications of failure. After expansion, the
paper was published at a loss and Pearse had to return it to
its original size.\(^{20}\) Edwards is correct in identifying this
episode as very important in helping us understand Pearse’s
psychological make-up.\(^{21}\) He approached the job at the paper
with great expectations that could never have been
realistically fulfilled, and the subsequent failure of the
enterprise left Pearse distraught and puzzled. He thought
that whatever he wished could be, and should be,
accomplished. He blamed the failure of the paper’s
expansion on the smallness of others who were not half so
committed as he.\(^{22}\)

As head of An Claidheamh Soluis, Pearse was asked to
contribute on an impressive variety of topics, most of which

\(^{20}\) Edwards, \textit{Patrick Pearse}, 68.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 67-68.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
centered on one or another of the endless and esoteric controversies surrounding the Gaelic League. To someone of Pearse's background these topics were ideal; having spent a whole childhood thinking about Gaelic Ireland, he considered himself an authority on anything that pertained to the subject. From the very first issue he set out to tell the readership, all of whom were already devoted disciples of the Irish language, where the truth lay and what their own allegiances should be.

In Pearse's thinking, the Irish language was everything. From it sprang Irish life, customs, and the peculiarly "Irish" world view, and Pearse accordingly equated the language movement with the national movement.

When Ireland's language is established, her own distinctive culture is assured . . . . All phases of a nation's life will most assuredly adjust themselves on national lines as best suited to the national character once that national character is safeguarded by its strongest bulwark [i.e., the language] . . . .

To preserve and spread the language then is the single idea of the Gaelic League . . . . We have a task before us that requires self-sacrifice and exertion as heroic as any nation ever put forth . . . . Woe to any Irish man who by his lethargy, his pride, his obstinacy, or his selfish prejudice, allows the moments to pass, or impedes this national work until it is too late.\textsuperscript{23}

Even though Pearse perhaps represented the opinion held by most of his readership, it was not a view held by everyone, and Pearse was immediately challenged by the more broad-minded members of the League.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{23}An Claidheamh Soluis, 27 August 1904.

\textsuperscript{24}Edwards, \textit{Patrick Pearse}, 70-71.
In these circumstances, Pearse was exposed as obviously immature in his espousal of intolerant and naive opinions which allowed little room for disagreement. He quietly yet firmly rejected those who did not support him as being less committed than himself. This kind of intolerance got him into trouble more than once, especially over the issue of political nationalism which Patrick viewed at this time as desirable but not absolutely essential to the cultural revival. Even though he had fallen under the influence of Arthur Griffith's book *The Resurrection of Hungary*, he totally missed the finer constitutional and political details, crediting Griffith with proving that the revival of the Hungarian language was the primary factor in leading to the eventual Hungarian nation. It became readily apparent that the finer points of politics were not his forte.

In almost every way Pearse's editorship was constantly controversial and at best a mixed success. One letter to macNeill, who sat on Coiste Gnothe, the ruling body of the Gaelic League, claimed that Patrick Pearse was going to destroy the paper by his irresponsible actions during what was a critical phase of the Gaelic revival. Pearse's position had placed him in an important role but his

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25 *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 16 June 1904.

narrowmindedness on certain subjects continued to show that he was not the least biased commentator possible in a movement fraught with internecine strife. Yet, in terms of his personal development as a writer, it was a period of great importance since he used *Claidheamh* as an organ for the publication of much of his prose and poetry.

There is evidence that this period of controversy bothered him considerably. He began to see himself as the movement's willing slave who was being battered and abused by those who did not agree with him, even though he was not beneath attacking others. Hyde wrote later about these factional disputes and their effect on the Gaelic League, and he blamed Pearse's editorial work as a typical example of the damage done to the ideals of the cause. The great problem was the League was becoming increasingly powerful, and the growing political involvement of its membership brought the cultural revival into the political spotlight. As the League became politicized, its leadership was forced to take positions on issues not within the usual scope of League interests. Hyde lamented these developments:

> The [Gaelic] League, which was really a delightful body of men and women so long as it was actuated by only one desire, that of restoring the Irish language, began to lose its charm when it became powerful. It was then

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28 Douglas Hyde Memoirs Manuscript, University College Library, Dublin.
worth capturing and people, notoriously Griffith's, set
out to do so.29

The substantial setbacks at An Claidheamh Soluis did
not hinder Pearse's writing, much of which appeared within
its pages, as well as in other publications. Two versions
of folktales, Bruidhean Chaorthainn (The Enchanted Hall of
Rowan-Tree), and Bodach an Chotha Lachtna (The Rustic in the
Drab Boat), were published through his connections with the
Publication Committee of the Gaelic League. These followed
a story for boys that he had pseudonymously written for
Claidheamh in 1905, and several literary commentaries for
the Gaelic Journal while he had still been a student.
Bruidhean is notable in that it revealed Pearse's
prudishness: he bowdlerized the original in order to remove
a lengthy reference to buttocks.30

At this time he say squarely within the conservative
mainstream of the Literary Revival. Since his entire
personal being was tied to the language movement, he looked
askance at people like Synge and Years who were not so
committed to the native sources of literature as he was. He
viewed Years's work as a dead end, against all the best
interests of the national revival that he believed was only
going to be accomplished by the Gaelic League. He believed
that the literature of the so-called "Celtic Twilight

29Hyde Memoirs Manuscript, quoted in Edwards, Patrick
Pearse, 89.
30Porter, P. H. Pearse, 76.
School" was grossly inferior to the modern Gaelic Writers. With amazing hubris he dismissed Yeats, Russell, and others out of hand.

... Do Mr. Yeats and his fellows hold a place in the intellectual present of Ireland comparable to that held, say, by an AutAhair Peadar [Father Peadar O’Leary] or Conan Maol [Patrick O’Shea]? ... The Twilight People will pass with the Anglo-Irish Twilight ... 31

Pearse was not the only critic to misunderstand the art of the Celtic Twilight writers, but his position is highly revealing about his sense of insecurity and inadequacy as an artist.

As Thompson has pointed out in The Imagination of an Insurrection, the artists in the Gaelic wing of the movement could not hold a candle to A. E. Russell, W. B. Yeats or John Millington Synge: their only weapon was to disparage the work of these men. 32 Thompson believes that for Gaelic artists such as Pearse, the storm which followed Synge’s Playboy of the Western World was decisive in discouraging many in the cultural movement. 33 In the middle of performances of the play the largely middle-class audience rioted and forced Yeats to appeal to the police to establish order. Thompson sees in the Playboy riots the "note of desperation and intensity" which reflected an ongoing hardening of opinion against the cultural movement, and

31An Claidheamh Soluis, 10 February 1906.
32See Thompson, Imagination, chaps. 2 and 3.
33Ibid., 73-74.
represented the first indication of support for more concrete forms of nationalist agitation that led to political action. The riots appeared to mark the failure of the cultural movement to achieve its goals. While the cultural movement was led towards politics, its failure led those "poet-patriots" of the future Easter Rising to despair and to take on, in response to their failure as artists, the self-conscious role of political rebel. The problem with applying this thesis to Pearse is that Pearse was not affected by the failure of Synge's work, seeing it as morally repugnant. Pearse's artistic endeavors were of a lesser kind, and he was still idealistic about what Irish art could achieve.

There is a great deal of wisdom in Thompson's analysis, without limiting it to a specific genesis in the Playboy riot of 1907. What can be agree upon is the existence of increasing doubt that cultural revival would be sufficient to produce the desired goal of an Irish nation. Pearse was no less affected by these feelings than anyone else, but he did not opt for immediate immersion in politics. His way was to explore a more readily rewarding arena, one not so open to attack from without and within, and an arena more suited to his abilities than politics. He

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34Ibid., 73.
35Ibid., 74-77.
36An Claidheamh Soluis, 2 September 1907.
started thinking of founding a school which could teach the noble Irish the lessons he had already learned.

Pearse seems to have first thought of the idea of an "Irish-Ireland" school sometime in 1906. In January of that year, Thomas O’Nowlan, a prominent League supporter, had approached Archbishop Walsh of Dublin with the idea of establishing such a school, and he named Pearse as a vice-president of the project. This school never came to life and its failure to do so appears to be related to Pearse’s depression at the end of that year.

Pearse was later to revive the idea of an Irish school by writing the Gaelic scholar Eoin MacNeill about it in the spring of 1908. Though MacNeill approved of Pearse’s ideas, he offered no funds for the proposed school. Pearse had much greater success getting money from other prominent Gaelic Leaguers. His prospectus for the school and some additional campaigning in its behalf paid off, and he bought Cullenswood House in Rathmines to serve as the school’s main building.

When St. Enda’s School opened to seventy pupils in the fall of 1908, it was being run by a headmaster who was no novice in the field of education. He had once taught, and during his tenure at Claidheamh Pearse had frequently

37 Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 111.
38 Ibid., 112.
39 Ibid., 113-14.
written on the subject of education in Ireland. As one might suspect, his motives in founding the school were to seize Irish minds before they could be Anglicized and to teach them in a compassionate environment the "ways" of Ireland. Subconscious motivations, however, also reveal themselves as the reasons why Pearse chose education as a career.

Thompson argues that the period of 1906-1908 was critically important in Pearse's movement towards an acceptance of physical force for national ends. Although Thompson's analysis has merit, the reasoning appears to stretch the evolution of Pearse's thinking on violence beyond chronological limits, dating his conscious acceptance of revolutionary thought too early. One of the critical factors in Thompson's diagnosis is Pearse's sense of artistic failure and inadequacy, but at this time he still seemed optimistic about his career as an artist. Later, when Pearse recognized that the achievements of Yeats and his colleagues were undeniably great, it is possible to say that a sense of failure played a great part in Pearse's outlook.

One reason why Pearse turned to teaching should by now seem axiomatic--his immaturity. In every way Pearse was immature for his age. He had no relationships with women other than female members of his immediate family. He was still painfully shy and uncomfortable with others, and he
had as yet not vision of what he wanted his life to be on a permanent basis. The role of education fulfilled his need to escape the controversies which had besieged him as a journalist and allowed him to inspire people who were less likely to reject him. It allowed him to live in the boy's world of fantasy and dreams.

There is no doubt that Pearse found boys attractive in a physical sense. He wrote much of his prose and poetry to or about them, especially early in his career, and while his theatrical pieces usually concerned adults, the relationships between characters are hopelessly idealized and romantic—as if they were a child's vision of life. It is true, however, that Pearse's writing, often nearly scandalous in its praise of the beauty of boys, was rarely explicitly sexual.⁴⁰

Boys had captured his imagination as early as 1902, when he had written "La Fan Tuath," his ten-part serial for *An Claidheamh Soluis*, where he included in his story an incident where Pearse undressed and shared a bed with a young boy. Edwards is correct in saying that, in the cultural milieu of which Pearse was a part, homosexuality was considered grossly aberrant, even amongst the enlightened.⁴¹ It can also be said with some assurance that Pearse was not consciously aware of his attraction to boys.

⁴⁰Ibid., 52-53.
⁴¹Ibid., 53.
What is important is that he obviously was so attracted. They raised in him feelings of pathos and passion that hitherto seemed to be missing from his personality. Boys readily aroused the very things he could not feel for others. He viewed them as angelic and pure but he also saw them as the potential source of some kind of sensual fulfillment that he longed to feel. No matter what one feels about Pearse, there is universal recognition amongst his biographers that something was unusual here.42 This becomes even more apparent when one realizes that it is extremely unlikely that Pearse ever had a sexual relationship with any woman. The only possible relationship of any kind with a woman was with Eveleen Nichols, a fellow Gaelic Leaguer who in 1909 died while swimming off The Great Blasket Island, off the coast of Kerry. Edwards has surmised that this supposed relationship is likely to have been the fabrication of one of the Pearse hagiographers.43

Women were only ideals to Pearse, who usually portrayed them in his writing as the embodiment of virtue or as a symbol of Ireland. He did write touchingly about mothers, but without any kind of understanding them as sexual creatures or human beings. One of his only women friends, Mary Hayden, a history instructor at University College, went with Patrick on a tour through the Gaeltacht

42 See ibid., 124-67.

43 Ibid., 126.
in January 1903. She was nearly twenty years his senior and no mention was ever made of any kind of relationship between them, although they briefly became intimate friends.\(^{44}\) She later wrote about his total lack of knowledge of women:

Their lower, or even their lighter side, he very little understood. He looked on the purity, the power of self-sacrifice, which is to be found more commonly in women than in men, as something divine. On this side he could understand them, for these qualities were strong in his own nature. Anything disgusted him; from a doubtful story or subject he shrank as from a blow . . . .\(^{45}\)

What we do know is that his interest in and extraordinary knowledge of boys was excessive by most standards. How predictable that he should be in excess all that his father had failed to be to him. He indulged the boys at his school and felt empathy with their traumas and personal crises. Not unexpectedly, Pearse was later acknowledged to be a major source of inspiration to them.\(^{46}\)

While still a youth, he had written romantic plays which included heterosexual love, but these appear to have ceased in adolescence.\(^{47}\) The cessation at this moment appears to have been almost a conscious one; at the time in life when sexual identity is confirmed and controlled, Patrick successfully seems to have avoided facing his own

\(^{44}\)Mary Hayden Diaries, January 1903, National Library of Ireland.


\(^{46}\)Dangerfield, *Damnable Question*, 139.

instinctual drives.\textsuperscript{48} It is as if he feared the possible consequences, at the age when the sexual drive anarchically manifests itself, of letting his emotional feelings surface.

In response to this problem, Pearse became overscrupulous in his observation of moral abstinence and purity.\textsuperscript{49} Such a reaction suggests a substantial maladjustment in his personal development. The obsession with boys obviously related to this lack of maturity, a kind of stunted sexuality. It also means, however, that he was able to keep control of his sexual desires by sublimating them into his truly creative work as an educator. His constant dwelling on the subject of boys in his early work suggests that, despite the successful repression of his sexual feelings, he could not hide the fact that his desires were there.

\textbf{Political Novice}

People acquainted with Patrick Pearse before 1912 knew him to be politically naive, if not ignorant. His thinking on the subject of politics was so inchoate that even his students at St. Enda's were aware of his political illiteracy.\textsuperscript{50} His early inability to comprehend the essence of politically complex issues led to accusations that his political thought was simplistic. This kind of criticism


\textsuperscript{49}Ibid., 99.

\textsuperscript{50}Denis Gwynn, "Patrick Pearse," \textit{Dublin Review} (January-March 1923), 110.
increased as he came to be in the public spotlight, and the effect of that criticism often led Pearse to lash out against his critics. Once, in 1910, he said to Desmond Ryan, after being attacked once again for his lack of sophistication, "Let them talk! I am the most dangerous revolutionary of the whole lot of them!"\textsuperscript{51}

His first real initiation into Irish politics occurred in 1907 when Pearse, in his position as editor of \textit{An Claidheamh Soluis}, had to give his journal’s position on the Irish Council Bill, which would have granted Irish control of administrative affairs while legislative power continued to be vested in Parliament. The devolution scheme differed from Home Rule by not providing for an independent Irish parliament and administration. Mary Hayden wrote that Pearse later attempted to justify the position that he had held at the time in favor of the devolution scheme. He argued that the Liberal’s proposal should have been accepted because it would have allowed the Irish control over their own education.\textsuperscript{52} Such reasoning was typical of Pearse and quite incomprehensible to the vast majority of \textit{Claidheamh}'s readership, most of whom were firm supporters of Home Rule. His editorial enraged separatists as well as Home Rule nationalists; \textit{Sinn Fein}, the official mouthpiece of Griffith’s party, vehemently attacked Pearse’s position, 

\textsuperscript{51}Mary Hayden, \textit{Home-Life}, 114.

\textsuperscript{52}Edwards, \textit{Patrick Pearse}, 152-53.
despite Pearse’s past sympathy for Griffith’s ideas.\textsuperscript{53}

The problem was that essentially Pearse was a non-political person. He had been brought up in an environment that was non-political. Even though his father had political interests, if not aspirations, his mother appeared to be without any political inclinations whatsoever, and it was her interests that had influenced Patrick more than anyone else’s. The various political intrigues of the Gaelic League and \textit{Claidheamh}, while fascinating to Pearse, seem to have bothered him.\textsuperscript{54} He had little understanding of the various political subtleties, a problem that was compounded by his natural respect for the constitutional process. When fellow nationalists expected him to be consistent and conform to some kind of ideologically pure position, his lack of political acumen might have caused him to miss facets of issues because they were simply beyond him. It is understandable that the oversensitive and unprepared Pearse felt this pressure of criticism more than many others might have. In reaction to that pressure, he might have seen a career in education as all the more comforting and appealing. Teaching boys furnished the kind of independence and isolation that allowed his unsystematic

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., 152.

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 152-53.
mind freely to spin his own brand of nationalism.55

Several factors came together at one time to lead Pearse ultimately into a role of leadership in Irish politics despite his obvious inadequacy. Less obvious a factor was Pearse's decision to move St. Enda's from Cullenswood House to The Hermitage in 1910. Set against the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains, the new facility had one distinct advantage over the old one--it was larger. Pearse's vision had grown to include a girls' school, and the move to The Hermitage allowed him to make Cullenswood House into a new school named St. Ita's, and to expand the size of the student body of St. Enda's. Unfortunately these changes proved to be a financial disaster. The location for the new St. Enda's was too far out from the city and enrollment started to decline thereby aggravating Pearse's habitual shortage of operating funds. Once again his reach had exceeded his grasp, but this time he could not easily return to the old arrangements. The problems of the school were not easily solved: it was not merely a question of cutting back the numbers of pages of a school newspaper.56

The demise of the stone-carving business further complicated the picture. The once profitable firm of "James Pearse" had sunk into debt as "Pearse and Sons," and Willie,

55See Edwards, Patrick Pearse, for an excellent analysis of Pearse's financial situation, 134-36.
56Ibid., 112.
like Patrick, had proven to be no sort of businessman. He had also proved to have only a minor talent as a sculptor, although he had some small successes.\textsuperscript{57} Willie's ineptitude effectively assured the firm's failure, and "Pearse and Sons" saw its business collapse in 1910 and its doors closed.\textsuperscript{58}

By 1910 the Pearse family's investment in the school was nearly total. By 1916 the family's entire income was connected with the school and they had all moved there to be closer to each other as well as to work for the school. Willie taught there, Patrick was its administrator (not a good omen) and also taught, and the Pearse women were, in effect, the administrative staff. Everything that the Pearses owned had been sunk into St. Enda's; even their furniture was used by the school.\textsuperscript{59} Thus any failure of the school meant financial failure and ruin to Patrick and his family. In order to keep the school afloat, he was forced to begin what became an endless attempt to stall creditors and raise money. The fact that Patrick expanded the school at the same time as the business was failing is remarkably revealing about Pearse's sense of reality.

More importantly, Pearse had succumbed to the legend of the Irish patriot, Robert Emmet. Emmet, who had led an

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 166-67.
unlikely and doomed rebellion in 1803, was believed to have walked frequently with his love, Sarah Curran, through The Hermitage grounds. Pearse was haunted by this idea, and the romantic image of the two lovers was to have a major impact on his imagination. Before the move to The Hermitage, the school publication, An Macaomh, had been devoid of any suggestion of physical-force nationalism. It soon became dominated by Pearse’s writings--strange new ruminations on Emmet’s national vision and sacrifice, along with new statements of the need for "Irish-Ireland" education in order to "harden" individuals.\footnote{An Macaomh, December 1910.}

The fascination Pearse developed for Emmet, at the same time as the emergence of his financial troubles, established a psychological tendency that was to follow Pearse to the grave. As his financial troubles increased, Pearse responded with inevitable feelings of helplessness, failure, and frustration at being misunderstood; simultaneously, and most importantly, his writing and thinking about the future grew increasingly grandiose and irrational in his response to these feelings. The fascination with Emmet led to his near-obsessive interest with other Irish patriots who had also been "martyred" in the cause of Irish freedom.\footnote{Patrick Pearse, Political Writings and Speeches, 62.}

Of equal importance in Pearse’s political development
was his contact with members of the IRB. Patrick McCartan, a member of the IRB, was very enthusiastic about the work at St. Enda’s. A request from Pearse for financial support led McCartan to suggest putting Pearse in touch with a friend of his who, he believed, would also be interested in the school—Tom Clarke. It appears that Clarke’s opinion of Pearse at that time was unfavorable. Clarke was concerned with the planning of a revolution, and the acquaintance of a self-centered, vain, and priggish schoolmaster must have seemed to him of dubious use. Furthermore, Clarke was also deeply suspicious of Pearse’s past support for the Council Bill and the Irish Parliamentary Party. He put off any meeting with Pearse until he was introduced to him by Sean MacDiarmada in February 1911. This meeting must have gone well, because MacDiarmada convinced Clarke to have Pearse give the oration at the Emmet commemoration only a couple of weeks later.

Little did Pearse or Clarke realize at the time that the Emmet commemoration linked their two destinies

62Patrick Pearse Papers, McCartan to Pearse, 27 May 1910, National Library, Dublin.
63Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 68.
64Ibid., 154.
65Le Roux, Tom Clarke, 94.
66See Donal MacDonagh, An Cosantair (August 1945). MacDonagh has Clarke and Pearse meeting at the Wolfe Tone commemoration. This is unlikely given both Pearse’s and Clarke’s presence at the Emmet commemoration.
inextricably. Either because Clarke was a keen judge of others or because Pearse talked a better game than he usually played, Clarke foresaw in Pearse the role of spokesman for the IRB's cause. After that meeting with Clarke, Pearse attended, or spoke at, practically every nationalist commemorative event or rally of any importance. He could have only been there with blessings from someone in the IRB, and Clarke or McCartan are the only logical choices for this person. Despite his relationship with Clarke, Pearse was not accepted to be a member of the IRB until November or December 1913, after being sponsored by Clarke over the objections of many of the rest of the organization's leadership. It is not possible at this time to ascertain exactly when Pearse knew about the IRB and the nature of Clarke's role in it, but his association with Clarke grew increasingly intimate, and it seems unlikely that Clarke would have maintained this friendship for long without speaking to him about the IRB.

The father figure that Clarke had become to many young men could not have failed to impress itself upon Pearse. Clarke's advocacy of Pearse, in the face of resistance from

67Le Roux, *Tom Clarke*, 121-22. See the Bulmer Hobson Diaries, National Library of Ireland, Dublin. Hobson claimed to be the one who swore Pearse into the IRB in November 1913. Edwards makes the mistake of equating Hobson's claim with the role of Pearse's mentor within the organization. There is more than enough reason to believe that Hobson was under Clarke's tutelage as much as anyone else within the inner circle. See Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, 121-22.
IRB men who had not yet forgiven Pearse for his stand in 1907, must have influenced Patrick. Le Roux later wrote of Clarke’s influence on Pearse:

It was Tom Clarke who was the real patron of Pearse, for it was he who, by facilitating Pearse’s progress as a public speaker on Republican platforms, and as a writer in Irish Freedom, implanted the Irish-Ireland leader into the articulate Republican movement. Clarke made it possible for Pearse’s evolution to follow its natural, steady and progressive course.  

How enthusiastic Pearse was about the IRB per se is difficult to determine. As late as the end of 1912 he was referring to the IRB as full of old men "past all capacity for action." This, however, was during the period when his acceptance into the IRB was being resisted by the majority of its leadership, and thus we cannot know how much is meant in that statement. Nonetheless Pearse had found a man fanatically committed to an ideal, who had paid a dear price for that ideal, and who was committed to Pearse. Organizations were not half so comprehensible to Patrick as heroes were. He had thought about heroes for a long time, and Clarke’s passionate belief in Ireland was much like that which he had come to admire in Emmet.

News of Pearse’s indebtedness had started to spread. Cathal Brugha was surely not the only one in the

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68 Le Roux, Tom Clarke, 121-22.
69 Quoted in McCay, Pearse, 76.
70 Ibid., 77.
71 Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 155.
IRB's inner circle to object to Pearse's membership in the IRB on these grounds.\textsuperscript{72} The school's enrollment continued to decline, the girls' school had to be closed, and creditors began to hound him. A great many of his papers from this period concern his financial matters. Even though Patrick was scrupulously honest in accounting for school funds, his old habits of not considering consequences remained a constant problem. For instance, when Clarke urged Pearse to launch his own private paper,\textsuperscript{73} \textit{An Barr Baudh}, Pearse did so with absolutely no funds set aside to maintain it.\textsuperscript{74}

Pearse wanted a paper of his own because he had new things to say, things that could not be said in a student-run paper or the occasional published poem. \textit{An Barr Baudh} exposed Pearse's new political awareness at a time when he seemed to have left the ranks of the cultural revivalists to join those of political action. The paper ran only a few issues and featured some writers of future renown, such as Eamonn Ceannt and Brian O'Higgins, but most of its copy came from Pearse. Its first issue was published the day before St. Patrick's Day, 1912, and considered what was then the major topic in Dublin's political life--the Home Rule Bill. In that first issue, Pearse advocated the use of violence if

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73}Le Roux, \textit{Tom Clarke}, 120.

\textsuperscript{74}Edwards, \textit{Patrick Pearse}, 158.
Asquith and Redmond failed to secure passage of the bill. How different this was from Pearse's confused views only five years earlier.

Pearse's meeting with Clarke was fortunate for both men. Troubled by the possibility of financial ruin, Pearse had begun to think deeply about his life and his beliefs. As always, his imagination in contact with history—in this case with the inspiration of Robert Emmet—sought solace and fulfillment in fantasy. It is understandable how Emmet became attractive to him, as he felt no doubt a little guilty about his responsibility for the failure of his father's business and the consequences of overexpansion at St. Enda's.

Emmet had achieved greatness and secured an enshrined place in the memory of the nation in spite of—in fact, in part because of—the magnitude of his folly; Pearse had begun to see in Emmet a kindred spirit. He spoke about this in 1914:

... Consider how the call was made to a spirit of a different [from that of John Mitchel or Wolfe Tone], yet no less noble mould; and how it was answered. In Emmet it called a dreamer and he awoke a man of action; it called to a student and a recluse and he stood forth a leader of men; it called to one who loved the ways of peace and he became a revolutionary ... 75

Not coincidentally that revolutionary was also a great failure. Pearse understood this and labeled his rebellion

75 Patrick Pearse, Political Writings and Speeches, 73.
"pathetic."

What made Emmet heroic in Pearse's eyes was the fact that he acted despite the inevitability of his failure. Pearse's imagination took him to Emmet, and in Robert Emmet he saw himself. Pearse too was an unlikely revolutionary. He was also a recluse and a dreamer. What he started to desire was to become a man of action, a leader of others, and a man who could change the course of Irish history.

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76 Ibid., 141-42.
77 Ibid.
CHAPTER VI

THE RISING

The Radical Rhetorician

Pearse was enthralled with the attention and notoriety he was receiving from his new political activity. Although An Barr Buadh was not a financial success, Patrick considered it a political one because it kept his name in the political limelight while allowing him to remain involved at the school. Pearse had become a figure to be dealt with politically, despite the fact that his political acumen continued to be suspect.

At a Home Rule rally at the end of March 1912, Pearse spoke in favor of maintaining ties with Britain and voiced his personal approval of Home Rule. Even though he came out in favor of a constitutional solution, Pearse warned the crowd that violence would result if the Liberals failed in their promise to deliver Home Rule for all of Ireland.

But if we are tricked again, there is a band in Ireland, and I am one of them, who will advise the Irish people never again to consult with the Gall, but to answer them with violence and the edge of the sword. Let the English understand that if we are again betrayed there shall be red war throughout Ireland.1

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1Political Writings and Speeches, 60.
That was pretty heady stuff for a moderate crowd of Home Rule enthusiasts in early 1912, especially since Pearse shared the speaker's platform with John Redmond. But Pearse's continued willingness to support Home-Rule, in addition to his support for the Irish Council Bill five years earlier, antagonized the very people whose approval he sought. Both republicans and separatists alike found Pearse's thinking unfocused, if not hostile to their conceptions of the national cause. Even though he was flirting with the idea of aggressive resistance, he had not consistently or clearly argued on its behalf.

The fact remained that Pearse seemed to be unappreciative of political subtleties, and he continually failed to appreciate the positions of those people and organizations he had come to admire most. If he truly wanted to be accepted by the republicans, he could not continue to come out in favor of Home Rule. He often expressed great bewilderment at the negative reception which nationalists gave his ideas. His espousal of more violent views in An Barr Buadh might have been an attempt to prove his sincerity to the violent radicals in the IRB. Nonetheless a month after his advocacy of Home Rule, Pearse argued in favor of the legislation because it would allow Irishmen to bear arms, an obtuse argument in the minds of republicans.

At the same time that Pearse was courting the IRB, he
was widely perceived to be both excessively vain and possibly emotionally disturbed.\textsuperscript{2} By now Pearse was somewhat stout of build; by any standard, the schoolmaster with the romantic ideas cut an unlikely figure for a revolutionary. Pearse usually wore black and the attire was an attempt to flatter his figure, but it seems also to have been a device used to convey gravity and purpose.\textsuperscript{3} This kind of

\textsuperscript{2}Mulcahy MSS, National Library of Ireland, quoted in Edwards, \textit{Patrick Pearse}, 161.

\textsuperscript{3}Erich Fromm's \textit{The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness} is an exposition on Freud's theory of the "death instinct." See Freud, \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle}, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1919) and \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents}, trans. by James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1962). Freud argues that counter to the erotic instincts of life and self-preservation exists a human desire to be free from the bonds of civilization and its imposition of values, morals, and social restraints. This impulse towards revolution is an inevitable manifestation of civilization that results in destruction and death. Fromm expounds upon Freud's theory by looking at all forms of human destructiveness. Some forms are aimed at others, but invariably all manifestations of violent destructiveness are self-directed.

Fromm was concerned with non-instinctual forms of aggression which had nothing to do with the biological instinct of survival. He labels these forms of aggression "malignant." A major form of this kind of aggression is "necrophilia," not merely love of the dead or erotic attraction to the dead, but love of all that is dead, decayed, putrid, sickly; it is the passion to transform that which is alive into something unalive; to destroy for the sake of destruction. It is the passion to tear apart living structures (369).

Fromm describes what he calls "the necrophilous character" (a phrase from the Spanish philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno; 367-68), as a personality that is obsessed with the things of death. Interestingly enough, Fromm analyzes the constant wearing of dark clothing as a form of necrophilia (377-78). Fromm's work is a convincing explanation of the pervasiveness of aggression and destructiveness in the human condition but it is suspect because of its cultural limitations. For more on the death instinct, see Karl
superficiality on Pearse's part was not lost on his numerous critics, and many were led to dismiss him as a dilettante and a crackpot.

Over the course of its brief existence, An Barr Buadh grew steadily more confrontational in its editorial position. The paper started to heap scorn on the moderate nationalists and to question Redmond's courage. The Gaelic League was soon criticized for its lack of conviction, and the budding Labour movement was viewed as being too internationalist. From his position as editor, Pearse accused the nationalist movement of being weakened by ambivalence and equivocation.

In one sense An Barr Buadh reflects the early development of Pearse's revolutionary ideology. It shows how Pearse steadily grew to embrace violence and demonstrates his desire to be at one with the people committed to the use of force. His analysis of the weakness of the nationalist will seem to be a projection of his own lack of inner conviction, as well as his sense of his own political provincialism. However, Pearse's analysis of the contemporary state of nationalist politics does not show that he was at all ready yet to take up arms on behalf of the cause. His continued support at this time for Home Rule

was a conscious rejection of the use of force unless all else failed. In a sense his stand reflected a certain amount of moral courage as he deeply desired to become a member of the IRB, and his continual temporizing hindered his acceptance into the organization. In fact, his writings in *An Barr Buadh* seem to have played a major part in his being denied membership in the IRB for such a long time. Even though Pearse was prepared to talk about violence, he had yet to come to consider it as the only solution.

By early 1912, it was becoming obvious that Pearse's busy political life had taken his attention away from the school and had nearly led to its failure. By the spring term, its financial health was dire, and he was forced to close the girls' school during the summer. Pearse felt that his political activities had to be curbed if the school was to survive, and he resolved to renew efforts in St. Enda's behalf. He was increasingly forced to go out and raise money and was increasingly rebuffed because many people had come to see his lack of business ability as the source of the school's problems. Although he was able to raise enough funds to keep the school going and to keep its creditors off his back, the long-range prospects for St. Enda's remained very gloomy as its enrollment continued to decline. Pearse should have moved the school back into

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5Ibid., 165.
Dublin proper; his insistence on keeping St. Enda's in the suburbs was the single greatest factor in its demise, and he was led to consider going to America in search of funds and students alike. Pearse had nearly lost his school in 1912, and he consequently decided that his political involvements had to be reduced in order to keep it afloat. In spite of his resolve, Pearse did not curb his growing relationship with Tom Clarke and the IRB. In the spring of 1913, Pearse started to contribute articles for the IRB's paper, Irish Freedom. This association led to some of Pearse's best writings on the subject of Irish nationalism. These articles reflected both the influence of the IRB on Pearse at the time and his growing disenchantment with the politics of moderation. An even greater illustration of Pearse's changing thought and its relationship to the IRB can be found in his speech at a commemoration at Wolfe Tone's grave in July, 1913. Speaking under Clarke's aegis, Pearse raised the rhetoric of violence to stunningly hysterical heights, in the process glorifying the idea of sacrifice for the sake of Ireland. In Tone's sacrifice Pearse found a model for the future.

This man's soul was a burning flame, a flame so ardent, so generous, so pure, that to come into communion with it is to come into a new baptism, unto a new generation and cleansing . . . . With what joyousness and strength should we set our faces towards the path that lies

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6Ryan, Remembering Sion, 126.
before us, bringing fresh life to this place of death.\textsuperscript{7} There are several things about this speech and Pearse’s enthusiastic embrace of the republican ethos which need commentary. For one thing, Pearse’s espousal of the IRB view led to his increasing acceptance in radical circles. As he seemed to grow increasingly committed to violence and sacrifice, he met with an ever-increasing enthusiasm from those he admired most. The more he pushed the limits of this vision of violence into language, the more he became acceptable to the membership of the IRB. This acceptance seems to have borne a relationship to his becoming increasingly daring in his public proclamations, and it resulted in an escalating rhetoric which stressed death and violence.

This is not to say that encouragement and acceptance were the sole causes of what became an obsession with death and violence, for Pearse was not considering the political issue in isolation away from all other events. The continual financial crisis at the school, as well as its implications for his family, affected directly his need to find release in some course of action. As the financial problems intensified, Pearse’s rhetoric grew more and more apocalyptic. Pearse admitted the connection between his desire for some kind of resolute action and his financial embarrassments when he told his former student, Denis Gwynn,\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{7}Political Writings and Speeches, 55-57.
that they "made him long for violent actions."  

Now that Pearse had been given a national forum, he came to envision opportunities for success which had not materialized in his artistic and educational careers. He longed for the acceptance and respect which had so often been heretofore denied to him, and both the subject and the political climate of the day provided him with the chance to make his mark. The problem was that, in spite of his role as a spokesman for Irish nationalism, Pearse remained socially awkward around most people. He was still the shy, withdrawn, and priggish figure he had always been. Even though he was animated with family and his few close friends, he was almost never so forceful or assertive in personal relationships as he could be when on the stage. The political role he was accorded was a limited one; it did not force him to be anything more than a speaker or a propagandist and it avoided his very real social limitations. We know that when he came before crowds, he moved them deeply—a possible result of his own ability to be transformed by the rhetoric of the nationalist vision. He was also transformed when with his students or when writing, in both cases presenting a model of sensitivity and empathy. Those causes which he felt deeply about could transform the awkward Pearse into the inspired teacher or political leader, accomplishing things that were never to

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8Gwynn, "Patrick Pearse," 95.
happen in his personal life. As Pearse came to need every possible success to offset his impending failure, he found his own salvation in a vision of selfless sacrifice. The rhetoric of that vision also served to bring him approval and a semblance of success.

The question of where Pearse would place his highest loyalty was not the only issue he faced during this period. Now that he was in his thirties, he was also faced with his failure to find someone with whom to share his life. Pearse was no closer at thirty to having a relationship with a woman than he had been before, and we have every reason to believe he died at the age of thirty-seven without ever having had an intimate relationship with anyone. Although there is no evidence to indicate that he or his family ever talked about this issue, it had to be obvious to everyone that his chastity was abnormal for a man of his age and status. For his family, the possibility that he would marry was probably a source of ambivalent feelings which may explain their silence on the subject.

At the same time, there is reason to suspect that Pearse was beginning to realize his failure as a writer. Although his career as a journalist was active, it was by necessity narrowly propagandistic. His creative attempts at drama could only be called successful if one could call the production of his plays at St. Enda's any kind of critical artistic success. There is an indication that he was coming
to realize that neither his nor the Gaelic art he had advocated for so long, was going to stand the test of time. He came to see the Gaelic League as a "spent force" that was outliving its usefulness, while Joseph Holloway records Pearse's reluctant recognition that Yeats, Russell, and Synge were going to receive a fame from posterity infinitely greater than that of any of the "Irish-Ireland" writers.®

Both Ruth Dudley Edwards and William Irwin Thompson find the source of Pearse's obsession with death in his growing sense of failure. While there seems to be an obvious connection between the two phenomena, his fear of failure is not a wholly sufficient cause for his preoccupation with death. Pearse had come to the idea of death not only as a way of salvaging his reputation, but as a means to salvation which had the power to give life itself, by tying the individual to a plan of personal and national redemption. In sacrificing himself for Irish freedom, the individual participated in a spiritual war which guaranteed him immortality.

Unsure of success, and more sure of failure, it is probable that Pearse sought more than release from what was beginning to look like an unpromising future. What appealed to him about death was not only its guarantee of eternal fame but the opportunity to free himself from a life which

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®Joseph Holloway Diaries, 24 November 1913, National Library of Ireland, Dublin.
was unable to fulfill his dreams. The public issue of Irish nationalism not only offered him the opportunity to have an historic role in helping to change Irish history, but it also presented him with an opportunity to resolve his existential crisis.

**Pearse's Vision of Violence and Death**

By the end of 1913, Pearse was heavily involved in the formation of the Volunteers, and he had become a member of its ruling Provisional Committee. He was also about to be inducted into the IRB. The rapidly escalating political situation had made some kind of armed conflict seem inevitable, and Pearse's role as an important apologist for Irish nationalism had placed him within the mainstream of the movement.

There is some reason to suspect that Pearse's reasons for joining the IRB were not altogether selfless ones. It is possible that he sought an IRB membership because it could open doors to sources of funding that had as yet been closed to him. By this time, he had decided to go to America in an attempt to bolster the school's fortunes. In order to be introduced to John Devoy and Clan na Gael supporters, he badly needed the proper ideological credentials in order to establish his credibility with the idealistic and ultra-nationalist Irish-American
expatriates.\textsuperscript{10}

It appears that Pearse's desire to join the IRB was genuine. He had tried to do so for some time, ever since Tom Clarke first proposed him for co-option by the organization. Pearse had come to see movements like the Gaelic League as becoming ineffectual, and his speechmaking at Republican-sponsored events and his steady writing for \textit{Irish Freedom} indicate that he was both a ready and a logical candidate for membership. Nonetheless Pearse had his detractors, and although he was admitted as a member of the IRB in December 1913, the entire leadership obviously did not support him wholeheartedly at the time.

There is little doubt that joining the IRB raised the chances that his American tour would be a success. He spent most of the first half of 1914 in America, and the trip was to play a very important part in his evolving radicalism. For one thing, the trip was generally a success; yet even though he raised a substantial amount of money for the school, it was not enough to place St. Enda's on a sound financial footing. More importantly, the American tour placed Pearse in contact with the expatriate Irish fanatics who had enthusiastically funded and thirsted for an armed revolution for decades. Although he had encountered this kind of conviction before, the continual immersion in the

superheated nationalist atmosphere in America was a new and heady experience. The people he met, such as Devoy, were very much like Clarke, and their romantic lust for violent resolution appealed to the impressionable Pearse. Desmond Ryan claims that, when Pearse returned to Ireland from America, he never stopped talking about the "wonderful" Fenians he met there.\footnote{Quoted in Ward, \textit{Ireland and Anglo-American Relations, 1899-1921}, 24.} Pearse expressed great admiration at their sense of conviction, decrying the fact that such men were not to be found in Ireland.

Pearse's tour basically consisted of a series of speeches and appearances in front of various Irish groups up and down the East Coast of the United States. He was introduced to Devoy through a letter from Bulmer Hobson attesting to his character and importance. It was decided that in order for him to get a proper hearing, it would be best to advertise Pearse as a "left-wing nationalist," and it appears that this fiction played a considerable part in making his tour a success.\footnote{Edwards, \textit{Patrick Pearse}, 186.} It was a role Pearse was willing to assume, as it seemed to pay off in financial dividends; but it appears to have had an uplifting emotional impact on Pearse also. Some of his American speeches, delivered to hundreds of rabid Irish nationalists, indicate how radical Pearse was willing to appear. On March 2, 1914,
before a crowd of New York Irish, Pearse declared:

. . . I say that before this generation has passed, the Volunteers will draw the sword of Ireland. There is no truth but the old truth and no way but the old way. Home Rule may come or may not come, but under Home Rule or its absence there remains for the Volunteers and for Ireland the substantial business of achieving Irish nationhood. And I do not know how nationhood is achieved except by armed men . . . .13

Most of the time Pearse was met with an enthusiastic response, but at one point he had a minor physical skirmish with members of the less radical Ancient Order of Hibernians.14 This attack did nothing to stop him; in fact, Pearse seems to have drawn strength from it. He seemed even more provocative when speaking at a commemoration for his hero Robert Emmet less than a week later.

To the grey-haired men whom I see on this platform, to John Devoy and Richard Burke, I bring, then, this message from Ireland: that their seed-sowing of forty years ago has not been without its harvest, that there are young men and boys in Ireland today who remember what they were taught and who, with God's blessing, will one day take or make an opportunity of putting their teaching into practice.15

The apparent effect of the tour was to reinvigorate not only Pearse but those whom he touched. Bulmer Hobson was with Pearse in Philadelphia, and both men apparently succumbed to the excitement that these meetings generated. Joseph McGarrity recorded his impressions of an evening when

13Political Writings and Speeches, 74-75.
14Bulmer Hobson Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin.
15Political Writings and Speeches, 86.
he joined Hobson and Pearse in joyous reverie, intoxicated by the excitement which they felt confirmed their hopes.

... The hours seemed to fly so swiftly, the prospect of Ireland again standing in arms in defense of her ancient rights, the prospect of help from a great power [Clan na Gael was then negotiating for support and arms from Germany], the general awakening that was taking place in Ireland seemed to make us forget everything else for the time being and think only of the fight in prospect.¹⁶

John Quinn, an Irish-American attorney and a leader in moderate Irish political circles, successfully declined Pearse's early requests about organizing an American tour. It was Quinn's resistance to radical politics which had forced Pearse to tour solely amongst the radical nationalists while he was in America.¹⁷ Despite his disagreement with Pearse's, and the IRB's, political position, Quinn wrote about Pearse with some affection. He recalled looking at Pearse, who was caught up in the ecstasy of the tour's success, and hearing Patrick say as he gazed out on snowy Central Park, "I would be glad to die for Ireland ... anytime."¹⁸

It is obvious that Pearse's tour of the United States was extremely gratifying and inspiring to him. It confirmed


¹⁷It also appears that Quinn was getting tired of Irishmen visiting their American brethren to drum up finances. See Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 184-85.

his speaking abilities, and he was captivated by the
determined enthusiasm of the exiled American Irishmen whom
he met. Pearse returned to Ireland carrying tidings from
Devoy to Clarke,\textsuperscript{19} inspired and ready for action, even
though the tour had not proven to be the kind of success he
had hoped for.\textsuperscript{20} He went to America with the endorsement of
key members of the IRB leadership, but Pearse received
neither the funds he had envisioned and he only recruited
two students for his beleaguered school.

Pearse came back to Ireland a changed man. Because he
had been billed as a radical, the Americans he met expressed
much more interest in his politics than in his views on
Irish education. The enthusiastic response to what he had
to say gratified Pearse. The fervent faith and commitment
he witnessed only confirmed in his mind that he had gifts
which needed to be explored. Pearse came home with a
renewed sense of purpose and a determination to demonstrate
to the scoffers the sincerity of his convictions.\textsuperscript{21}

Shortly after Pearse returned from America, the
picture in Ireland was clouded by new and disturbing
political developments for the militant nationalists. In
June 1914, fearing the loss of his control of Irish
politics, Redmond took over the Provisional Committee of the

\textsuperscript{19}McCay, \textit{Padraic Pearse}, 80.
\textsuperscript{20}Letters, 447.
\textsuperscript{21}Edwards, \textit{Patrick Pearse}, 197.
Irish Volunteers. To the more radical membership of the Committee, it appeared as if Redmond's takeover would blunt the progress made so far, and within a short period of time their fears were to be realized. Redmond's political moderation rapidly moved the Volunteers more forthrightly behind Home Rule, and the political machinations of the Redmondites made people such as Pearse fear that their voices were being suppressed. Eventually Redmond forced the radicals to split away from the Volunteers when he pledged the organization's support for the British war effort against Germany in September 1914. This proved to be too much for the radicals who left to form their own "Irish Volunteers" as an alternative to Redmond's now-renamed "Nationalist Volunteers."23

On the surface the radicals seemed to have lost out to Redmond. The Irish Volunteers, under MacNeill, numbered at best some ten to twenty thousand men, while Redmond's followers numbered over one hundred seventy thousand.25 What neither Redmond, MacNeill, nor the British realized was the fact that all of the IRB went into the smaller organization. IRB men now totally dominated the leadership


25 Ibid., 111.
of the Irish Volunteers, and MacNeill's organization had its ranks filled with republicans. Because of their smaller size the Irish Volunteers were much easier to coerce than the old Volunteers would have been.

Unbeknownst to anyone, except for those on the IRB's Supreme Council, the Republicans had decided in August 1915 to establish a "Military Committee" to oversee plans to use the Volunteers in an insurrection against the British. Unbeknownst to anyone, except for those on the IRB's Supreme Council, the Republicans had decided in August 1915 to establish a "Military Committee" to oversee plans to use the Volunteers in an insurrection against the British. That committee was hand-picked by Clarke and consisted of men he trusted who were members not only of the IRB but also of the Volunteers Headquarters Staff. The Military Committee consisted initially of Pearse, Joseph Plunkett, and Eamonn Ceannt. They faced a far easier task after the split in the Volunteers than they had before.

Pearse had moved rapidly through the ranks of the IRB to hold membership on what proved to the organization's most important committee. He had done so because he was one of the only men on the IRB's Supreme committee who could speak to the entire spectrum of Irish nationalism. This can be clearly seen in Pearse's selection as the keynote speaker at O'Donovan Rossa's funeral on August 1, 1915. The death of the old Fenian warrior provided an opportunity for nationalists of many persuasions to come together in tribute to the Republican vision and heritage. The keynote speaker

26Ibid., 71-71.

27Dangerfield, Damnable Question, 141.
had to be a man who had been within the mainstream of the nationalist movement, had become radicalized, and had the ability requirements and was chosen to be O'Donovan Rossa's chief eulogist.

By August 1915, Pearse had become a major political figure on the strength of his rhetorical and propagandistic skills. His leadership position in the Volunteers had come about because of the reduced size of that organization. The critical nature of his position, along with his long-standing ties to more moderate organizations such as the Gaelic League, had led to his emergence as the vital person in the IRB's plan to use the Volunteers in some kind of violent action. Pearse had been groomed by Clarke for his role at the funeral, and his presence was vitally important to the IRB.

Pearse rose to his historic occasion as he never had before. The O'Donovan Rossa speech was to be the apogee of his political speaking career, and it remains one of the most important speeches in Irish history. Pearse had been urged by Clarke to "Make it hot as hell, throw all discretion to the winds," and Pearse, with thousands of armed men before him, did what he was told.

This is a place of peace, sacred to the dead, where men should speak with charity and all restraint . . . the seeds sown by the young men of '65 and '67 are coming to their miraculous ripening today. Rulers and Defenders of Realms had need to be wary if they would guard

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28Le Roux, Tom Clarke, 142.
against such processes. Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring nations. The Defenders of this Realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think that they have pacified Ireland. They think they have pacified half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools!—they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.29

The speech was an immediate national sensation. The Freeman's Journal, the paper of the decidedly non-radical United Irish League, chose to publish the full text.30 With his speech at O'Donovan Rossa's funeral, Pearse became, in the public's imagination, the official spokesman for the physical-force nationalists. The tremendous impact of the event was not lost on Pearse. Desmond Ryan reports that after the speech was over and all the crowd had gone home, Pearse sat alone in his study, aware that "... he had spoken the just word ... to immortalise a man less great than himself."31

There is every reason to assume that Pearse believed what he said and that he spoke from personal conviction; but it was a conviction recently acquired. Perhaps his recent commitment to the republican cause was the source of his unusual power. His real sincerity came powerfully across to

29Political Writings and Speeches, quoted in Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 232.

30Kee, Bold Fenian Men, 238-39.

31Ryan, Remembering Sion, 193.
those who were deeply moved by his words. One listener commented on the forceful effect Pearse’s speeches had on the crowds:

I suppose the people of Dublin never heard quite such speeches as he gave them. He poured out, certainly, the gospel of nationality as they heard it speaking of itself in their own hearts, in that vague first yearning which it’s the craft of the orator to turn into self-conscious will and act . . .--he would croon to us in that peculiar voice of his about birds and mountains and misty lakes and of the ancient Irish love of colour in costume and of bodily beauty in hero and in hero’s Lady-love. A poet, a philosopher, a mystic, one would say, not a leader of the people in the hard tussle of politics, in the desperate onslaught upon a brutally unsensitive organization like the Parliamentary machine. Yet he did lead and the people followed. They hung on his slow, melodious words, dreamed his dream and very largely did his will.32

The souvenir guide of the funeral makes it obvious that Pearse had outdone himself when he spoke over O’Donovan Rossa’s grave:

Cold, lifeless print cannot convey even an idea of the depth and intensity of feeling in which his words were couched. Calm and deliberate, in soft yet thrilling accents, his oration was almost sublime . . . . For some moments after Mr. Pearse had finished there was an intense, an all pervading, silence, then we gave forth round after round of cheers which surely must have gladdened the spirits of Rossa and his colleagues, O’Mahony, Stephens, and O’Leary, who lie so near.33

The significance of the setting for Pearse’s speech, Glasnevin Cemetery, must have been obvious to Pearse. The cemetery’s status as an Irish nationalist burial ground had

32Martin Daly, (pseud. Stephen MacKenna), Memories of the Dead (Dublin: n.p., 1917), 176.

33Souvenir program, quoted in Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 237.
been established decades before. He had visited the place often as a child and much of his father’s work had been placed there, and in giving his oration Pearse lived out the ceremonies he had fantasized about as a child.34

Pearse’s speech moved the people profoundly because in stressing the erotic nature of the Fenian’s sacrifice and the religious nature of the place, he struck a deep, and widespread, emotional chord. Pearse electrified the crowd by identifying cosmic principles which guided and gave life to the Republican movement. The O’Donovan Rossa speech not only clearly and movingly stated the Republican creed, it expressed the deep longings of Pearse’s heart and won him the kind of approval he so desired.

The evolution of Pearse’s national vision was not expressed only in his public speaking and journalistic efforts. By 1916, he had reached maturity as an artist and was, in spite of his heavy schedule, writing a great deal. Pearse’s writing reflected the dramatic changes which he was going through in his personal life, and the themes of his later plays, poems, and stories grew increasingly stark and tragic.

Pearse’s early writing shows little of this kind of seriousness. Most of his early endeavors were either journalistic pieces on Gaelic Irish life or papers on

various Irish language topics. As he got to be more confident, he came out with Irish language versions of traditional folktales. By 1905, he was at work on several pieces of fiction, such as Poll an Phiobaire (The Piper's Cave). Poll an Phiobaire received some acclaim; and since it was an adventure story for boys, it was put on the curriculum for the Intermediate Examination. An interesting slip in the translation of the title, one noted by Pearse's critics at the time, was that it could also be rendered The Piper's Hole, a fact that caused consternation to Pearse's publishers. The Minutes of the Gaelic League's Publication Committee indicate that the Committee tried and failed to get the author to change the title. Despite the controversy over his first major piece of fiction Pearse went on to write and publish several children's stories that were issued in a book by the Gaelic League under the title Iosagan agus Sgealta Eile (Little Jesus and Other Stories) in 1907. Iosagan received even better reviews than Poll an Phiobaire, and Pearse's literary career seemed to be on its way, especially given his editorial position at An Claidheamh Soluis which published several of his stories.

There is no doubt that Pearse showed initially considerable literary talents, but these must be assessed

35Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 95.
36Ibid., 94-95.
37Ibid.
within the restrictive confines of the Irish-Ireland movement. The language barrier automatically limited his immediate audience, and Pearse, like all the artists of the language movement, never escaped the parochial bounds of native Irish culture. Even though the period in question was one of great literary fertility in Dublin, Pearse’s art scarcely impressed those outside the movement. For instance, W. B. Yeats scarcely mentions Pearse in his autobiography, and then only in passing. Nonetheless Pearse’s early fiction had a kind of romantic, infantile charm, and there was some reason to expect more from Pearse. He did continue to produce pieces of writing, but, apart from his poetry, they have had little impact or lasting significance except as curious historical artifacts.

As time went on, Pearse wrote more and more pieces for the stage and, together with Willie and Thomas MacDonagh, produced these plays at St. Enda’s. In retrospect, they are simplistic but nonetheless they are highly evocative of Pearse’s changing temperament over the years. His subject was always Ireland, using boys as either messengers of the truth or, as in his play Iosagan (1910), the bearers of salvation.

As Pearse became more and more embroiled in the political events of his day, these simple themes became

38Yeats, Autobiography, 244.

39Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 131.
darker ones with messages of hopelessness and despair. These dark overtones were present in some of his earlier writing, but the changes now seem portentous and more numerous. In his 1914 production of An Ri (The King), the plot is set in a monastic school in the middle ages. Students at the school discuss their king’s recent series of military setbacks and are told by their priest that his defeats are a result of his sinfulness. When the king approaches the school in retreat from another defeat, the priest tells him he must give his throne to someone more righteous and just than he. One of the boys in the school is chosen because of his holiness. The boy, named Giolla na Naomh, or The Servant of the Saints, dies while leading his troops to a great victory.

As early as 1914, then, we have Pearse exploring in dramatic form the subjects that were increasingly to capture his artistic and political imagination until the Rising. Obviously, Giolla is a "child-hero redeemer" who, like Christ, dies to save his people. Because the boy is pure of heart, his death, like Christ’s, is a cosmic one which atones for the wrongdoing and weaknesses of others. Pearse began to expound these ideas in plays, stories, and poetry, and he also began to explore other means of expression such as editing a collection of Irish rebel songs in late 1914.

This idea of the child’s death in service to Ireland became an obsessive interest for Pearse. It was obviously
the theme of a dream which his sister says dated from childhood and had been with him all his life. Pearse, however, claimed that he had the dream in 1909.

I dreamt that I saw a pupil of mine, one of our boys at St. Enda's, standing alone upon a platform above a mighty sea of people; and I understood that he was about to die there for some august cause, Ireland's or another.

He looked extraordinary proud and joyous, lifting his head with a smile almost of amusement; I remember noticing his bare, white throat and the hair on his forehead stirred by the wind, just as I had often noticed them on the hurling-field. I felt an inexplicable exhilaration as I looked down on him, and this exhilaration was heightened rather than diminished.40

The vividness of this dream, as well as the ideas it contains, indicate just how important this theme was for Pearse at this time, about 1913. The boy is also a representation of Pearse himself, the child's exaltation a reward Pearse seems to desire.

By 1915 these ideas were the whole focus of Pearse's most ambitious theatre pieces to date. Hand in hand with the ideas of sacrifice and redemption which he had already explored was embracing violence as the necessary means of achieving not only national victory but also individual deliverance. This can best be seen in his play The Master, written in late 1915. Pearse's protagonist, Ciaran, is the master of a small school in the forest in pre-Norman Ireland. Ciaran's lack of religious faith is confronted by

one of his devout students, a young boy, who calls on the
archangel Michael to defend him against attackers. Ciaran’s
unwillingness to believe in the tenets and powers of the
boy’s faith, along with his stoic refusal to take up arms to
defend himself and the school, leads to his being struck
dead by the emotional impact of the boy’s revelation.
Edwards has seen this play as a reflection of Pearse’s
bewilderment at his own sudden endorsement of physical-force
nationalism. She maintains that the child’s faith is
meant to confirm, despite the horrible consequence, the need
to take up arms.

At the same time Pearse was writing The Master, he was
also writing about war as a source of life. In an essay
written in December 1915, Pearse praised the war in Europe
because it was so costly, citing the slaughter as proof of
the war's value.

The last sixteen months have been the most glorious in
the history of Europe. On whichever side the men who
rule the peoples have marshalled them . . . . It is
policy that moves the governments; it is patriotism that
stirs the peoples . . . . It is good for the world that
such things should be done. The old heart of the earth
needed to be warmed by the red wine of the battlefields.
Such august homage was never being offered to God as
this, the homage of millions of lives given gladly for
love of country.

By this time, Pearse had been advocating physical

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41Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 142.
42Ibid., 232-33.
43Spark, December 1915.
force for quite a while, but his essay "Pearse and the Gael" was something different indeed. Not only was blood being used to impregnate the cold earth, Pearse had come to equate the national vision as a religious faith which was served only by the deaths of those who believed it.

It is because peace is so precious a boon that war is so sacred a duty. Ireland will not find Christ's sword. What peace she has known in these latter days has been the devil's peace, peace with sin, peace with dishonour . . . . We must not flinch when we are passing through the uproar; we must not faint at the sight of blood . . . we (or those of us who survive) shall come unto a greater joy. We and our fathers have known the Pax Britannica. To our sons we must bequeath the Peace of the Gael.44

This glorification of death and violence had not come to Pearse ex nihilo. He was all too familiar with ancient Irish texts such as the Tain which exalted violence. He had become deeply influenced by the writings of Wolfe Tone and John Mitchel. Denis Gwynn recalled that by 1915 Pearse was almost never without his copies of Tone's Autobiography and Mitchel's Jail Journal, a vitriolic diatribe against Britain.45 Mitchel's single-minded hatred and his long imprisonment bear uncanny resemblance to Clarke's biography--a resemblance that Pearse could not have missed. Mitchel's "holy hatred," as Pearse came to call it, provided the motivation for the violence of the Fenian terrorist campaigns of the 1870s and 1880s, and Tone was the greatest

44Political Writings and Speeches, 218.
45Gwynn, "Patrick Pearse," 98.
Republican hero.

Pearse wrote about his new conception of physical force nationalism as a spiritual obligation that came complete with its own horsemen of the apocalypse. Most important was Pearse’s elevation of Mitchel and Tone to places of honor above his old hero Robert Emmet because of his unsophisticated development as a nationalist. 46 Emmet was demoted because Pearse’s political development had outgrown the romantic revolutionary. Pearse was becoming more radical by the day.

Pearse expressed the depths to which he had come to believe in this radicalism in his poem "Christmas 1915."

O King that was born
To set bondsmen free.
In the Coming battle,
Help the Gael! 47

More and more, Pearse was turning to poetic forms of expression. One can only speculate as to the reason for this change. It might reflect a dissatisfaction with the dramatic form, especially since he was unable to produce his plays anywhere but at St. Enda’s. But it might be that poetry offered an immediate emotional release that was not to be found in short stories or drama. Whatever the reason, Pearse’s only lasting literary contribution has been the poems he wrote during the last few years of his life. And

46 Political Writings and Speeches, 245-46.

47 Ryan, Poets, 30.
it was in those poems that Pearse's militant advocacy of violence reached a crescendo.

In the poetry which Pearse wrote in the last three or four years of his life, the ideas of heroism, violence, and dedication became obsessive, wholly unlike their benign and innocent expression in his early writing. At the same time he was developing the ideas of commitment and sacrifice in his political writings, Pearse's poetry came to stress themes of death, the efficacy of blood sacrifice, and the search for redemption.

Although some of these themes which became the foundation for Pearse's later poetry had been explored as early as 1912 in his play *An Rí*, it was in his poetry that Pearse expanded upon the major theme of the play. One commentator had contended that the play raised nationalism to a "religion." 48 This religious aspect of Pearse's conception of nationalism is a major feature of his poetry, clearly seen in one of his most famous poems, "Renunciation." But it is not only nationalism as a religious theme that is explored in "Renunciation." Pearse also describes the commitment to the nation as being one in which the total human being must unequivocally accept not only violence and death but also a sexual denial which leads to a great fulfillment as well. This denial is not merely an attempt to deny sexual fulfillment, but an exchange for

an eternal life. Pearse reaffirms the sexual tension at the core of the nationalist commitment to Ireland.

"Renunciation"

Naked I saw thee,
O beauty of beauty,
And I blinded my eyes
For fear I should fail.
I heard thy music,
O melody of melody,
And I closed my ears
For fear I should falter.

I tasted thy mouth,
O sweetness of sweetness,
And I hardened my heart
For fear of my slaying.

I blinded my eyes,
And I closed my ears,
And I hardened by heart
And I smothered my desire.

I turned by back
On the vision I had shaped,
And to this road before me
I turned my face.

I have turned my face
To this road before me,
To the deed that I see
And the death I shall die.49

Thompson has interpreted the first line of this poem as Pearse's recognition of failure; the solution is akin to the act of the religious who castrates himself in order to avoid falling into sin.50 The denial represents a conscious embrace of the merits of death over life. Because of Pearse's Catholicism, the imagery of flesh and sensual

49Ryan, Poets, 18.

50Thompson, Imagination, 124.
experience often has been opposed to that of eternal life, and death represented deliverance. In Thompson's opinion, Pearse was the perfect expression of Irish Catholicism: chaste, pure in motive and deed, no defiler of himself or of the image of women.51

Thompson's analysis of "Renunciation" is highly provocative, but it falls on one major point. As an adult Pearse's Catholicism was not as deep or devout as legend would have it. Pearse never seems to have been involved in any of the activities surrounding the major evangelical revival which was rejuvenating Irish Catholicism in his lifetime.52 Despite the significance of this phenomenon, neither Pearse nor his family seem to have been touched by it. For instance, thousands of devout Irish Catholics at this time became involved in the support of missionary work or chose to take vows, and yet none of the Pearse appear to have been involved with the Church in such a way.

In large measure, Pearse's religious reputation rests on the words of his family and the imagery used in his writing. The information obtained from his sisters and mother is suspect, and the imagery he used was a convention of his society and time. Neither one of these is a particularly persuasive argument for his supposedly

51Ibid.

52See O'Farrell, Ireland's English Question, for an analysis of Irish Catholic revival at this time, 224-30.
extraordinary devotion. In fact, the only real commentary we have from an unbiased source is that of the confessor he had as a youth. Father George O'Neill, S.J., is quoted by Patrick Thornley as saying that Pearse's faith, even as a youth, was unremarkable. "He was an [religious] enthusiast of the sombre, humourless kind, with a highly exaggerated sense of the value of old Irish literature, a sincere Catholic." McCay has commented on the problem of determining Pearse's legendary religious devotion and finds the evidence for it to be non-existent. While we can say with certainty that Pearse was a conscientious Catholic, it is impossible to ascribe to him, on the basis of the evidence, anything more.

This question off the nature and fervor of Patrick's faith is an important one. For one thing, it would obviate his Irish Catholic status as a nationalist saint if it were discovered that he had consciously sought death. It is also important because the question colors one's analysis of his later poetry, as it did the work of Thompson, who assumed that Pearse was as devout as posterity had pictured him. Pearse's main critics, J. J. Horgan and Father Shaw, both attack Pearse on the basis of what they claim is his heterodoxy. What might be said with some degree of certainty is that Pearse was a typical Catholic of no

54 McCay, Pearse, 46.
excessive devotion whose use of the Catholic imagery was due to his cultural upbringing as much as anything else; to believe otherwise requires some kind of documented conversion experience of great emotional power, and the evidence cannot support this contention.

A more likely explanation than Thompson’s suggests that Pearse sought artistic, moral, and spiritual justification for the act which he knew he must do in order for his life to have meaning. The choice was between life and eternal life, and an outright suicide would have robbed him of the latter. This was not to say that Pearse was conscious of this choice, but there are other indications, such as his constant wearing of black, which indicate that the idea of death was impressing itself upon him. The idea of death was constantly in his mind, a fact revealed in his poetry, his statements to contemporaries, and his other writings. A case in point is his poem "A Rann I Made," written in 1914.

"A Rann I Made"

A rann I made within my heart
To the rider, to the high king,
A rann I made to my love,
To the king of kings, ancient death.

Brighter to me than light of day
The dark of thy house, tho’ black clay;
Sweeter to me than music of trumpets
The quiet of thy house and its eternal silence.55

It is important to note that as Pearse thought more

55Ryan, Poets, 16.
and more of death, his thought was not limited to Catholic terms; increasingly he drew upon the legend of CúChulainn. This can be seen in his poem "I am Ireland,"\textsuperscript{56} where Pearse envisions himself as the land that bore CúChulainn. Thompson connects Pearse's ideas of CúChulainn to the translations of the myth by the Anglo-Irish historian, Standish O'Grady. O'Grady placed CúChulainn as a figure in mythic history whose life took place "in the context of a cosmic drama."\textsuperscript{57} Adopting an approach which Thompson finds distinctly "Wagnerian," O'Grady's "reconstruction" of the Irish mythic cycle referred to the era of the Táin as "The Heroic Age," because of his less than scholarly ability in Gaelic.\textsuperscript{58} In the generation which followed O'Grady, the generation of the Irish literary revival, O'Grady's influence was pervasive among the Irish-Ireland movement of which Pearse was an adherent.\textsuperscript{59}

CúChulainn became for Pearse the center of a cosmic drama to save the redeem Ireland, representing, by his sacrificial death, a kind of Christ for the nation. As a Christ figure, CúChulainn's example became a central motif in Pearse's later works. For his play The Singer, Pearse created a role that put into character what Pearse felt to

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{57}Thompson, \textit{Imagination}, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid.
be the only tool of salvation for Ireland. Written in the months immediately preceding the Rising, *The Singer* was not published in his lifetime. Its hero, MacDara, is a rebel. MacDara is forced to depart from his homeland in Connaught. He wanders through the countryside as an exile, earning his deep as an itinerant teacher, until loneliness and despair cause him to curse God and deny his fate. This dramatic rejection is MacDara's Gethsemane experience, and he is led not only to new faith but back to his home. All is not well in the land, however, and MacDara is forced, despite the alluring temptations of life, to lead his people who are too afraid to fight. MacDara does so because he is certain of his eternal survival even though he is sure to die in battle.

There can be little doubt that the subject matter expressed in the later writings of Pearse reflected his own search for meaning and a place in life. Within the confines of his cultural experience, he expressed these problems in ways that he and his society understood. Pearse came to hold very strange ideas of how the revolution was to be brought about and what it represented, but they were not alien to those of his era, however excessive they were. Hobson, who did not follow Pearse's path, believed Pearse's "ideology" was the key to his rapid rise in republican circles since it reflected the feelings of many of his contemporaries. Nonetheless, looking back, Hobson
recognized how troubling Pearse's thinking was:

He had evolved a strange theory that to keep a national spirit alive it would be necessary that there should be a blood sacrifice in every generation. He had visions of himself as the scapegoat for his people.\footnote{Bulmer Hobson, \textit{Ireland Yesterday and Tomorrow} (Tralee: Anvil Books, 1968), 198.}

It is obvious that Pearse's writing in the last years of his life reflected the issues he was struggling with emotionally. He was still in many ways that young, dreamy, and lonely boy. Those dreams which had sustained him as a child were the ones he returned to when he as last appeared to be the master of his own fate.

Above the main door to St. Enda's was a carved panel of the boy warrior CúChulainn. Inscribed on the panel were CúChulainn's most famous words from the \textit{Táin}: "I care not though I were to live but one day and one night provided my fame and deeds live after me." Pearse looked upon that saying as a motto for the school, and it can be assumed that the saying had some truth for him as well. He assured himself of fame by coming out on Easter Monday and by speaking the language of those who followed him. One month before the Rising, Pearse gave what was to be his last speech to his students. He gave them his excuse for what he was about to do: "As it took the blood of the Son of God to redeem the world, so it would take the blood of Irishmen to
redeem Ireland."\textsuperscript{61}

When Pearse eulogized O'Donovan Rossa, he spoke before a crowd that was profoundly ill at ease about the possibility that Britain was going to conscript Irishmen to fight at the European front. Conscription had existed as a possibility since the beginning of the war, but the continual drain of casualties had made it seem ever more probable. John Redmond's pledge of support to the Asquith government nearly a year before had had the effect of staving off fears about conscription until the military disasters in France during the summer of 1915 changed the situation dramatically.

Redmond had pledged himself to recruit Irishmen as a demonstration of Irish goodwill. The passage of Home Rule in 1914 raised his reputation at home considerably, and the initial response of his recruitment drives had been good. However, as talk in London turned increasingly toward the need for a military draft, popular anxiety in Ireland grew. Some of Redmond's colleagues in the Nationalist Volunteers began to pressure him to withdraw his pledge.\textsuperscript{62} On top of everything else, it was widely perceived in Ireland that Irish volunteers in the field were not receiving their share of glory for their sacrifices at the front. The lack of

\textsuperscript{61}Political Writings and Speeches, 286, quoted in Thompson, Imagination, 98.

\textsuperscript{62}Kee, Bold Fenian Men, 233.
recognition of the Irish soldiers embittered Redmond\textsuperscript{63} and outraged Irish public opinion throughout 1915 and through the early months of 1916.

Irish public resistance to the threat of conscription mounted, and Redmond found it more and more difficult to find recruits. Part of the reason for this decline in responsiveness was the fact that Redmond's strongest supporters had enlisted early, and the numbers of potential recruits in Ireland willing to serve the British had rapidly diminished.\textsuperscript{64} The conscription issue heightened Irish nationalist resentment against Britain, and in late 1915 it presented enough of a threat that the Undersecretary for Ireland wrote that he believed an armed "outbreak" would result from any attempt to institute a military draft.\textsuperscript{65}

Reports from British intelligence both from Dublin and the countryside indicated that they believed anti-conscription sentiment had grown so rapidly, and had become so entrenched, that Eoin MacNeill's Volunteers, with support from Redmondites, had planned an anti-conscription uprising as early as October 1915.\textsuperscript{66} Eventually Parliament passed a Conscription Act in January 1916 which, although it excluded

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{63}Gwynn, \textit{Life of John Redmond}, 441-44.
\item \textsuperscript{64}Ibid., 441.
\item \textsuperscript{65}Ruth Dudley Edwards, "The Decline and Fall of the Irish Nationalists at Westminster," in \textit{The Making of 1916}, 133.
\item \textsuperscript{66}Mac Giolla Chiolle, \textit{Intelligence Notes}, 224.
\end{itemize}
Ireland, had the effect of exacerbating Irish fears of a draft.

By the end of 1915, Pearse was heavily involved in his work as an officer on the IRB’s Military Council and as Director of Military Organization at the Irish Volunteer’s headquarters. He had successfully lobbied for the position with the Volunteers a year earlier, even though a less qualified individual could scarcely have been imagined. IRB men under Clarke’s influence now held key leadership positions in the Volunteers and it was these posts which controlled the military activities of the organization. A Rising led by members of the IRB now seemed to be more than possible.

Even though Pearse had developed into a fire-breathing revolutionary, he had changed little as a man. He had always been gracious to strangers, but he continued to look to his family as his only close friends. He continued to live with his mother and sisters at St. Enda’s, and he and Willie were as close as they ever were. The Pearses’ life was in most respects typically bourgeois. It seems he had not changed enough externally to merit the kind of positions which he had come to hold; and yet in spring 1916 Pearse found himself to have the most important combination of positions of any man in Ireland.
Easter Monday, 1916

Plans for the Rising had, by now, taken on their own momentum. The training of troops had gone on for many months, and the IRB's Military Council had arranged for the smuggling of arms into Ireland from Germany. All of this planning and scheming went undetected by both MacNeill and Dublin Castle. MacNeill falsely believed he had things under control although he feared that the radicals were up to something. The Government believed that they knew the critical data, but their records indicate that they largely overlooked men like Pearse and Plunkett.

Part of the Castle's smugness was a result of their access to German diplomatic communiques that indicated that Sir Roger Casement would head an attempt to overthrow the Government. Casement was in Germany negotiating for support for the Volunteers, but he was not at all privy to the actual planning of the Rising. Even though the British believed incorrectly that something was up as early as 1913, the Castle correctly believed that a Rising could be successful only after a major shipment had taken place with a corresponding German invasion of the island. The Castle had fixed its gaze upon what they called the "Sinn Fein Volunteers" (the Nationalist Volunteers), and it believed

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that they were the force to be reckoned with.\textsuperscript{69}

The Castle was several times removed from reality in their analysis of the situation. The Volunteers were merely an unwitting pawn in the IRB plan. However, it was not even the IRB that the British administration had to fear. For Clarke and his men had not only fooled the leadership of the Irish Volunteers, they had also circumvented the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The Military Council had been hastily formed during an IRB Supreme Council meeting gerrymandered in favor of Clarke's followers.\textsuperscript{70} The Military Council operated without the supervision of the Supreme Council because it purposely misled the Republican leadership and failed to report its operations.\textsuperscript{71} When the Rising occurred, IRB men in the Irish Volunteers recognized Pearse's orders to mobilize as having come from one of their own and they assembled according to his instructions, never realizing that the decision to revolt was not sanctioned by the IRB's leadership. For most of the leadership of the IRB, men such as Hobson who had been outcast from the Clarke group because of his support for Redmond's takeover of the Volunteers in 1914, the news of the Rising came as a cruel shock. Some men who had been on the outskirts, such as The O'Rahilly,

\textsuperscript{69}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{70}\textit{Edwards, Patrick Pearse}, 241-42.

\textsuperscript{71}Kee, \textit{Bold Fenian Men}, 236.
realizing that a Rising was about to begin, joined the rebels on Easter Monday and died most valiantly.\footnote{Edwards, \textit{Patrick Pearse}, 277.} The Clarke faction had scored a great strategic victory long before the Rising took place. It was a victory which those outside of their ranks did not know about until it was too late.

The Castle stupidly believed that it totally understood the situation, and behaved in a strangely contradictory manner. Although the Government had been warned by such reliable sources as Redmond’s deputy, John Dillon, that an outbreak was about to occur, if often acted quite blithely about the situation. Sir Matthew Nathan, Chief Undersecretary for Ireland, seems to have been sure of the improbability of any problems because he decided it was safe to bring his sister-in-law and her children to Dublin for the Easter holidays.\footnote{o’Broin, "Birrell."} Despite what the Government knew to the contrary, and in spite of warnings from people such as Dillon, intelligence reported to London that there was no danger of insurrection as late as April 1916.\footnote{Mac Giolla Chiolle, \textit{Intelligence Notes}, 230.} The Government succumbed to pride in believing that it knew what was going on when in fact they knew just enough to obscure the truth.
They had built up a hierarchy of traitors with Casement at the top position and under him at different levels MacNeill and the rest. The facts were entirely different. Casement was a subordinate, an almost irrelevant figure in the whole business and had come [back from Germany, only to be captured instantly by the British] to stop, not to start a rebellion . . . .75

Perhaps MacNeill was more surprised than anyone to read the news, on Thursday, April 20, 1916, that Pearse had ordered a large-scale military maneuver for Easter Sunday, April 23. On Monday, April 17, MacNeill had been presented with a document, supposedly stolen from Dublin Castle files, which gave instructions for the arrest of Volunteer leaders and the confiscation of arms. There is conclusive evidence that the paper was a forgery, written by either Sean MacDermott or Plunkett.76 The threat of this preemptive strike on the Volunteers forced MacNeill to concede the need to prepare to defend themselves. When MacNeill saw Pearse's orders in the newspapers, he realized that Pearse had clearly ordered the mobilization in order to fight an insurrection. When the outraged MacNeill confronted Pearse that evening at St. Enda's, Pearse admitted that MacNeill's perceptions were indeed correct. MacNeill issued a countermanding order and awakened to find that a shipment of small arms from Germany had been intercepted in Queenstown harbor.

76Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 267.
The Government made the fatal mistake of logically assuming that the Rising was dead in the water, but pragmatic objections and setbacks were not enough to keep Pearse and his comrades from acting. Even the issue of more orders from MacNeill, printed in The Sunday Independent, countermanding all previous orders to come out, failed to deter Tom Clarke, who grudgingly agreed to a one-day postponement. Late Sunday evening, Pearse sent forth an order, which MacNeill could not countermand in time, to meet at the ICA headquarters, Liberty Hall, the following morning.

The original plan had been simple, but it suffered from requiring both precision in the implementation of its tactics. In fact, without arms, there was no way the plan could work. More to the point, the plan was so unrealistic that the rebel leadership might never have intended it truly to work. The plan called for the seizure of strategic buildings and areas of downtown Dublin, with the captors then bunkering down to await the "rising" of the countryside to support Dublin's example. From the outset the plan was designed to be symbolic and demonstrative; it did not seek any kind of military victory. For example, they intended the takeover of St. Stephen's Green, the beautiful public park in the middle of Dublin. The problem with this idea was that the park was totally surrounded on four sides by

77Ibid., 273.
tall buildings—ideal for the purpose of pinning down armed revolutionaries. The sole value of such a move was a symbolic one since everyone in Ireland knew of the famous park.

The rebel leaders who gathered at Liberty Hall knew that they could not win, and most of them seemed resigned to die. Connolly, who had been secretly co-opted to the Military Council in January 1916, without the knowledge of the IRB’s Supreme Council, acknowledged to others that he fully expected to die during the fighting. By taking care of his bills on Easter Sunday evening, Pearse also indicated that he did not expect to survive the Rising. Patrick and Willie rode into the city on bicycles Monday morning; several people saw them pedaling along, wearing giant, bulging overcoats. At Connolly’s headquarters, they joined the assembling troops, which numbered somewhere around nineteen hundred men. The largest single detachment, about four hundred in number, went with Pearse, Connolly, Plunkett, MacDermott, Ceannt, and Clarke to the large General Post Office building in the center of the city. The rest of the troops were deployed in various positions around Dublin.

79 Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 24.
The rebels easily took control of the unguarded positions, with the exception of Dublin Castle where they failed to press home an attack even though the administrative center was guarded by only two men. Casual observers were shocked to find that the rebels meant business. Most Dubliners had long since become accustomed to bands of armed men on their city streets, but the charge of the troops into the unprotected GPO must have struck more than a few observers as ludicrous. Ever mindful of the historic nature of events, Pearse asked Tom Clarke to be the first to enter. Members of the Citizen Army under the leadership of musician and silk-weaver Michael Mallin and the eccentric socialist aristocrat, Countess Markievicz, took over St. Stephen's Green, but not without a fight from disgruntled holiday folk who were basking in the sun.81 Pearse had been chosen by his fellow revolutionaries to be titular head the new "government" as well as its army. In his roles as "Commandant-General, Commanding in Chief, Army of the Republic," Pearse stepped out of the GPO and read to onlookers the "Proclamation of the Republic." The reception was less than gratifying; people laughed and went on with their daily business.

Shortly afterward, sometime in the late afternoon, the rebels fired their first shots. Hapless British cavalymen

stumbled down the street into a fusillade of fire from the GPO, and most of the rebels fired without knowing what was going on. The early rebel actions were moderately successful, but the first day or two was the lull before the storm.

The inevitable counterattack was not long in coming. The British moved into position and started lobbing artillery rounds into the building from the square at Trinity College only a half mile away. The Government troops were helped by many of the indignant local citizenry, who enthusiastically informed on the rebel supporters. Without arms or any real organization, the country uprisings never occurred; the rebels' defeat was just a matter to time.

Throughout the action, Pearse failed to fire a shot. He busied himself with writing propaganda and talking about Irish literature with Plunkett, who was bedridden because of his tuberculosis.82 Despite knowing full well that Casement's debacle had ruined the chances of a mass nationwide rising, Pearse told the men that they were getting information about such activities and that the news was promising. Nonetheless, Pearse had taken the precaution to secure a priest for the purpose of hearing confession. He was particularly enraged at Dublin citizens who looted

buildings right next to the GPO. At no time does it appear that Pearse led the troops in combat, nor did he participate in the building's preparation for battle. Most of the tactical decisions were made by Connolly, who was the probable leader of the Rising in the opinion of the troops.

The rebels fought tenaciously and inflicted heavy casualties. Faced with the collapse of the now-burning building around them, Pearse ordered it evacuated. Carrying the severely wounded Connolly on a make-shift stretcher, the rebels got only a couple of blocks away before holing up for the night in a house. Pearse ordered the rebels to surrender when he saw three non-combatants accidentally killed before his eyes. He was convinced that a surrender would save lives, not only of the troops, but also of the citizens of the city. At several spots, local rebel commanders were stunned to get the surrender order since they had barely been tested and had held their own.

Fighting ceased with the unconditional surrender of rebel forces on Saturday, 29 April, and Pearse was promptly whisked off to military headquarters, then on the the Dublin military prison. He and Willie, who had been faithful to

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83Ibid., 144.
85Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 304.
his brother despite having had nothing to do with the planning or implementation of the Rising, were both tried before a military tribunal and received the death sentence. Like so many Irish patriots before him, like Emmet and Tone, Patrick had one last speech to make at his trial.

When I was a child of ten I went down on my knees by my bedside one night and promised God that I should devote my life to an effort to free my country. I have kept that promise. As a boy and as a man I have worked for Irish freedom, first among earthly things. I have helped to organize, to arm, to train, and to discipline my fellow countrymen to the sole end that, when the time came they might fight for Irish freedom. The time, as it seemed to me, did come and we went into the fight. I am glad we did, we seem to have lost. We have not lost. To refuse to fight would have been to lose; to fight is to win. We have kept faith with the past, and handed a tradition to the future . . . . We . . . love freedom and desire it. To us it is more desirable than anything in the world. If you strike us down now, we shall rise again and renew the fight. You cannot conquer Ireland. You cannot extinguish the Irish passion for freedom. If our deed has not been sufficient to win freedom, then our children will win it by a better deed. Both Willie and Patrick were sentenced to be shot by a British Army firing squad. Before the fateful day, Pearse wrote letters to his mother and brother. In his letter to his mother, Patrick told her of papers he had prepared explaining financial affairs. He ended it with a love letter to his family.

I have just received Holy Communion. I am happy except for the great grief of parting from you. This is the death I should have asked for if God had given me the choice of all deaths,—to die a soldier’s death for Ireland and for freedom. We have done all right. People will say hard things

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86 Political Writings and Speeches, quoted in Edwards, Patrick Pearse, 318.
for us now, but later on they will praise us. Do not grieve for all this, but think of it as a sacrifice which God asked of me and of you.

Good-bye again, dear, dear Mother. May God bless you for your great love for me and for your great faith, and may He remember all that you have so bravely suffered. I hope soon to see Papa, and in little while we shall all be together again.

Wow-wow [his sister Margaret], Willie, Mary Brigid, and Mother, good-bye. I have not words to tell my love of you, and how my heart yearns to you all. I will call to you in my heart at the last moment.

Your son,
Pat.87

This letter is a statement of his fidelity to his mother, to the family, to the Church, and to Ireland. It is a letter of love, but it is also an assertion of his independence from the world he had failed to understand and control. It is also a confession of resignation and more than a little accusation. Like his courtroom speech, it is a pleading for respect from those Pearse imagined had not believed he could succeed in anything. It is not the letter of a man who was concerned about his eternal future. It is a letter of a man who realized he has won the goal he has sought, a release from the things which held him back. There is no bittersweet expression of his wish that things had gone differently. Just before completing his letter, Pearse wrote his last poem, ostensibly to fulfill his mother’s wish, "... to write a little poem which would seem to be said by you about me."88 This poem is a statement of

87Letters, 281-82.
88Ibid., 281.
Pearse's affirmation of his need to die. It serves not to fulfill her wish, but to control her after his death. Instead of speaking "her" words for her, he has forced upon her his own words, making her remember him as he wanted to be remembered.

"The Mother"

I do not grudge them: Lord, I do not grudge
My two strong sons that I have seen go out
To break their strength and die, they and a few,
In bloody protest for a glorious thing,
They shall be spoken of among their people,
The generations shall remember them,
And call them blessed;
But I will speak their names to my own heart
In the long nights;
The little names that were familiar once
Round my dead hearth.
Lord, thou art hard on mothers:
We suffer in their coming and their going;
And tho' I grudge them not, I weary, weary
Of the long sorrow--And yet I have my joy;
My sons were faithful, and they fought.89

The faithful sons died, one after the other, on the third and fourth of May, 1916. Patrick died first, at 3:30 in the morning, shortly after seeing a priest.

89Ryan, Poets, 24.
CHAPTER VII

PATRICK PEARSE AND THE EUROPEAN
REVOLT AGAINST REASON

Even though the Dublin Easter Rising of 1916 is commonly regarded as one of the most important events in modern Irish political history, the immediate public reaction against it certainly did not portend its future status. Most immediate opinion, in Ireland as well as from Irish expatriates, seems to have been that of anger at the high number of civilian casualties and damage to private property. The reaction by the Bailieborough, County Cavan, branch of the United Irish League was typically condemnatory: "... [It is] regretted that the young men who joined in such a movement did not follow the advice of Mr. [John] Redmond [leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster]."2 Irishmen as far away as Otago, New Zealand, wrote Redmond to express their sorrow, and offer


their continued support for Great Britain and the Allies.\(^3\) Although Redmond's personal sympathies were split between the Government and the insurrectionists, the reaction of his party and its supporters was one of outrage, "the characteristic reaction of the middle-class."\(^4\)

While the public was angered by the damage caused to property and the high number of civilian casualties,\(^5\) the British execution of the leaders of the Rising galvanized public sympathy behind the rebels and helped make them into martyrs for Ireland. By killing the republican leadership, the British legitimated the physical-force nationalists' cause. The leadership of the Parliamentary Party fully realized that moderate politics stood to lose if the rebels were martyred. John Dillon wrote to Redmond in London and urged him to stop the executions of Pearse and the others. Dillon agreed with Redmond that the Rising was wrong, but he worried about the effects of martyrdom.

You should urge shortly on the government the extreme unwisdom of any wholesale shooting of prisoners. The wisest course is to execute no one for the present. This is the most urgent matter for the moment. If there were shootings of prisoners on a large scale the effect on public opinion might be disastrous in the extreme.

\(^3\)Ibid., 6.

\(^4\)Hobson, *Volunteers*, 198.

\(^5\)Casualties were officially listed at 538 for the Army, Royal Irish Constabulary, and Dublin Municipal Police, of which 132 were killed, with 2,217 civilian casualties, of which 318 were killed. One hundred sixty were convicted, with fifteen executed. See Mac Giolla Chiolle, *Intelligence Notes*, 238-39.
So far public opinion might be disastrous in the extreme. But the reaction might very well be created [if the Government executed the rebels] . . . .6

At first Redmond blamed the Rising on the Germans,7 and only reluctantly agreed with Dillon on the question of reprisals.8 He was never to recognize fully, even after the executions, that the significance of the Rising was that it had changed everything. Dillon was much more attuned to the atmosphere in Dublin, and the commencement of executions convinced him that the Party at Westminster had to change its tactics.9

What Dillon suggested was a change in the party's tactics at Westminster towards a kind of "militant constitutionalism" along Parnellian lines, but Redmond never made such a move.10 Redmond's tragedy was his growing inability to diagnose correctly the Irish political situation. He continued to label all separatist groups as "Sinn Feiners," and his reluctance to identify himself with the Rising and its martyrs sealed his, and his party's, demise in 1918 by drawing public support behind the idea of

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7Redmond, Rising, 9.

8Ibid.

9Lyons, "Dillon," 32-34.

10Boyce, Nationalism, 288.
separatism.11

Dublin Castle’s ignorance became apparent in the post-Rising Royal Commission inquiry. Sir Matthew Nathan’s utter ignorance of the Irish political scene in 1916 became a matter of public record when it was obvious that the Castle had paid too much attention to the wrong people.

Some scholars have questioned the need for the Rising.12 Conor Cruise O’Brien argues that there was no reason to expect that the British would renege on their promise to implement Home Rule at the end of the war in Europe13 and that the Rising was essentially a meaningless act raised to a mythic level by the stupidity of the British. While O’Brien’s analysis of the Home Rule situation in 1916 is convincing, his analysis of the Rising, why and how it occurred, is shortsighted. What motivated individuals like Pearse to participate in a suicidal insurrection were the same kinds of non-rational motivations that offer a sense of moral conviction to revolutionaries all over the world. These grievances, hopes, and desires, which are the bases of insurrection and revolution, are not necessarily rational nor are they dispensed with necessarily


13Ibid., 21-23.
by conventional political responses. If these non-rational factors are the cause of insurrectionary violence, it is unlikely that they will become fully understandable by an analysis of pragmatic, rationalistic, and perhaps more conventional, historical inquiry. Approaches which assume that the primary motivations at work in individuals and political movements are manifestations of reasoned political thinking fail to appreciate or clarify those kinds of mobilizing forces which often enable ordinary men to do extraordinary things.

Ireland's Easter Rising of 1916 was not, by and large, the result or manifestation of some rational process. It was rather the result of deep-seated psychological and emotional conflicts which many militant Irish nationalists experienced at the time. Patrick Pearse's unique contribution to Irish political history stems from his personal experience of despair, irresolution, the need to escape his personal situation, failure, and ambivalence—at the same time that many nationalists had to face similar apprehensions about Ireland's future. The road to personal and national deliverance laid out and traveled by Patrick Pearse was in fact the way that the Republican movement needed to go for some kind of conclusive deliverance from the modern age and Great Britain which represented
This revolt against modernity was hardly restricted to Ireland. At the same time that Pearse and his comrades marshaled the most violent elements of Irish nationalism for an act that was consciously designed to be a symbolic gesture, certain of their deaths, millions of Europeans marched off in defense of equally, if not more, abstract patriotic ideals. World War I occurred after a period of intellectual revolt against reason as well as escalating terrorism and political violence, which bears an uncanny resemblance to political developments in Ireland during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Yet the tendency of both Irish specialists and European historians to remove Ireland's history from a general European context has served to relegate Pearse and the Rising to the status of an odd and parochial phenomenon. While Ireland's size is small, its political experience was like that of countries on the Continent with oppressed ethnic groups which struggled to achieve independence and/or hegemony. In this sense late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland is Europe in microcosm. Nationalistic movements in Poland, Italy, and the Balkans, bore close

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14 The issue of modernity in Ireland has been delineated in the critical collision against Patrick O'Farrell’s Ireland’s English Question by Joseph Lee’s The Modernization of Irish Society, 1848-1918. It has been most usefully addressed in Tom Garvin, "Priests and Patriots: Irish Separatism and Fear of the Modern, 1890-1914," Irish Historical Studies, 25, no. 97 (May 1986): 67-81.
similarities to those in Ireland. Likewise, the development of the Irish Republican Brotherhood's belief that violence was not only a political but also a spiritual and moral force was but another manifestation of the "subjectification" of thought that prevailed in Europe in the early twentieth century. No single incident in European political history more clearly demonstrates this phenomenon than the Easter Rising of 1916.

H. Stuart Hughes's *Consciousness and Society* argues that European social thought in the early part of this century underwent a major revolt against the rational tenets of positivistic thought. The "revolt" against reason manifested itself across many disciplines, from philosophy to the new physics, but was perhaps strongest in social and political theory. Hughes found that this revolt "displaced":

\[\ldots\] social thought from the apparent and objectively verifiable to the only partially conscious area of unexplained motivation. In this sense the new doctrines were manifestly subjective. Psychological processes had replaced external reality as the most pressing topic for investigation. It was no longer what actually existed that seemed important: it was what men thought existed.\[\text{16}\]

This revolt against positivism's standards of progress and logic, found widespread intellectual and cultural


\[\text{16}\]Ibid., 66.
expression. It was not a phenomenon from which Irish intellectuals were distinguishable: Yeats, Synge, Shaw, A.E. Russell, and Joyce, were major literary lights of their day. Joyce spent most of his adult life in Europe. Yeats was as at home in London as in Dublin. Irish participation in European political thought was not inconsiderable. Marx and Engels wrote about Ireland. James Connolly was a leading socialist, one of the few working men who rose to leadership in the movement and acquired a noteworthy international intellectual reputation. Little work has been done on Irish politics within this European context, but the presence of an enduring Irish contribution to European letters indicates that the conventional dismissal of Ireland from the general consideration of European intellectual history of this period is mistaken.

In addition to reconsidering Ireland's involvement within the intellectual and cultural life of Europe, there is the need to consider the nearly universal climate of confrontation and violence which pervaded Western societies during this period. George Dangerfield's The Strange Death of Liberal England describes the collapse of Britain's Liberal Party as taking place within a climate of almost


inevitable violence, in which the politics of moderation and compromise began to founder on the forces of unreason. Dangerfield believed that the period preceding the Great War was characterized by the sinking of reasonable political practice into a morass of ever more polarized opinions, interests, and issues which succeeded in bringing down the consensus that had dominated British political life for decades. Dangerfield demonstrated how force became a tool of both coercion and repression that immobilized a political system based on the idea of rational consensus. As the pattern towards confrontation grew to be more entrenched, the ideas which were the foundations of these social, political, and intellectual factions assumed the character of articles of faith.

In his *Reflections on Violence* (1907), Georges Sorel maintained that there existed myths which were revolutionary canons of great social movements. These myths "... are not descriptions of things but expressions of a determination to act."¹⁹ They represent the desire to destroy the status quo, a search "... for a combat which will destroy the existing state of things..."²⁰ Sorel found the greatest example of this in the anarcho-syndicalist "myth of the general strike," a battle of the


²⁰Ibid., 58.
collective proletariat to destroy the state and establish a society of the workers. The strength of the myth's hold on its believers is a result of its total avoidance of the contradictory issues and analytical problems which face orthodox socialism. According to Sorel, the myth serves no ideology which needs explanation or apology, it exists as an explanation of will, it brooks no academic differences or analytical equivocations which render it meaningless or impossible, and its essential truth is affirmed when it is suppressed or persecuted.

Sorel identified the emotional power of the emerging political movements of Europe in the early 1900s as being one that drew its strength from myths which claimed the power to eradicate and change everything. The quibbles of Liberals, Conservatives, Socialists, and Monarchists all would fall before the irresistible power of myth.

With the general strike all these fine things disappear, the revolution appears as a revolt, pure and simple, and no place is reserved for sociologists, for fashionable people who are in favour of social reforms, and for the Intellectuals who have embraced the profession of thinking for the proletariat.

Behind the myth of the general strike operates a desire for apocalyptic disaster to which men commit themselves at all costs. It is an idea which represents all

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21 Ibid., 140.
22 Ibid., 140-41.
23 Ibid., 157.
of the hopes and aspirations, emotional and irrational, which political theory, organization and activity never satisfy.\textsuperscript{24} The myth of the general strike aims at nothing less than "complete catastrophe"—a cataclysmic overthrow of the past.\textsuperscript{25}

Sorel's catastrophe is not an aimless one. Although its primary manifestation is destruction, the violence of the general strike is ultimately soteriological in nature and aims to save men from a world of suppression and injustice that is based on reason. Thus violence becomes the means by which justice and virtue are at last established in the world of men. Sorel's view was that "It is to violence that Socialism owes those high ethical values by means of which it brings salvation to the Modern World."\textsuperscript{26} Because violence destroys inequity, it represents the righteous pathway to a new morality, that will reign triumphant over as well as redeem the ruins of the unjust, and immoral modern order.

Sorel went on to suggest that the faith and emotional energy committed to the myth were the source of its tenacity. Myth is neither rational nor scientific, it claims no point of debate, it exists as a reality in the mind of the faithful, and it galvanizes them into action

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 145.  
\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 153.  
\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 272.
because of their hope in the apocalypse to come. What Sorel described was a religious idea to which men were committed by faith despite, or perhaps because of, never having seen it happen. In this sense faith in the myth is eschatological and apocalyptic, looking toward a future that can only be brought about through the violent destruction of what already exists.27

Sorel conceded that there were non-socialist myths of equally compelling power to that of the myth of the general strike.28 The cases he allowed for were wars of revolution or liberty—both having the same kind of psychological power which the myth of the general strike generated.29 In Pearse's case the myth of a noble Ireland won by violent and resolute action converted him to Republicanism. Violent revolution could eradicate the modern morass in Irish society and culture; it could also pave the way for Pearse to reconcile opposites, and eradicate the equivocations in his own life.

Patrick Pearse's unique contribution to Irish political history was his expression of the "mythic" ideas which served as the moral basis of physical-force nationalism. He was not alone in doing so but his success lay in the coincidence of historical events with his own

27 Ibid., 142.
28 Ibid., 267-70.
29 Ibid., 269-70.
search for things to believe which could make him into a whole person.

The politics, culture, and society of Pearse's Ireland were in turmoil. Catastrophic depopulation, especially in rural areas, reached a peak in Pearse's early adulthood. With emigration was the migration of the Irish into Dublin and Belfast. Not only was Irish society in some distress at the turn of the century, there was also an intellectual revolution of major proportions which began in the 1880s and continued in many ways into the late 1930s. Whatever its considerable contribution was to Irish culture and national identity, the Irish Literary Renaissance represented a major upheaval in ideas and sensibilities. The "rediscovery" of Celtic mythology, folklore, and the Irish language and the Anglo-Irish revival in poetry, drama, and fiction demonstrate that Irish culture was in a period of significant transition.

While politics appeared to move toward peaceful constitutional resolution, the failure to secure Home Rule cleanly pushed many political moderates towards the same kind of confrontational politics that were becoming more evident in Britain. The political turmoil in Ireland was, as Dangerfield demonstrated, a major manifestation of the kind of polarization that was increasingly common in British

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30 Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 110-11.

31 Dangerfield, Damnable Question, 57-138 passim.
politics. The apparent failure of moderate constitutional politics in the Irish case allowed the politics of revolutionary violence, which had survived unsullied by compromise, to seem increasingly legitimate as a form of political action. Irish nationalists had evolved into polarized camps: one committed to the politics of reason and accommodation, the other committed to an absolute to be won at any cost. This second party was republican and separatist; its already substantial tradition of violence had proved that it would tolerate no compromises, but like its constitutional counterpart it had known only failure in 1798, 1848, and 1867. Nonetheless, the myth of violence gave physical-force nationalism an apparent integrity which constitutionalist politics never possessed. Violence on behalf of Irish freedom came into its own through failure and death, upheld by each generation as an expression of Irish retribution, and faithfulness to a holy cause.

Pearse did much more than merely float on a tide that was going his way. He quickly became the leading spokesman for the Irish tradition of armed resistance. Under the tutelage and inspiration of men of single-minded conviction and experience such as Thomas Clarke, Pearse gave artistic expression to what was for him a new-found political ideology. He became the evangelist for the Republican tradition of violence. Pearse was certainly not alone in glorifying the myth of Republican violence but his unique
consciousness of that past, along with his profound psychological needs synergized with Republican tradition in a mythopoeia where violence held personal and national soteriological possibilities. Because of this synergy of personal experience and revolutionary tradition, Pearse's impact upon the history of his country was to be remarkable.

Pearse's thanatic vision was aestheticism which expressed itself within political action. The rhetoric which he brought to bear on the contemporary situation ultimately renewed and continued the tenets of Irish Republican faith. Pearse, and his fellow poets of the Rising, not only gave voice to the myth but lived it out in order to appropriate what was perceived to be its life-giving power. 32

Pearse's critics have claimed that his vanity and self-aggrandizment were an overcompensation for his inability, and the inability of the other artists manques who followed him into the Rising, to face reality. In this view, the poets of the Easter Rising self-conceitedly sought to create politically what they could not achieve in their art, thus rendering the Rising ludicrous and pitiful. The Rising was a histrionic re-enactment of myth in which Pearse cast himself in the lead role. 33


33 Robert O'Driscoll, "Return to the Hearthstone: Ideals of the Celtic Literary Revival," *Place, Personality, and the Irish Writer*, ed. Andrew Carpenter (Dublin: Gill and
There can be no argument with this conclusion. Pearse did conceive of himself as a tragic figure and sought to live out a heroic role in re-enacting a myth. But he did so believing that the Republican myth had power to redeem his life and his culture. Since he did not expect to survive, Pearse's efforts cannot be judged as having been simply self-serving.

Patrick Pearse was not the only man in Europe to think this way at the time. His patriotic poetry has thematic similarities to Rupert Brooke's romantic call to his generation in "The Soldier"—to die for the English national myth as a form of eternal service and cultural redemption. Brooke's "1914 Sonnets" emphasize the same ideas: earth and decay in "The Soldier"; the glory and redemption of violent death and the pouring out of "the Red sweet wine of youth" in "The Dead"; and war's ability to free the captive spirit in "Peace".34 This captivity is because of the nature of the age and it is to be overcome by embracing, despite its horror, cleansing violence. The human spirit is to be freed from modernity's clutches by means of war.

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour, And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping, With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary . . . 35

For Brooke, a period of personal alienation and morbid introspection ended when he briefly saw action in October 1914. 36 Brooke recounted that the sight of a great city in flames and the threat of death made him feel fulfilled and upon his return to England for more training he was moved to write his war sonnets "1914." 37

A year earlier Brooke had gone on an extensive trip to North America and South Pacific: partly to overcome his melancholy with sights of the new culture. 38 This trip was a stimulating one for Brooke but even before he left he had come to see some things quite differently from the way he had seen them before. Though once a youthful Fabian he began to reverse the positions he had once held on on many modernist trends in art. Not the least of these reversals was his decision, contradicting an opinion he had expressed a couple of years earlier, that Henrik Ibsen's "modern" drama was populistic. 39 He now lamented Ibsen's abandonment of classical soliloquy and said that Ibsen was "... a

35Ibid.
37Ibid.
38Ibid., 400ff.
39Ibid., 377-78.
great and dirty playwright. . ."\(^40\) As if to emphasize the point Brooke voiced his admiration of Strindberg for his "honesty" in depicting human relationships especially because Strindberg would not give in to the feminism which plagued Ibsen's work.\(^41\)

Unfortunately Brooke found little in America that encouraged him: American art was being ruined by its commercialization.\(^42\) On the whole he found the spectacular countryside melancholy because "... one misses the dead"--because the New World had no history to speak of and consequently "... it had no sense of purpose."\(^43\) Finally, before the cataract of Niagara Falls he had the realization that he was not a modernist.

I am a Victorian after all . . . I sit and stare at the thing and have the purest nineteenth century thought, about the Destiny of Man, the Irresistibility of Fate, the Doom of Nations, the fact that Death awaits us All, and so forth. Wordsworth Redivivus. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!\(^44\)

For Brooke the war meant more than an escape from the prosaic and ignoble and the prospect of middle-age and

\(^{40}\)Ibid., 379. Brooke went so far as to take up the sword against what he now saw as the "revolt against Victorian hypocrisy." See Hassell, 378-79.

\(^{41}\)Ibid., 155-56.


\(^{43}\)Ibid., 155-56.

dotage. He saw the war as an opportunity to side with others who had found the modern sensibility so enervating. He wrote in a letter to his friend in England, the poet John Drinkwater, in January 1915 that he had come to find the war:

... exhilarating and terrible ... Still, it's the only life for me, just now ... I'd not be able to exist, for torment, if I weren't doing it. Not a bad place to die, Belgium, 1915? I want to kill my first Prussian first. Better than coughing out a civilian soul amid bed-clothes and disinfectant and gulping medicines in 1950. The world'll be tame after the war, for those that see it ... Certain sleepers have awoken in the heart. Come and die. It'll be great fun. And there's great health in the preparation ... If you stay there you'll not be able to start afresh with us when we come back. [Charles] Péguy and [Georges] Duhamel; and I don't know what others. I want to mix a few sacred and Apollonian English ashes with theirs, lest England be shamed.45

The war changed him, not because he reveled in the prospect of violence, but because the war allowed him and his generation to find the sense of purpose he had failed to find in poetry as well as modern culture.46 Brooke's obituary in The Times was written by his close friend Edward Marsh and began the enshrinement of Brooke as a symbol of his generation.

He expected to die; he was willing to die for the dear England whose majesty and beauty he knew; and he advanced towards the brink in perfect serenity ... ... he was all that one would wish England's noblest sons to be in days when no sacrifice but the

46Hassell, 472-473.
most precious is acceptable, and  most precious is that which is most freely proffered. 47

There are even closer parallels between Pearse, a Catholic committed to the gospel of redemptive violence, and the French poet Charles Péguy. Péguy was as obsessed as Pearse and Brooke were with the idea that his generation was the last and only hope, that history had presented them with an opportunity and an obligation to save what their nation and culture represented. In 1913 Péguy explained that this generation was to be offered up as a sacrifice "... because it had to endure the mediocrity of contemporary history." 48 For Péguy, redemption could only be found in a commitment to faith and belief in the nation of France restored to its glory -- this was the source of personal and spiritual integrity without which men lost themselves and the time for commitment was upon his generation.

We are the last. Almost beyond the last. Immediately after us begins another age, a quite different world,

47The Times (London), 26 April 1915. Robert Wohl comments upon the irony of Brooke's death from an infection (without really seeing combat) and the icon he became after the war. See Wohl's excellent The Generation of 1914 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 91-92. By coincidence, it is likely that Pearse did not fire a shot during the Rising and Péguy died (see below) in the opening months of the war. This meant that none of these three saw any protracted combat of the kind faced by the disillusioned generation of veterans such as Owens, Junger, Graves, Remarque, or Sassoon.

48Quoted by Wohl, 249.
the world of those who no longer believe in anything; those for whom this is a source of pride and glory. 49

The idea of the French nation as the last repository of noble values so attracted Péguy in the last years before the first World War that he condoned violence in service to the nation, and he implied approval of the assassination of Jean Juarès because it was a patriotic act. 50 Péguy's notion of the good was evolving into one in which integrity, will, and faithfulness were the determining factors.

The Péguy of 1914 valued constancy over morality. In his eyes even a murderer had become a good man when he killed for the sake of principle. 51

Péguy had come to see the defense of Catholic France as a divine mission against the modern spirit.

... our Christian sanctities ... [are] plunged into the modern world, in this vastatio, in this abyss of incredulity, of disbelief and unfaithfulness ... isolated like beacons vainly assailed during well-nigh three centuries of raging furious sea ... . The holy war is everywhere. It is ever being waged. All of us stand in the breach today. We are all stationed on the frontier. The frontier is everywhere. 52

Péguy posited a myth of the nation to stand against this modern tide. He attempted to raise Joan of Arc as the myth incarnate, not only as the spirit of France but also the


51Ibid.

52Peguy, Basic Verities, 177.
refutation of the modern age. For Péguy the battle was between the national myth and the corrupting reason of positivism and the way was to be won by violence.

Our positivists will learn metaphysics as our pacifists will learn war. Our positivists will learn metaphysics by the firing of rifles.

What the national myth required was willful self-sacrifice, without which men were doomed to an impotence which robbed them of their humanity. Péguy found hope in the exercise of the will.

Nothing is as murderous as weakness and cowardice. Nothing is as humane as firmness.

The mythic idea of the nation was served by men who willingly sacrificed themselves on its behalf. Péguy made his sacrifice on behalf of the myth and died early in the war leading a suicidal charge against a German machine-gun position in the First Battle of the Marne. Péguy, like Brooke and Pearse and many others, had come to see that violence in service to a myth had powers of individual and cultural redemption. Serving the myth onto death meant eternal joy and beatification.


54 Ibid., 159.

55 Ibid., 155.

Happy are those who die for a temporal land,
When a just war calls and they obey and go forth,
Happy are they who die for a handful of earth,
Happy are they who die in so noble a band.

Happy are they who die in their country's defense,
Lying outstretched before God with upturned faces.
Happy are they who die in those last high places,
Such funeral rites have a great magnificence.57

The outbreak of the First World War led many of less
than radical sympathies to view the coming blood-letting as
a joyous end to the decadence of a corrupt era. In August
1914 Thomas Mann was to write his brother Heinrich that
whatever the war might bring in terms of personal difficulty
it was a great opportunity not to be denied or avoided.

What a visitation! What will Europe look like, inwardly
and outwardly, when it is over? . . . Shouldn't we be
grateful for the totally unexpected chance to experience
such mighty things?58

Mann wrote in 1917 that in 1914 he had believed that
the war was to be "... a purification, a liberation, an
enormous hope ... . The victory of Germany will be a
paradox, nay a wonder: a victory of soul over numbers. The
German soul is opposed to the pacifist ideal of civilization
for is not peace an element of civil corruption?"59 There
is little doubt that Mann at the beginning of the war saw


and ed. by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Alfred A.

59Quoted in Hans Kohn, The Mind of Germany (New York:
the conflict as a metahistorical clash in which Germany represented something quite old that was seeking liberation in the modern age.\textsuperscript{60}

Ernest Jones records that the normally pacifistic Sigmund Freud was no more immune than Mann was to these war enthusiasms in 1914. The declaration of war invigorated Freud.

\ldots{} his response [Freud's] was rather one of youthfulness, apparently a reawakening of the military ardors of his boyhood. He said that for the first time in thirty years he felt himself to be an Austrian \ldots{}. He was quite carried away, could not think of any work, and spent his time discussing the events of the day with his brother Alexander. As he put it: "All my libido is given to Austria-Hungary." He was very excitable, irritable, and made slips of the tongue all day long.\textsuperscript{61}

Pearse was, like many European intellectuals, concerned about the kind of life threatened by modernity. Because of this anxiety, these intellectuals came to fear that spiritual values and categories were eroding before the power of positivism, reason, and science. Theirs was not an original concern; but it was nonetheless an intense and often depressing one.

Pearse believed that the Easter Rising was not only a strike for Irish freedom; it was also a revolt against the

\textsuperscript{60}Hans Kohn has said that Mann in a series of now notorious essays published in 1914 saw the war as yet another example of Germany's ancient struggle against "Rome" and its civilization. Ibid., 254.

kind of world which he believed was represented by England. By 1916 Pearse had come to see armed rebellion was necessary to save traditional Ireland from the ravages of materialistic, rationalistic, and all too modern England. Denis Gwynn claimed that this idea occupied Pearse in the years shortly before the Rising.

... [Pearse] used to recur continually to the assertion that the people had lost their souls and were becoming vulgarized, commercialized, anxious only to imitate the material prosperity of England.62

At one point Pearse, sharing the feelings of many who attended and rioted at the first production of the play, criticized J. M. Synge’s Playboy of the Western World because the realistic dialogue to be "morally repugnant."63

Pearse found the source of Irish ills in English influence. As England was responsible for the increasing materialism of the Irish people, it was also responsible for the institutions which acted to subvert Irish values and culture. As an educator and head of an "Irish-education" school for boys Pearse saw the English educational system as the culprit which had made Irish children into "willing slaves" in more than just the political and economic sense. 64

The true Ireland was losing its soul to Britain’s modernity and the educational revolution which he felt himself to be a


63An Claidheamh Soluis, 2 Sept. 1907.

64Political Writings and Speeches, 16.
part of was only part of something what was much bigger.\textsuperscript{65} Pearse was the person who made Ireland's national cause into a matter of duty against the modern world represented by the Empire which held Ireland against her will and corrupted her spirit.\textsuperscript{66}

Two points were stressed by Pearse that helped to establish him as the important figure he is today in Irish political nationalism. Both points are revealing of the political climate of the time and also Pearse's personal development. They demonstrate that the resolution and wholeness he sought personally spoke to the needs of radicals in the Republican movement.

The first point had to do with Pearse's belief in the paramount need to act in some fashion. He thought, as did many of his contemporaries, that the arming of Orangemen in the North was spiritually the same thing as Fenianism, the difference being only one of goals.\textsuperscript{67} Pearse believed that action by Irishmen was more important than anything. He came to see that his generation had an obligation which, like generations of Irish patriots before, it had to discharge.\textsuperscript{68} He grew to feel pressure to act more and more,

\textsuperscript{65}Patrick Pearse to W. P. Ryan, 18 March 1915, Patrick Pearse Papers, University College, Dublin.

\textsuperscript{66}Shaw, "The Canon of Irish History," 122-25.

\textsuperscript{67}Hobson, \textit{Volunteers}, 198.

\textsuperscript{68}Pearse, \textit{Political Writings and Speeches}, 198.
and this anxiety found expression in his writing and speeches. He was not above talking about it to friends either, as he replied to Denis Gwynn's statement that a British dreadnought could defeat a rising and ruin Pearse's beloved Dublin: "I would sooner see all Dublin in ruins than that we should to on as we are living at present."\(^\text{69}\) Pearse desired an apocalypse which could release him and his generation from a present which was shameful.\(^\text{70}\) Soon Pearse began to speak of violence as a means of freeing Ireland from Britain and from its lack of will.\(^\text{71}\) Ireland was not free because it had allowed itself to be emasculated and this emasculation had led to an acceptance of the impotence, dishonor, of peace.\(^\text{72}\) This peace had to be overthrown because it was a peace which was "... the devil's peace, peace with sin, peace with dishonor ..."\(^\text{73}\)

For Pearse as for Pégyuy, and Brooke, and others, the way out was through self-immolation, to become, and die, a hero. Only then, he believed, could his "generation" (obviously a term for himself) no longer be ashamed because

\(^{69}\) Gwynn, "Patrick Pearse," 94.

\(^{70}\) Pearse, Political Writings and Speeches, 91-92.


\(^{72}\) Ibid., 195.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 218.
of its failure to act.\textsuperscript{74} Pearse believed that the means of overcoming had its own uniquely Irish precedent. What he wished to appropriate for this was the heroic ideal which he believed had existed in the old Gaelic Order. But there are obvious problems with choosing myth as the basis of any course of political action in the twentieth century. The values of that myth, those exemplified in the Irish epic, the \textit{Táin Bo Cualgne}, were those of an archaic warrior elite. While Cúchulainn, the child-hero-redeemer of the \textit{Táin}, wins his battle for glory, he loses the battle on earth. While he wins eternal triumph and renown, he is killed by his enemies. While he is vulnerable and mortal he remains invincible.

The idealization of this myth meant an implicit acceptance not only of the heroic ideal but also the hero’s fate. The acceptance of death on behalf of one’s fellow man led Pearse to see Cúchulainn’s death in defense of his country as a work of atonement and redemption like that of Jesus Christ.

From this came Pearse’s celebrated notion of the blood sacrifice on behalf of Ireland. The power of the Crucifixion, so much a part of Irish Catholic theology, Pearse joined together with the idea of Cúchulainn’s noble death in the defense of Ulster. In both cases it was the shedding of blood which won the eternal battle and in fact

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., 66.
was, in Pearse’s words "... a cleansing and sanctifying thing." Pearse thought he had seen this demonstrated when, on July 26, 1914, four nationalist supporters were killed and thirty-seven wounded by British troops. The "Bachelor’s Walk Massacre" had, according to Pearse, served to "re-baptize the movement" and the bloodshed had served to rescue the Irish Volunteers from balking at committing themselves to fight the terrible conflict that was to come. In the midst of the Rising Pearse was to write that the sacrifices of the rebels served as "... a redemption of Dublin from its innumerable sufferings ..." By 1916 Pearse had not only come to believe Cúchulainn’s fate had meaning but also that it offered an example to be emulated which could rescue Ireland from its shameful present and Great Britain. The Rising was an attempt to embrace the power of the myth in the service of a chiliastic vision.

Patrick Pearse saw in Cúchulainn heroic violence sanctified ... Resurrected in the present, Ireland’s past glories, pagan and Christian, gave birth to a new messianism which looked forward to that future time when a new Ireland would rise equal to the old.

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75 Ibid., 99.
76 Patrick Pearse to Joseph McGarrity, 28 July 1914, Patrick Pearse Papers, National Library of Ireland.
78 O’Farrell, Ireland’s English Question, 239. O’Farrell demonstrates that these kinds of feelings against modernity as represented by Britain were widespread in pre-
This identification of Irish political and cultural hopes with the heroic fatalism of the Táin and Christian soteriological terminology had greater ramifications than just the synthesis of pagan and Christian culture. The marriage of these elements in such a self-conscious way as an apocalyptic political solution indicates just how difficult the search for an Irish political identity had been. The example of the Gaelic Order was bound to be fraught with peril in a modern world, and the adoption of it as the core of a political commitment was clearly absurd. The synthesis of Cúchulainn and Christ\(^7\) required a considerable leap of faith; nevertheless, this synthesis furnished an example which Pearse fashioned into a sacrificial modality for future Republicans to reaffirm in their own sufferings and deaths. The fact that these ideas have endured demonstrates how important they are within Irish culture.

Embracing the world of the Táin meant that Pearse saw

Rising Ireland and popularly disseminated in the novels of Canon Patrick A. Sheehan. See O'Farrell, 230-32. Sheehan was perhaps the most popular of contemporary Irish novelists and his antipathy to Britain was couched in religious terms, usually contrasting Ireland's spirituality with the enervating materialism and cynicism of modern English culture and society. A representative work of Sheehan's in this regard is his novel Luke Delmege (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1901).

\(^7\)This synthesis can be seen in several places in Pearse's plays and poetry. The clearest dramatic examples can be found in "The King" and "The Singer." Pearse's self-identification with Christ can be seen in his poems "The Mother" and "A Mother Speaks."
the need to embrace all of its values and ideals. He maintained that his "Irish" school at St. Enda’s had been established to resurrect the old Gaelic Order’s system of education in order to "regenerate Ireland." He saw his school as a bastion standing in the way of total surrender to English values, the very values of corrupting civilization itself, the "... biggest impediment to these ideals [i.e., ancient Irish ones]." These ideals were to rescue Ireland and renew it through the willingness of disciples who assented to fight and die with them in mind. In an odd Christmas reflection written from the school in 1910 he said that the student of St. Enda’s was being trained to be "... an efficient soldier, efficient to fight, when need is, his own, his people’s, and the world’s battles, spiritual and temporal." To fight battles so would mean suffering and death, but it was only through sacrifice that Cúchulainn’s reward could pass down to new generations. In the words Pearse quoted from the Tain for the school’s motto the means and the goal were all too clear: self-sacrifice on behalf of Ireland assured eternal fame.

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81 Ibid., 331.

82 Ibid., 339.
I care not though I were to live but one day and one night provided my fame and my deeds live after me.\textsuperscript{83} This ritualistic courting of death and violence borders on the psychopathic.\textsuperscript{84} Pearse and those who followed him to certain destruction came to believe that their actions somehow appropriated the transcendent powers of the myth. Pearse failed to see that what he was really doing was attempting to re-invent the myth mimetically. Since myth is by definition impossible to invent, the reasons behind living a myth out in life are suspiciously irrational if not pathological. It is doubtful that myths can be, except perhaps in a psychotic state, \textit{consciously} experienced. Patrick Pearse appears to have sought what his rational mind could not furnish by living out the sacrifice that is at the heart of the myth. Through a ritualization of the hero's death, Pearse hoped to experience the personal transformation which made his life whole and complete and establish his renown.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{83}Martin Daly [Stephen MacKenna], (Dublin, Pamphlet in the National Library of Dublin), 17.


Pearse suffered severe psychological conflict which made the prospect of dying on Easter Monday 1916 seem attractive, even compelling. The most obvious conflict was the his sexual backwardness. Pearse's sexual immaturity was severe and in adulthood, the behavioral aberrations of his youth and adolescence gave way to embarrassing poems praising the beauty of young boys and an almost compulsive interest in their welfare. Like Rupert Brooke, Pearse's writings are full of negative images of middle and old age, and his heroes are almost always children. The erotic imagery in his poetry and the mores and values of his culture suggest the possibility of sexual anxiety and tension. Nonetheless, neither his sexual ambivalence nor his eroticization of death and violence was wholly unusual for his time; moreover, these traits manifested themselves thematically in the works of Pearse's fellow poets of the Rising.

In addition to his considerable sexual immaturity, Pearse had been unprepared psychologically to take up adult responsibilities. His father, who represented what would have been the normal model for establishing the young man's sense of autonomy and ideals, was notably absent from Patrick's life. It does not seem accidental that Patrick, like so many other Irish revolutionaries, should suffer from an English parent, and that he rebelled against his father's

English connection while enthusiastically embracing his mother's Irish heritage.

Pearse suffered from the smothering attentions of his female relatives throughout his life, but especially in his childhood. He declined to marry and there is nothing to indicate that either he or his brother ever had romantic or sexual relationships with women. Nonetheless, in his dreams, Pearse was often alone and away from his inescapable family and the realities of this world, and then he was strong and free.

When people have been talking to me about national policies, I have been listening to the flickerings of the wings of flies on a window-pane that I once knew; in the midst of military plans and organizations I have been watching myself as a child come out of a certain green gate into a sun-lit field; or as a lad breasting great breakers beneath the moon, striving with strong white shoulders, wet and glistening.®

Pearse talked constantly about failure, betraying his sexual impotency, emotional inadequacy, intellectual deficiency, and other perceived defects. The most compelling idea in his life was his oft-stated need to act—not only to express himself, but to act in a decisive way in order to redeem himself. In Pearse's culture the idea of personal redemptive transformation was everywhere. It existed in the transformation symbolism of the Eucharist, and in the Táin, where Cúchulainn was transformed into an unstoppable warrior by his warp spasm. In both the Christian and Celtic

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86 Patrick Pearse, "My Childhood," in The Home Life of Patrick Pearse, 8.
concepts of transformation, base elements are miraculously changed into heavenly and divine ones. In both cases the elements' potentiality was realized, a potentiality locked within their own natures, waiting to be liberated for some divine purpose. These ideas were utmost in Pearse's mind shortly before his death when he saw himself dying, as Robert Emmet had in 1803, for a divinely ordained purpose—a sacrifice for Ireland like Christ's on the Cross. It was the transforming power of myth that attracted Pearse; he wanted to accept its offer of a wholeness which destroyed all self-doubts and inadequacies. Ultimately that wholeness came from a death which enjoined the dead with all of the nationalist martyrs of the past and those who suffer for it at present. It was at this point that Pearse came to speak of the need of one man who would shed his blood to redeem the nation and hand on the cause, now well served by one's own generation, to those that were to follow.


88Gaelic American, March 1914.

89Pearse, Speeches, 86.

90In a farewell speech to his students given shortly before the Rising Pearse said: "As it took the blood of the Son of God to redeem the world, so it would take the blood of Irishmen to redeem Ireland." Speeches, 98. Pearse's self-identification with Christ has played no small part in his status within the Republican tradition.

91Ibid., 286.
While death was the inevitable payment for this redemption the martyr could die with the assurance, as Pearse saw it, that "Life springs from death . . . ." In 1915 Pearse even went so far as to claim that Ireland could well learn from Europe the transforming power of death.

The last sixteen months have been the most glorious in the history of Europe. On whichever side the men who rule the peoples have marshaled them . . . . It is policy that moves the governments; it is patriotism that stirs the peoples . . . . It is good for the world that such things should be done. The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed by the red wine of the battlefields. Such august homage was never being offered to God as this, the homage of millions of lives given gladly for love of country.

The hard-bitten socialist Connolly bitterly attacked the anonymous author's tribute to death:

No, we do not think that the old heart of the earth needs to be warmed with the wine of millions of lives. We think anyone who does is a blithering idiot.

However, within months of criticizing Pearse for these intemperate remarks, even Connolly was to agree, as were so many others, with Pearse's vision of blood-sacrifice and redemption. Two months later Connolly showed how he embraced Pearse's vision.

Without the slightest trace of irreverence but in all due humility and awe, we recognize that of us, as of

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93Spark, December 1915.

94Worker's Republic, 25 December 1915.
mankind before Calvary, it may truly be said 'without the shedding of Blood there is no Redemption'.

Patrick Pearse spoke to a time and a society in which many had come to believe as he believed; and they followed him in his desperate action. He had led a life that was emblematic of that lived by many of his contemporaries, and his search for wholeness was mirrored in their search for spiritual wholeness in an age of rationality.

Pearse sought to create through destruction and his rejection of the modern age which faced Ireland came in a violent refutation of the politics and culture of reason. His personal need for the approval of history, a kind of eternal justification and sanctification, has been granted. His impact on history has been far greater in death than it ever had been in life. By reconciling life and death in his violent search for wholeness, he paved the way for other Irish revolutionaries to follow. There were others who spoke much as Pearse did, but few communicated with his sense of emotional certainty. As a contemporary who heard him wrote shortly after the Rising:

Men must find some centre of power or action or intellect about which they may group themselves, and I think Pearse became the leader because his temperament was more profoundly emotional than any of the others. He was emotional not in a flighty way, but in a serious way, and one felt that he suffered more than he enjoyed.96

95Workers's Republic, February 5, 1916.

The failure of Irish nationalists to find any pragmatic and peaceful solution to their search for cultural and political independence led many of them to seek solutions that were not bound by the notions of reason. It was Pearse who came to couch the solution in chiliastic terms which promised to free Ireland and to save Ireland from the modern spirit that England represented. With Pearse to inspire them these nationalists won their greatest victory through the self-destructive yet regenerative and liberating act of self-immolation. In all of this Pearse pointed the way; his lack of maturity and insight did not hinder him from taking on a role that a large portion of his society was all too willing to grant him.

His contribution to that history should not, however, eclipse the fact that he brought to Irish politics concerns which were not limited to Ireland. Patrick Pearse was not a parochial enigma: like many of his generation, he was deeply concerned that modernity and its culture of reason represented a threat to values and culture. By embracing the subjectivity of myth over the received dictates of reason and pragmatism, Patrick Pearse came to articulate the Irish rejection of modernity at a critical moment in Irish history. That Pearse was Irish should not hide the fact that his vision was one that he shared with many European intellectuals of the day.
CHAPTER VIII

PATRICK PEARSE AND PATRIOTIC SOTERIOLOGY: THE
IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY AND THE SANCTIFICATION
OF POLITICAL SELF-IMMOLATION

The historical issue of Irish nationalism and violence has often been obscured by the conflicting claims that violence is necessary and justified or that it is gratuitous, immoral, and terroristic. The morality or immorality of Irish political violence is an issue which is extraneous to the issue of the historical development of the beliefs which sustain the justification of violence and death within Irish nationalism in the twentieth century. Conventional discussions about the use of violence in Ireland tend to miss the fact that the Republican tradition, as a result of Pearse and the Rising, understands Irish nationalism as a theology with its own morality. Violence in Republicanism is prescriptive and manifests itself in response to the theological explanation of things. These

1A version of this chapter was presented on October 13, 1988 as a lecture "The Theology of Violence and the Irish Republican Army" given as a part of the 1988-89 History Department Lecture Series of The American University in Washington D.C. It is to be published at a future date as a chapter of a volume on terrorism in the series edited by Alan O'Day and Yonah Alexander.
Discussions have failed to address the question of how it is possible that so many Irish men and women chose to kill, to be killed, and to die, on behalf of an Irish republic. By choosing self-immolation, these people, either consciously or unconsciously, confirm a dogmatic theology of violence held by Irish Republicanism whose credo was articulated by Patrick Pearse in Dublin's Easter Rising of 1916.\(^2\) Pearse promulgated an archetype of Irish Republican martyrdom in which the Irish patriot reenacts a redemptive myth sanctifying not only the infliction of death and violence upon others but also the suffering of it by faithful nationalists. Since 1916 Irish republicanism has consistently reaffirmed the Easter Rising's modality of self-immolation whereby the patriot's willingness to die yields soteriological possibilities, i.e., in mimetically dying on behalf of Ireland the republican martyr seeks to redeem both his country and himself.

In twentieth-century Ireland this has often meant that Irish Republicans have chosen to die the death of the martyr—choosing death over life rather than to surrender or compromise faith in the republican vision of a free and

united Ireland and the theology has glorified these willing
deaths in the belief that they are redemptive acts that help
usher in a new age of righteousness. The result has been a
replication within the Irish revolutionary tradition of
long-established if unorthodox religious ideas and practices
in Western Christianity.

The development of movements in Christianity which
combined notions of violent anti-colonialism grievance and
chiliastic beliefs with an emphasis on "voluntary martyrdom"
dates from the ancient Church. As the Church came to be
identified with the Roman Empire in the fourth century, it
became the focus of conflict between native populations and
imperial authority. The clearest case of this phenomenon
was in rural North Africa in the development of the Donatist
heresy.

The conversion of the north African population to
Christianity took place amidst competing pagan religions\(^3\)
and resulted in resentment of Roman power and the Latinized
culture of the Church.\(^4\) It does appear that the African

\(^3\)Before its conversion to Christianity the area of
Numidia was one of fanatical devotion to the cult of Saturn
and Caelestis, which required enormous personal sacrifice of
its followers. The worship of Saturn appears to have been
strongest amongst those of the lower classes and peasants. See W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of
Protest in Roman Northern Africa* (London: Oxford University
Press, 1952), 77-85.

\(^4\)See C. N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*
(London: Oxford University Press, 1940), especially chap.
four; see also Frend, *Donatist*, 106-7.
conversion to Christianity was not, at least in its initial phase in the late second and early third centuries, so alien as to represent a significant change from the emotionally appealing qualities of African national paganism. Nonetheless, by the end of the third century the African church, after its initial inroads amongst women and the lower orders, had firmly established itself amongst the educated elites in African society. The extent to which Christianity had been accepted was demonstrated in the steadfastness of African Christians in the face of imperial persecution of the faith during the Decian and Diocletianic persecutions. In fact, the Africans were perhaps the most faithful and uncompromising part of the Church, and it was out of this experience whence a sense of godly superiority over those who had once renounced their faith developed, especially amongst the lower classes who had supplied the majority of the African martyrs.

In the fourth century the north African church was split by a struggle between the Catholic Church and the sect known as Donatism. The Donatists broke with the Roman Church over the issue of the reinstatement of once-lapsed

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5Ibid., 83-93.

6A. H. M. Jones, "Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?" Journal of Theological Studies NS, 10, no. 2: 284-86.

7Ibid., 285-86.
church officials and communicants to the church, and they attacked what they viewed as the acceptance of grave sins. Donatism was also an anti-imperial political movement supported mostly by the Berber peasants in Numidia who resented the domination of their church by the Latinized elites who collaborated with their imperial administrators. Donatism spread rapidly and emerged as

8In the African part of the Empire during the Great Persecution of Diocletian (303-5) the issue concerned the surrender of the Scriptures: those who did were called traditores or "surrenderers," and after 305 the majority of the Numidian episcopate accepted the recommendations of conservative-minded confessors against readmitting these once-lapsed church officials and believers to the church. See B. H. Warmington, The North African Provinces from Diocletian to the Vandal Conquest (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 77-78. The Donatists argued that the administration of the sacraments by the traditores would condemn the recipients. See Frend, Donatist, 283ff.


10The issue of whether or not the Donatists were a social or nationalistic revolutionary movement is the subject of considerable debate. It is Frend's opinion that they were not nationalistic, but were interested in religious reform that suggested social reform as well. See The Donatist Church, 153-55, et passim, as well as Ramsey MacMullen, Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966). For Frend the Donatists were not mere anti-
the most significant challenge to the Catholic Church in Roman Africa.

The religious and political threat of Donatism resulted in occasionally violent confrontations with the church and the authorities. The Donatists now believed that imperialists, but were a movement set against Rome's authority as a "symbol of the imperfection of the present transitory phase." (171) Knox argues that Augustine would have discussed the social "agenda" of Donatism if there had been one but he did not. See Knox, Enthusiasm, 62-63. An interesting analysis of nationalism in early religious heresies is A. H. M. Jones's "Were ancient heresies national or social movements in disguise?" Jones comes down squarely against nationalism within these movements because he believes the concept of nationalism is applied anachronistically. Virtually all the other major commentators have gone at least as far as Frend's interpretation of the revolutionary social nature of Donatism and there is a considerable body of opinion which accepts that Donatism was a nationalistic, and anti-imperial, movement with a specifically North African flavour. Along these lines see Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire 4 vols., (New York: Peter Fenelon, Collier, & Son, 1900), especially Vol 3, Chap. 21, 294ff.; Baxter; Willis; Warmingtong; Cochrane, especially Chap. 4; Gerhart B. Ladner, The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers (New York: Harper & Row, 1958; revised ed., 1967), esp. 465ff; E. Tengstrom, Donatisthchen u. Katholiken: soziale, wirtschaftliche u. politische Aspekte einen nordafri- kanischen Kirchenspaltung (Gotheburg: n.p., 1964), and P. R. L. Brown, "Religious Dissent in the later Roman Empire: The Case of North Africa," History, 46 (1961). The problem with this discussion is that it largely fails to address anti-Roman feelings within the context of local and regional senses of oppressed self-identity. In the light of the chiliastic impulses of modern social and political movements it must appear obvious that the regional resentment against one's rulers has often been displayed in ways that are unconscious of ideology. The fact is that the Donatists attacked the status quo which happened to be heavily Latinized and pro-Roman in spiritual, political, economic, and social ways. The "nationalism" of a number of heresies who manifested local "ethnicity" similar to that seen in Donatism is widely accepted in Patristic studies.
Roman church was an evil which needed to be attacked so that the truth could be protected. They regarded themselves as the remnant of a pure Christianity set upon by a compromising apostasy willing to use its political advantage to secure its position. The Donatists saw their victory in cosmic terms—a victory to be won ultimately in eternity.

By the time of the death of Constantine in 337, the eponymous founder of the movement, Donatus of Carthage, would preside over a church council of at least 270 bishops. The moral issue which had led to the initial Donatist break with the church now included the belief that the Empire represented wicked Babylon set against the Heavenly City of God. As the Church continued in its intimate relationship with the empire the Donatists became

11Pelikan, Emergence, 308-9.

12It should be mentioned that the Romans and the Church tended to refer to the Donatists as Montanses because the cult’s ministry tended to take place in caves. See Optatus of Mileve II. 4.

13Frend, Donatist, 337. Optatus tells us that in 318 Donatus the Great, out of his see of Carthage, appointed a Donatist bishop in Rome. Optatus II. 4.

14W. H. C. Frend, Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 554. The Donatist response to the Church’s relationship was heavily influenced by Tertullian. It was Tertullian’s position that Christianity should reject Roman culture. See Cochrane, Christianity, 227-28; Tertullian, De Idolotaria. 6-9; Apol. 38.
increasingly numerous and violent in their opposition. By any standard the Donatist exaltation of martyrdom was extraordinary. They identified themselves as a church of martyrdom and held that the righteousness of true believers predisposed them to suffering and that suffering was a mark of holiness. Donatist church services included a recitation of the acts of the Donatist martyrs, and members of the sect sought burial near the tombs of martyrs and saints long before the practice was common in Christianity. Both Optatus and Augustine commented extensively about the importance of martyrdom to the heresy, and what Donatist writings survive confirm this fact. Augustine, who became increasingly preoccupied with the Donatist heresy, cited the Donatist theologian Petilian's

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17 Apparently Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) was an important model for Donatist martyrs. Frend, *Donatist*, 318.


19 Ibid., 320.

claim that Christianity "... makes progress by the deaths of its followers"\textsuperscript{21} as proof of the excess zeal for martyrdom held within the movement.\textsuperscript{22} In Numidia, where Donatism flourished, Christianity replaced the cult of Saturn with a Christian cult that emphasized fanatical devotion and enthusiastic martyrdom.

The Donatist movement was to see its most violent manifestation in the appearance of the Circumcellions in 340.\textsuperscript{23} The Circumcellions got their name (\textit{circum cellas}) from living around the tombs, cells, and shrines of saints and martyrs.\textsuperscript{24} They were fanatically violent Donatist peasants\textsuperscript{25} who roamed the country killing and robbing Romans and Catholics and desecrating Catholic shrines and churches, and even fed the consecrated elements of the sacked churches to dogs.\textsuperscript{26} Augustine records that their war cry of \textit{Deo

\textsuperscript{21}Quoted in Augustine, \textit{Contra Litter. Pet.}, II. 85. 196.

\textsuperscript{22}See Frend, \textit{Donatist}, 101.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 171.

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 173. There is some disagreement on the origin of the name amongst the authorities. There is a frequent ascription of their name to the fact that they were thought to live in stone agricultural houses (\textit{cellae}). Warmington, \textit{North African}, 85.


laudes terrified those in the African countryside.\textsuperscript{27} Circumcellion tomb inscriptions described themselves as "agonistici—champions" or "milites Christi—soldiers of Christ."\textsuperscript{28} Optatus dwelled on their penchant for violence\textsuperscript{29} and a modern commentator has drawn the conclusion that the Circumcellions were "terrorists" whose violence was aimed at interfering with the law and its representatives.\textsuperscript{30} Some have likened Circumcellion atrocities to agrarian Irish outrages in the nineteenth century. The Circumcellions commanded fierce allegiance from their followers and mutilated those who deserted from their cause.\textsuperscript{31}

While the Circumcellions were the vanguard of Donatist violence and resistance to the Empire, they were a mixed blessing to the third generation of Donatist bishops who tended to desire some kind of rapprochement with Rome. The Circumcellions were betrayed on several occasions by the more conservative Donatist establishment (which had grown

\textsuperscript{27}Augustine, \textit{Ennarr. in Ps.} 132. 6.

\textsuperscript{28}Frend, \textit{Donatist}, 174.

\textsuperscript{29}Optatus III. 143.


\textsuperscript{31}Augustine, \textit{Ep.} 105. ii, 3.
increasingly urbanized, Latinized, and well educated) and Circumcellions furnished a large number of new martyrs for veneration with the sect.

As it was Augustine's continual theme that the church should be unified, his belief that the Circumcellions were directed by Donatist clergy led him to condemn Donatism's willingness to use violence against Christians,\(^{32}\) even when the Donatists denied responsibility for their allies.\(^{33}\) Perhaps the fact that Augustine himself narrowly avoided a Donatist ambush while on the road in his own diocese sometime around 400 played a role in his condemnation of the movement.\(^{34}\) Even though Circumcellionism never became widespread in Donatism its influence was significant. Although the first laws against Donatism were written in 377\(^{35}\) it was not until after a bishop's conference at Carthage in 411 that the heretical movement was to see extensive persecution through its slow decline and then disappearance by 700.\(^{36}\)

To the Church the Donatists and the Circumcellions

\(^{32}\)Augustine, Ep., 108. 6. 18; 185. 4. 16; Contra Litter. Pet., 2. 24. 26; 2. 164. See also Willis, Saint Augustine, 172-74.

\(^{33}\)Willis, Saint Augustine, 29.

\(^{34}\)Augustine, Enchir. 5. 17. It appears that Optatus was a major influence on Augustine when it came to the issue of Donatism, see Willis, Saint Augustine, 25.

\(^{35}\)Optatus, II. 18.

were guilty of more than just attacks upon the Catholic community or sedition, the movement appealed to nomadic elements in north African society who lived off of the land—a habit that Augustine found to be very disturbing.\textsuperscript{37} As such Circumcellionism was a violent resistance to change in what had been their traditional way of life\textsuperscript{38} and represented "... an archaistic protest against the waning of something."\textsuperscript{39} The Circumcellions, unlike the Donatists, were strongly influenced by ascetic communal life\textsuperscript{40} and were known for their elaborate religious rituals and liturgy.\textsuperscript{41} But nothing brought the condemnation of the Church\textsuperscript{42} more than the cult's enthusiasm for voluntary martyrdom.

The Donatists and Circumcellions have been remembered largely because of their violent aspirations to ethnic, 


\textsuperscript{38}Warmington, North Africa, 100. 

\textsuperscript{39}Knox, Enthusiasm, p. 51. 

\textsuperscript{40}Frend, Donatist, p. 320. Cochrane and others have called the the Circumcellions the "left wing" within the Donatist movement "made up of communist, anarchist-millenialist fanatics ..." This judgment reflects more about Cochrane's and some of his colleagues' views in 1940 than it does about Circumcellionism. It is likely that they were communally oriented along the lines of the early apostolic community of the New Testament--Bakunin had little influence on the Circumcellions. See Cochrane, Christianity, 206. 

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid, 174. 

\textsuperscript{42}The most important Augustinian argument in favor of suppressing the Donatists is Contra Gaudentium.
religious, and political freedom. Violence came to be the means of both expressing the righteousness of the cause and overthrowing the colonial establishment; however, although their attacks upon Catholics and Romans served as divine retribution against the wicked, violence also offered the opportunity for the heretics to die as martyrs for their faith. The Donatist passion for martyrdom led Edward Gibbon to describe them as above all people who sought death through a variety of means. The Donatists profaned pagan temples in order to elicit revenge and threatened armed Catholic travelers with violence if they would not kill them. While the Donatists did not generally abet the crimes of the Circumcellions, devout Donatists did nonetheless become enthusiastic voluntary martyrs. These Donatists, intent upon martyrdom, jumped (sometimes en masse) off cliffs if they could not persuade the authorities to execute them, often doing so after informing friends of the time they planned to do it. Despite frequent Donatist citations of the martyrs of 2 Maccabees 6, 7 to prove that suicide was a legitimate form of martyrdom, Augustine and the church condemned this self-immolation as being evil and false.

Theologically, the problem with voluntary martyrdom is Christianity's long history of equivocal martyrs. Authentic martyrs die rather than deny the truth and realize that

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43 Gibbon, Decline and Fall, 294-95.
44 Ibid.
death is preferable to life compromised. The Donatist cult of martyrdom, tinged with Circumcellion violence, obviously represents an intolerable development within Christian orthodoxy. Like Catholic martyrs the Donatists died for what they believed; yet they sought death actively in an attempt to appropriate the eternal historical reward and spiritual victory of the martyr. Martyrdom enables the saint to win the ultimate victory over an unconquerable foe, and by self-immolation the Donatists hoped to achieve a similar end.

The Donatists were not alone in their resistance to either the Church or the Empire. Similar movements throughout the late Roman Empire have been noted by historians. But the Donatists stand out in their willingness to use violence. In Circumcellionism, its most extreme form, Donatist violence had a soteriological character such that the willingness to inflict it or suffer it was held to demonstrate devotion. By immolating himself, the martyr kept faith with the Donatist tradition and secured a place in the acts of the cult's martyrs. The fact that the leadership of the movement was willing to betray the most fanatically devoted members of that movement only served to reinforce the special place martyrdom had in a sect built

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45 See MacMullen, Enemies of the Roman Order; Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture.

46 The Donatists in 394-95 successfully stifled a schism within their ranks when it brutally suppressed the followers of Maximian. See Frend, Donatist, 213-14.
upon the notion of sacrifice. In betrayal the martyr’s fate mirrored Christ’s own and served to confirm the unique calling given over to those who died as martyrs.

The orthodox Judeo-Christian sacrifice originates in a covenant initiated by the Deity which defines the sacrifice as an animal or precious thing offered to God in order to expiate a sin or purify a defilement. Christianity inverted this concept of sacrifice in the Passion of Christ where Jesus was both the victim Lamb of God and the offerer of the sacrifice who represented mankind. Christ’s offering of Himself is appropriate given His possession of both a fully human and divine nature (because of this His death cannot be seen as a suicide—it gains eternal victory over sin and death not only for Himself but also for all mankind).

The key issue in the Western tradition of martyrdom is soteriology. Martyrdom in classical culture tended to be exemplary and involved neither an idea of cosmic atonement nor expiation. On the other hand, the Jewish martyr died as a sacrifice for his people in order to reconcile them with God and to prepare them for the age of righteousness to come. As the chosen people of God the Jews expected suffering at the hands of a sinful world and passed on to

47 Optatus, III. 4; II. 14. 20. See also Warmington, North Africa, 85; Frend, Donat, 176.
48 Frend, Martyrs, 68.
49 Ibid., 50.
Christianity the idea that true martyr's suffered death undeservedly. Martyrs were given a choice of whether or not they would deny the truth as they knew it and martyrs died without opposing those who persecuted them. Each martyr's death served as a witness to the essential truth of this theology. In both the classical and the Judaic case the martyr's death was meaningful; the difference lay in the soteriological implication of the Judaic martyr's death as it served the larger issue of the salvation of Israel, while the classic martyr's death served the state.

The soteriological elements of Judaic martyrdom had an enormous impact upon the early Christian church's ideas about martyrdom especially the case of the Maccabees. John Chrysostom saw the Maccabees as the best example for Christians to follow. W. H. C. Frend, the leading authority on the subject, claims that Christians recognition of the exemplary nature of 2 Maccabees 6, 7 was almost universal after the third century, and the early Church tended to regard them as archetypes and thus included them

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50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 47.
52 Ibid., 55-56.
53 Ibid., 68.
54 Ibid., 20.
55 Ibid., 21.
in their list of martyrs of the faith\textsuperscript{56} (the absence of attention paid to the Zealots of Masada in A.D. 74 seems significant). Some early accounts of Christian martyrdom reveal literary forms and themes similar to those found in the Maccabean literature.\textsuperscript{57} From the outset the church considered martyrs to be a group that was set apart and it was widely believed that they shared in a name given to Jesus himself.\textsuperscript{58} In the early Church groups which did not produce martyrs were open to question because it was believed that their doctrine was too easily abandoned. Irenaeus, seeking to discredit Gnosticism, commented that the cult had produced few, if any, martyrs since the appearance of Christ.\textsuperscript{59}

Jesus Christ decisively changed the Western tradition of martyrdom. His martyrdom was both a divine and a human event which shattered the parochialism of earlier forms of martyrdom in a single universal redemptive act.\textsuperscript{60} Christianity has had to deal with the problems that this causes, because the sacrifice on the cross combined the roles of sacrificer and offering in a way that was unique and bound to present problems of imitation. As long as the

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., 20-22.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{59}See Irenaeus, Adv. Haereses. I.; Libri V.

\textsuperscript{60}Frend, Martyrs, 68.
Christian martyr’s death was one that merely re-enacted the death of Jesus out of love for one’s Lord and was suffered under similar circumstances there was no problem. Martyrdom assured the Christian of salvation and was seen to be the confirmation of a special blessedness: "Death [of the martyr] was the beginning of true discipleship." But martyrs who courted death believing that their death was a redemptive act in the way that Jesus’s had been represented a misunderstanding of the believer’s role.

Given the character of Donatist martyrdom one would have to side with Augustine that such a conception of martyrdom was heretical. While paganism had a tradition of devotio or self-immolative martyrdom Christian theology had to assume that self-immolation was wrong because it arrogated the role of Jesus Christ to the pseudo-martyr and denied the historical uniqueness of the Crucifixion. The Donatist’s actions implied that the final sacrifice had not been enacted and arrogated to themselves the divine role that was Christ’s alone. In their advocacy of suicidal martyrdom the Donatists implied that the final sacrifice had been insufficient, a central tenet of the Christian’s

61 Ibid., 15.


63 Jewish examples would include Samson although "Samsonic suicide" should raise many other questions. Judges 16:23-31.
understanding that Jesus Christ died once for all men. The Donatist martyrs assumed to themselves the divine act which redeemed mankind and it was this presumption, and the accompanying usurpation of God's authority, that must have been a major factor in the Church's eventually charging the Donatists with heresy. By killing themselves they not only violated orthodox doctrine prohibiting suicide but also acted out of presumption. True martyrs do not seek death and are killed because of what they believe; thus, true martyrs are not suicides. Christian martyrs die with a transcendent certainty in mind which informs their choice and they die believing that they actually had no choice.

64 Frend has observed that the Donatists sought martyrdom both as a confirmation of ultimate victory and as a way of guaranteeing a sacred position of spiritual authority over one's former rivals and oppressors. Martyrdom was an act of intense and eternally satisfying hostility. "... martyrdom was their means of victory, in itself an act of vengeance, for martyrdom gave them hope of revenge hereafter, as the judges of the pagans. See Frend, Donatist, 107-8.

65 This would indicate the inappropriateness of applying Emile Durkheim's idea of "altruistic suicide" to cases of religious martyrdom. Written under the bias of sociological positivism, Durkheim's Suicide reflects an utterly secularized view which assumes that the ultimate determinations in choosing to die in the affirmation of something is a combination of ideological conviction and psychological inadequacy. Durkheim did consider the idea of "obligatory altruistic suicide" by which he claims that the group and its shared identity prepares some individuals to die out of their commitment to the group's ideals (221ff). Christianity in this analysis does not advocate overt suicide but it does "... assign to him [the believer] personal duties he is forbidden to evade ... " (226). One would have to say that this analysis fails to consider transcendence as either a valid human experience or
The Donatists' acceptance of violence only compounded this heresy.

Historically and theologically Donatism spawned a number of hereies which combined revolutionary violence, strong ethnic or "nationalist" resentment against a colonial and imperial power, and enthusiasm for martyrdom. Edward Gibbon noted similarities between the Donatists and the eighteenth-century Camisards, an analogy taken up by more recent historians. Louis XIV himself cited Roman policy towards Donatism to justify his own persecution of the justifiable aspiration.

Unfortunately the modern insensitivity towards martyrdom mars each of the major works which have followed Durkheim's lead. Karl Menninger's *Man Against Himself* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1938; Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1966) remains the most important exploration of the "death instinct" first articulated by Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* trans. James Strachey (London: Norton, 1922), and more developed in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1962). Menninger accepts Freud's hypothesis without qualification and believes that the martyr's death is a form of suicide in which the religious justification of it is merely an instance of the act finding a rational cause ex post facto which hides the true purpose of the unconscious: to kill the would-be martyr (18). Menninger acknowledged his dependence upon Freud, who was particularly insensitive to assertions of the possibilities of the human experience of transcendence and argued that religious ideas, while important for a variety of reasons, were ultimately illusions. For more on Freud's attitude towards religious experience see his *The Future of an Illusion*. For an analysis of this issue in Freud's life see Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York: Norton, 1988), especially 525-27; 544-45.

Other works on suicide which do consider martyrdom include Alfred Adler, "Suicide," *Journal of Individual Psychology* 14 (May 1958) and numerous works by E. S. Shneidman and N. L. Faberow.

66 Gibbon, *Decline*, 294; see also Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 361.
Parallels have been also noted between the Huguenots and Donatists and Anabaptists.

Perhaps the clearest parallel can be seen in the heretical Bohemian nationalist movement the Hussites of the 15th century. The Hussites were a nationalist revolutionary movement committed to the overthrow in Bohemia of German culture, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Catholic Church. It was a popular religious movement heavily influenced by the English Lollard heresy and the Free Spirit movement of Belgium and Northern France. The founder of the movement, W. J. Sparrow Simpson, Saint Augustine and the African Church Divisions (London: Longmans, Green, 1910), 147.


68 Knox, Enthusiasm, 58-59.


70 Heymann agrees with several nineteenth century historians that the Reformation began with the Hussites a century before Martin Luther. See Heymann, John Zizka, ix-15.
Jan Hus, argued that the Germans were the "enemies of God" who, with the Roman Catholic Church, oppressed the lower orders in early fifteenth-century Bohemia.\textsuperscript{71}

Hussism eventually grew less radical which led to a split between the more urban and reformist conservative majority within Hussism and the radical Taborites. The Taborites were committed to the rejection of the sinful church, the empire, and German culture, and sought to set up a communistic apostolic community in southern Bohemia.\textsuperscript{72}

Originally pacifists the Taborites became militant revolutionaries\textsuperscript{73} in the face of betrayal at the hands of their Hussite brethren to the Germans from 1419 onward.\textsuperscript{74} They came to see themselves as ordained to kill the sinful and the apostate,\textsuperscript{75} and they accepted the idea that God would come to them to establish the millenium, the thousand year reign of Jesus over the righteous on earth. Their name 'Taborite' came from Mt. Tabor traditionally the place where Christ foretold of his Second Coming in Mark 13.\textsuperscript{76} Violence was not only necessary to defend the truth but also

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71}Heymann, 49ff.
\item \textsuperscript{72}Kaminsky, "Chiliasm," 45.
\item \textsuperscript{73}Ibid., 50-52.
\item \textsuperscript{74}Kaminsky, "Free Spirit," 169.
\item \textsuperscript{75}Kaminsky, "Chiliasm," 57.
\item \textsuperscript{76}Ibid., 45.
\end{itemize}
efficacious to hasten the Second Advent and their chiliastic expectations increased with persecution at the hands of the Hussites and German authorities.

The Taborites developed what one historian has described as an "ideology of violence." John Capek, a university student and Taborite priest wrote a tract which argued that God's elect had an obligation to kill sinners because they were enemies of Jesus. In that tract Capek claimed not only that it was sinful not to kill the enemies of God but also that "Every believer must wash his hands in that blood." Because the Taborites thought of themselves as the elect of God they believed that they could commit robbery of non-Taborites. Poor and violent, the Taborites were persecuted and eventually eradicated only after many had died as martyrs for the holy cause.

Donatists and Hussites, and many similar heresies began as rural ethnic movements against imperial and colonial administrations closely allied with orthodoxy.

77 Ibid., 45-60 passim; Cohn, Pursuit of the Millenium, 213.


79 Ibid., 57.

80 Cohn, 212.

81 Quoted by Cohn, 212.

82 Ibid., 217.

83 Another example of a radical chiliastic movement dedicated to ushering in the new age against an apostate
Eventually the leaders of these movements made political accommodations which alienated their most radical followers. The resulting estrangement led to collaboration between the governments and leaders which resulted in large numbers of radical martyrs who became the basis of a cult of martyrdom. The Circumcellions and the Taborites stood apart in the extent of their violence and radicalism which included a chiliastic hope of bringing about a new age by violence and self-immolation. Given the nature of the odds against them the devout heretics continued to act in ways which either directly or indirectly brought about their martyrdom and with it the unique reward that their movement held for martyrs. In these cases martyrdom took on nationalist overtones as the imperial oppressors were seen to deny both religious and political freedom. Thus the martyr's death came to be seen as the inevitable and necessary sacrifice on behalf of the nation. Martyrdom was an act of faith which sanctified the suffering of violence as a means of redemption.

In the Irish republican tradition this idea of sanctified nationalist violence has had a long and enduring

role. The vast power of the British Empire arrayed against Irish independence made it necessary for Irish republican advocates of the use of physical-force to explain their continued failure to secure its goals. In 1798 when Theobold Wolfe Tone gave substance to republican ideas by leading a United Irishmen and a French invasion force against the British. The Rising of 1798 ended in defeat at the hands of the British, and in Tone’s own suicide, and since that time Irish republicanism has suffered only ignominious defeat which has to be explained. The moral superiority of the Republican cause obviously has not resulted in victory on the battlefield. As the movement depends on this idea of moral superiority its dependence on violence, in light of its failure to bring about the supposedly inevitable victory, needs justifying when the results of violence are so ineffective and often reprehensible.

In 1916 the issue was whether or not violent overthrow of the British regime was justified given the British promise of some measure of independence in 1914 with the final passage of a bill for Home Rule (to be placed in effect at the end of the First World War). It was Patrick Pearse who argued that violence was needed, not because it was politically justified or even morally necessary but because it was essential if his generation was to take its place with previous Irish generations in demonstrating its
righteousness by acting as witnesses to the righteousness of the cause. For Pearse the conflict was a cosmic one where Irish patriots were being called to kill and to die in order to redeem the nation and themselves. He believed that his generation had not kept faith with the tradition and after 1913, Pearse's rhetoric grew to be dominated by themes of killing and sacrifice.

We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, to the sight of arms, to the use of arms. We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood.  

For Pearse the shedding of blood was more important than the unlikely victory to be won—it served to win the battle on an eternal plane where a new Ireland, resurrected, pure, Gaelic and Catholic, unspoiled by England and the modern age, could emerge triumphant over its eternal enemy to assume its rightful place. Pearse's language, in both his writings and his speeches, couches violent romantic nationalist ideology in theological language that emphasizes martyrdom as a means of bringing about the new age. It was Pearse's ability to describe this conflict and its violence in theological terms that were historically understandable to Irish nationalist culture that has made him such an important figure within the republican tradition.

In Irish history religious martyrdom has always been

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84 Political Writings and Speeches, 98.
a feature of her struggle against England. The absence of Irish martyrs before the Tudor conquest of Ireland and the Reformation has been noted by many scholars. By far the greatest number of the 258 beatified Irish martyrs comes out of the Cromwellian terror, and the year of 1651 produced the largest number with 34.85 Hence Irish religious martyrdom came to have a distinctly nationalist cast. The confiscation of Ireland and the passage of the anti-Catholic Penal Laws from 1695 to 1709, which secured the position of the Protestant Ascendancy (on whom the imperial government depended), guaranteed the identification of Catholicism with Irish nationalism and by implication the position of martyrdom as a witness to the truth. Irish martyrs did not die solely because they were Roman Catholic but because they were Irish Catholic witnesses of a free and unconquered Ireland.

Chiliasm has long been a prominent feature of Irish nationalism. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries groups committed to agrarian violence, both Protestant and Catholic, manifested many of the features of chiliastic revolutionary violence which have been discussed by not only E. J. Hobsbawm in his books *Primitive Rebels* and *Bandits*, but also Sylvia Thrupp and Christopher Hill.86 Daniel


86 E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), and *Bandits* (New York: Delacorte Press,
O’Connell, the greatest Irish politician of the early nineteenth century, received no small measure of support from a popularly shared view of him amongst Irish Catholic supporters as an apocalyptic figure complete with stories that his birth was miraculous, his swaddling clothes had curative properties, and that as a child he confounded his elders with his wisdom. O’Connell’s apocalyptic rhetoric was very much like that of the Gaelic poets of his day, and after O’Connell won his election to Westminster in 1829 he became the object of Gaelic poetry which heralded his victory in apocalyptic verse.

It is sweet and gentle Daniel O’Connell who is the true plant of Gaelic blood,
Who with legal learning and mental sharpness,
Did beat down the greedy brood,
And as it is written in Pastorina,
That rent will be remitted to Gaels.
And the seas will be speckled with fleets coming,
In by the headland of Clare.

The revival of popular Catholic religious enthusiasm in the 1880s and 1890s had a distinctly messianic flavor and


89Tomas Ruadh quoted in John Murphy, "O’Connell and the Gaelic World," in Nowlan and O’Connell Portrait of a Radical, 45.
sought Ireland's moral reformation in order to prepare her for its inevitable moral and spiritual victory over materialist England. Like martyrdom chiliastic expectations in Ireland became invariably Irish, Gaelic, and Catholic.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood or the Fenians was, in Sean Cronin's words, the first "uncompromising[ly]" Irish nationalist movement. Founded simultaneously in New York and Dublin in 1858 by men who had taken part in the doomed Young Ireland rebellion in 1848, the Fenians were totally committed to violence as the only means of ending British rule in Ireland. Fenianism had little in the way of any social or political program—its appeal, both in Ireland and abroad among Irish expatriates, was in its resolute willingness to use violence on behalf of national liberation.

The Fenians endured despite continual failures from their foundation until the Easter Rising. The Fenian Rising of 1867 was only another in a series of Irish revolutionary fiascos in the nineteenth century and the movement was forced to resort to terroristic tactics much like other radical European movements of the same period. Perhaps the creation of a republican cult of revolutionary martyrdom was

90 O'Farrell, Ireland's English Question.

91 Cronin, Irish Nationalism, 91.
the I.R.B.'s most notable accomplishment. In part this was a result of the inevitable—the Fenians had little chance against the most powerful empire on earth; thus defeat, the constant companion of the Republican movement, needed some kind of explanation, and martyrdom offered a theodicy whereby apparent failure was ultimate victory in mythic terms.

On November 23, 1867 three young Fenians were hanged in front of Salford Gaol in Manchester for the killing of a police guard. The "Manchester Martyrs" as they came to be known were not the first martyrs for the Republican cause nor were they to be the most famous. Their deaths do mark the beginning of a cult of martyrdom replete with iconography, hymnology, and liturgy that played a conscious role in the Easter Rising of 1916 and has been passed to the present era of Irish Republicans. Since their bodies were, like those of Pearse and the leaders of the Rising nearly fifty years later, buried in quick-lime, their supporters were forced to stage mock funerals which became enormous processions through the major Irish cities. Their graves became the focus of nationalist pilgrimages and the song written to commemorate their deaths based on their last

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words from the dock, "God Save Ireland," became the theme song of physical-force Irish nationalists until the 1920s. This song and many others written to commemorate the Fenians seemed to stress a mystique of death whereby patriotic death was made to be mandatory. On such ideas Fenianism thrived, not because the Fenians believed these ideas themselves (a more tough-minded and courageous group is hard to imagine— they were also very adept propagandists) but these ideas played well in America, Australia, Irish ghettos in Britain, and at home, and helped to bring arms and support for the movement. As the Fenians retreated into the tactics of the Dynamite War of the 1870s and 1880s and political assassination by the "Invincibles," the myth of the nationalist martyr was the only way to explain a just cause which could not win its victory. Republicans were imprisoned and executed not because they were defeated but because the cause was moral and overwhelmed by an opulent, immoral, and irreligious England. The fact that membership in the I.R.B., because it was a secret society, meant automatic excommunication from the Church according to Pius IX's Syllabus of Errors of 1864, mattered little as many Republicans believed that the institutional church was a collaborator with the British government. The pronouncements of nationalists against violence within the

main wing of Irish nationalism, those of the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster, were the prattlings of those who were willing to betray the saints and martyrs of Republicanism.

When Pearse and his fellow republicans seized positions in downtown Dublin on Easter Monday in 1916, they did not intend to win a military victory. What they sought was an opportunity to demonstrate that they were keeping faith with the republican tradition. They intended to kill, and ultimately to be killed, in order to resurrect Gaelic Ireland by means of a blood sacrifice which served to expiate sinful complacency and compromise. Although the leadership of the Rising fully expected to die, Pearse had convinced them that the patriot's martyrdom would win the ultimate and eternal battle. Pearse's sense of the tradition led him to conclude that to remain at peace was to break faith with the vision of what Ireland was meant to be and to choose to live in sin. Sacrifice would be the means of salvation.

The Easter Rising provided a dogmatic theology whereby Irish Catholic nationalists could, in good conscience, die the death of the martyr. In the process the martyr's death would win a cosmic conflict through which good won over evil and sin was vanquished by a morality willing (and

94 In 1912 Pearse wrote, "I would boldly preach the antique faith that fighting is the only noble thing, and that he only is at peace with God who is at war with the
thereby proving itself to be more moral than that of its enemy) to sacrifice those who believe in it. Pearse recognized that this theology led to self-immolation, exchanging a wretched existence for everlasting life and eternal victory. It meant an embrace of death itself.

Pearse’s ideas marked the promulgation of an Irish Republican theology which required martyrdom. The sixteen leaders of the Easter Rising executed by the British knowingly guaranteed their own deaths and deliberately created a mythic archetype which distinguished the Irish Republican Army’s spiritual mission from the narrow nationalism of the I.R.B. Since 1916 these ideas have endured as members of the Irish Republican Army have returned over and over to reenact these mythic actions. Through reenacting the myth of the republican martyr the patriot is redeemed and enters eternity.

Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the cult of martyrdom associated with Republican hunger strikes. Since 1916 nearly nine thousand Irish republicans have gone on hunger strike of whom at least twenty-two have starved themselves to death. From the first to the last, Irish hunger strikers have acted out of duty to the Republican tradition’s call with few illusions—death was the purpose of their actions because by dying as martyrs they could win powers of evil." See Political Writings and Speeches, 12.

These figures are compiled from a number of sources.
in eternity what was not winnable at the moment. Self-immolation could lead the republican to a transcendent and universal set of values. The Irish journalist Peter Beresford has commented on the mentalité of the Irish hunger strike of 1981 in his very sympathetic book Ten Who Died.

Hunger-striking, when taken to the death, has a sublime quality about it; in conjunction with terrorism it offers a consummation of murder and self-sacrifice which in a sense can legitimize the violence which precedes and follows it. If after killing—or sharing in a conspiracy to kill—for a cause [and] one shows oneself willing to die for the same cause, [then] a value is adduced which is higher than that of life itself. 96

As a political tactic the hunger-strike makes little sense since it sacrifices the movement's most dedicated members and leadership. Yet as an exercise of demonstrating the moral superiority of the cause, it is without equal. No one starves himself to death without knowing that his cause is right. By his actions the hunger-striker places a new set of values and moral constraints upon those who persecute him and by this forces the persecutors to give in or to cooperate in a murder/sacrifice. The Irish cult of voluntary martyrdom has enabled Irish patriots to kill themselves, and allow themselves to be killed, because they have committed themselves to an eternal quest for values. This quest serves as its own justification and acts as a moral imperative by which the values of Irish Republicanism are proven, reaffirmed, and reappropriated through the

blood of Irish Republican martyrs. It is a spiritual quest toward personal and national fulfillment.

In 1920 the forty-one-year-old Lord Mayor of the City of Cork Terence MacSwiney was captured by British troops at a meeting of the Cork I.R.A. brigade and given a two year sentence for sedition. MacSwiney was a sometime playwright, philosopher, and poet, commander of the Cork brigade, and successful politician, who went on hunger strike with over fifty colleagues to protest the British claim to jurisdiction in Ireland. MacSwiney was an extraordinary idealist and a devout Catholic who saw the conflict in almost Manichean terms. He felt that the martyrs of Ireland's past struggles for independence had shed their blood in a cause that had yet to be completed. The martyrs of the past had laid down their lives as examples to be followed and once again the nation had called for martyrs to pay the price of salvation with their lives. MacSwiney put it clearly in 1918.

But it is because they [the martyrs] were our best and bravest that they had to die. No lesser sacrifice would save us. Because of it our struggle is holy--our battle is sanctified by their blood, and our victory is assured by their martyrdom. We, taking up the work thy left incomplete, confident in God, offer in turn sacrifice from ourselves. It is not we who take innocent blood but we offer it, sustained by the example of our immortal dead and the divine example which inspires us all--for the redemption of our country. 97

MacSwiney died after a hunger-strike of seventy-two days and

97O'Hegarty, MacSwiney, 78-79.
in the process became a world-reknowned figure. His funeral was attended by thousands including twelve Irish Catholic bishops.98

MacSwiney took Pearse's theology and made it the doctrine of suffering and endurance. In his mayoral acceptance speech he gave the movement's beatitude by saying in effect "Blessed are the sufferers for they shall conquer":

. . . the contest on our side is not one of rivalry or vengeance, but of endurance. It is not those who can inflict the most, but those that can suffer the most who will conquer.99

Ultimately MacSwiney argued that suffering and death validated the patriot's life. If he did not die for the cause, his life was compromised and intolerable. In his play "The Revolutionist" of 1914 MacSwiney's hero says shortly before he dies:

Yes--tell them nothing matters if they don't give in--nothing--nothing--the last moment--that's the important time. . . . What's the good of being alive if we give in?100

In 1981 ten young Irish Republicans died while on hunger strike in a protest against the British refusal to recognize them as political prisoners and grant them the right to wear their own clothes. Bobby Sands, a twenty-seven year old republican who had spent over nine years of

98Beresford, Ten Men Dead, 18.
99Quoted in Ellis, 19.
100O'Hegarty, MacSwiney, 98.
his life in British prisons for republican activities, was the first to die and remains, in part because he died first and in part because of his considerable talents as a writer, the best known of the martyrs of H-Block in the Long Kesh Prison. He has become an international hero of many revolutionaries and Sands read Fritz Fanon and Che Guevara along with other standard works of revolutionary ideology while in prison. Sands withstood an amazing amount of pressure in order that he might die for Ireland. At various times he was pressured by other Republicans, family, friends, the Church, British authorities and politicians to abandon what seemed to be a useless exercise. But Sands continued in the belief that his suffering and ultimately his death would serve to redeem Ireland and give life to its "risen people" in order that Ireland's eternal freedom could be won in another time.

In the cases of MacSwiney, Sands, and the martyrs of 1916 the choice was seen to be more than just life or death. They died voluntarily according to a system of belief which provided a theodicy that accounted for the failure of Republicanism to win an earthly victory. They also died out of commitment to an abiding and undeniable vision of the future Ireland. This apocalyptic legacy in Irish republicanism was largely Patrick Pearse's creation. His vision continues to command the patriot's attention and

101 Beresford, Ten Men Dead, 60.
serves to provide the moral basis of the republican’s actions and his Christian orthodoxy has been questioned by some scholars. Nonetheless, for the Irish Republican Army the issue of the morality of violence is problematical. Their violence is prescriptive and manifests itself in response to the theological explanation of things established by the martyrs of the 1916. Thus the I.R.A. understands Irish nationalism as a theology with its own morality and moral imperative or, as Bobby Sands, in Irish, wrote as the closing words of his prison diary, "'Tiocfaidh ar la,' I said to myself. 'Tiocfaidh ar la'." (Our day will come, our day will come).102

The Irish Republican Army did not fashion this theology ex nihilo. In Ireland’s Catholic environment the I.R.A.’s theology of violence came into being in a manner which bears striking affinities to other heretical nationalistic movements that were anti-imperial, revolutionary, and theologically oriented. Like the Donatists Irish nationalism took on a religious cast which made the theodicy understandable and lasting by means of a cult of voluntary martyrdom and through it found a way to make suffering and defeat desirable. Patrick Pearse’s language synthesized a dogmatic theology and articulated a set of beliefs which has proven to be enduring and

102Bobby Sands, One Day in My Life (Cork: Mercier, 1982), 118.
compelling. In this sense the violence of the I.R.A. is hardly inexplicable terrorism, it functions in a tradition in Western culture which, out of a deep sense of grievance and a hope to institute a new age, will not surrender its notion of the holy and the true.

It is suggested here that Patrick Pearse, an undeniably important man in his nation's history, was another ordinary man with an extraordinary life. He won in death what he sought in life, and his success marked a turning point in the history of Ireland and modern European history. The lasting nature of his vision has, in a sense, vindicated him despite whatever excesses it has inspired since. Because of his success, Patrick Pearse has become enshrined in the memory of his people and perhaps that is as it should be.
APPENDIX

The following passage is from Patrick Pearse's unfinished "autobiography" in The Home-Life of Patrick Pearse. Home-life was edited by Patrick's younger sister Mary Brigid Pearse, and the edited version of his work seems to have been little altered from the original. The dating of this document is difficult, for it is not clear whether the entire piece was written all at the same time. This author believes that it had to be written sometime after mid-1914 because Pearse refers to daydreaming while planning military activities and debating policy.¹ His participation in such events before 1914 was very unlikely, despite his Volunteer membership, because of his trip to America in the early part of 1914. "My Childhood" is brief enough that it was most likely written within a short period, and then work on it ceased, no doubt because of the press of Pearse's political duties.

The issue of the document's reliability is an important one, but can be dismissed on the basis of the apparent honesty and non-calculation which seems to have gone into most of Pearse's writing, especially when it came

to his poetry. His proclivity for honesty exposing his inner thoughts and feelings was great and might be credited to his naive belief that his inner struggles were profound and tragic.

There is also the issue of the nature of this document. The question of whether this is a dream or reality is immaterial. The point is that "My Childhood" is Pearse's adult reconstruction of his own past. To Pearse, it told of a past in which he placed his faith as if it were documented reality; his "autobiography" is a faithful presentation of the reality of his childhood as he remembered it. However, this is not an objective historical account of a series of incidents; it is a subjective account of what he understood to be the truth.

"New Arrivals on the Scene"

My first great adventure (after those strange migrations which some may look upon as myths) was the coming of Dobbin.

Dobbin was of wood, but apart from the disadvantage he was as gallant a steed as ever knight-errant rode. My father had fashioned him, toiling at him for many nights in his workshop after his apprentices had gone home; building him five hands high; giving him mighty limbs and a proud head and a fiery eye; a broad back and round shapely haunches. He was grey, as all famous steeds have been; and he towered grandly the evening my father set him up on a table for us to see.

'Dobbin is his name,' my father said solemnly, not as if he were making a suggestion, but as if he were announcing some fact as old as the Creation.

That night, my mother, who had been ill for a few days, stole down from her room to see Dobbin; and the next morning a little brother came to us mysteriously-- a more momentous coming even than that of Dobbin.
And my mother was very ill, and the little brother had to be sent away to Uncle Christy's, where he was fed on the milk of one cow. My mother nearly died; and during all that time Dobbin remained quietly stalled behind the door. Sometimes I climbed up upon him and bestrode him; but oftener I sat with my sister near the fire, and watched the fire-fairy, and studied the ways of Minnie and Gyp.

It was a long time before my mother came down to us again. When she did come, looking very pale, one of the first things she did (after pressing my sister and myself to her heart) was to go over and kiss Dobbin; and in gratitude for that gracious kiss I told her that I would consider the little brother (who returned to us the same day) entitled equally with me to bestride that noble steed, as soon as his little legs should have the necessary length and strength to grip on. For the present they were obviously too fat for any such equestrian exercise. So I alone rode Dobbin, and galloped him to many a battle. Sometimes I harnessed him to a state-coach, and he drew my sister on triumphant entries into cities; often I yoked him to a carrier's cart, and he rattled along country roads at night; there were [sic] times when he toiled under loads of hay; I have even known him, suitably draped in black, to pace mournfully with hearse and coffin behind him to Glasnevin. But oftenest I rode him in quest of some Holy Grail, to the relief of some beleaguered Ascalon or Trebizond, or over the slaughtered hearts of some Roncesvalles or Magh Mhuirthemhne.

I have been told it is a marvelous thing that I remember so clearly the days before and after the birth of my brother; for I was only two years and five days old when he was born. It would seem marvelous to me if I did not remember that time and all its little incidents. What greater thing has ever happened to me than the coming of that good comrade? Willie and I have been true brothers—companions! As a boy he was my only playmate; as a man he has been my only intimate friend. We have done and suffered much together, and we have shared together a few deep joys.

While Willie was too small to play with, my sister and I were sufficiently loving companions. Sometimes we quarreled. One of the chief grounds of quarrel was her frequent insisting on my putting Dobbin to what I considered base uses. She was perpetually killing people in the most terrifying and unheard of ways, and calling upon me to bury them. This meant that, instead of driving Dobbin to war, I had to yoke him to hearse and go on a lugubrious progress to Glasnevin. I thought that she should bury her own dead.

In those days she was both bigger and of a more dominating character than I, and she generally had her way.
She extracted considerable deference from me as her junior by over a year. She insisted that her wisdom and experience were riper than mine, and, by dint of hearing this again repeated, I came to believe it and to entertain for her a serious respect.

She finally lost my confidence, in the affair of the London Horse’s tail.

The London Horse was a present which my father had once brought me from London; he was much smaller than Dobbin, but was more elegant and had real hair. One day my sister instructed me in the properties of hair.

‘If hair is cut, it grows. For instance, if I were to cut the London Horse’s tail, it would infallibly grow again.’

I was dubious; she was positive. She urged me to dock the tail quite short so as to ensure a luxurious growth. I yielded so far as to reduce the flowing appendage by half its length. Not one fraction of an inch did it ever grown again!

We always tried to persuade ourselves that our toys had life. We quite realised that their life was different from our life, or from Gyp’s, or Minnie’s. But we felt that they had a kind of mystic toy life; and we thought it probable that at night, when the house was still, they disported silently on the carpet; that the dolls rode frantic races on the London Horse; that the cows (I had a fawn and a brindled cow) browsed in secret pastures under the furniture; that my white goat climbed the back of the sofa as if it were a crag.

Once I crept out of bed and downstairs, although sore afraid, to see these esoteric gambols; but all the toys were very quiet. I hoped then that I had come too soon to too late. I could not bring myself to believe that they were merely wooden, without any quickening of joy anywhere within them. But fear of the dark staircase would never allow me to steal down to see them again.

The night at that time was always terrible to me. I thought the house was peopled by strange beings, uncanny and terrifying. My mother and Auntie Margaret knew that visions of some gruesome sort (I never coherently described them) affrighted my sleep, and they used to sit by me if I was restless.

Often and often [sic] did Auntie Margaret steal up to me when she was visiting us, and sit silently beside my bed.
How good it was to hear her step! And when my mother did not come (thinking I was asleep like the others) how often have I lain tossing from one side to another, trying to call their names, yet fearing to raise my voice lest it might attract the notice of some grisly thing outside the door!

Only when my father and mother came to bed would relief come to me. I used to pray as my mother taught me, but the prayers never drove away the spectres. Only when dawn began to come greyly through the window-blinds did they creep back to their lairs. ²

The main events at issue in this remarkable passage are the simultaneous coming into existence of two things in Patrick's young life. The first is a wooden hobby-horse; the second is the birth of his brother Willie. The manner in which this story is told obviously suggests that the two events were somehow linked in the infant's mind, and the ensuing action describes his coming to understand what was, in fact, a major psychological upheaval.

Pearse labeled this story an "adventure" in contrast to previous "myths" which he experienced before. The suggestion is that he regarded these incidents to be unique, considerably different and of significantly greater importance than those he had known before. There is a sense in which the boy remembered the incident in a way that was also different, a way which gave it meaning, unlike the myths he was so careful to dismiss.

The adventure is that of a boy just barely over two years old. It is the "coming" of a horse named Dobbin. The use of a colloquialism for sexual orgasm is understandable

²Ibid., 16-18.
when one considers the various forms of the verb "to come." It can be used to indicate where one has come from, either in terms of location, existence, origin, background, genealogical lineage, and so forth. To come can be used to indicate a coming forth such as the coming forth of a rosebud. It used to be a commonly used expression concerning the age of a horse, as in "she was coming into her sixth year." Thus the verb "to come" has a variety (certainly not exhausted here) of meanings, most of which discuss coming with emanational or existential connotations that support the colloquial term's sexual nature.

The combination of the horse with the sexual connotation of the word "coming" seems especially significant in this case. Erikson maintains that the age of two is especially important in the question of autonomous identity. That is to say, autonomy is established in the second or "early infant stage," in tension to concepts of shame and doubt at this age when the central psychological crisis is over bodily function. The period from two to three years of age is one where the child's orientation is necessarily anal, concerned with the issues of control, enjoyment, and elimination. It is at this stage that the child's attention is invested in the psychological problem of gaining a sense of self-control while still maintaining

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one's self-esteem. The result is a sense of pride and autonomy which goes with the feelings of victory over one's bodily function, but in the process, because the inevitable failures, discovering shame and doubt about not only one's abilities but the nature of the child's relationship with its parents.  

Erikson maintains that the question of trust that has been dealt with as an infant is threatened by the parents' role as the guardians of values and standards of social behavior. The parent must tread the narrow line between firm direction on the one hand and allowing freedom on the other. Anality centers on the issues of holding back versus letting go, and learning to do each in an appropriate way. In a sense the issue is one which focuses at the very heart of human mores and values, as well as law and order.

In this instance Patrick was struggling not only with the anal problem of controlling his biological urges, but also with what seems to be a subconscious awareness of his own sexuality. The Horse is the critical figure in this regard, as it seems to represent unbridled passion and the

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4 Ibid., 71.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 71-72.
7 Ibid., 72-73.
8 Ibid., 74-78.
powers of procreation. Dobbin, a hobby-horse made from living substance, could also be seen as a demonic sexuality waiting to break loose from its seeming incorporeality.

Patrick describes the horse in detail, marvels at its beauty and symmetry, but suggests that Dobbin is just a little fearsome as well. Dobbin is full of potentiality, huge, looming, brimming with awesome and mysterious power. Patrick pays special attention to Dobbin’s great height and shape, and his description of Dobbin is palpably sensual. Dobbin is grey, a reflection of his heroic nature and gallantry.

As significant as Dobbin is, nothing is more awesome or mysterious than the way he is delivered into the world. He is created, made, out of living material by Patrick’s father. The work is done a little mysteriously, away from home when the shop was closed. The choice of the word heroic to describe the effort involved in creating Dobbin is peculiar—a recognition of the boy’s admiration for the man who made the horse. Dobbin arrives in the arms of his creator. The father gives Patrick the horse and names it as if he were God himself. The infant boy recognizes this omnipotent power and likens it to that of the Creator.

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10Ibid. Jones maintains that the hobby-horse is a reflection of the latent demonic power of the passion of the horse symbol.
At the end of this passage, Patrick talks about his fear of the dark and the strange beings who peopled the house in the dark. His fears over these visions are nearly overwhelming. But nothing is as effective as his father going to bed with his mother. The very thought of his father consoles Patrick, and indicates how much the boy needed his father, and how much he loved him.

The distance between James Pearse and all of his children was probably not unusual for the time. Nonetheless, the infrequency of Patrick’s references to him are striking, and lead one to conclude that the separation was great between the father and his son. This is not to imply that there existed an antagonism between them. Patrick invariably spoke well and affectionately of his father, and in most cases related stories about James Pearse with a sense of poignancy.

What separated the two individuals was less personal than it was a reflection of mutual inability. Both the boy and his father seem shy and James did not seem to harbor anything but affection for Patrick. The problem was that the boy never received enough affection from James and was being smothered by the attentions of the female side of his family.

What Patrick seems to have wanted in this recollection was the abiding, omnipotent and quietly benevolent presence of his father. While James probably cared for his son as
best he could, Patrick’s need far outstripped what went on between them.

After Dobbin comes, Patrick’s mother, "ill" in the child’s mind, comes down to see the toy horse. The immediate consequence of this in Patrick’s mind appears to be the birth of his brother. Thus Dobbin, and Patrick’s sexuality, are associated in Patrick’s mind. To compound the problem is the way his mother has to "steal" her way to see Patrick’s new companion, implying a kind of illicit interest. Obviously, Patrick has associated the two events, the coming of Dobbin and his brother. Dobbin has to be quieted when Willie’s birth nearly causes his mother’s death. Only occasionally can Patrick sneak off and ride the horse which must remain quiet behind a door. He and his sister watch the fire and the family pets while waiting for developments.  

In this section of "New Arrivals" Patrick has come to an awareness of his sexuality. The discovery is further compounded by the implied responsibility he has for both his brother’s birth and mother’s near death. The problem is oriented around his need to control that power and the non-cooperative nature of the horse. The horse is barely controllable, but Patrick lets us know that he later "rode him to many a battle." Thus it is possible that the boy’s exercise of his horse’s passion has caused him to be

11Pearse, "My Childhood," 17.

12Erikson, Childhood and Society, 85ff.
shamed about his failure to be a good steward and control Dobbin.

When his mother at last comes down from her room, she is pale and weak. She is not too ill to bless Dobbin with a kiss. The kiss serves as a benediction and an absolution of wrongdoing. Approved of and sanctified, Dobbin comes out of hiding and is ridden with great vigor. Patrick returns his mother's favor by accepting Willie, even though he is careful to let us know of his privileged and dominant position vis-a-vis his brother.

Several points about the later parts of this passage stand out. One is the boy's acceptance of his infant brother. Young Willie has been taken away, perhaps to protect him from catching his mother's illness. Patrick, though now accepting of his brother, refuses as yet to share what he alone can do—ride the horse. Thus, though Willie is accepted, his acceptance seems to be somewhat provisional and depends on his riding of Dobbin.

It is important to note that while Patrick received what was probably the most honored male name in Irish culture, Willie received one that was one of the most ignominious. The name William was associated in Irish history with two separate English conquerors. The diminutive form of Willie might have come about as a suppression of the son's low estate and position in the family, symbolized in the awful historical association of
his name. Patrick's relationship with his brother is described by Patrick with an air that is distinctly patronizing. He glows over his brother, a result not only of their intimacy, but also of the older brother's being comfortable with his dominant role. Nothing could indicate this more than Patrick's discussion of his own birthday in regards to his brother's, a gentle reminder that he was first.

Secondly, the passage brings into view Patrick's relationship with his older sister, Margaret. She comes off as being a terribly threatening figure, constantly killing people off (dolls?) and forcing Patrick to take them to be buried at Glasnevin Cemetery. She inhibits Patrick, attempting to control both him and Dobbin, and Margaret uses the horse for "base" purposes. He claims to have had her as a "sufficiently loving companion," a less than hearty endorsement, especially for Pearse who was effusive when it came to expressing his feelings for his family. In the end Margaret makes Patrick believe that a new horse's tail is regenerative and fools him into cutting the 'London' horse's tail. The issue between sister and brother is one over the control of the horse and how it is to be used. Patrick's relationship with his elder sister bears no resemblance to the one he bore with his mother or brother, both of whom defer to his wishes. Margaret orders him about and in effect gets him symbolically to castrate himself in a denial
of his sexual potential.

The trips to the cemetery with Dobbin seem especially important in light of Patrick's adult life. He has to tie his horse to a cart, cover him in black, and make him pull the cart full of bodies to Glasnevin. Dobbin, the early expression of Patrick's sexuality, is relegated to a graveyard detail. It seems to represent an identification of the procreative, life-giving forces within Pearse, with a noble mission that resulted in death. Even though Patrick is forced to go on these journeys by his sister, he later does so on his own. The importance of these thoughts about Glasnevin Cemetery seem highly significant in light of the famous eulogies later gave them.

This entire section of "My Childhood" appears to illustrate dramatically that Pearse had long associated life with death. His discovery of sexuality seems related in his mind to the near death of his mother. His conflict is one that is between his productive instincts and the potential harm that could result from them. Even though there is the implication of his mother's acceptance of the horse and its power, Patrick is there when the horse is symbolically tied to life-denying activity.
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