Ireland at War and Peace

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Edited by

Alison O'Malley-Younger and John Strachan

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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This volume is dedicated to the memory of a friend, colleague and distinguished scholar of Ireland, both at war and at peace, Professor A. C. (Tony) Hepburn.

—Alison O'Malley-Younger and John Strachan

INTRODUCTION

ALISON O'MALLEY-YOUNGER

The end of art is peace
Could be the motto of this frail device
That I have pinned on our deal dresser –
Like a drawn snare
Slipped away by the spirit of the corn
Yet burnished by its passage and still warm.
—Seamus Heaney, 'The Harvest Bow' (1979)

In *The Irish On the Somme* (1917), Michael MacDonagh recounts a widely circulated anecdote relating to the stereotypical notion of a Ireland as a nation made for conflict. After 'a gruelling engagement', he reports, a wounded Dublin Fusilier is hobbling back to the field station. A medical orderly rushes out to aid him, and, stricken by his plight, laments the fact that 'it is a dreadful war', to which the Irish soldier replies: ''Tis indeed, sir, a dreadful war enough … but, sure, 'tis better than no war at all'.[1] Although quite possibly apocryphal, the tale highlights the manner in which the Irish people have frequently been attributed with a bellicosity matched only by their ability to booze, bull and blarney.

MacDonagh's memoir offers extensive examples of the alleged propensity for warring found in Irish troops, suggesting that belligerence is an innate trait of the race which makes the Irish soldier particularly fitted to combat. Each nation has 'its own type of soldier' and the nature of a country's soldiery is nationally revealing:

> Each nationality evolves its own type of soldier, and each type has its distinctly marked attributes. As troops, taken in the mass, are the counterparts of the nations from which they spring, and indeed, cannot be anything else, so they must reveal in fighting the particular sort of martial spirit of their race.[2]

This essential and racial predisposition to violence is seen, in this particular context, as an attribute. 'The Irishman', MacDonagh argues:

> when he is absorbed in a martial adventure… has no room in his mind left for a thought of being afraid or even nervous. He likes the thrill of movement, the fierce excitement of advancing under fire for a frontal attack on the enemy, the ferocity of a contest at close grips. This is the temperament that responds blithely to the whistle - 'Over the parapets'. His blood is stirred when the actual fighting begins, and as it progresses he is carried more and more out of himself.[3]

Thus reckless, fuelled by 'the courage of dare-devilry and the rapture of battle',[4] the Irish soldier, on command, plays 'leapfrog with death'.[5]

Given the longstanding and turbulent relationship between Ireland and England, the image of the Irish as wild and warlike - when viewed from some British perspectives - had a long provenance, beginning as early as the twelfth century when Papal Bulls were issued to endorse Henry II's invasion of Ireland, citing the Norman king's God-given right to 'subjugate this barbarous and uncouth race ... and to root out from them the weeds of vice'.[6] How best to lance this barbaric boil on the colonial body politic? Repeatedly, over the centuries, the suggested recipe for a civilising poultice was to combat violence with violence, as Sir Ralph Rokeby - one of Sir Philip Sidney's legal assistants - rationalised in 1570:

> It is not the mace nor the name of a Lord President and Council that will frame them to obedience. It must be fire and sword, the rod of God's vengeance that must make these cankered sorts and stubborn minds yield for fear.[7]

Once undertaken, these wars of pacification set a chain of events in motion which saw Ireland gripped by incursions and insurrections, punctuated by uneasy peaces, counter-strikes and savage reprisals, based on ancient hatred and embroiled in the politics of national identity.

By the time MacDonagh compiled his memoirs the stereotype of the fighting Irish was well-established and, indeed, lauded in some Irish quarters, motivated in part, perhaps, by ancient heroic epics such as *The Tain* which glorified the berserker rages of Cuchulain as the zenith of martial masculinity, his wildness making him uniquely fitted to defend the land under attack. Unsurprisingly, due to his valour and warlike prowess Cuchulain came to be hailed as the 'ideal' of Irish manhood in the rhetoric and iconography of militant and romantic advanced nationalism – in particular that of Padraig Pearse, for whom he became the yardstick by which martial masculinity should be measured: a paragon of heroism and sacrifice, and a template for subsequent patriot 'martyrs', prepared to shed their blood for the cause of Ireland.

This image of the patriot martyr became a propagandist tool *par excellence* to physical force nationalists who rallied the faithful to action using a warlike and patriotic register popularised by Thomas Davis and borrowed by Pearse and others, not only to advocate but to glorify war as a remedy to the perceived degeneration of an Irish people suffering under an imperial yoke. As an article written under the pseudonym of 'Lucan' in the militant journal *Irish Freedom* of September 1911 thunders:

> Give us war, say we. War in our time, O Lord. Send the lightning of your thunderbolts through the tyrant nations of Europe; let them rend and tear each other; to that end the crucified nations shall have freedom and nobility at last; and that earth may purge itself from its sins in good red blood.[8]

This enthusiasm for 'good red blood' is echoed later in the same piece by an evangelical crusade against peace. Arguing that 'Ireland has been maimed in war many a time, but it is in peace that she has been crucified', Lucan continues by lambasting the 'poisoning and corrupting peace':

> … the living death of a poisonous and corrupting peace, when men grow timorous and slavish, and materialistic, so that they do mean things, live meanly and generally cumber the earth, men who might have died like men instead of living like hogs.[9]

Thus - in war - the Irishman is seen at his virile and soldierly best. In peace he is made weak and is only half a man; a bootlicking and worldly toady to the folks in the big house, to the businessman, even - and worst - to the English. This is a rallying cry to arms, the like of which was taken up from the Fianna to the Fenians, and one that kept the necessity for conflict perpetually alive in the minds of succeeding generations.

This philosophy of self-immolation and redemptive violence has come to be associated most clearly with the aforesaid Pearse, for whom the resurrection of fallen heroes was a powerful weapon in his ideological arsenal of sacrifice and blood. Consider, for example, his soapbox oration over Wolfe Tone's grave in 1913:

> We have come to one of the holiest places in Ireland; holier even than the place where St Patrick sleeps in Down. Patrick brought us life, but this man died for us. He was the greatest of Irish Nationalists … we have come to renew our adhesion to the faith of Tone: to express once more our full acceptance of the gospel of Irish Nationalism which he was first to formulate in worldly terms. This man's soul was a burning flame, so ardent, so generous, so pure, that to come into communion with it is to come unto a new baptism, into a new regeneration and cleansing.[10]

Framing his elegiac exhortation in Christian terminology, the sage of St Enda presents an image of Tone which fits seamlessly into a paradigm of sacrificial heroism which translates a reverence for the dead into a new baptism of nationalist fire.

There is propaganda in poetry, and there is poetry in propaganda. Pearse's oration comprises both. Filled with hyperbole and passionate lyricism, the speech surrounds Tone with a largely Catholic iconography, despite the fact that Tone was a Protestant by birth and an atheist by choice. We are connected, as Eugene O'Brien argues, not with 'the historical Wolfe Tone, but with a narrative image of Tone'[11] which resonates with the ideology of the speaker. Perhaps it is fitting that this collection opens with an essay which addresses Tone, someone known to separatists such as Pearse as 'the father of Irish nationalism' due to his central role in the events of 1798. In O'Brien's essay, Tone is viewed through the lens of the 'ideologically constructed cognitive conduits', which motivated Pearse's 'highly selective' image of the patriot. Using Derrida's notion of 'Messianistic remembering', the essay tracks the way in which Tone was ideologically 'dis-membered' and then 're-membered', in a politically apposite manner, as 'a Gaelic, Catholic nationalist *avant la lettre'*. O'Brien relates Pearse's constructed image of Tone with that of Cuchulain. Referring specifically to the mural of the young Cuchulain in the entrance hall of Scoil Éanna, O'Brien points out the way in which Pearse visually and verbally remodels the mythical hero, fusing it with images of Christ to depict 'the essential core of Irishness' advocated by the school: rebellious, sacrificial, but fundamentally Catholic.

There are, according to Susan Cannon Harris, 'two erroneous assumptions that are depressingly common in Pearse scholarship: one, that Pearse *was* the Rising and two, that homosexual desire is inherently pathological and that therefore if we want to respect Pearse's sacrifice, we must either ignore/deny his sexuality, or separate it completely from his political life'.[12] She continues: 'insofar as Pearse can be said to have expressed sexual desire in his earlier writings, that desire seems to have been directed at preadolescent boys, which means that suggesting Pearse recognized or acted on these desires looks very much like accusing him of paedophilia and/or child abuse'.[13] Harris's complaint, in part relates to the suggestion, made most famously by Ruth Dudley Edwards in her 1977 *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure*, that Pearse's 'martyrdom' was a compensation for the personal and psychological issues with which he had struggled in life; amongst them his latent paedophilia as displayed in his writings such as *'A Mhic Bhig na gCleas'* ('Little Lad of the Tricks'), a poem written while Pearse was headmaster at Scoil Éanna (St Enda's)

which, it might be said, appears to have erotic undertones. While the jury remains out on this issue, scholarly consensus is that irrespective of what Pearse's desires *may* have been, they remained un-acted upon, if indeed they existed at all. More important to Pearse, it is argued, is the philosophy of Scoil Éanna to create an ideal of patriotic Irish boyhood, based on a Christian and Gaelic ethos.[14]

In the second essay in this collection, Lauren Clark addresses this notion of the creation of the child in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Ireland in the 'growing national discourse of advertising'. While acknowledging contemporary disquiet with Pearse's sexuality as allegedly manifested in his poetry, Clark's focus is directed more closely at his business acumen and the commercial success of Scoil Éanna, which she attributes, in part to the advertising campaigns designed to 'shape adolescent preferences' to 'kill out profiteering and keep out foreign made clothing'. In short, Clark argues that advertisements for Scoil Éanna - along with those for other educational institutions of the era - 'embraced consumerism as being nationalistically edifying'. As a consequence, she maintains, education and childhood were placed in the crossfire of debates pertaining to Irish national and Irish consumerist allegiances.

Clark's essay is the first of three in this collection which deal with issues of commodity culture and advertising in the post-Parnellite period in Ireland. In the second of these, Alison O'Malley-Younger addresses the commodification of another of Pearse's patriotic paragons, Robert Emmet, the young nationalist hero pietised by Pearse, who was executed for his part in the 1803 uprising in Dublin. O'Malley-Younger situates Emmet in the contemporary and commercial world of melodrama, examining Dion Boucicault's 1884 eponymous play in the light of the battles which raged over the importation of foreign amusements by cultural separatists such as the firebrand D. P. Moran who repeatedly inveighed against the importation and mass consumption of English amusements as disaggregating and detrimental to the formation of a 'people nation'. Taking these arguments into account, O'Malley-Younger examines the mercenary blandishments undertaken to promote Emmet as a manufactured commodity designed to appeal to the tastes of the consuming public by an entrepreneurial and self-promoting herald of consumer Modernism: Dion Boucicault.

Taking up the baton of commodity culture, Matthew Hayward's essay addresses the proliferation of commodities in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), relating this to the worldwide growth of consumerism, and the specificities and inconsistencies of the 'Buy Irish' campaign as represented in the novel. Focusing on Joyce's depiction of A. E. and his involvement in the notoriously separatist *Irish Homestead*, Hayward draws

parallels between the 'imperial power of commodities' and their silent coercion of the consumer, concluding that 'the global competitions of imperialism and its economics reminds us that military wars are only the physical manifestation of the ideological wars and industrial rivalries that the individual feels but rarely sees'. In the vagaries of consumerism, *Ulysses* presents 'an Ireland at war in peace'.

A collection of essays on the theme of *Ireland at War and Peace* would seem incomplete without the inclusion of W. B. Yeats, not least because, to cite T. S. Eliot, he 'was one of the few poets whose history is a history of their own time, who are part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them'.[15] Thus, for Eliot, Yeats's poetry serves as a key to unlock the tumult of this turbulent period. Unsurprisingly, the poem most oft-quoted to indicate Yeats' political engagement is 'Easter 1916', written to commemorate the Rising of 24 April, an event which Yeats proclaimed to Lady Gregory both 'moved' him deeply and left him 'very despondent about the future', as he felt that 'all the work of years has been overturned'.[16] Yeats's disillusionment is echoed, according to Nick Serra, in the '*poesis* of inertia' which categorises the poem; a poetic designed to attenuate or blunt emotional response in the reader by foregrounding the commonplace at the level of characterisation. Serra's essay starts from the premise that Yeats believed in 'an occult poetic paradigm' which lends itself to a symbolist reading of both Yeats's poetry and politics. Easter week 1916 represented for Yeats, according to Serra, 'an interruption' from his occultist preoccupations and his initiation into the Inner Order of the Golden Dawn. The poem, he maintains, is 'atypical' in its lack of 'overt magical symbolism', displaying an unwillingness to memorialise an event which he acknowledged 'had overturned his work of years to *remove* politics from Irish letters'. Thus, according to Serra's provocative argument, Yeats was compelled to find a veiled way of voicing his censure without attracting disapproval. This he does by foregrounding the mundane, the vague and the quotidian to provoke an unwitting murmur of assent to an assertion that remains largely unformed. In sum, says Serra, the poet desacralises the protagonists, divesting them of their tragic role and reinvesting them with all-too-human attributes in the tawdry theatre of politics.

Yeats' esotericism was not always favourably received. In a book vehemently attacking the 'Celtic School of Drama' established by Yeats and his contemporaries, the critic F. Hugh O'Donnell declared the writer's work as a 'wedding of Madame Blavatsky and Finn MacCumhail' and 'A sort of witch's cauldron of aboriginal superstition and Ibsenite neo-paganism'.[17] O'Donnell's coruscating criticism echoes the heated debates

which raged over the nature of Irish identity in a nation coming into being, and battle lines were drawn as to who had the right to represent Ireland and to teach the people how to see themselves as Irish. In a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* of 15 July, 1913, Yeats famously argued that:

> There is a moment in the history of every nation when it is plastic, when it is like wax, when it is ready to hold for generations the shape that is given to it. Ireland is now plastic, and will be for … years to come … if the intellectual movement is defeated Ireland will for many years become a little huckstering nation, groping for halfpence in a greasy till. It is that, or the fulfilment of her better dreams. The choice is yours and ours.[18]

For Yeats and his contemporaries the fulfilment of these dreams rested in their hands and in the establishment of a 'national theatre' which would 'build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature',[19] advancing a revolutionary agenda, and bolstering nationalist sentiment. Though its aims were admirable its methods did not go uncontested even within the Revivalist camp. In an 1899 article published in the Gaelic League's organ, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, entitled 'English Literature and Irish Humbug', D. P. Moran described the Irish Literary theatre as 'nebulous twaddle labelled "the Celtic note"'.[20] In the same publication, Padraig Pearse went even further, arguing:

> Apparently, the only thing to make a man or an institution Irish is a little dab of green displayed now and again to relieve the monotony, a little elaborate twaddle about 'the children of the Gael' or a little meaningless vapouring about some unknown quantity 'termed Celtic glamour' … Let us strangle it at its birth.[21]

Unsurprisingly, these debates found an outlet on the stage and in theatres, culminating in consequential riots over politics, language and religion. Spectators armed with missiles repeatedly targeted the actors on the stage, rival groups and playwrights in order to make heard their opinions regarding the national agenda. Perhaps the most famous of these disturbances are those associated with John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907). Willy Maley's essay addresses the theatre riots and the controversy surrounding the first performances of Synge's *Playboy* and Sean O'Casey's later *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). Although both plays were subsequently revived in Dublin and played to packed houses, the hullabaloos that heralded their first staging were historical events in which prominent Irish literary and historical figures played a part, not least the furious figure of Yeats. As Maley's piece points out, the plays exist for us as texts to be read and plays to be

watched, but we also get some sense of the very drama of their first performances and the attendant boisterous consequences, in heated debates around nation and culture through their initial reception.

In common with Synge, notions of censure, censorship and national identity coalesce around the enigmatic figure of Samuel Beckett, who famously, and finally, severed all ties with his native Ireland with the parting shot at both the Catholic Church and the British Government: *'Il nous ailes en culer a la gloire'* - 'they have buggered us into glory'.[22] From thence Beckett wholly embraced exile in Europe, and the dilemma of where to place him in our literary canons began in earnest. This uncertainty is symbolised by the taxonomies of the august Modern Language Association who, over the decades, have indexed him as French, English and Irish, and to countless scholars who have debated and discussed his hyphenated Anglo-Irish provenance, the 'Irish' resonances and references in his works, set against his embrace of the uncertainties and ambivalences of experimental Modernism and choice of the French language as tools in which to create his works. 'Beckett's complex textual structures and equally complex reception' underpin Fritz Wefelmeyer's essay, which offers comparative close readings of Beckett's texts in translation to interrogate the 'particular resonances of Irish history' and to answer the question of, as he states, 'why Beckett preferred France at war to Ireland at peace', remaining in France during the Second World War.

Patrick Maume's essay takes us from stage to page in his analysis of Eilis Dillon's novels *Bold John Henebry* (1965), *Across the Bitter Sea* (1973), and *Blood Relations* (1978). Dillon is perhaps best remembered for her children's stories, which are also tales which chart the emergence of nationalism and civil strife in Ireland. On the surface, Dillon's children's fictions are romantic adventures set in idyllic locations, but violence and xenophobic conflict simmers underneath, challenging the hoped-for peace of the younger generation. As Maume's essay argues, these tensions also re-emerge in Dillon's books for adults, which hint at contemporary Irish controversies by suggesting that the 'ending of cultural and economic protectionism in the 1960s and 1970s does not abandon the original republican vision, but fulfils it'.

The 'republican vision', particularly in the context of the sectarian north is a way of seeing which has been repeatedly attributed to the subject of our next essay: Seamus Heaney. That Heaney's poetry is readily associated with conflict, particularly in poems such as 'Requiem for the Croppies' and 'Punishment', is a critical commonplace. Less common is the stance adopted by Adam Hanna, whose essay here argues that Heaney's poetry is 'not merely symptomatic of a nostalgic desire for a

remote and secure existence, nor an analysis of a cultural condition, but is part of his exploration of the relationship between language and memory'. Concentrating on Heaney's more recent works, Hanna offers a sustained close reading of the poet's compositional practices, relating them throughout to contextual cues and clues to suggest that form and content combine to allow the poet not to propagandise but to conceive a poetry which responds 'to the demands of different occasions and the contrasting impulses', and a 'desire for an enclosed territory and the challenge of the external and unknown'. As such, his work is responsive to changing patterns of war and peace.

Bridging the ancient and modern, Ulf Dantanus's essay offers a symbolic segue into the importance of the trope of the horse in the imagery of mythological and romantic nationalism and its emblematic function in the conflict between rural tradition and urban modernity. Horses proliferate in Irish literature and myth, according to Dantanus – from the fifteenth century to the present day – in the works of Yeats, Behan, Ní Chuilleanáin, Ní Dhomhnaill and Heaney, as much as in the speeches of Connolly and Pearse, in Irish and English, and often, as Dantanus observes, a politically and culturally connotative symbol of 'the complex relationship with England'. Horses, argues Dantanus, provide reminders of the 'nightmare' of history.

The pages of Irish history are stained with war, conflict, insurrection and bloody battles which leave the writer with the problem of how to represent what might seem to some to be unrepresentable. Can literature carry the emotional and moral freight generated by the centuries of violence which have infected the Irish question and the question of 'Irishness'? These questions underpin the final essay in this collection, in which Daniel W. Ross examines the fictions of Deirdre Madden through the lens of contemporary trauma theory. Ross maintains that in Madden's novels, as in Vera Brittain's memoir of the First World War and its monstrous human cost, *Testament of Youth* (1933), violence renders the domestic uncanny, and the traumatic memories of such violence cause its victims to relive their experiences in perpetuity. In their attempts to bear witness to the horrors of the past, they are rendered silent. These are telling silences, gaps between experience and recollection filled with phantoms that coalesce around the traumatic event rendering the victim unable to speak. Ross concludes that Madden's novel, *One by One in the Darkness* (1996), though a warning that for Northern Ireland the road to recovery will be a long one, also offers a message of hope. Healing and recovery may take time but it is not impossible. Indeed, an evocation of the past with its attendant traumas is perhaps necessary to the collective

catharsis and healing of Irish society in the midst of peace, however fragile that peace might be.

Notes

1. Michael MacDonagh, *The Irish on the Somme* (London and New York, Hodder & Stoughton, 1917), p. 14
2. MacDonagh, *The Irish on the Somme*, p. 57.
3. Ibid., p. 63.
4. Ibid., p. 58.
5. Ibid,, p. 38.
6. Cited in P. Johnson, *Ireland Land of Troubles: A History from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day* (London, Methuen, 1980), p. 15
7. Cited in Nicholas P. Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland* (New York NY, Barnes & Noble, 1976) p. 30
8. Cited in Susan Cannon Harris, *Gender and Modern Irish Drama* (Bloomington IN, Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 128
9. Cited in Harris, *Gender and Modern Irish Drama*, p. 130
10. Padraig Pearse, *Collected Works of Padraig H. Pearse: Political Writings and Speeches*, 5 vols (Dublin, Phoenix, 1917-22), vol. 2, p. 58
11. Eugene O'Brien, *Examining Irish Nationalism in the Context of Literature, Culture and Religion*: *A Study of the Epistemological Structure of Nationalism* (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 44.
12. Susan Cannon Harris, *Gender and Modern Irish Drama*, 2002, p. 144.
13. Harris, *Gender and Modern Irish Drama*, p. 146.
14. See Elaine Sisson, *Pearse's Patriots: St Enda's and the Cult of Boyhood* (Cork, Cork University Press, 2004).
15. Cited in R. F. Foster, *Paddy & Mr Punch* (London, Penguin, 1993), p. 212
16. Cited in Michael O'Neill, ed., *The Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London, Routledge, 2004), p. 132
17. F. Hugh O'Donnell, *The Stage Irishman of the Pseudo-Celtic Drama* (London, John Lang, 1904), p. 9
18. In R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats - A Life*, vol. 1, *The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 494.
19. Augusta Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, second edition (Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1992), p. 20.
20. *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 29 April, 1899.
21. Ibid., 20 May, 1899.
22. In Stephen Watt, *et al.*, *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 146.

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MESSIANISM OR MESSIANICITY?: REMEMBERING REVOLUTION AND THE SHAPING OF IRISH NATIONALISM

EUGENE O'BRIEN

'We have thought little about our ancestors, much of our posterity. Are we forever to walk like beasts of prey, over the fields which these ancestors stained with blood?' Here, on 5 December 1791, the policy of the Dublin Society of the United Irishmen was set down in the *Northern Star*. Contrast the temporal perspective of this manifesto with that uttered by P. H. Pearse on the steps of the General Post Office in the centre of Dublin on Easter Monday 1916, when he inscribes his act of rebellion under the rubric of a monological reading of his ancestral past: 'Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom'.[1]

My contention in this chapter is that the resurrection of the 'dead generations' in Pearse's rhetoric is a central tenet of the epistemology of Irish nationalism. It is through a highly selective process of remembering, a highly selective grading and sifting of information into ideologically constructed cognitive conduits, that the metaphorical call of these dead generations is constructed. The methodology involved is centripetal in that there is a facing inwards and backwards towards a foundationalist core of the past, a mode of memory which Jacques Derrida has termed 'Messianistic'. This paper will demonstrate the difference between Pearse's selective subsumption of aspects of Tone and the United Irishmen into an ideological centripetal construct through which Pearse valorised his own Gaelic, Catholic vision of Irish nationalism, and the actual project of the United Irishmen. This, I would contend, was more Messianic, to use Derrida's term, and involved a centrifugal opening, spatially and temporally, to other cultures, to other aspects of Irishness, and to the future.

Theobald Wolfe Tone, a Dublin-born Protestant who was sent to Trinity College to study logic, and who was later called to the Irish bar in

1789, was far from the typical image of a British-hating Irish nationalist. Indeed, one of his early career plans involved the setting up of a British colony in the South Seas, and he went so far as to hand in a copy of his plan for this colony to Number 10 Downing Street (he received no reply from William Pitt the Younger, the Tory Prime Minister). Tone's aims, in terms of this projected colony, were to 'put a bridle on Spain in time of peace and to annoy her grievously in time of war'. He also planned to serve with his brother in the British East India company at another stage of his career, before returning to Dublin in 1788. His political position was influenced largely by the French Revolution, which, as he wrote later, 'changed in an instant the politics of Ireland dividing political thinkers from that moment into aristocrats and democrats'. It is important to note that his influences stemmed, not from history, as our opening epigraph makes clear, but from contemporary events and philosophies.

Perhaps the central socio-political influence of the French Revolution was the libertarian and emancipatory thrust of its informing, secular-Enlightenment ethic. The writings of Enlightenment thinkers were disseminated thoroughly throughout different parts of Ireland, especially in the north of the island, where they found a ready reading public among Presbyterians. The work of Tom Paine was especially influential, with four Irish newspapers reprinting *The Rights of Man*, a work labelled by Tone as the 'Koran' of Belfast. Enlightenment theories of society and government, embodied in practice by the French Revolution, offered an example of how a seemingly stratified and hierarchical society could be completely changed according to the will of the people. The philosophical foundation of this revolutionary ethic was the total reorganisation of society, through the application of reason.

Indeed, this form of educational improvement was central to the Enlightenment project, specifically Kant's *What is Enlightenment*, where what came to be known as the credo of the Enlightenment, *Sapere Aude* ('Dare to know'), was first enunciated. That most of the sources of this Enlightenment knowledge came from outside Ireland underpins the centrifugal impetus of the United Irishmen. To this end, pamphlets which distilled the writings of Enlightenment thinkers were distributed among the peasants of the north of Ireland between 1795 and 1797, documents which contained the writings of Godwin, Locke (especially his notion of the implied contract between ruler and ruled), and Paine, as well as those of Voltaire and Volney. The selection of writers distributed and read by the United Irishmen makes for an impressive list of liberal thinkers on social and political issues, and further reinforces the claim that their views on identity were necessarily universalist and transformative – their aim

was to broaden the notion of Irishness so that it might be inclusive of the different socio-religious traditions of Roman Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter. In this respect, their project was focused on the future in terms of transformation, as opposed to defending notions of the past.

In an Irish context, perhaps the most interesting aspect of these Enlightenment ideas and their embodiment in the French Revolution was the non-sectarian and secular character of the movement. Kevin Whelan notes that the Revolution provided the intriguing spectacle for Irish Protestants of French Catholics 'systematically dismantling the *ancien régime* equation between Popery, despotism and political slavery'.[2] Hence, for the first time, Catholics and Protestants could find common cause, and achieve political reform through the assertion of this commonality. The United Irishmen's project then, was the achievement of the dismantling of the existing Protestant state, and its replacement with a secular equivalent which was both 'inclusive of Catholics and thoroughly reformed'.[3] The temporal orientation here is clearly futuristic, whereas the spatial one is centrifugally directed towards Europe.

To achieve such an objective, Tone needed to allay Presbyterian doubts about the ability of Catholics to overcome sectarian bigotry and obedience to Rome. It was with this in mind that he wrote his pamphlet 'An Argument on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland' (1791). The main thrust of his argument was that the French Revolution should have demonstrated to all that Catholics were capable of making common cause with a secular movement which was essentially national in character. He made the point that 'Popish bigotry' and obedience to the 'rusty and extinguished thunderbolts of the Vatican' were no more in France, and that by extension, they could be no more in Ireland as well. He went on to state that no serious measure of reform in Ireland could ever be obtained which would not 'comprehensively embrace Irishmen of all denominations'.

The important point about Tone's political transformation, and his polemical writings is that the impetus came from outside Ireland. His notion of Irish identity is centrifugal in direction in that it eschews the normative and given sectarian categories of identification and mutually exclusive aspects of identity. Rather than accepting these given, historical aspects of religious identity, Tone looked at France and America for a model that would enlarge and liberate notions of identity, which were fixed and unchanging, and allow for a broadening of the normative criteria of identity; which would place sectarian divisions to one side and instead embrace the Enlightenment-driven notions of liberty, equality and fraternity. In the ringing terms of Napper Tandy: 'the object of this institution [the United Irishmen] is to make a United Society of the Irish

Nation; to make all Irishmen Citizens, all Citizens Irishmen' (words reported in the *Northern Star* on 5 December 1791). The choice of the term 'citizen' is redolent of the French Revolution, as is the sentiment expressed. The thrust of their revolution was transformative and transactional; their aim was to break with the past, and, instead, to create new structures wherein the whole notion of Irishness could be altered and opened to notions of alterity and plurality.

However, this emancipatory and reformist definition of Irishness was undermined by the association of the United Irishmen with the Defenders. These were a secret society whose inception was in response to the sectarian attacks on Catholics in the North of Ireland by Protestant groupings called, variously 'the Protestant Boys', 'the Wreckers', but most often 'the Peep o'Day Boys'. The resultant informal mobilisation of Catholics took place in a manner largely similar to that of former agrarian secret societies. However, there was one important difference. The Defenders were formed solely for the defence of Catholics against Protestants, and as such, the very name is a potent signifier of the sectarian and centripetal attitude to identity espoused by this group. It is hardly surprising that sectarian fighting ensued and that after a skirmish in County Armagh in 1795, afterwards known as the Battle of the Diamond, the Orange Order was founded.

In essence then, the Defenders originated from an opposition between Catholics and Protestants, an opposition that was both economic and sectarian. In this sense, they embody the *status quo* of the Irish situation in that their inception was predicated on the religious, economic and paramilitary differences of the past between Catholics and Protestants. What they were defending was their own religious affiliation and their own set notion of identity. To this end, their societies were bonded in the rhetoric of quasi-religious signifiers in terms of oath and symbol, and their orientation was centripetal in that they looked towards what was already there, and defended it. There was no philosophical input in their scheme of things in terms of redefining notions of Irishness: they 'defended' what they had; they defended notions of 'self' against the 'other' with no room for any middle ground between the two. Their vector of Irish identity was totally at odds with that of the United Irishmen.

On taking into consideration the epistemologies of the United Irishmen and the Defenders, it becomes obvious that there was a central rift between them in terms of goals. Both were oath-bound secret societies which hoped for some form of relief from the contemporary political system, and both were influenced by the events of the French Revolution; but there the similarities ended. The United Irishmen espoused a centrifugal view of

Irishness, a view wherein the past history of religious enmity and internecine strife was to be forgotten, and not used in any way as a foundation on which to build a new Ireland. On the contrary, the past was seen as something to be jettisoned in favour of the future. In this epistemology, Irish identity was something, not given and fixed, but rather to be created and forged in the light of contemporary influences from outside. The influence of the Enlightenment hovers over their writings and their political philosophy. In this sense, their philosophy is Messianic in the sense that Derrida uses the term; in *Spectres of Marx* (1994) he outlines the implications of a Messianism that would work in tandem with the *critical* aspects of Marx. Such a Messianism would be 'Messianic' in so far as it would assume the structure of Messianic thought, but it would be 'a Messianism without religion'. This is how he describes it:

> The effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, like that of the Communist promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined Messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation [that is, the relation to the final event or last judgment] to the to-come of an event and of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated.[4]

The crucial difference here is the orientation towards the future and outwards towards a developing sense:

> Awaiting without horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the *arrivant* from whom or from which one will not ask anything in return and who or which will not be asked to commit to the domestic contracts of any welcoming power (family, state, nation, territory, native soil or blood, language, culture in general, even humanity), *just* opening which renounces any right to property, any right in general, Messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited *as such*, or recognized in advance therefore, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope—and this is the very place of spectrality [i.e., ghosts].[5]

Given the emancipatory thrust of the philosophy of the United Irishmen, and the attendant Enlightenment imperative towards secularisation, the connection with an avowedly sectarian organisation like the Defenders could only mean a dilution of one or other position. Which position stood in most danger of such dilution becomes clear with the use of the sectarian threat from the Orange Order as a lever to make the Defenders see the value of a union with the United Irishmen. Indeed, the point was made by

The Nation in 1843 that 'to the Armagh persecution is the union of Irishmen most exceedingly indebted', as such acts drove the Defenders into a rapprochement with the United Irishmen. Such was the success of this campaign that by mid 1796, new members in Ulster were being sworn in as Defenders and United Irishmen simultaneously.

This amalgamation was the key to the process of selective remembering of the 1798 rebellion as a plank in a narrow, nationalist litany, as evidenced by the co-option of Wolfe Tone in the rhetoric of Patrick Pearse. With the large-scale input of the Defenders, it became possible to 'remember' 1798 as an Irish Catholic rebellion against the wicked, Protestant, British forces. This process of mythological appropriation culminated in the rhetorical mutation of the idea of nationalist republicanism into a narrowly defined, *de facto* sectarian creed, where essentialist criteria such as religion and political and cultural traditions were definitive. The United Irishmen became remembered as the precursors of the insurrectionists of Easter 1916, but this memorisation was ideologically motivated and channelled in terms of exactly what was being remembered and what forgotten. The imperative towards contemporary Enlightenment aims was forgotten, as was the secularised notion of Irishness. Instead, 1798 became one more bead on the Catholic nationalist rosaries of revolution and rebellion.

In actuality, Tone had little time for religion, and saw the aim of the United Irishmen, as the creation of a country where the terms 'Protestant', 'Catholic' and 'Dissenter' would be subsumed under the common name of 'Irishman'. It is important to realise the transformative epistemology that was at work in this ideal. The very nature of Irishness was to be changed; the divisions of the past, as signified by the religious divisions already noted, were to be subsumed in the present and future by a notion of Irish identity which to this day has not come into being. Crucially, it was the difference between these aims, and the reality of the United Irish/Defender rebellion, that allowed Pearse to co-opt Tone into a Catholic, Gaelic, nationalist vision of Ireland. In an oration given at the grave of Tone, in Bodenstown, County Kildare, in 1913, Pearse 'remembered' Tone in the following terms:

> We have come to one of the holiest places in Ireland; holier even than the place where Patrick sleeps in Down. Patrick brought us life, but this man died for us. He was the greatest of Irish Nationalists ... We have come to renew our adhesion to the faith of Tone: to express once more our full acceptance of the gospel of Irish Nationalism which he was the first to formulate in worldly terms. This man's soul was a burning flame, so ardent, so generous, so pure, that to come into communion with it is to come unto a new baptism, into a new regeneration and cleansing.[6]

The sacramental rhetoric with which this passage resounds embodies the centripetal notion of remembering that Pearse was setting up; the image chain of 'holy, holiest faith, gospel, soul, burning flame, communion, baptism, regeneration and cleansing,' demonstrates clearly the influence of Roman Catholicism on Pearse's thinking and remembering. That Wolfe Tone, as Conor Cruise O'Brien notes, was a 'child of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment' whose hope was that Enlightenment rationality would supplant what he regarded as 'superstitious beliefs',[7] does not figure in this speech. Instead, Tone is sacralized by being compared explicitly with Saint Patrick, bringer of the Christian message to Ireland, and implicitly with Christ 'this man died for us'. The secular imperative of the Enlightenment has been subsumed into a Catholic nationalist *Weltanschauung*; Tone has been 'remembered' as a quasi-Defender in Pearse's pantheon of Irish martyrs, as well as undergoing a posthumous conversion to Catholicism. He is seen as an analogue of the Messiah, a trope which is seminal to Pearse's ideologically driven remembering of 1798, a remembering which is the origin of his particular definition of Irish nationalism. As he also noted, in the same year:

> The people itself will perhaps be its own Messiah, the people labouring, scourged, crowned with thorns, agonising and dying, to rise again immortal and impassable. For peoples are divine and are the only thing that can properly be spoken of under figures drawn from the divine epos. If we do not believe in the divinity of our people we have had no business, or very little, all these years in the Gaelic League.[8]

Here, we see the vatic voice of Pearse, especially keeping in mind the title of this piece, as he persuasively reconciles politics, religion and language in the people of Ireland, the chosen people. Here religious influences cohere, as the 'chosen people' trope of the Old Testament combines with the 'Messianistic' trope of the New Testament. This combination of different faculties is, I would argue, one of the most important influences of essentialist Irish identity. The narrative structure of this passage seeks closure in terms of the passion of Christ. It is by reanimating this passion and death in Ireland that Pearse will proceed, politically and culturally. It is by locating and, if necessary, altering, the past through a selective notion of remembering, that Pearse can point the way towards his redemptive aesthetic.

Pearse anthropomorphises Ireland through the literary device of *prosopopeia* (giving face), and presents Ireland as an amalgamation of Christ, Catholicism, and Celtism. His commitment to Irish language issues was reinforced by his founding of an all-Irish school, Scoil Éanna, where a

generation of boys were taught the Irish language and culture with Pearse as headmaster. The final item in his redemptive synthesis was the great Irish mythical figure, Cuchulain, the central figure in many of Standish O'Grady's books. For Pearse, Cuchulain would be the personification of all things Irish, and thus would be seen as an exemplar of an idealized Gaelic heroic type of Irishness, towards which all might aspire. Like Tone, it could be said that 'this man died' for his people, and as such, he formed part of Pearse's selective reanimation of the past through Messianistic figures.

In the entrance hall of Scoil Éanna, one of the first things to be seen was a large mural of the young Cuchulain taking his weapons; in the same hall, there was also Beatrice Elvery's painting of Christ as a boy, naked to the waist, with arms outstretched in the cruciform position.[9] This iconic fusion of these two Messianistic figures in Pearse's personal pantheon is completed by their location in an all-Irish school. So here we see the essential core of Irish identity being created through imagery. The visual juxtaposition of these two figures in the entrance to the school made the ideology of Scoil Éanna very clear. In 1913, Pearse put this threefold identification into explicit terms:

> The story of Cuchulain symbolizes the redemption of man by a sinless God. The curse of primal sin lies upon a people; new and personal sin brings doom to their doors; they are powerless to save themselves; a youth free from the curse, akin with them through his mother but through his father divine, redeems them by his valour; and his own death comes from it. I do not mean that the Táin is a conscious allegory: but there is the story in its essence, and it is like a retelling (or is it a foretelling) of the story of Calvary.[10]

This fusion of Cuchulain and Christ (and we note the similarities with the Messianistic remembering of Tone), is created by the similarity of their narrative, in other words, through aesthetic criteria. Theirs is a narrative of suffering, death, but ultimate redemption both for their people and for their own posterity. The same scriptural narrative has been extended, by Pearse, to the lives of Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmett, both of whom were seen in this sacrificial light. The final character in this narrative of sacrifice and redemption is, of course, Pearse himself. Given his continued use of aesthetic criteria to create his own 'New Testament' of mystical nationalism, it is fitting that this climactic identification, which is also a prophecy of the act of sacrificial rebellion which Pearse himself will lead, should be voiced in a fictional work. In itself, such an identification points up the dangers of the intersection of the aesthetic and the ideological. In Pearse's *The*

Singer, the hero, MacDara, sets out to face the foreign enemy with these emblematic words:

> One man can free a people as one man redeemed the world. I will take no pike, I will go into battle with bare hands. I will stand up before the Gall as Christ hung naked before men on the tree.[11]

From the already cited view of the Messiah as the Irish people redeeming themselves, a view stemming from that of individual Irish Messianistic figures redeeming their nation, Pearse moves to a personal identification with Christ, in terms of following his path of sacrifice and redemption. The association of the English with those who crucified Christ is also clear.

It is important to realise the potency of remembering in Pearse's project of defining Irish nationalism. His version of memory is religious in mode in that his construction of Irishness is valorised by the past, those 'dead generations' already referred to, and sanctified by a series of Messianistic figures which will culminate in Pearse himself. While the historical object of the United Irishmen was the transformation of their society through a combination of education, propaganda and military action, their 'Messianistically remembered' object is now seen as part of the mythico-religious trope of blood sacrifice. His whole notion of 'remembering' is predicated on this Messianistic cast of thought wherein perceived differences in politics and epistemology are elided through the aesthetic and mythic criteria which create a seamless and teleological narrative.

I have deliberately chosen the adjective 'Messianistic' as opposed to 'Messianic' to describe the thrust of Pearse's ideologically-driven process of remembering. In an interesting discussion of memory, and particularly religious and mythic memory, Jacques Derrida differentiates between these terms. For Derrida, speaking at Villanova University in 1994, 'Messianic structure is a universal structure. As soon as you address the other, as soon as you are open to the future, as soon as you have a temporal experience of waiting for the future, of waiting for someone to come, that is the opening of experience'. Derrida goes on to note that the Messianic structure is predicated on a promise, on an expectation that whatever is coming in the future 'has to do with justice',[12] and, in terms of this definition, it is clear that the project of Tone and the United Irishmen could be described in terms of such a Messianic structure.

In his impassioned pamphlet 'An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland', Tone argued that for any future Irish government, there must be radical transformation in the Irish body politic. He noted that

'everywhere but in Ireland Reform is going forward, and levelling ancient abuses into dust. Why are these things so? Because Ireland is struck with a political paralysis that has withered her strength and crushed her spirit: she is not half alive, one side is scarce animated, the other is dead … Religious intolerance and political bigotry … bind the living Protestant to the dead and half corrupted Catholic, and beneath the putrid mass, even the embryo of effort is stifled'. For Tone, the past is clearly not something to be reified, either in its totality or selectively; rather is it something that needs to be transformed, or reformed, into a better future. His project then, was to find a cure for this paralysis through the 'strength of the people', a strength which would enable them to seek reform in the future. His final point is a telling one, namely that 'no Reform is honourable, practicable, efficacious or just which does not include, as a fundamental principle, the extension of elective franchise to the Roman Catholics'. In their seminal declarations and resolutions, the United Irish Society of Belfast, in 1791, declared that the past could no longer be allowed to act as a break on change, or as they put it 'when antiquity can no longer defend absurd and oppressive forms'. Instead, they, in Messianic manner, would look to the future, and to the coming of justice and a sense of ethical fairness by speaking about a 'cordial union' among 'ALL THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND' [capitals in original], and by adverting to reforms which would be inclusive of 'Irishmen of every religious persuasion'.

Obviously, this future-orientated politics had as a seminal objective, the annealing of the 'intestine divisions among Irishmen' through the 'equal distribution of the rights of man through all sects and denominations of Irishmen'.[13] The notion of 'levelling ancient abuses into dust' has a Messianic ring to it. It speaks of the past only in terms of repudiating its injustices so as to create a better future, and as soon as one is 'open to the future', notes Derrida, then notions of 'justice and peace will have to do with this coming of the other'.[14] These very notions are integral to the ideas of the United Irishmen, and antithetical to the Messianistic mindset of Pearse.

As we have seen, Pearse tended to remember the past through particular Messianistic figures: Christ, Cuchulain, Tone, Emmett, MacDara and, finally, himself. Derrida has pointed out the dangers implicit in such a notion of remembering. He argues that as soon as the Messianic structure is reduced to particular Messianism, as we have outlined above, then one is 'reducing the universality' and this has political consequences: 'then you are accrediting one tradition among others, and the notion of an elected people, of a given literal language, a given fundamentalism'.[15] This is precisely the effect of remembering

Messianistically: Gaelic, Catholic nationalist Irishness becomes the only Irishness, and selective remembering leads to a teleological reading of history which sees the events of the past as an old testament constantly leading towards the coming into its kingdom of this type of nationalist Irishness.

In the epigraph to this essay, the attitude of the United Irishmen to remembering the past is set out clearly. Here, on 5 December 1791, the policy of the Dublin Society of the United Irishmen was set down in the *Northern Star*, and espoused a divergent version of Irish identity. Here the vision is focused on the present, the future, and the example of other countries who dealt with similar political problems. Here we see the legacy of the Enlightenment, and of political rationality, and we see a different type of remembering, a remembering which takes on notions of responsibility to the plurality of the past. Pearse spoke of taking up the struggle in the name of the 'dead generations'; he saw himself as the heir to a single seam of historical momentum. However, as Derrida notes in *Spectres of Marx*: 'there is no inheritance without a call to responsibility', and this responsibility is usually a 'critical, selective and filtering reaffirmation' of what has gone before. Hence, to remember is to be selective, to be critical, to filter. These 'dead generations' may embody the remembrance of one strand, one selection of memories of Irishness, but there are others, and there may, in the future, be different paradigms of Irishness entirely.

I think that, in the light of these statements of political objectives, the epistemological structure of Tone and the United Irishmen could well be described as 'Messianic', in the Derridean sense. As Derrida puts it, the 'Messianic' attitude is one which constitutes:

> The historical opening to the future, therefore to experience itself and to its language, expectation, promise, commitment to the event of what is coming, imminence, urgency, demand for salvation and for justice beyond law, pledge given to the other inasmuch as he or she is not present, presently present or living.[16]

For Tone, as he participated in the formation of the Belfast society of United Irishmen, the orientation of his movement was predicated on such a historical opening to the future. As Napper Tandy had put it, their aim was to change present and future notions of Irishness and citizenship; it was a transformative and open project.

In terms identical to Derrida's definition of the Messianic, Tone and Napper Tandy were looking to 'the promise of what is coming', and were describing an orientation towards the future, a future wherein notions of