

Maciej Ruczaj, *The Liturgy of Revolution: Political Theology of Patrick Pearse between Catholicism and Modernism*.

Patrick Pearse is a major personality in Irish history and in Irish language literature, a contested figure whose legacy and achievements have been hotly debated. In this scholarly and engaging thesis Maciej Ruczaj brings intellectual rigour and fresh comparative perspectives to a central aspect of Pearse's writings and political viewpoint and actions. His introduction clearly identifies the focus of the thesis. Stating that 'Catholicism provided Pearse with a symbolic framework for his construction of the discourse of Irish nationalism' Ruczaj 'traces the theological background of Pearse's thought by analysing both his political and creative writings.' Ruczaj notes astutely that the politicisation of Irish historiography meant that Pearse's intellectual legacy was seldom discussed '*sine ira et studio*', and states correctly that scholars have not hitherto engaged at a deep level with Pearse's use of theological ideas to frame his revolutionary thought. The author 'aims at filling this gap' and in this he succeeds admirably. The comparative aspect of the thesis brings a further level of richness and its careful framing in Pauline theology and the 'ethics of foolishness' in the course of the exegesis proves illuminating for both Pearse's politics and his creative writing. The author shows a deep knowledge of political theory, theology and the Catholic liturgy and his references to the writings of Tomaszewski, Schmitt and Mickiewicz bring new energy and fresh insights to consideration of Pearse's political thinking. The main body of the thesis would be very suitable for publication, with some minor corrections and clarifications (and perhaps a telescoping of some of the theory and backdrop.)

The first chapter contains a biographical study and a clear summary of the process of mythologizing which followed the Irish rebellion known commonly as the 1916 Easter Rising. Sources for the mythologizing of the figure of Pearse himself and evidence for his influence are discussed in a measured and knowledgeable manner. There is some excellent use of new sources. Some of the leadership in the Rising were neither Volunteers nor Citizen Army members (Clarke and Mc Dermott) and there were some unaffiliated rank and file: the role of the IRB in the Rising should be briefly noted in any future publication: its secretive and oath-bound nature will be relevant later. It should also be noted that several commentators and relatives have disputed Pearse's role as leader (this is partly acknowledged in 1.3). Biographical information in 1.3 is useful; perhaps a slight amendment might be made to state Pearse was *a* key figure (not *the* key figure) in the development of Irish language prose on page 27. Phil O'Leary, who will be mentioned later by the author, should be cited here along with the other bilingual scholars mentioned on page 37. The imaginative impact of the Rising is discussed in a stimulating manner with suitable references to relevant scholarship (Kiberd etc.) In this regard, while the Rising was indeed a military failure, the small but not inconsiderable initial achievement of the Rising – the Republican army's success in maintaining control of the city for several days - should be mentioned. Although readers of any future publication may well be familiar with the politics of the period, the extent of the 'autonomy' of Home Rule should also be explained in a footnote. The use of the term 'bardic poetry' properly refers to *Filíocht na Scol* (learned metred poetry from Bardic schools from a specific period (up to the seventeenth century)). The two Pearse poems cited here take their cue from early Irish poetry and a poem by Ó Rathaille respectively.

Chapter two traces the theoretical backdrop to the relations between nationalism and religion in general and then discusses these intersections in a specifically Irish context. Judicious use is made of source material and the scholarship cited is drawn from both classic and more recent work. Relevant scholarship is well chosen and carefully sifted, providing for an engaging analysis. The author shows an excellent understanding of nationalism in an Irish context. In 2.3 the interesting discussion of Romantic messianism could be broadened slightly to include discussion of the messianism of the Aisling tradition and its idea of a state of bliss (mentioning especially the work of Breandán Ó Buachalla). Given Pearse's interest in the political song and poetry of that period, the roots of Irish nationalism in seventeenth century conflicts (discussed at a later stage by the author) should also be explored here, and this will broaden and complicate the Irish version of the narrative of nationalism's connections with Romanticism. Recent work by Vincent Morley on the thematic continuity in versions of Irish nationalist history could also be included in the discussion in any future publication in order to complete the already excellent theoretical framing of the theme of the thesis.

After a consideration of Pearse's views on tradition and modernism, the following chapters explore Pearse's writings through the lense of what the author terms Pearse's '*translatio sacri*': a re-imagining of the nation and its narrative in analogy with the (Catholic) Church and its narrative of salvation. The author's deep knowledge of Pauline theology and the Bible is a particular strength and allows him to reveal the extent and consistency of Pearse's philosophical framing of his political thought. Given the author's expertise, it might be interesting for him at a future stage to explore similarities in Pearse's political thinking and that of later exponents of revolutionary theology such as Oscar Romero. There are excellent close readings of *The Singer* and *The Fool* and there are also insightful readings of lesser known texts such as *A Song for Mary Magdalene*; these readings have import outside of the theme of the thesis, as literary criticism.

Ideas are clearly expressed and supported by suitable evidence which is drawn from a broad authoritative base; arguments are logically constructed and often expressed with elegance and aplomb. The title seems to be missing some punctuation and very occasionally the definite article is used where this would not be usual in English (eg 'the Home Rule', 'the Irish politics'.) The word 'disconnect' on page 14 should be 'separate'. There is a typo in the second line of the abstract ('prominent') and the phrase 'black legend' will not be clear to English speakers. The phrase 'ideologue', used in the abstract, is loaded and should be replaced with a more neutral term. 'Bardic poetry'; the spelling of 'persean' should be 'Pearsean' (p 35)

Throughout the thesis arguments are nuanced and conclusions are reached in a considered manner: the author acknowledges Pearse's almost complete lack of reference to religion in his unfinished autobiography and notes incisively that Pearse was 'almost completely immune to a central ('common' might be better here) motif of Gaelic league rhetoric' - 'the exaltation of the Irish language as a 'protective wall' against moral corruption'. The author sensibly outlines the boundaries of his thesis; however, a brief acknowledgement of Pearse's growing connections with socialists Larkin and Connolly could be instructive, given later discussion of Pearse's wish for redemption of the 'people'. Very occasionally the author overstates the case; for example, in his citing of Boyce's opinion that the Rising was completely 'led and planned by Catholics'. Correctly noting Pearse's affinity with Protestant nationalist leaders, the author might like to explore 'The Psychology of a Volunteer' in any future publication order to tease out Pearse's thinking on this

theme. The influence of the Capuchin Friars in influencing public opinion in the immediate aftermath of the Rising could also be further explored. The thoughtful and imaginative analysis of Pearse's plays could be further strengthened by consideration of the plays' staging and reception.

The author's meticulous and sometimes *bravura* dissection of Pearse's thinking as expressed both in his creative writing and in his late political pamphlets is a very significant contribution to both Pearse studies and political theory in general. His statement that 'liturgy...provides a template for Pearse's understanding of the Rising in relation to his writings' is wholly proven. The importance of the thesis goes beyond this and Ruczaj makes a compelling case that even outside of their relevance to the Rising 'Pearse's works remain the most compelling documents of a decisive phase in the development of Irish nationalism' : indeed the thesis reveals Pearse's writings to be compelling documents in the broader context of political theory.

Maciej Rucis to be congratulated on this thesis. Meticulously researched and intellectually thought provoking, it is an important and timely contribution to political, philosophical and religious studies, to the study of Irish History and literature and to Irish studies in general. With some editing, this will make for an important monograph, which if expedited, could be issued in time for the surge in interest the centenary commemorations will bring to Pearse studies.

I recommend the thesis for defence.

Dr Róisín Ní Ghairbhí, St. Patrick's College, 20th May 2014