

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

OPPONENT'S REPORT

Maciej Ruczaj, *The Liturgy of Revolution: Political Theology of Patrick Pearse between Catholicism and Modernism* (Ph.D. Thesis)

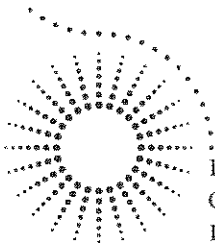
This detailed and thoroughly researched dissertation makes a significant contribution to Pearse scholarship of course, but also to Irish studies in general, as well as to the discussion of the phenomenon of nationalism in a much wider European perspective. It fits into a range of recent scholarly endeavours that strive to broaden the geographical context in which Irish culture is typically studied. In this respect, the discussion of the affinities between Patrick Pearse and the Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz is of special importance – while the circumstances of the introduction of Mickiewicz's writing into Gaelic Revival circles have been recently analysed by Mark Ó Fionnáin, little work has been done to assess the actual influence of his ideas. The relevant passages of the thesis thus constitute a valuable contribution to the study of Polish-Irish relations.

A great advantage of Mr Ruczaj's thesis is its interdisciplinary nature as it draws on a wide range of facts and notions from the fields of literature, political science, philosophy, and theology in order to capture the various influences combined in Pearse's characteristically syncretic thought. Also the language background of the research is impressive as it combines material in English, Polish, and to a degree also Irish and Latin. The resulting picture of Pearse is thus arguably more nuanced and multi-layered than in previous scholarly treatments. Worthy of appreciative comment is also the candidate's acute sense of irony and paradox which adds to the liveliness of the text. One of the best examples is the title of Chapter Six: "The Übermensch of the Western World".

While the thesis has a well-designed structure and a coherent argument, it clearly suffers from insufficient final editing that resulted in a number of unnecessary language and spelling errors. Nevertheless, these are the most prominent in the introduction and the first two chapters, gradually become less frequent and do not hinder the understanding of the text. More attention should have been devoted to the spelling of names and words in Irish, e.g. "de Blacám", *recte* "Blácám" (13); "Padraig Mac Piaráis", *recte* "Pádraig Mac Piarais" (16); "Gaeltachtí", *recte* "Gaeltachtaí" (27); "An Mháthir", *recte* "An Mháthair" (27); "Íosogán", *recte* "Íosagán" (92 and elsewhere).

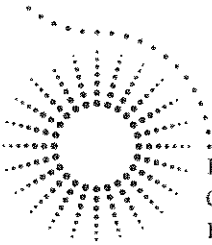
I have four comments/suggestions for debate, two (rather particular ones) related to literature, two to history and politics.

1. **Can Pearse's deliberate juxtaposition of Cú Chulainn and Christ stem from his familiarity with Irish medieval literature, discussed on p. 177?** According to Kim McCone, the conscious effort of medieval *literati* to create this "typological" connection is clear from a number of medieval texts, such as *Aided Con Culainn* (Cú Chulainn's Death).



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2. The discussion of Pearse's short stories on pp. 112-114 is accurate and rightly points out their typical features, such as their indebtedness to the discourse of the "traditionally spiritual" western peasant and their stress on endurance and humility. **I wonder how the analysis of "An Dearg Daol" from Pearse's second collection would fit into the overall argument of the dissertation.** The tale is considered by O'Leary as "the most artistically satisfying of his stories" and definitely displays features highly atypical of Pearse's literary *oeuvre*, such as an implicit critique of Catholic clergy or a degree of realism concerning social problems in the West of Ireland.
3. The interpretation of the 1798 Rebellion as shaped mainly by "ethnic millenarian consciousness [...] focused on the restoration of the Catholic Church and of the traditional land order" (57) seems to hark back to the "jacquerie" interpretation embraced by the so-called "revisionist" historians. Without saying that the view completely lacks relevance, it is perhaps important to note that it was vehemently contested by a group of "post-revisionist" historians of the 1990s, with Kevin Whelan as their prominent speaker. These laid emphasis precisely on the "French-styled republicans of Presbyterian origins" whose influence is largely dismissed in the dissertation (57). The embracement of the "jacquerie" view of 1798, taken over from Hutchinson, may serve as a random example of a certain downplaying of the Protestant/Enlightenment strand of Irish nationalism in the thesis as a whole. This is understandable given the "Catholic" focus of the study, yet it is a strand that has constantly kept re-emerging in Irish nationalism until these days. **What is the degree of its relevance for Pearse's political thought?**
4. The laudable effort to discuss Pearse in the wider context of contemporaneous European thought raises important questions as to what the nature of this context precisely is. Does it have any significance for the discussion of Pearse that Roger Griffin developed his concept of "primordial modernism" as a part of his study of the relationship between modernism and Fascism? After all, the title of his monograph, quoted many times in the dissertation, is *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*. Similarly, it cannot be denied that the opinions of Carl Schmitt – such as the critique of the overabundance of debate in liberal democracy, his rejection of rationalist law, his praise of the leader's power to decide and ultimately, dictatorship – bears strong affinities to the ideology of the upcoming German Nazism. This is, after all, to a certain degree corroborated by Schmitt's subsequent biography. In the thesis, "modernism" is initially defined broadly as a general condition of the times that "shaped numerous political and social movements, ranging from anarcho-syndicalism to conservative authoritarianism" (69). Nevertheless, the connection to Schmitt's political philosophy and Griffin's research seems to imply a more specific affinity of Pearse to European right-wing authoritative politics. Yet Pearse clearly differed from it as well, as can be gleaned from the egalitarian



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elements in the Easter Proclamation, the cooperation with the left-wing Citizen Army, as well as the quoted remark of Schmitt himself, who saw Pearse (maybe on the basis on the above-stated) as an “Irish Rebel with syndicalist connections” (107). **Do these differences have significance and if so, to what influences can they be attributed? What is Pearse’s precise place on the map of European political thought?**

In conclusion, I sincerely hope that Mr Ruczaj’s thesis will be turned into a full-fledged monograph in the nearest future as the upcoming centenary of the Easter Rising will undoubtedly lead to an increase in public interest in its principal ideologue. The dissertation has considerable potential to contribute to the public debate about Patrick Pearse’s legacy and beyond any doubt, to make it more lively.

The dissertation fulfils all the necessary standards and requirements and I am pleased to recommend it for defence./S radostí doporučuji práci k obhajobě.

Praha, 6. května 2015

Mgr. Radvan Markus, Ph.D.