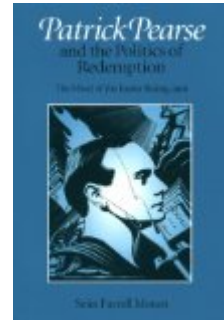


**Sean Farrell Moran.** *Patrick Pearse and the Politics of Redemption: The Mind of the Easter Rising, 1916.* Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994. x + 233 pp. \$42.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8132-0775-9.



**Reviewed by** Thomas P. Maloney

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If there was ever an ideal candidate for the psychohistorical biography, it is surely Patrick Pearse. In his brief life we have the tale of a politically naive stonemason's son, who was in actuality a mama's boy all along, that is, until he discovered the power of death to grant him the security and gratification that his real life didn't supply. If only he was a carpenter as well, then Irish history would really be in for a rewrite. In conclusion, it's better to become a myth than to try to teach them through poorly written school dramas.

Sean Farrell Moran's *Patrick Pearse and the Politics of Redemption: The Mind of the Easter Rising, 1916*, is a marvelously incisive look at Pearse, and his zeal to become that type of man of which legends are made. However, myths and legends have their most profound impact upon those who are most impressionable - and this Pearse clearly was. Pearse in fact, seems to have discovered a new version of the 3 F's - Fascination, Fantasy, and Fanaticism. [1] Moran's approach to Pearse combines the use of modern psychological analysis (Erickson, Freud, Fromm, Hartmann, and Jung) with a careful analysis of Pearse's writings,

as well as those of his biographers. For those who are thoroughly familiar with R.D. Edwards, *The Triumph of Failure*, and W. I. Thompson's *Imagination of an Insurrection*, Moran's findings will not seem very unusual. Both of these works have previously questioned the nature of the Easter Rising as a heroic moment in Irish history, and Pearse's role as a leader in that struggle.

Moran elucidates both the environmental and psychological forces that molded Pearse, and convincingly argues that an unsatisfactory home life led young Patrick to seek approval and security elsewhere. The issue of Pearse's apparent homosexuality is dealt with in some detail. Pearse, uncertain of his Irishness (his father was English), his sexuality, and his adult role in life, eventually decided that being a hero was the best way to escape obscurity. Pearse was able to sublimate those aspects of his personality which he found troubling, and devote his attention nearly single-mindedly to the Irish cause. By definition the process created an enigmatic figure, an odd fellow who was perhaps too devoted to the task to deal sensibly with worldly matters. Although he

passed the Irish Bar, he tried but one case and lost. He did not seem to be concerned to lodge appeals in earthly courts, but rather in Ireland's collective memory. Perhaps his impatience was with himself and his inability to financially or otherwise manage his deceased father's successful monument works, or to sustain his own pioneering efforts in Irish education. Whatever the precise cause, the solution for Pearse was to win approval, and to become a man of action, but as Moran repeatedly points out, Pearse was happiest when he sanctified the image of innocent young boys.

Pearse's dissatisfaction with life as he found it drove him to seek out ideals. Like many other Irish men and women of his day he came to embrace the Celtic revival in art, literature and language. Pearse was a dedicated cultural nationalist, and served the movement well, particularly in his role as editor of the Gaelic League's *An Claidheamh Soluis* (The Sword of Light). Here Pearse was able to indulge in both poetry and rhetoric, and perhaps most significantly in relating and interpreting the heroic tales of ancient Ireland. As to politics, Pearse matured from a position of general satisfaction with the British Government's proposals for Irish Home Rule to a position of militant Republican extremism. Moran displays how, initially, Pearse emulated the romantic rebellion and heroic speech of Robert Emmet, but eventually succumbed to much more potent stuff such as John Mitchel's vituperative *Jail Journal* and Wolfe Tone's strident Republicanism. Still, Pearse's political transformation would probably have been impossible without the guidance of Fenian hero and fellow poet Tom Clarke, who eventually secured for Pearse access to the highest levels of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood. Clearly, this was a case where the pupil came to outshine the mentor, for Pearse's thanatic Republican oratory soon came to hush the masses gathered at patriotic commemorations.

The milieu in which Pearse was to eventually find himself was one characteristic of all would be European revolutionaries at the time - the struggle for the rights of small nations, and a revolt against modernity. The struggle for the workers of the world was on as well, but Pearse was able to convince none other than James Connolly to put socialism on hold. For Pearse, the former of these movements was easily buttressed by the power of Irish myth and legend. If as some claimed, cultural nationalism in general was atavistic, for Pearse it provided the true fruits of freedom - selfless blood sacrifice for the nation. It is not difficult to understand why Pearse's school for boys, St. Enda's, carried Cochulainn's famous speech "I care not though I were to live but one day and one night provided my fame and deeds live after me" as its motto (p. 160).

Pearse's preference for myth, and his longing for a heroic age in Ireland came to serve as the source of renewed life for Ireland's Fenian dead. His rhetoric, always inflammatory, was by 1916 infused with soteriological imagery. By Easter 1916, Pearse had thrown all caution to the wind, his demand was now for no less than a redemptive blood sacrifice for Ireland. The pragmatic could ignore such talk, but the zeal of patriots, once aroused, proved impossible to stop. From 1915 onward, Pearse had adopted the custom of wearing black, as if in mourning for his own eventual death, as well as those of other patriots. Pearse was acutely aware of the likelihood of the Easter Rising failing as a military effort, but he was also fully cognizant of the powerful role of martyrdom in Irish history. For a population as yet unsatisfied by British legislation, in an age of global conflict, Pearse correctly predicted what the future must be, and thereby immortalized himself and the other rebels of 1916. As Yeats was to remind us, Ireland had 'changed utterly.'

Sean Farrell Moran has produced a wonderful and useful addition to modern Irish history and biography. His arguments are consistent and

well presented, while his psychohistorical methodology is applied judiciously. No one who wishes to fully understand the 1916 Easter Rising can afford to ignore this work.

[1] The 3 F's were: Fair Rent, Fixity of Tenure, and Freedom to Sell, and were popularized during the "Land War" (1870).

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