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Source: *Nordic Irish Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Special issue: Cultural Memory and the Remediation of Narratives of Irishness (2014), pp. 1-17

Published by: Dalarna University Centre for Irish Studies

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24332390>

Accessed: 08-11-2018 12:42 UTC

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Visioning Ireland: Pearse, Prosopopoeia and the Remembering of O'Donovan Rossa and Tone

Eugene O'Brien

The clear true eyes of this man almost alone in his day visioned Ireland as we of to-day would surely have her: not free merely, but Gaelic as well; not Gaelic merely, but free as well.¹

These are the words in which Patrick Pearse set out a vision of the Ireland that his branch of the republican movement wished to inaugurate: an Ireland that was politically free and socio-culturally and linguistically differentiated from England. This phrase has become a mantra for the republican movement in terms of a template for an Ireland of the future. Interestingly, this speech was given at the graveside of the old Fenian, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, and it formed part of the graveside oration, a traditional locus of public speech in the Irish republican tradition. It has been described as the 'apogee of his oratorical career',² and took place on August 1st, 1915. This funeral, organised and orchestrated by Tom Clarke, was set out to promote the Fenian cause and provided an 'opportunity to show a united front of the IRB, ICA and Volunteers', which was underscored by the attendance of leading nationalists 'including Arthur Griffith, James Connolly, Eoin MacNeill and Constance Markievicz'.³

The epistemology of the graveside oration, itself an on-going trope of the republican movement in all shades of expression, is interesting. It is a place of mourning, of public memorialising, where the focus is necessarily on the past; while at the same time there is often a linguistic swerve towards a vision of the future which the dead person might wish to see enacted. It is as if there is a specific valence in speaking from the grave of a respected patriot, and that the words are somehow more powerful when delivered from this location. Such an oration transforms death from the realm of the personal to that of the cultural, and in this case, the socio-political. It also allows the graveside orator to become almost a mouthpiece of the dead patriot, with the oration being almost an act of ventriloquism, as Pearse here is telling us of the type of Ireland for which O'Donovan Rossa would have wished. Such ventriloquism has strong ideological

connotations: 'it seduces us to the delusive harmonies of identity-based (rather than differentially based) languages systems'.⁴

In republican practice, the funeral has always been a site of significance in terms of giving a message that the struggle will continue. Desmond Ryan, in his contemporary biography of Pearse, tellingly notes that 'he spoke on innumerable platforms throughout the country and surpassed himself in his great O'Donovan Rossa oration at the historic and imposing funeral of the dead Fenian'.⁵ The key word here is 'platform', as the funeral becomes a socio-political locus wherein the ideology of the movement is transmitted through the focus of the mourning and memorialising discourse. This essay will suggest that literary tropes of metaphor, simile, personification and prosopopoeia have been used as a way of narrating a very specific type of socio-political and cultural memory in the Irish republican tradition which in turn remediates a specific narrative strain of Irish history and identity to the exclusion of contending strains of identity. The staging of this remediated version of Irishness on platforms such as this allows for a more performative enunciation of this single strain, a series of performances which foreground the single strain and make all of the other perspectives a quiet and passive audience which do not attempt to interrupt or challenge this performance. These tropes have been used to make what is an aleatory series of historical events read as something of a seamless narrative which has a teleological outcome, and their enunciation at the graveside is significant. Lacan notes that 'memory must be re-experienced with the help of empty spaces',⁶ and the grave is just such an empty space in the sense of being empty of life. In short, it will be argued that seemingly-unmotivated strings of memory which are used to validate this ideological position are, in fact, mediated through a suasive literary and symbolist discourse which needs to be critiqued if the philosophy of the republican movement, from Pearse to the present day, is to be unpacked.

The persona of O'Donovan Rossa that is created by Pearse in this oration is one that is specifically motivated and ideologically-shaped. Pearse is less interested in the historical achievements of the Fenian, than in co-opting him into a sacralised form of Irishness. In a speech significantly entitled 'O'Donovan Rossa – Character Sketch', again delivered in August 1915, we see this mediated form of memorialising at work:

And here we have the secret of Rossa's magic, of Rossa's power: he came out of the Gaelic tradition. He was of the Gael; he thought in a Gaelic way; he spoke in Gaelic accents. He was the spiritual and intellectual descendant of Colm Cille and of Sean an Diomais. With Colm Cille he might have said, 'If I die it shall be from the love I bear

the Gael'; with Shane O'Neill he held it debasing to 'twist his mouth with English.' To him the Gael and the Gaelic ways were splendid and holy, worthy of all homage and all service; for the English he had a hatred that was tinged with contempt. He looked upon them as an inferior race, morally and intellectually; he despised their civilisation; he mocked at their institutions and made them look ridiculous.⁷

What is going on here is the giving of face to the dead man, a similar exercise that is enacted in the graveside oration, and it is a classic example of prosopopoeia: 'the master trope of poetic discourse'.⁸ Prosopopoeia involves the 'fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-graves'.⁹ In Paul de Man's account, prosopopoeia is the fiction that something or someone other than ourselves can speak almost through us. De Man's position certainly does not endorse the possibility of actually dialoguing with the dead, as it 'is entirely clear that their words are imposed by the living'.¹⁰ Thus O'Donovan Rossa is spoken of as if he were alive, and as if he were speaking directly to Pearse himself. Pearse seems to know his innermost thoughts, his feelings, his hopes and his character, and this memory of O'Donovan Rossa has come to be taken as truth, though it is not a truth universally accepted.

Ruth Dudley Edwards, in her biography of Pearse, suggestively notes that in his 'idealization of the rather unattractive figure' of O'Donovan Rossa, he 'sketched himself, and heralded the approaching revolution',¹¹ and much the same point is made by his contemporary Desmond Ryan: 'at last he had spoken the just word he sought to immortalise a man less great than himself'.¹² O'Donovan Rossa is given face and voice by Pearse in a form of transformative ventriloquism which remediates this particular perspective. While the occasion, the genre and the whole ideological tone of such orations would seem to suggest that the speaker is merely the living receptacle who is channelling the thoughts and visions of the dead man, in fact, what is actually taking place here is a direct reversal of that process. The dead cannot speak, and only the living can give voice to thoughts, so, ironically, it is the dead man who is the dummy with the speaker acting as the role of ventriloquist. This chiasmatic reversal is carried on through prosopopoeia and other literary tropes, all of which work at naturalising this voicing of the dead in a manner which seems to be almost commonplace. The actual body is necessary to cement the material connection between the dead man and the living speaker; the dead body is the core of the teleological memorialisation that is taking place.

Death, notes Jacques Derrida, 'is neither entirely natural (biological) nor cultural',¹³ and the graveside is a potent liminal symbol of a border between essence and existence; between life and death; between the past

and the present. Pearse's oration is voiced in a specific tense, which both commemorates the life of the dead Fenian and also projects a spectral presence into the future: '[he] visioned Ireland as we of to-day would surely have her':

Deliberately here we avow ourselves, as he avowed himself in the dock, Irishmen of one allegiance only. We of the Irish Volunteers, and you others who are associated with us in to-day's task and duty, are bound together and must stand together henceforth in brotherly union for the achievement of the freedom of Ireland.¹⁴

Jacques Lacan sees the tense of a rhetoric such as this as the 'future anterior', which he defines as 'what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming',¹⁵ and Samuel Weber, expanding on this notion, sees the temporal location of such discourse as an 'inconclusive futurity of what will-always-already-have-been [. . .] a "time" which can never be entirely remembered, since it will never have fully taken place'.¹⁶ This use of the future tense might at first seem surprising in a memorialising discourse like a graveside oration; however, a critique of such discourses demonstrates that the whole purpose of the oration is not to remember the dead person, but rather to use the fact of their death, and the associated feelings of grief, sadness and anger that invariably accompany death, to political and ideological ends in terms of future actions and engagements.

It is the Ireland of the future that is valorised here by that 'henceforth' which is the hinge that ushers in the future anterior into what is ostensibly a remembrance of the dead Fenian, even though it is couched in a discourse of mourning for him. His death allows the future to be born, and this memorialisation of him is enunciated precisely towards that end. The teleology of memory here is very much directed towards a possible future shaped by Pearse, but valorised by the dead Fenian, and by his works and philosophy, but more emotionally significant is the fact of his death, O'Donovan Rossa is seen as someone who gave his whole life for the cause of Irish freedom, and as such, he is above or beyond many of the political and socio-cultural arguments of the time. The dead body, which is quintessentially material, is co-opted as a transcendental silent signifier which will encourage the listeners, and those who read the text of the oration, to follow his example and enact revolution. The real focus of the oration is not on the memory of the real life of O'Donovan Rossa, but rather on a version of his life which is used as an emotive fulcrum around which people will be encouraged to join the revolutionary movement of the IRB.

As Pearse puts it: ‘let no man blaspheme the cause that the dead generations of Ireland served by giving it any other name and definition than their name and their definition’.¹⁷ It is the deaths of these generations, as opposed to their political thinking or philosophy, that are worthy of support, and there is almost an onus of guilt placed on the listeners to value these deaths by upholding the definitions of Irishness held by these dead men. Here memory is deliberately used as a reifying force; Pearse is not open to debate about the nature of the freedom to be espoused, nor is he willing to include contemporary theories or philosophies in his thinking. In fact, he has stressed that there is no room in his worldview for any renegotiation of the definitions and axioms of the past: his notion of a political philosophy is summed up in the aphorism: ‘Ireland one and Ireland free’, which he sees as ‘the definition of Ireland a Nation’. Interestingly, he sees this philosophy as being given by the teaching of the ‘Gaelic League and the later prophets’,¹⁸ so rather than an epistemology of nationalism or republicanism, what is being offered here is a form of revealed truth, a truth which is validated by the deaths of Irish patriots. It is their death, as opposed to their ideas, that is stressed as a motive force, and in another essay, he copper-fastens this point, rhetorically asking if ‘these dead heroic men live[d] in vain?’ if later generations do not adhere to their ideas, and he goes on to explain these ideas with great clarity: ‘has Ireland learned a truer philosophy than the philosophy of ‘98, and a nobler way of salvation than the way of 1803? Is Wolfe Tone’s definition superseded, and do we discharge our duty to Emmet’s memory by according him annually our pity’.¹⁹

This connection between memory and futurity, between the past and the future anterior, is one which has preoccupied Jacques Derrida, and he has spoken of it in terms of the notion of messianism. His attitude to memory is one which has relevance for this discussion of Pearse and his very specific re-membling and remediating of O’Donovan Rossa:

This messianic structure is not limited to what one calls messianisms, that is, Jewish, Christian, or Islamic messianism, to these determinate figures and forms of the Messiah. As soon as you reduce the messianic structure to messianism, then you are reducing the universality and this has important political consequences. Then you are accrediting one tradition among others and a notion of an elected people, of a given literal language, a given fundamentalism. That is why I think that the difference, however subtle it may appear, between the messianic and messianism is very important.²⁰

There is a very specific type of memory at work here, and there is a very specific relationship between memory and the future. Derrida sees the messianistic as located on a particular place at a particular time; what he calls the 'religions of the book',²¹ which have a defined messianistic location where Abraham, Jesus and Mohammed began their ministry. Islam, Christianity and Judaism all began as local religions and all have shrines and places of pilgrimage which value the local and, ironically, have made these places significant as a liminal site between the memory of a specific event and the promise of a future destiny. In the messianistic mode of memory, the future is directed along the tramlines of the past; there is a lineal structure, and the aim of this mediated mode of memory is to create the future in the image of that past, and that is precisely the activity in which Pearse is engaged in his graveside oration. He is using the death of O'Donovan Rossa to messianistically delineate the teleology of Irish republicanism. The past here is of value as it prescribes the direction of the future; through the sacrifice of the dead generations, a baseline is set up from which the tracks of the future can be built, and from where the direction of the future can be shaped.

Hence, the tense in this graveside oration hovers between present, past and future:

I propose to you then that [. . .] we renew [. . .] we ask [. . .] we avow [. . .] let no man blaspheme [. . .] In a closer spiritual communion with him [. . .] in a spiritual communion with those of his day, living and dead, who suffered with him in English prisons, [. . .] and speaking on their behalf as well as our own, we pledge to Ireland our love, and we pledge to English rule in Ireland our hate.²²

The communion here is with a living force, as opposed to a deceased person, and from this graveside comes the future anterior of a revolutionary Ireland, validated by the life and sacrifice of the dead Fenian. A funeral is a particularly apposite location for this process, for as Slavoj Žižek notes, in speaking about the rituals of mourning, 'there is something obscene, transgressive, in talking about the dead at all'.²³ Pearse certainly saw the value of death as a very specific site of memorialisation, as the dead person could be co-opted, or to use his own term, set up in communion with, the ideological attitudes of the living – with no chance of contradiction or complication. Both Dudley Edwards and Ryan imply that the euhemerised O'Donovan Rossa who was given face by Pearse might not be readily recognisable to those who knew him, but this is precisely the point. The transgressive aspect of memory here is at work, and Pearse is using the site of death as a locus of mystification through which a mythical communion

can be enacted between living and dead. It is a supremely persuasive and ideological position to take, as the memory of the dead person is validated by the ventriloquized voice of that person.

If *prosopopeia*, the giving of face, is a fictive voice, a trope whose artifice strives to make amends for the fact of death, it is nevertheless a figure which ‘already haunts any said real or present voice’.²⁴ That is to say, it reminds us of the distance between past and present, that which ‘makes the inscription of memory an effacement of interiorizing recollection, of the ‘living remembrance’ at work in the presence of the relation to self’.²⁵ Given the centrality of death in this process of mediated memory, and given the role of a specific place in messianistic memorialisation, the fact that many such speeches are often delivered at gravesides is not remarkable. Pearse’s oration at the grave of O’Donovan Rossa is paralleled by his speech at the grave of Theobald Wolfe Tone at Bodenstown.

In what Alison O’Malley-Younger calls his soapbox oration, given at Tone’s grave at Bodenstown in 1913,²⁶ Pearse spoke of having ‘come to one of the holiest places in Ireland’.²⁷ For Pearse, it is the grave of Wolfe Tone that has been the object and destination of the pilgrimage, and not the ideas of Tone and the radical ideology and philosophy of the United Irishmen. Rather than being the source of new ideas and a possible template for the future, Tone is seen as ‘the greatest of Irish men’ whose grave is now ‘the holiest place in Ireland’, as it must be ‘that the holiest sod of a nation’s soil is the sod where the greatest of her dead lies buried’.²⁸ For Pearse, it is Tone as dead historical fact, as opposed to Tone as an eventual transformer of how a society sees itself and organises itself and looks to the future that is of prime importance.

The site of the grave is semiotically supersaturated, and it is this site of memory that validates the relationship that Pearse goes on to outline:

I feel it difficult to speak to you to-day; difficult to speak in this place. It is as if one had to speak by the graveside of some dear friend, a brother in blood or a well-trying comrade in arms, and to say aloud the things one would rather keep to oneself. But I am helped by the knowledge that you who listen to me partake in my emotion: we are none of us strangers, being all in a sense own brothers to Tone, sharing in his faith, sharing in his hope, still unrealised, sharing in his great love. I have, then, only to find expression for the thoughts and emotions common to us all, and you will understand even if the expression be a halting one.²⁹

Like the previous example, there is a parallel sense of communion as Tone is connected spiritually and fraternally to those who have come to his graveside many years later. This sense of giving face to the dead, of creating a 'live' memory of someone who has died, is a seminal trait of not just Irish republican politics, but of nationalist politics everywhere. Rhetorically here, the focus is on the 'I' of the speaker and on the sense of a common message shared by all – speaker, audience, and the spirit of Tone – and on the speaker as just a vehicle of this sacred message. It is the trope of ventriloquism again, as the voice of the dead man seemingly comes from the tomb, haunting the speaker and the audience, and allowing the speaker to voice the thoughts of the dead man. It is messianistic memory at its most potent, and it is especially potent due to the locus of its utterance. The tomb is very much a liminal site: the end of an immanent life, but also the hope of a transcendent one. And given Pearse's messianistic tendencies, for him, there can be no doubt that the connection is always operative between the graves of the dead generations and that of Christ, from where his new, supernatural life began on Easter Sunday.

For Derrida, the open tomb is at the core of most definitions of politics across history:

I would say that there is no politics without an organization of the time and space of mourning, without a topolitology of the sepulcher, without an anamnestic and thematic relation to the spirit as ghost [*revenant*], without an open hospitality to the guest as *ghost* [in English in the original], whom one holds, just as he holds us, hostage.³⁰

For Pearse, this is very much the case, as he takes the personae of O'Donovan Rossa and Wolfe Tone and engages in prosopopoeia which is:

the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech. Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*).³¹

I would argue that this prosopopoeic ventriloquism of Tone and O'Donovan Rossa is a form of mediated, messianistic memory that is far from an accurate account of the life, and more importantly, the political philosophy, of Tone. In 1791, in Belfast, Tone spelled out the necessity of reform, and significantly, reiterated the idea that 'a cordial union among all the people of Ireland' would be both a methodological and political

necessity as well as a philosophical aim of their society. He went on to add that reform could only work if it was inclusive of '*Irishmen* of every religious persuasion' [italics original].³² For Tone, rights and duties were central to this new sense of Irishness: 'let every man, rich and poor, possess his rights by equal laws, and be obliged to perform the duties of a citizen'.³³ Tone's movement was firmly centred on civil society and as James Napper Tandy put it: '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'.³⁴ To underscore the secular nature of the movement, which hoped to unite the three religious divisions of Catholicism, Protestantism and Presbyterianism (Dissenters), Tone advocated that 'we would have no state religion, but let every sect pay their own clergy voluntarily'.³⁵ In 1791, the philosophy of the United Irishmen was enunciated in temporal terms which were antithetical to the perspective of Pearse: '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?'.³⁶

Both Tone and Tandy seem to accord little value to the past and its memories per se; unlike Pearse, they are more focused on changing the present in order to usher in a new future. The past as teleological guide to the future is not part of their agenda, but the memorialised United Irishmen that have come down to us through Pearsean rhetoric are seen as part of an almost biblical and salvific seamless narrative, where Tone takes the place of Jesus Christ as the saviour of his people:

We have come to the holiest place in Ireland; holier to us even than the place where Patrick sleeps in Down. Patrick brought us life, but this man died for us. And though many before him and some since have died in testimony of the truth of Ireland's claim to nationhood, Wolfe Tone was the greatest of all that have made that testimony, the greatest of all that have died for Ireland whether in old time or in new.³⁷

Here, the messianistic tenor of his memorialising rhetoric becomes overtly messianistic, as he directly associates Tone with Christ, through the hinge of Saint Patrick. Here politics becomes theocentric, as the death-resurrection trope is transferred from the religious to the socio-political sphere, and it is proleptic of the central role of another grave, or set of graves, in republican ideology. For Pearse, Christ and Cuchulain formed the twin poles of his sacral symbolic chain: he 'wove his Christian and pagan Irish enthusiasms into a unique system of belief',³⁸ and for 'good or ill, he had something of the religious fanatic about him'.³⁹ That he

adequated his religious and political ideologies is clear from any reading of the imagery and the symbolic chains of his work, but he is overt about the connection: 'I am old-fashioned enough to be both a Catholic and a Nationalist', wrote Pearse in 1913,⁴⁰ and he seemed imbued with the sense that 'People who had suffered in God's cause could, happily, expect to partake in a large share of God's glory'.⁴¹

The proleptic nature of this becomes clear when we consider that eight months after his oration at the grave of O'Donovan Rossa, Pearse himself and fourteen colleagues, were executed by the British government for their part in the 1916 rising, between May 2nd and May 16th. From the spaces of their graves, arose a whole ideology of sacrificial republican teleology, and after the War of Independence, a narrative was constructed which seemed to lead to that point of freedom which sketched the nodal points that Pearse himself has set out: Tone, Emmet, O'Donovan Rossa and the men of 1916 themselves. Irish republican philosophy was now messianistically focused on these nodes of mediated memory. History, a series of aleatory and diffuse events, was now moulded into a distinct teleological narrative. Yet there are different memories which have not been seen as part of this narrative. For example in May 1915 Pearse led 900 Volunteers through Limerick, and 'according to press reports they were booed and stoned. Pearse's men fired blank shots in warning – extraordinary in itself – but in the end they were protected by the police and the Royal Munster Fusiliers'.⁴²

Pearse's mediated memory of O'Donovan Rossa and Tone deliberately set out to claim their thinking as an inheritance; their spectres were voiced by him to ensure that the message would be productive and purposive in terms of what he wanted to achieve. His very specific form of memory, and the fusion of past and future anterior in this memorialising discourse is aimed at creating and describing his inheritance – both that which he has inherited from the dead generations of the past, and that which he will bequeath to generations of the future. As Derrida observes:

To inherit is not essentially to receive something, a given that one could then have. It is an active affirmation; it responds to an injunction, but it also presupposes an initiative, the signature, or countersignature of a critical selection. To inherit is to select, to sort, to highlight, to reactivate.⁴³

Such reactivation or choice is precisely what is at stake in these two mediations of memory. The giving of face to the dead patriots, Tone and O'Donovan Rossa, is essentially a fictive act. De Man notes that *prosopopoeia* is 'the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or

voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech',⁴⁴ and the fictionality is a strong point. Pearse, despite what his writings say, was not as fully committed to armed insurrection and violent separatism as might seem. As late as 1912, he was 'still talking about his support for Redmond's Home Rule party',⁴⁵ so the single narrative trail from Tone to O'Donovan Rossa to Pearse is more plural and diffuse than he would have us believe. His memorialising of Tone and O'Donovan Rossa is very much a fiction, a giving of face and voice wherein it is not they, but Pearse himself, who speaks, and each of the ventriloquized voices are imbued with Pearse's sacral-nationalism as opposed to their own less religious perspectives. Messianistic memory attempts to elide the fact that 'the speech of the dead is a *fiction*'.⁴⁶

It is this fictional aspect that has been the focus of this article. I am not saying that he deliberately mis-remembered Tone and O'Donovan Rossa; what I am saying is that he selectively chose aspects of their lives which he persuasively wove into a narrative which had a beginning, middle and end, and that Pearse saw himself as the ultimate validation of this rhetoric through his actions in Easter week in 1916. That the dead generations were given voice at the gravesides of Tone and O'Donovan Rossa is proleptic of his words at the beginning of the proclamation of the Irish republic:

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.⁴⁷

Interestingly here, two of the rhetorical tropes that we have been discussing are conflated in this political declaration. Those dead generations, to whom Pearse gave both face and voice, are now given militant force in the proclamation, delivered after several sites in the centre of Dublin were taken over by armed force. Similarly, the sacral messianistic note that we have analysed is also clear in the invocation of the deity. Ironically, it is Pearse who, while invoking both the dead and the deity, is actually giving voice to them. It is that suasive ventriloquism at work again, as what seems to be a validation of his actions from the voices of the past, and from the perspective of the transcendent, is actually Pearse ventriloquizing both.

Here the mediated memory of the past has proven to be centrally operative in the birth of a future which Pearse so ardently desired. Mediation is the key because in this narrative, Pearse talks about plural generations but a single 'tradition of nationhood', and this is very much a remediation of Irish history, because just as, for Derrida 'there is always *more than one language in the language*',⁴⁸ so in culture, there is always

more than one tradition in any country. Indeed, even within the Irish Volunteers, there was a plurality of traditions, aims and ideologies at work, and what Pearse is doing is remediating and re-membering his narrative of the past in order to provide a teleological swerve towards his desired future.

In one sense this is memory in a very specific, ideological and performative sense, but on the other, it is a motivated narrative with a very particular ideological agenda and can almost be seen as a fiction. The dead generations are incapable of calling anyone to their banner as they are dead. Pearse, in fact in this speech, is using the rhetorical device of *catachresis*, as defined by Derrida in his essay 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy'.⁴⁹ Discussing Fontanier's analysis of *catachresis*, Derrida sees it as the 'imposition of a sign upon a meaning which did not yet have its own proper sign in language',⁵⁰ and this is precisely what Pearse does. The dead generations cannot speak, God cannot speak and Ireland cannot speak, nor can Ireland beget children in any real sense of this term, yet all of these are remediated from inanimation to animation, and from lack of personhood to personhood, in Pearse's rhetorical swerve in this proclamation; but crucially, this prosopopoeia has another function. It transfers the agency of the Rising from Pearse and his colleagues who have formed a secret society (the Irish republican brotherhood) within the Irish Volunteers, and who have overridden a direct order from their commander in chief to cancel the Rising, to this personified Ireland, those dead generations, and to some form of divine warrant. It is the ultimate self-absolution from any sense of responsibility for their actions, as it makes those who are proclaiming a Republic seem to be passive subjects, who are not agents of the change but merely attentive listeners to the siren calls of a personified Ireland, and the voices of those dead generations who had a single narrative of nationality which they managed to mediate and remediate down through history.

But this is not just something that affects a linguistic analysis of the performative nature of the 1916 proclamation, as it has significant real-world implications as well. This document could well be seen as the foundational text of the modern state of Ireland, as it inaugurates a republic which seeks to be independent from Britain. As such, it is an interesting epistemological position, as it has a Janus-like relationship with a mediated version of the past and a mediated version of the future. Derrida has spoken at length about what might be termed the epistemology of inauguration. He says that the life of any institution implies that 'we are able to criticize, to transform, and to open the institution to its own future'. Derrida goes on to talk about the paradox of the moment of inauguration of any institution, which, while starting something new, is at the same time true to a memory

of the past, and to things received from the culture, adding that such a moment must 'break with the past, keep the memory of the past, while inaugurating something absolutely new'. Derrida, looking at the notion of inauguration, notes that there are no guarantees, and 'we have to invent the rules'.⁵¹

Derrida's example of this inaugural mode of thinking looks back at the origins of philosophy in Greece, tracing how what was originally a specifically 'Greek' philosophy, had within it an 'opening, a potential force which was ready to cross the borders of Greek language, Greek culture'.⁵² From this discussion, he progresses to the concept of democracy, making the point that while the concept of democracy is part of the Greek heritage, it is a heritage that 'self-deconstructs [. . .]' so as to uproot, to become independent of its own grounds'.⁵³ This sense of a concept becoming independent of its own grounds is central to Derrida's sense of an inaugural moment, and this is precisely what is not allowed to happen in the 1916 proclamation. In this the rebels at no stage claim agency for their own actions; instead they are capitated by images of the past, those dead generations, the personified Ireland and the monological singular notion of tradition. I am using the term 'captate' in the sense developed by Jacques Lacan to refer to the hold which an image can have over the development of a nascent subjectivity, what Anika Lemaire terms the 'synchronies of spectacular captation',⁵⁴ that occurs in the mirror stage, when a child becomes captivated by, and identifies with, its image in the mirror. Identification, here, initially means the infant's 'captation by its mirror image, a "total body form" that is at odds with the direct experience of motor incapacity and nursing dependence',⁵⁵ but in Lacanian theory it becomes a metaphor for our need to identify with other aspects of society, culture or ideology throughout our lives. The lure of the specular image becomes increasingly important in Lacan's later work, and he uses the term 'captation' to describe 'the imaginary effects of the image in the other, a relation of seduction and fascination',⁵⁶ and this is what is seen in Pearse's rhetoric as his fascination with an imaginary singular tradition, which has been handed down from some prosopoeic notion of Ireland by those dead generations, causes him to remediate the aleatory and plural processes of history into a teleological narrative.

I speak of being 'captivated' in the sense of being lured and held by an unusual person, event or spectacle. To be captivated is to be captured by means other than the purely physical, with an effect that is, nonetheless, lived and felt *as* embodied captivity,⁵⁷ and this is very far from the Derridean idea of an inaugural process of breaking with its own ground. Pearse at no stage attempts this – indeed, he is digging back ever deeper

into the ground of his ideology and his focus is very much on the past as opposed to the future. Instead, Tone is suavisly captated into Pearse's own vision of Irish history: the appeal to him, and to O'Donovan Rossa, is messianistic as they are the signifiers of the past, or a singular remediation of the past, as captating the present and holding it hostage to the future. In terms of the use of the words 'single tradition', it could be argued that Tone was of a quite different tradition, being a Deist from an Ascendancy, Protestant background, and he would have had little time for the invocation of God in the proclamation, given his already-cited view that there should be 'no state religion'.⁵⁸ It is not accidental that Anderson has noted a 'strong affinity' between nationalist and religious imaginings.⁵⁹ Indeed, he has made the valid point that the dawn of the age of nationalism coincides with the dusk of religious thought,⁶⁰ as both tend to work with some form of 'sacred text', and in this context it is no accident that God is invoked as part of the motive force for the actions of the rebels. The discourse infantilises the rebels, seeing them as children who are not in control of their own actions or lives, and who need to be 'called' to action by the forces of the past, of the transcendent and of the image of a mythologised and anthropomorphised notion of Ireland which has captated their image.

In terms of the idea of captation by an image, it is interesting to note the absence of personal agency in the opening sentence: it is not the rebels who are striking for freedom; instead, they are some kind of vessel which is used to enact the desire of the prosopopoeic Ireland: 'Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom' [my italics]. There is a case to be made that this initial lack of personal responsibility for actions is a rhetorical trope that has become reified in a perennial lack of responsibility for actions taken in the Irish public sphere, from early acts of murder in the Irish Civil war up to the contemporary banking crisis and the political decisions which brought this about before, during and after the recession.

In conclusion, far from becoming independent of its own grounds, and looking to a future where there are no rules, and where rules, and by extension, the future itself, have to be reinvented, Pearse is locating his new nation firmly on the ground of a remediated version of the past. An infantilised group of rebels, seeing themselves as children in the thrall of a prosopopoeic image of Mother Ireland, is a very poor legacy for the Enlightenment and progressive thought of Tone which looked to establish a modern secular republic in Ireland. In 1791, in Belfast, Tone spelled out the necessity of reform, and significantly, reiterated the idea that 'a cordial union among ALL THE PEOPLE OF Ireland' [capitalization original], would be both a methodological and political necessity as well as a

philosophical aim of their society. He went on to add that reform could only work if it was inclusive of ‘*Irishmen* of every religious persuasion’ [italics original].⁶¹ For Tone, rights and duties were central to this new sense of Irishness: ‘let every man, rich and poor, possess his rights by equal laws, and be obliged to perform the duties of a citizen’.⁶² This is very far from the Pearisian proclamation.

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