

**Patrick Pearse**

**Memorial Discourse**

**Trinity Monday**

11 April, 2016

Dr Anne Dolan

Associate Professor in Modern Irish History

Provost, Fellows, Scholars, Colleagues, and Friends,

I cannot quite decide if Patrick Pearse would be appalled or delighted to be the subject of a Trinity Monday discourse. No doubt he would be overjoyed to be keeping company with Robert Emmet, Thomas Davis and Theobald Wolfe Tone; he would probably be content to join his old Gaelic League colleague, Douglas Hyde again, and maybe even gratified by the kind of republicanism that came after him in Mairtin Ó Cadhain.<sup>1</sup> He will be testy at best with Edmund Burke, downright unpleasant with Edward Carson, and it is bound to get nasty with Luce, with Joly, men who were on this side, defending these walls, during Easter week 1916.<sup>2</sup> Provost Mahaffy's outrage will certainly please him, because all the certainties of Trinity that Mahaffy stood for are gone if 'a man called Pearse', as Mahaffy once dismissed him, gets his discourse, gets to be spoken of, on this day, in here.<sup>3</sup> If there is a place somewhere in the extremities of the heavens for the recipients of Trinity discourses we are about to barge in with an unlikely and, for most there, an unwelcome guest. We are about to start a row; so don't be surprised if a few chairs get thrown.

You see, Pearse is just not a Trinity man, at least not in any obvious or usual sense. Good Trinity men, and they usually are men when it comes to discourses, are honoured for their scholarship, their service, their life's work shaped in or by or for this College. Robert Emmet is probably one exception; but he was dead a good two hundred years before Professor Geoghegan brought him back into the fold in 2003; Emmet at least sat his exams even if he never received his degree.<sup>4</sup> Pearse cannot even claim so much. All the same there is a vein of Trinity that runs right through his life, that makes him a Trinity man even if it is by the most contrarian definition of that term. If we accept that we are shaped by our hatreds as much as by our passions, then Trinity certainly shaped the life of Patrick Pearse. In turn, if, to quote the Provost, that that 1912 to 1923 period of war and revolution, brings us the 'forces [that] shaped the modern university', brings us 'the story of a university being forced

---

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Geoghegan, 'Robert Emmet' (2003); Bolton C. Waller, 'Thomas Davis' (1930); David Dickson, 'Theobald Wolfe Tone' (1999); D.W. Greene, 'Douglas Hyde' (1972); M.T.W. Robinson, 'Douglas Hyde' (1992); Cathal Ó Háinle, 'Máirtín Ó Cadhain' (2002) <https://www.tcd.ie/Secretary/FellowsScholars/discourses/>

<sup>2</sup> L.M. Cullen, 'Edmund Burke' (1997); R.B. McDowell, 'Edmund Burke' (1976); J.J. Stockley, 'Edmund Burke' (1929); G.A. Chadwick, 'Edmund Burke' (1900); C.C. O'Brien, 'E.H. Carson' (1979); D. Berman, 'A.A. Luce' (2014); J.H.J. Poole, 'John Joly' (1958); Patrick Wyse Jackson, 'John Joly' (2007)

<sup>3</sup> Terence de Vere White, 'J.P. Mahaffy' (1962) <https://www.tcd.ie/Secretary/FellowsScholars/discourses/>; J.P. Mahaffy to Charles Power, 10 Nov. 1914, *Irish Times*, 14 Nov. 1914.

<sup>4</sup> Geoghegan, 'Robert Emmet'; Patrick M. Geoghegan, *Robert Emmet: a life* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 79-85.

to adapt to circumstances', this man Pearse certainly played a fair part in the forcing and the circumstances of that.<sup>5</sup> This is not going to be a traditional discourse of achievements in scholarship, of a life spent enlightening a discipline, in adding to the greater good and glory of what gets to be achieved in and of this place; it simply cannot be. Rather it is a discourse of a somewhat tempestuous relationship between a man and a university that had to take cognisance of what he tried to change, that had to adapt to the kind of Ireland he wanted to create. That said, it would be foolish to overstate the effect of one upon the other; what follows has to be taken in the spirit of all the other broader forces that shaped Pearse's life and the life of this college. I am not making a claim for any eureka-like solution to it all by binding Pearse and Trinity together as never before. Certainly most of his biographers tend to overlook this place, even go out of their way, as we shall see in some cases, to make no mention of any connection with Trinity at all.<sup>6</sup> Equally, as Tomás Irish has noted, three official histories of Trinity College spent a grand sum of eight pages out of more than a combined thousand on the Easter Rising; Pearse and his doings, it seems, counted just as little inside these walls.<sup>7</sup> Making this connection between Trinity and Pearse has not really suited anyone very much at all. You can say I am forcing the significance and the meaning of Pearse's relationship with Trinity because it is 2016, because every school, college, institution, club and organisation of any and every kind and none has been instructed to eagerly worry away at the memory of Easter 1916; that this is just another shameless example of that. Grand: if you are a cynical soul you will. But in digging beneath and behind the passing references, and, by God, it did mean digging in the minutiae at times, one marks the other enough for this to mean more than just the obligation of paying some sort of predictable centenary dues. Much as it might unsettle him, much as it might have appalled the Trinity of his own and much later days, Pearse was, well, a type of Trinity man. Whether that's for good or ill – I will leave that for you to decide.

Pearse certainly inherited a very particular view of Trinity from his father, James Pearse. James Pearse was born in Bloomsbury in London in 1839, in a place of working class poverty not to be confused with Bloomsbury's later much more fashionably self-conscious set. As

---

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Prendergast, 'Foreword' in Tomás Irish, *Trinity in war and revolution 1912-1923* (Dublin, 2015), p. x.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Desmond Ryan, *The man called Pearse* (Dublin, 1919); Louis Le Roux, *Patrick H. Pearse* (translated by Desmond Ryan) (Dublin, 1932).

<sup>7</sup> Irish, *Trinity in war and revolution*, p. 128.

David Thornley put it, it was more Fanny by Gaslight than the Bloomsbury of the Woolffs and the Webbs.<sup>8</sup> While not an eminent Victorian in Lytton Strachey's sense, he was certainly eminently Victorian in his will to push himself from the drudgery of a chain making factory in Birmingham where he started work at the age of eleven or twelve, from the one half of a cottage his family occupied there, to evening classes in drawing, to an apprenticeship in sculpture, to the craft of a stone mason, and he acquired, with success and an increasingly middle class kind of prosperity, the far grander title of 'James Pearse, Sculptor' for himself.<sup>9</sup> The surge of church building after Catholic emancipation, after the famine, brought many sculptors and stonemasons to Dublin, and James Pearse began working here intermittently from the late 1850s before finally settling in 1863 or early 1864.<sup>10</sup> By 1873 he had set up in partnership at 182 Great Brunswick Street, or Pearse Street as we know it now, before establishing his own business in architectural and monumental sculpture at number 27, in 1878.<sup>11</sup> By then he was already married to Patrick's mother, Margaret Brady, who worked in a stationer's shop on the same street.<sup>12</sup> Letters to her on rather quite knowing terms from 1876, suggests there might have been some intimacy with her before the death of his first wife, Emily Fox, who, along with his first four children, Mary and James, and Agnes and Amy, tend to get glossed over, as I am no doubt glossing over them here, as rather shadowy intrusions into the idealised notion of the later family Pearse.<sup>13</sup> One child may have died of neglect, another may have been institutionalised; indeed, Bulmer Hobson certainly believed this abandoned half-sister was one of the little secrets the Pearse brothers never spoke about.<sup>14</sup>

Brought up as a Unitarian, James Pearse was received into the Catholic Church in 1870, and however much his famous son liked to think his father a deeply religious man, most suspect his conversion was more to endear himself to the canons and parish priests whose

---

<sup>8</sup> David Thornley, 'Patrick Pearse and the Pearse family', *Studies*, vol. 60, no. 239/240 (Autumn-Winter 1971), p. 336.

<sup>9</sup> G. Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London, 1920); Joost Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse: the making of a revolutionary* (Basingstoke, 2010), chapter 1. Augusteijn is in possession of the Lennon papers relating to material gathered on the Pearse family, particularly the life of the young Patrick Pearse. They are the foundation of Augusteijn's treatment of Pearse's early life. These papers are not yet in the public domain.

<sup>10</sup> Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, pp. 9-11; Thornley, 'Patrick Pearse and the Pearse family', pp. 336-40.

<sup>11</sup> He set up in partnership with P.J. O'Neill. Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Anne Dolan & William Murphy, 'Margaret Pearse (Brady)', in James McGuire & James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009), vol. 8, pp. 17-19.

<sup>13</sup> Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Bulmer Hobson quoted in Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 19.

commissions were the source of his rise from stonemason to sculptor, from employee to businessman.<sup>15</sup> He possessed and had read a copy of the Koran; he supported and even funded the work of the Freethought Publishing Committee, may even have been the anonymous author of pamphlets entitled ‘Is God the first cause?’, and ‘The Follies of the Lord’s Prayer’, while his willingness to work on a Sunday as if it was Monday was certainly a source of comment behind the squinting windows of Great Brunswick Street.<sup>16</sup> Radical in his thought, he had been a follower of Charles Bradlaugh, the MP for Northampton, another self-educated, working-class man. Bradlaugh, the moving force in that Freethought Publishing Committee, which was all for agnosticism at worst and atheism at best, was for workers’ and women’s rights, for universal suffrage, for birth control, for the destruction of privilege and for Irish home rule.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, James Pearse saw home rule as a supreme act of the kind of ‘self-reliance’ he seemed to model his own advance upon, and his support for it grew maybe under the influence of his new nationalist wife.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it was on the question of home rule that Trinity began to loom as more than just a place the Pearse family had to walk around or by, if not necessarily through, to conduct most aspects of their daily lives. In 1886 Thomas Maguire, Professor of Moral Philosophy, first Catholic Fellow of this College, published one of a series of pamphlets entitled *England’s duty to Ireland*.<sup>19</sup> Maguire later ended up embroiled in scandal amid the Pigott Forgeries, dying in London just before he was called to defend his role.<sup>20</sup> But in his pamphlet Maguire started as he meant to go on: ‘most people will admit at the first blush that Ireland is less civilised than England’, that Home Rule would mean ruination, that it was the whim and the will of the degraded, the uncouth and the guttersnipes. For Maguire there was only, as he put it, ‘one good thing in Ireland, but only one: Trinity College’.<sup>21</sup> Provoked to the point of ‘I’ll teach the bloody fellow a lesson’, James Pearse put pen to paper, and more than one hundred and fourteen neatly handwritten

---

<sup>15</sup> Thornley, ‘Patrick Pearse and the Pearse family’, pp. 336-40; Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, pp. 16-18; Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: the triumph of failure* (Dublin, 1977), pp. 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 16; Ruth Dudley Edwards, *The seven: the lives and legacies of the founding fathers of the Irish republic* (London, 2016), pp. 120-1.

<sup>17</sup> Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 18; Dudley Edwards, *The seven*, pp. 120-1; Brian Crowley, ‘“I am the son of a good father”: James and Patrick Pearse’, in Roisín Higgins & Regina Uí Chollatáin (eds), *The life and after-life of P.H. Pearse* (Dublin, 2009), pp.21-2.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Self-reliance: *Labor omnia vincit*’ was a motto he used in his business. Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 10; Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Maguire, *England’s duty to Ireland, as plain to a loyal Irish Roman Catholic* (Dublin & London, 1886).

<sup>20</sup> Patrick Long, ‘Thomas Maguire’, in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 6, pp. 282-3.

<sup>21</sup> Maguire, *England’s duty to Ireland*; Desmond Ryan, *Remembering Sion* (London, 1934), pp. 101-2.

foolscap pages later, he produced his own pamphlet in reply, one thousand copies at the cost of a good £10-13 shillings to himself.<sup>22</sup> In a meandering, wordy and quite tedious fashion, he called down Tiberius Sempronius, Caius Gracchus, Polybius, Addison, and any and all of the other forces he could find from the assemblings of his bookshelves on to the head of ‘the defamatory Professor of Trinity’ as he termed Maguire.<sup>23</sup> And in attacking Maguire he also showed something of his contempt for this place: ‘Does he consider his connection with the Great Protestant element in Trinity has rubbed off from his nature the ignorance which would otherwise have disfigured it? Perhaps he regards Trinity as a kind of purgatory for benighted but “loyal Catholic” Professors: and holds that he has successfully passed through the fire of intelligence, and purged from his mind, the original ignorance of Catholicism?’. Home Rule would mean, he ended, ‘that bitterness and strife may depart from the land in spite of all the professors and owls who hoot and screech from the walls of old Trinity’ – a friendly neighbour indeed.<sup>24</sup>

Pearse was seven years old when his father published this pamphlet, and the son may well have noticed that this spat caused a greater kind of activism in the father, who spoke at his first public meeting as a result.<sup>25</sup> Desmond Ryan remembers the older Pearse re-reading his father’s pamphlet; saying with ‘affectionate humour’ as Ryan put it, ‘that “for an Englishman, he was not too bad”’, as if all those one hundred and fourteen pages, all that anger with Trinity, all that disgust with Maguire, might just have lessened the stain of James Pearse’s original sin – the stain, the slight of Englishman.<sup>26</sup>

Pearse’s mother, the granddaughter of a rebel of 1798, the grand-niece of a veteran of the American Civil War, with ties to the rebellion of 1867, this woman of good clear Fenian stock, has been taken as the more pertinent influence on his life.<sup>27</sup> It has paid a certain interpretation of Pearse to play up her nationalist forebears, to craft him a creature in her image, who took little from the brusque, quite cantankerous father, who was even largely

---

<sup>22</sup> Ryan, *Remembering Sion*, p. 102; Gill & sons to James Pearse, 22 March 1886, NLI, Ms21,079.

<sup>23</sup> Draft of James Pearse, *England’s duty to Ireland as it appears to an Englishman*, NLI, Ms 21,079.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> He is also believed to have collected approximately 7,000 signatures from Protestant supporters of Home Rule. Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Ryan, *Remembering Sion*, p. 102.

<sup>27</sup> Dolan & Murphy, ‘Margaret Pearse (Brady)’, in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 8, pp. 17-19.

edited out of Pearse's own scrap of autobiography when Pearse's sister Mary Brigid published it in 1934.<sup>28</sup> Pearse's last letter to her, the poem to her, the manner in which she contributed to the hagiography of her own son's death maybe even more than his life, explains how even one pamphlet entitled 'Pearse the Patriot was his Mother's son' almost confers upon her the miracle of a virgin birth.<sup>29</sup> She received a state funeral in 1932 for little more, it seems, than giving him life. For those who want the martyred Pearse, this father would not do. Pearse himself was said to have sought something Irish in his father's ancestry, truffling in the records at Somerset House in London, going back four hundred years, but finding only Englishman after Englishman, with a colonel of his majesty's army there at what must have been, for Pearse, a quite bitter end.<sup>30</sup> In many ways though he is very much this English man's son; he is full of contradictions just like his father, the radical free thinker who carved the billiard playing monkeys on the Kildare Street Club, the committed home ruler who had helped to carve the twenty-six princesses for the Queen's robing room in the House of Lords; the supporter of Bradlaugh to whom status and advancement were measured so carefully and neatly and precisely out, even down to the makeshift Eton collars his sons wore to the mockery of their classmates in the Christian Brothers school.<sup>31</sup> I do not want to take his father's Englishness, as others have done, to explain why and how he ended up in the GPO, that his extremism was to make up for what J.J. Horgan rather alarmingly called his 'Irish-English breed' in 1948.<sup>32</sup> Even though Pearse himself chose to blame all that was gloomy and dark in him on the Englishness within himself, I want this English father for just one more purpose yet, because he betrays something of that son's hatred but obstinate fascination with this place.<sup>33</sup> Buried somewhere in those one hundred and fourteen pages James Pearse tackled Maguire's views on the law. Maguire implied that Protestants outnumbered Catholics at the Bar by two to one, because the 'Bar requires the most of that commodity' – brains.<sup>34</sup> I am not saying this planted a seed

---

<sup>28</sup> Mary Brigid Pearse, *The home-life of Padraig Pearse: as told by himself, his family and friends* (Dublin, 1934).

<sup>29</sup> Dudley Edwards, *The seven*, p. 119.

<sup>30</sup> Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, pp. 9-10; Joost Augusteijn, 'The road to rebellion: the development of Patrick Pearse's political thought', in Roisín Higgins & Regina Uí Chollatáin (eds), *The life and after-life of P.H. Pearse* (Dublin, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> J.J. Horgan, *Parnell to Pearse: some recollections and reflections* (Dublin, 1948), p. 242.

<sup>33</sup> *An Barr Buadh*, 11 May 1912.

<sup>34</sup> Draft of James Pearse, *England's duty to Ireland as it appears to an Englishman*, NLI, Ms 21,079.

in the mind of the father, that when he saw his boy was clever, that he was going to prove those screeching ‘owls’ and ‘professors’ of ‘old Trinity’ as he called them wrong, that he was going to show them just what a stonemason’s son could do, but Pearse’s pursuit of the Law has puzzled many of his biographers, given he only went on to take and lose one solitary case.<sup>35</sup> Some have put it down to Wolfe Tone’s example; that Pearse even felt his failure at the Bar somehow mirrored Tone’s contempt for the profession.<sup>36</sup> This is perhaps how Pearse might have liked to romanticise it later, but his father must have taken particular pleasure from his son’s studies, if not to thumb his nose more than a decade later at Maguire, then at least to satisfy the desire for the type of respectability a son in such a profession could command. For the son born on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1879 in the back room over the shop, King’s Inns made a gentleman of him, took him in here to the lecture rooms of Trinity College, to Maguire’s very haven, in his own right.<sup>37</sup> When Pearse was called to the Bar in June 1901, the *Irish Times* recorded him as ‘Patrick Henry Pearse, second son of James Pearse...sculptor’: it mattered that day that he was James Pearse’s son, even though James Pearse had died the year before.<sup>38</sup> Doing what his father might have wanted might be a more prosaic but maybe a more fitting explanation than Theobald Wolfe Tone.

But before Pearse had come through front gates of this College, he launched his own first public condemnation of this place. By 1898 he had been elected to the Executive Committee of the Gaelic League, had immersed himself in its squabbles and in its work, while at the same time beginning his freshman year in modern languages at the Royal University, in what would later become UCD.<sup>39</sup> He was teaching Irish classes in the College, mangling the language as far as James Joyce was concerned, who left Pearse’s class out of boredom to take up Norwegian so he could better understand Ibsen instead.<sup>40</sup> But Pearse was a rising star in the Gaelic League by 1899 because he was young and keen to please and because there is always room in small, growing organisations for someone who will do the hard work and the monotonous jobs. In response to the establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre in May of

---

<sup>35</sup> Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 63.

<sup>36</sup> Ryan, *Remembering Sion*, p. 105.

<sup>37</sup> J.J. Lee, ‘P.H. Pearse’, in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 8, pp. 19-27; Carty, *In bloody protest*, p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> *Weekly Irish Times*, 15 June 1901.

<sup>39</sup> He was conferred with his degree in modern languages with second class honours, winning a second class exhibition of £21, *Irish Times*, 2 Nov. 1901.

<sup>40</sup> Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 29.

that year, he wrote in some indignation to *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the League newspaper, to make his feelings clear. Not yet twenty years old he wrote, in furious English mind, that ‘we have “Irish” national politicians who in heart and soul are as un-Irish as Professor Mahaffy; we have a “national” literary society which is anti-national without being so outspoken as Trinity College...The “Irish Literary Theatre”’, he finished, ‘is in my opinion, more dangerous, because glaringly anti-national, than Trinity College. If we once admit the Irish literature in English idea, then the language movement is a mistake. Mr Yeats’s [sic] precious “Irish” literary Theatre may if it develops, give the Gaelic League more trouble than the Atkinson-Mahaffy combination. Let us strangle it at its birth. Against Mr Yeats personally we have nothing to object. He is a mere English poet of the third or fourth rank, and as such he is harmless. But when he attempts to run an “Irish Literary Theatre”, it is time for him to be crushed.’<sup>41</sup> For the sake of Pearse’s own posterity it was probably a good thing he was not. It was quite a view though of Trinity, never mind Yeats, given he was about to start attending lectures here in the Michaelmas Term of the following year. You might even call it getting off rather on the wrong foot.

Although he later mellowed in his views about Yeats, about the theatre, with his own pupils from St Enda’s appearing on the Abbey stage, Trinity College was clearly the lodestar from which he plotted his gradations of anti-Irishness from.<sup>42</sup> This letter was, certainly, coloured by what was by then a raging dispute between the Gaelic League and what Pearse called the ‘Atkinson-Mahaffy combination’ at Trinity over the status of the Irish language in secondary schools. John Pentland Mahaffy, the classical scholar, the tutor of Oscar Wilde, the flaneur who had published *The principles of the art of conversation* just a few years before, had little sympathy for a language which he asserted had nothing of worth that was not ‘religious, immoral or indecent’.<sup>43</sup> He despised the Gaelic League, and particularly those he felt should know better than to join its babbling ranks. With his colleague, Professor Robert Atkinson, Professor of Sanskrit and comparative philology, who was a noted Irish scholar in his own right, he attempted to reduce the status of the Irish language when a vice regal commission on

---

<sup>41</sup> P.H. Pearse to the editor, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 13 May 1899, in Séamus Ó Buachalla (ed.), *The letters of P.H. Pearse* (Buckinghamshire, 1980), pp. 8-9.

<sup>42</sup> Elaine Sisson, *Pearse’s patriots: St Enda’s and the cult of boyhood* (Cork, 2004), p. 8; Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The splendid years* (Dublin, 1955), p. 145.

<sup>43</sup> Patrick Maume, ‘Sir John Pentland Mahaffy’, in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 6, pp. 285-7; W.B. Stanford & R.B. McDowell, *Mahaffy: a biography of an Anglo-Irishman* (London, 1971).

Intermediate education was set up in 1899.<sup>44</sup> Pearse would go on to condemn the entire intermediate system in his 1913 pamphlet *The murder machine*.<sup>45</sup> Douglas Hyde, founder of the Gaelic League, whose own capacity for the language was dismissed by Atkinson as just ‘Baboon Irish’, mounted a response to Mahaffy, which managed to thwart his efforts and maintain the status of the language just as it was, with Pease working vigorously behind the scenes of this campaign.<sup>46</sup> The dispute received considerable attention, with dishonourable mention in the House of Commons, with Mahaffy satirised by ballad, and later in a play by Hyde where the professors of Trinity having fallen under an ‘enchantment’ were left with nothing but the power of Gaelic speech.<sup>47</sup> Mahaffy’s reputation outside these walls was colourful at best. His response to an appeal to put shoes on the feet of Dublin’s news-boys was only to remark that it was good for them to go barefoot just as the Greeks had done, and while this may have prompted a guffaw or two on commons, it did not go down so well elsewhere.<sup>48</sup> But this thwarting of Mahaffy drew public attention to the League in a way that it had not known before; Mahaffy even admitted himself to one newspaper that he ‘had restored harmony in the Gaelic family by drawing them on himself’.<sup>49</sup> And in ways he had. Gaelic League revenue went from £43 for the year 1898 to £2,000 by 1900; it began publishing pamphlets and papers, and we find Pearse elected secretary of its publications committee that same year.<sup>50</sup> Mahaffy took his revenge in 1901 though; he managed to get himself appointed to the Intermediate board, and while the Irish language remained untouched, Greek and German suddenly found themselves with a prominence they had never had before. Hyde claimed that Mahaffy was trying to ‘teutonize’ young Irish minds because ‘Mahaffy and the King both spoke German’.<sup>51</sup> While Hyde was certainly mocking Mahaffy’s tendency to namedrop his courtly connections, Hyde was putting rather bluntly a

---

<sup>44</sup> Linde Lunney, ‘Robert Atkinson’, in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 1, pp. 192-3.

<sup>45</sup> P.H. Pearse, *The murder machine* (Dublin, 1916).

<sup>46</sup> Donal McCartney, ‘Hyde, D.P. Moran and Irish Ireland’, in F.X. Martin (ed.), *Leaders and men of the Easter Rising: Dublin 1916* (New York, 1967), p. 46.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur Griffith also penned a satire of Trinity professors conspiring to assassinate Hyde. Maume, ‘Sir John Pentland Mahaffy’, in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 6, pp. 285-7.

<sup>48</sup> Maume, ‘Sir John Pentland Mahaffy’, in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 6, pp. 285-7.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

view of where Trinity stood.<sup>52</sup> Mahaffy, the man who once quipped that the only reason to learn Irish was to be able to instruct one's ghillie when shooting and fishing in the West, was becoming Trinity's most public voice on the question of language and Irish culture, and as the cultural revival put down stronger and stronger roots, that voice, as Patrick Maume writes, was increasingly perceived as 'the voice of a brutally elitist version of aristocratic unionism'.<sup>53</sup> It was why this College could come to be that Pearsian lodestar.

The very point at which the Gaelic League was embroiled in its most bitter conflict with Trinity College, a point when Pearse was evolving as a key figure in that movement, was when Pearse began to attend lectures in Constitutional and Criminal Law here. Students at King's Inns had been obliged to attend lectures at Trinity since 1850; an 1846 report to a House of Commons committee had revealed 'an inadequacy in legal education' among King's Inns men, so attending lectures became a compulsory part of their law degree.<sup>54</sup> College records note a P.H. Pearse attending lectures from Michaelmas term 1900, through Hilary term 1901, to the end of Trinity term the same year. He was clearly keen at the start: one of only three in his class of thirty-three Trinity and King's Inns students, who managed to attend all twelve of that term's lectures. He only made it to ten of twelve after Christmas, and just nine in his final term. He came away with a mark of 48 in the first term – not quite the disaster we might now think – the highest mark was 58 and the lowest 16; and he came in joint fifth in his class. He received a 52 in the second term, moving to fourth place, improving it seems the fewer lectures he went to. He was one of a number of students who required a 'Special' in his last term, and we are left no record of his mark.<sup>55</sup> If only he had had a good tutor it might have all have turned out in such a very different way. At this point, it must be remembered, he was studying for two degrees; was teaching Irish classes in a variety of institutions, was deeply involved in Gaelic League activities, and was helping his brother, Willie, run the family firm.<sup>56</sup> Remember also, his father had died suddenly in 1900,

---

<sup>52</sup> Mahaffy's references to his courtly connections prompted one Dublin wit to suggest that President Wilson should have added a fifteenth point to his plan to provide compensation 'to Provost Mahaffy for the loss he has sustained by the abolition of so many European Courts'. 'Memoir of Provost Mahaffy', NLI, Ms22,902.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Maume, 'Sir John Pentland Mahaffy', in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 6, pp. 285-7.

<sup>54</sup> Daire Hogan, *The honourable society of King's Inns* (Dublin, 1987), p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> 'Constitutional and Criminal Law Class, 1889-1905', Michaelmas Term 1900-Trinity Term 1901, TCD Ms 4,713.

<sup>56</sup> Lee, 'P.H. Pearse', in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 8, pp. 19-27; Sisson, *Pearse's patriots*, p. 34.

so the aloof young man, many of his fellow students remember, had the awful numb commotion of grief to contend with quite apart from all the urgency he must have felt by being absorbed in the language movement that seemed to matter to him above all else. He was ill at ease at King's Inns, attending the debating society but never speaking, and he seemed equally uncomfortable here. He was remembered as one fellow student put it as 'a big, shy boy who neither drank nor smoked, nor joined in our adventures or took part in our debates. If one of the wits, who never failed in that company, let fall a jest too risqué over the coffee and the wine, Pearse would hurry away blushing'.<sup>57</sup> Another said he was 'too serious for levity', that 'he used to come to lectures and the moment they were over, he would walk off speaking to nobody'.<sup>58</sup> No doubt, he was conscious of his appearance as young men were and are, conscious of the cast in his left eye, of anything that set him apart. His biographers Ruth Dudley Edwards, and more recently Joost Augusteijn, have put his difficulties in Trinity down solely to his cultural politics. His 'resentments of the anti-Gaelic elements within Irish society', as Dudley Edwards puts it, '...were not lessened by his brief experience of Trinity'; she did not feel the need to expand on that.<sup>59</sup> While Augusteijn simply states his 'nationalist outlook and strong interest in the Irish language and literature were not shared there'.<sup>60</sup> This was certainly a factor, as we have seen, but it was not just as straightforward as that. If you go through the class lists for those three terms, regardless of creed or politics, many of the names, a Babbington, a Baronsfeather, a Julian, a Hahn, a Fforde with two fs, a Carrothers, an Honourable E. Gibson, and in quite good P.G. Wodehouse fashion, a C.B. Phipps, they seem and sound of a very different class to the boy born over a stonemason's dusty shop at the College's side gate.<sup>61</sup> Trinity, King's Inns, they cannot have been easy places, regardless of politics, for him to have ever felt that he belonged. Tracing through some of those names can confirm some of Dudley Edwards' and Augusteijn's views: Andrew Kingsbury Overend, was known for his staunch unionism, even later refusing to take the judicial oath in Irish in the Free State. He was appointed though to the High Court in 1943, so even he cannot be classified in those simple political terms of

---

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, pp. 63-4

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>59</sup> Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: the triumph of failure*, p. 41.

<sup>60</sup> Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 64.

<sup>61</sup> 'Constitutional and Criminal Law Class, 1889-1905', Michaelmas Term 1900-Trinity Term 1901, TCD Ms 4,713.

black and white.<sup>62</sup> Young men like Charles Gilbert Stenhouse Baronsfeather must have troubled Pearse, with such a name alone. The son of a stockbroker, he went on to a medical missionary career, and was a quite prolific author, publishing *The ABC of Cantonese*, and, of course, his triumph, ‘Constipation in relation to pseudo-dysentery and continued fever in the tropics’.<sup>63</sup> But they were not all, even if more than most were, like Baronsfeather. There was James Murnaghan who was of a clearly nationalist background. The son of George Murnaghan, the nationalist MP for Mid-Tyrone, Murnaghan went on to support Sinn Féin, and was involved in the drafting process of the Free State Constitution.<sup>64</sup> Pearse was not completely ideologically at sea here as it has been so easily set out. Whatever about the certainties of the Atkinsons and the Mahaffys the student body was more diverse in its opinions than maybe Augusteijn and Dudley Edwards allow. Politics may well have soured Pearse’s view of Trinity, but the boy from the Christian Brothers in Westland Row must have felt the cruel, often unspoken barbs of class, and they no doubt sharpened his hatred of this place. He was certainly more at ease in what became the new UCD; encouraged in the language movement there, mixing with Eoin MacNeill, teaching there, and he became chairman of the College Literary and Historical Society, albeit for his organisational if not his debating skills.<sup>65</sup> He even made some friends there with a cohort of young people more likely to come from a similar background to his own, where he could say more openly that he had come on a scholarship from a Christian Brothers’ school. He certainly found it a far less daunting student life. He would call the national university ‘an intellectual headquarters for the Gael’, not a compliment he would ever bestow on TCD.<sup>66</sup>

There is a quite peculiar treatment of his university career in most of the early hagiographical treatments of his life, almost as if King’s Inns and Trinity had no place in his formation at all.<sup>67</sup> One of the first accounts of him, published after the Rising, simply suggests that he

---

<sup>62</sup> Robert Marshall, ‘Andrew Kingsbury Overend’, in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 7, pp. 1018-20.

<sup>63</sup> C.G.S. Baronsfeather, *The ABC of Cantonese* (Pakhoi, 1912); C.G.S. Baronsfeather, ‘Constipation in relation to pseudo-dysentery and continued fever in the tropics’, *Dublin Journal of Medical Science*, series 4, vol. 140, no. 2 (Aug. 1915), pp. 84-92.

<sup>64</sup> Ronan Keane, ‘James Murnaghan’, in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 6, pp. 788-9.

<sup>65</sup> Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 64.

<sup>66</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 June 2005.

<sup>67</sup> See for example, Desmond Ryan, *The man called Pearse* (Dublin, 1919); Louis Le Roux, *Patrick H. Pearse* (translated by Desmond Ryan) (Dublin, 1932). Ruan O’Donnell, in the most recent biography of Pearse, even mistakenly asserts that he received his BL from TCD. Ruan O’Donnell, *Patrick Pearse* (Dublin, 2016), p. 19.

‘won his BL’, a phrase one of his later biographers, Desmond Ryan, repeats in his book in 1934, as if he won it in a raffle at some sort of huxter travelling show.<sup>68</sup> Trinity suffered as much as King’s Inns in this; both were glossed over in what was fast becoming after 1916 a much more straightforward path from the Christian Brothers to the GPO. It maybe even suggests the sense that in a post-rising Ireland, in an independent Ireland, a true Gael like Pearse could not be seen to have an association with the dreaded TCD. Pearse was being remade in a very particular image, and Trinity was to have little or no place in that.

Some of those biographers might just have been misled, but probably not, by the public stance Pearse took on the university question in early 1905. By then editor of the Gaelic League newspaper, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, he wrote frequently on issues of education, no doubt stirred by his increasing interest and research on bilingualism and the direct language teaching methods he had observed in practice in Belgium and Wales.<sup>69</sup> The establishment of a recognised ‘national university’, or for some a ‘Catholic university’, lay at the heart of the Irish university question. The setting up of a Royal Commission to consider the issue had prompted all sorts of suggestions, including one from the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, William Walsh, to make Trinity the national university, which meant, by his lights, building a Catholic chapel, establishing a chair in Catholic philosophy, a degree in Irish and securing a proportion of Catholics on what would be an elected governing body of the college.<sup>70</sup> Many in the Gaelic League wanted a national university more than a Catholic one, holding that a Catholic one could be just as un-Irish in its ways, as Pearse wrote in the League newspaper, as ‘TCD is today’.<sup>71</sup> In putting forward his views he poured forth more scorn on the Trinity he now had his own kind of first-hand knowledge of, even if he kept it largely to himself. ‘The grievance of Ireland’, he told a meeting of the Catholic Graduates’ and Undergraduates’ Association, ‘was not merely that she possessed no Irish university which Catholics could conscientiously enter, but that there existed no Irish University at all. They had a University which catered more or less adequately for that portion of the British garrison which could not afford to go to Oxford or Cambridge.’ Instead of what he called ‘that West British University’, he ‘...wanted an intellectual headquarters for Irish Ireland – an Irish national

---

<sup>68</sup> ‘Coilin’, *Patrick H. Pearse: a sketch of his life* (Dublin, 1916), p. 5; Ryan, *Remembering Sion*, p. 105.

<sup>69</sup> Elaine Sisson, *Pearse’s patriots: St Enda’s and the cult of boyhood* (Cork, 2004), pp. 29-30.

<sup>70</sup> Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 113; Senia Paseta, ‘The Catholic hierarchy and the Irish university question, 1880-1908’, *History*, vol. 85, no. 278 (April 2000), pp. 268-84

<sup>71</sup> *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 28 Jan. 1905 & 9 Feb. 1907.

University safeguarding the scruples of Catholics, but whose doors would be open to all.’<sup>72</sup> He went on to describe for his audience what he considered necessary to make Trinity ‘National’: ‘it would have first to be remodelled so that Catholics and Nationalists could enter it...In the first place, Dublin University would have to come into touch with Ireland. How could it do that? Amongst other changes it should introduce a popular element into its government...ample provision should also be made for distinctively Irish studies, and three chairs should be devoted to modern Irish language and literature, old Irish and Celtic philology, and Irish history and archaeology’.<sup>73</sup> When the University Bill was finally published in 1908 Pearse feared it would cause a divide of Irish university education on largely religious lines: that Trinity would just be for Protestants, who ‘cannot afford to go to Oxford or Cambridge’ – he clearly liked the line enough to use it again.<sup>74</sup> All of this commentary on Trinity, not least his strident views of it as the university for those of the British garrison, might oddly have prompted the rumour that circulated after the Rising that Pearse had intended to take on the role of Provost in what was to be his new republic. The *Irish Times* reported on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1916 that documents had been seized to prove this intention.<sup>75</sup> In one early publication about the leaders of the Rising in 1917, this had blossomed, as Chinese whispers usually do, into something far more concrete: ‘it is even said that evidence exists that he was at one time selected and very nearly appointed Provost of Trinity College’.<sup>76</sup> Mahaffy’s daughter, Elsie, managed to make light of it in her diary referring to Pearse as the ‘prospective Provost of Trinity College and future master of our house’, but she did not trouble to pack her bags just yet.<sup>77</sup> While Tomás Irish believes that the rumour is ‘suggestive of a degree of respect the rebels may have held for Trinity and its potential in a new Irish Republic’, the most recent biography of Pearse by Ruan O’Donnell chooses to take a rather different view.<sup>78</sup> He writes one solitary comment: ‘Character

---

<sup>72</sup> *Weekly Irish Times*, 8 April 1905.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* A Trinity graduate, Charles O’Connor, responded to his lecture and spoke of how fairly he was treated in Trinity.

<sup>74</sup> *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 11 April 1908.

<sup>75</sup> *Weekly Irish Times*, 29 April 1916.

<sup>76</sup> *The Sinn Fein leaders of 1916 with fourteen illustrations and complete lists of deportees, casualties* (Dublin, 1917), p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> Elsie Mahaffy’s account of the Easter Rising, TCD Ms 2074, f.58r

<sup>78</sup> Irish, *Trinity in war and revolution*, p. 136.

assassination followed that of the firing squad'.<sup>79</sup> Dr O'Donnell has clearly a very interesting view of the office of Provost.

Pearse continued to write against Trinity in *An Claidheamh Soluis*. His article 'Trinity and the Gael' in February 1907, referred to the College as a 'British institution', which, with no claim to be a national university, must therefore be only a provincial one.<sup>80</sup> Although he held his line on the College, he was rather more measured than some; the *Catholic Bulletin*, at its most extreme, referred to the College as an 'Elizabethan rat pit'.<sup>81</sup> But after founding his boy's school, St Enda's in 1908, Pearse's pronouncements became less frequent, not least because he had a school to run and fund, and, indeed, money worries dogged him for most of the rest of his life. His papers are full of demands and threats from all sorts of creditors with the Magdalene Laundry in Lower Gloucester Street amongst them.<sup>82</sup> A short note from a Henry Harbison dated April 24<sup>th</sup> 1916 probably never reached Pearse that Easter Monday morning, but Harbison was the collector of taxes, and he said he was coming 'to destrain [sic] for all taxes due'; a verb sinister enough to take one's chances perhaps in the GPO.<sup>83</sup> For these and other reasons Pearse became a slightly less vocal critic of this place, but the connections nonetheless remained. Cullenswood House, the location of St Enda's from 1908 to 1910 had been the childhood home of the Trinity historian William Lecky. Desmond Ryan made a virtue of it, writing in flowery fashion that 'in the library near where Pearse was standing, Lecky had turned pages in his boyhood', because Lecky, even like those very pages could be turned, just as the nationalists of his own time had tried, to bluntly separatist ends.<sup>84</sup> Never mind that Lecky was so appalled by the misrepresentation of his work that he took to writing unionist pamphlets as a riposte.<sup>85</sup> When St Enda's moved to the Hermitage the boys were schooled in their nature studies in the grounds where Trinity's 'bold Robert Emmet' had wandered round, and Emmet was certainly called on to cast a quite considerable shade.<sup>86</sup> But

---

<sup>79</sup> O'Donnell, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 103.

<sup>80</sup> 'Trinity and the Gael', *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 9 Feb. 1907.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in R.B. McDowell & D.A. Webb, *Trinity College Dublin 1592-1952: an academic history* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 431.

<sup>82</sup> Magdalene Asylum, Lower Gloucester Street, to Mrs Pearse, 12 June 1910, NLI, Pos 7,216.

<sup>83</sup> Henry Harbison to P.H. Pearse, 24 April 1916, NLI, Pos 7,216.

<sup>84</sup> Desmond Ryan, *Remembering Sion* (London, 1934), p. 90; Sisson, *Pearse's patriots*, p. 20.

<sup>85</sup> Donal McCartney, 'William Edward Hartpole Lecky', in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 5, pp. 390-1.

<sup>86</sup> Brendan Walsh, 'Radicalising the classroom: Pearse, pedagogy of progressivism', in Higgins & Uí Chollatáin (eds), *The life and after-life of P.H. Pearse*, pp. 228-9. Walsh claims that St Enda's pupils were taught by a TCD Professor of Zoology, David Houston, but Houston worked in the Royal College of Science for Ireland.

perhaps the boys themselves stop any straightforward assertions being made. St Enda's was school maybe predictably to Eoin MacNeill's sons, maybe less obviously so to James Larkin's son, but the nationalist MP, Stephen Gwynn, also sent his son Denis there. Denis Gwynn was the grandson of the Trinity Professor of Divinity, John Gwynn. Even such a small sample suggests far more complexity in the school and its outlook, more fluidity of allegiances than the lens narrowed by the events of Easter 1916 often allows us to see.<sup>87</sup> Thomas MacDonagh's application for the Chair of English Literature at Trinity in September 1913 further underlines how and why we need to appreciate a far more variegated landscape both inside and outside these walls. That Pearse was one of his referees, writing a positive, albeit brief, appraisal of his friend, alongside Hyde and Yeats and others, suggests that Pearse, despite all he had written and said of Trinity, could still conceive of MacDonagh, who had worked closely with him at St Enda's, as a Professor in this College.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps he saw MacDonagh as another means to make it change, but it should be borne in mind that MacDonagh was applying for jobs in other colleges at the same time, that there was nothing specific to Trinity or its Chair in Pearse's reference. It seems what Pearse's friend was most in need of was a job.

It is not to say that Pearse was mellowing towards Trinity, but even he had to concede that attitudes seemed to be shifting here. He must have known or been aware of the foundation of the Gaelic Society in Trinity in 1907; Douglas Hyde, Eoin MacNeill, amongst others he knew frequented meetings.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, his friend, the historian, Mary Hayden, was certainly prominent at the Society's 1911 inaugural event.<sup>90</sup> The Society was established, as Tomás Irish writes, to 'counter the false notion that Trinity was aloof from Ireland', indicative perhaps of what those who had, what Pearse would have called, 'Irish sympathies' in the College felt they were battling against.<sup>91</sup> Mahaffy was a quite regular attender, and even admitted at one Gaelic Society event that his stance on the Irish language had mellowed since

---

There is no record in TCD of Houston teaching here. My thanks to Professor David McConnell for insights on David Houston.

<sup>87</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford, 1999), p. 195.

<sup>88</sup> Application of Thomas MacDonagh for appointment to the chair of English literature in Trinity College Dublin, 24 Sept. 1913, NLI, Ms 10,855/2.

<sup>89</sup> Irish, *Trinity in war and revolution*, p. 25.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

his pronouncements in 1899.<sup>92</sup> But his change of heart received nothing like the kind of public attention his outbursts of 1899 had. He summed up too conveniently what a West-British view sounded and spoke and looked like to be allowed to disappear into a more gentle and benevolent force. And soon enough he was to sum up those very sentiments quite vigorously again.

The Gaelic Society was proving a troublesome lot for College authorities by November 1913. Politics was radicalising and the Gaelic Society had invited Captain Jack White to speak. White, was a Winchester and Sandhurst man, a veteran of the Boer War, who would go on to embrace anarchism and free love, but who in November 1913, was still just a trade unionist and an advocate of home rule.<sup>93</sup> He proved a radical enough sort of cove for Provost Traill's tastes. White had been part of the Citizen League, a group founded with R.M. Gwynn, the chaplain at Trinity, who together hatched the idea to drill the locked out Dublin workers, so conceiving of the Irish Citizen Army that very month in a fellow's rooms in Trinity.<sup>94</sup> White called on the students to attend a lecture the following night, which was to be critical of the police and their treatment of the strike. Instead of ignoring the invitation, and maybe risking a handful of students remembering to attend, Traill threatened to take rooms from any resident student who dared to go. As a result more than one hundred students formed up in procession, singing raucously under the Provost's window as they went, before returning unpunished to the comforts of College life.<sup>95</sup> It was in light of this incident that it might be worth considering Mahaffy's response to the Gaelic Society's attempts to mark the Thomas Davis centenary in November 1914. According to Society minutes, planning for a Davis event began in May, and Pearse was one of the proposed speakers from the start.<sup>96</sup> Yeats was to give the main address, and Mahaffy, then vice provost, was invited to chair. By November 1914 Pearse had become a prominent speaker on anti-recruiting platforms; he had been involved in the Irish Volunteers from the very outset in November 1913, and when the Great War began he had taken the minority position, remaining with the Volunteers who refused to

---

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25; *Irish Independent*, 17 Nov. 1908.

<sup>93</sup> McDowell & Webb, *Trinity College Dublin*, pp. 418-19; Fearghal McGarry, 'James Robert (Jack) White', in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 9, pp. 889-90.

<sup>94</sup> Irish, *Trinity in war and revolution*, p. 66; McDowell & Webb, *Trinity College Dublin*, p. 418.

<sup>95</sup> McDowell & Webb, *Trinity College Dublin*, p. 419.

<sup>96</sup> Minutes of the Gaelic Society, TCD, 26 May-10 Nov. 1914, TCD Ms, MUN/SOC/GAEL/1.

answer the Irish Party leader, John Redmond's call to go 'wherever the firing line extends'.<sup>97</sup> Pearse was vehemently against Britain's war cause, but invigorated by the imagery, the language of war, by what he would go on to disturbingly term the 'red wine of the battlefield'.<sup>98</sup> Given that Trinity men had already died in the war, that 'three hundred members of its Officer Training Corps are now on active service' as the *Irish Times* wrote, Mahaffy took umbrage at that thought of sharing a platform with such a man, and refused to allow the event to take place inside the College.<sup>99</sup> The Society minuted a sequence of rather panicked meetings, actually on the back of an anti-recruiting leaflet, but went ahead with the event on November 20<sup>th</sup> under the auspices of the Students' National Literary Society, in the Antient Concert Rooms on that old familiar Great Brunswick Street.<sup>100</sup> Yeats, resplendent in evening dress, was the speaker most reported on, even managing to raise a cheer for Nietzsche for nothing but his own amusement, and only passing reference was given in the press to the fact that a 'Mr P.H. Pearse seconded the motion' of thanks to Yeats.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, such brevity might have served Pearse well; the theatre critic and voracious diarist, Joseph Holloway, noted that while Pearse rose to 'great and continued applause. He started off in Gaelic and cooled his enthusiastic following. Afterwards he spoke longly and drearily in English. His style of delivery is deadly monotonous... Yeats bent down his head on his chest and looked at [some] points as if dropping off asleep'.<sup>102</sup> But none of this really mattered. It was the way Mahaffy acted as much as the act itself that caused the fuss. He referred dismissively, in what McDowell and Webb called, 'a characteristic flourish' to 'a man called Pearse' as if he was some unknown and undesirable specimen of an upstart.<sup>103</sup> When the Gaelic Society chose to publish its entire correspondence with Mahaffy, in the newspapers, they provoked him more, and it was this rush to the press that probably sealed the Society's

---

<sup>97</sup> *Irish Independent*, 21 Sept. 1914.

<sup>98</sup> *The Spark*, Dec. 1915.

<sup>99</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Nov. 1914; TCD, MUN/V/5b/11, Register, vol. 21, 1914, 5/21, Board meeting, 14 Nov. 1914.

<sup>100</sup> Minutes of the Gaelic Society, TCD, 10 Nov. 1914, TCD Ms, MUN/SOC/GAEL/1; Joseph Holloway, 'Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer', 20 Nov. 1914, NLI, Ms 1,819; W. B. Yeats, *Tribute to Thomas Davis: with an account of the Thomas Davis centenary meeting held in Dublin on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1914, including Dr Mahaffy's prohibition of the 'Man called Pearse' and an unpublished protest by AE* (Cork, 1965 edn).

<sup>101</sup> Austin Clarke, 'A centenary Celebration', *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Winter 1964), pp. 307-10; W.B. Yeats to Lady Gregory, quoted in R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: a life I: the apprentice mage, 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1997), p. 525; *Irish Times*, 21 Nov. 1914.

<sup>102</sup> Joseph Holloway, 'Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer', 20 Nov. 1914, NLI, Ms 1,819.

<sup>103</sup> McDowell & Webb, *Trinity College Dublin*, p. 419; J.P. Mahaffy to Charles Power, 10 Nov. 1914, *Irish Times*, 14 Nov. 1914; TCD, MUN/V/5b/11, Register, vol. 21, 1914, 5/21, Board meeting, 14 Nov. 1914; TCD, MUN/V/6/5, companion vol. to Register, vol. 4.

fate.<sup>104</sup> The Board of the College agreed unanimously on November 14<sup>th</sup> to support Mahaffy's decision to stop the meeting, and went on to suppress the Dublin University Gaelic Society altogether.<sup>105</sup> There was a place for washing dirty linen and it was not in the pages of the *Irish Times*. But more than that it was about a fine line between allowing and protecting free speech and being seen to give succour to the enemy in time of war. And that line had been breached and crossed by Pearse as far as Mahaffy was concerned. It is worth remembering that Mahaffy had a son serving at this time in France.<sup>106</sup> When you consider the rest of the agenda of that same Board meeting it is clear what was shaping that unanimous view. After the urgent business of supporting Mahaffy and then suppressing the Society were out of the way, after a third item, rather ironically on the payment of Irish language lecturers, was done with, there was a discussion of Voluntary Aid Detachment work in College; that one house was now ready to receive 24 refugees, and another to house injured soldiers coming home from the various fronts. A gift of £100 was given, along with the promise of a £10 grant each month. There was further consideration of College officials on active service and a variety of other more mundane day-to-day matters which were nonetheless touched in some shape or form by the war.<sup>107</sup> But what lasted in most minds was that flourish of 'a man called Pearse'. It is rarely noted that Tom Kettle spoke at the same meeting, if it is, it is usually to say that he was in his British Army uniform and that he was on the unsteady side of drunk.<sup>108</sup> He had come, he said, to defend the right to free speech even if it was the speech of a man with whom he could no longer agree; that it was a principle Davis had cherished, even if his *alma mater* seemed to have forgotten it.<sup>109</sup> Kettle was shouted down by that 'enthusiastic following' of Pearse; no better or worse than Mahaffy, they only wanted free speech when it suited themselves.<sup>110</sup> Pearse's own speech was interesting in terms of how his thinking had changed. It was more extreme; for the first time in public he was showed how

---

<sup>104</sup> *Irish Times*, 14 Nov. 1914; TCD, MUN/V/5b/11, Register, vol. 21, 1914, 5/21, Board meeting, 14 Nov. 1914; TCD, MUN/V/6/5, companion vol. to Register, vol. 4.

<sup>105</sup> TCD, MUN/V/5b/11, Register, vol. 21, 1914, 5/21, Board meeting, 14 Nov. 1914.

<sup>106</sup> Irish, *Trinity in war and revolution*, p. 99.

<sup>107</sup> TCD, MUN/V/5b/11, Register, vol. 21, 1914, 5/21, Board meeting, 14 Nov. 1914.

<sup>108</sup> Joseph Holloway, 'Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer', 20 Nov. 1914, NLI, Ms 1,819; Clarke, 'A centenary celebration', pp. 307-10; *Irish Times*, 21 Nov. 1914.

<sup>109</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 Nov. 1914.

<sup>110</sup> Joseph Holloway, 'Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer', 20 Nov. 1914, NLI, Ms 1,819; Clarke, 'A centenary celebration', pp. 307-10; Terence de Vere White, 'Mahaffy, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the Vice-Regal Lodge', in F.X. Martin (ed.), *Leaders and men of the Easter Rising: Dublin 1916* (New York, 1967), p. 19; Xavier Carty, *In bloody protest: the tragedy of Patrick Pearse* (Dublin, 1978), p. 94.

he had moved, as Yeats put it, from Davis's love of Ireland to John Mitchell's hatred of England.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, just four days later Pearse became Director of Organisation of the Irish Volunteers. Yeats wrote shortly after to Ezra Pound of that night, that 'Pearse was half-cracked and wanting to be hanged. He has Emmet delusions same as other lunatics think they are Napoleon or God'.<sup>112</sup> We might have been better served over the years to have heard more of that Yeats than all that 'terrible beauty is born'.<sup>113</sup> In the short term, though, this incident brought a type of notoriety for Pearse that he had not had before. The *Irish Times* wrote an editorial about the incident, about him and what the paper thought he was and what he stood for.<sup>114</sup> Mahaffy had made a name for him he might not otherwise have had in 1914. In the longer term, Mahaffy's hasty phrase lingered troublingly on. In 1916 a Canadian journalist, F.A. McKenzie, published his account of the Rising; that Pearse was identified for him by a Dubliner as the man 'Mahaffy wouldn't let...take part in a Trinity debate last autumn because he's a hot anti-recruiter'.<sup>115</sup> By 1919 *The man called Pearse* became the title of Desmond Ryan's first memoir of Pearse. He thanked Provost Mahaffy for the use of the phrase in the opening page, but made no reference to how or where it came from in the book.<sup>116</sup> He could count that his readers would simply know. And therein lies the harm. It became a short hand to dismiss Mahaffy and Trinity more broadly in a single stroke, as Patrick Maume puts it, as 'West Briton par excellence'.<sup>117</sup> Of course, the part the College played in the suppression of the Rising, that it became a key base for the British army to suppress the rebels from, informed its image after Irish independence, so too did its strong association with the Great War, maybe more so its willingness to be openly associated with its remembrance when others began to keep their sorrows more quietly to themselves,

---

<sup>111</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Tribute to Thomas Davis: with an account of the Thomas Davis centenary meeting held in Dublin on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1914, including Dr Mahaffy's prohibition of the 'Man called Pearse' and an unpublished protest by AE* (Cork, 1965 edn); Clarke, 'A centenary celebration', pp. 307-10; Dudley-Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: the triumph of failure*, p. 227.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: a life II – the arch poet 1915-1939* (Oxford, 2003), p. 62.

<sup>113</sup> W.B. Yeats, 'Easter, 1916', *Michael Robartes and the dancer* (Dublin, 1920).

<sup>114</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Nov. 1914.

<sup>115</sup> F.A. McKenzie, *The Irish Rebellion what happened and why* (London, 1916), p. 48.

<sup>116</sup> Ryan, *The man called Pearse*, pp. 1-2 & p. 130.

<sup>117</sup> Patrick Maume, 'Sir John Pentland Mahaffy', in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 6, pp. 285-7. Charles Wyse Power of the Gaelic Society began his Bureau of Military History Statement decades later referring to the incident. He described Mahaffy as 'strongly pro-British' and Trinity representing 'the interests of the British Empire', BMH WS 420. 'Mahaffy's designation as the archetypal unionist is in large part due to his phrase "a man called Pearse"...': Terence de Vere White, 'Mahaffy, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the Vice-Regal Lodge', in F.X. Martin (ed.), *Leaders and men of the Easter Rising: Dublin 1916* (New York, 1967), p. 18.

but that phrase ‘a man called Pearse’ seemed to sum and bundle it all so easily up, made it harder for this College to be seen for what it was rather than for the caricatured creature of Mahaffy it was perceived to be. It was an easy stone to throw, a type of ‘sure what would you expect’, when Trinity risked raising its head above the parapet.

At the end of his life Pearse found a Trinity man, William Wylie, by his side. Wylie had studied law at Trinity, and had come back during Easter Week 1916 as a member of the Officer Training Corps.<sup>118</sup> Once the Rising was over, he was sent by the authorities to prepare the prosecution of the leading rebels. He was unsettled to find in Pearse a decent man, and wrote later of Pearse in quite favourable terms, even describing Pearse’s statement at his court martial as of ‘the Robert Emmet type’, thus contributing in his own particular way to the myth of Pearse after his execution on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1916.<sup>119</sup>

Since his death Trinity, has in many ways, been improbably kind to Pearse. Elsie Mahaffy’s diary began in vigorous denunciation of the turmoil and the death of Easter week; she noted that they even had to sack the chauffeur, Austin Whelan, because he came back to College after the Rising calling Pearse ‘a true patriot’ and such ‘sentiments’, she said, ‘were out of place in the Provost’s House’.<sup>120</sup> Although she could not be said to have softened entirely, her early statements that the ‘rebellion was headed by a handful of ruffians’ did make way for something quite clearly changed as the diary went on.<sup>121</sup> ‘Pearse indeed had much that was loveable about him’, she wrote close to the end; she was reading the hagiographical pamphlets, collecting bits and scraps, keeping picture of the rebels; she was trying her best, as she put it ‘to realise this man’.<sup>122</sup> The first Lecky Chair of History, Walter Alison Phillips, had little trouble realising him and the wider Irish independence movement as unconstitutional, undemocratic terrorism. For his 1923 book, *The revolution in Ireland*, he was given access to Dublin Castle records and personnel, all of which marked him further out for what he called ‘the avalanche of abuse’ he received in the new Irish Free State which was trying desperately to find its roots in anything that was honourable about 1916 rather than all

---

<sup>118</sup> Irish, *Trinity in war and revolution*, pp. 149-50; Robert Marshall, ‘William E. Wylie’, in McGuire & Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, vol. 9, pp. 1059-61.

<sup>119</sup> León Ó Broin, *W.E. Wylie and the Irish revolution* (Dublin, 1989), p. 21.

<sup>120</sup> Elsie Mahaffy’s account of the Easter Rising, TCD Ms 2074, f.75r-f.76r.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, f.88r.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, f.148r & f.151r-f.152r.

that was dishonourable in the recent civil war.<sup>123</sup> His book left a mark on the official mind in the new state, and it was still being spoken of when the idea was mooted to collect the recollections of veterans of the revolutionary period, because as, Minister for Education, Tomás Derrig, put it, history needed to hear from the ‘Irish point of view’.<sup>124</sup> Alison Phillips, and by extension Trinity, was clearly seen as presenting the British one still.

Through the 1930s and beyond Trinity embraced more scientific approaches to history, and maybe chastened by the Alison Phillips effect, and no doubt by the sense that 1916 was not yet history in the proper sense, it was some considerable time before Pearse was dealt with head on by TCD again. With the Board discouraging the expression of what might be considered controversial views on political or religious matters in the public domain in the early Free State, forbidding the use of college addresses if the urge to write to a newspaper or government department grew too much, that ‘policy of inconspicuousness’ as R.B. McDowell calls it, may well have silenced some in College as the foundation myths of the new state seemed to be finding themselves more and more vigorously in the GPO.<sup>125</sup> In terms of direct analysis of Pearse the political scientist, David Thornley, was probably the first in Trinity to try, producing three essays on Pearse between 1966 and 1971.<sup>126</sup> A biography was planned but never completed, but those essays did try to trace a more human Pearse in defiance of the plaster saint that Pearse had by then become.<sup>127</sup> He began the work knowing, as he wrote, ‘that anyone who talks about Pearse in Ireland with any degree of frankness violates a shrine more sacred even than Tone’s, Emmet’s, or John F. Kennedy’s’; he also conceded that when he began ‘I just did not like the man’.<sup>128</sup> All the same he was among the first to try and portray a human Pearse, with faults and failings as much, and more

---

<sup>123</sup> W. Alison Phillips, *The revolution in Ireland 1906-1923* (London, 1923); W. Alison Phillips, *The revolution in Ireland 1906-1923* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn) (London, 1926), p. v; for mixed reviews of the book see *Irish Times*, 16 Nov. 1923; *The Spectator*, 24 Nov. 1923; J.A. Moran, ‘A new history from Trinity College’, *Catholic Bulletin*, vol. xiii, no. 11 (Nov. 1923), pp. 760-5; J.A. Moran, ‘Professor Alison Phillips of Trinity College Dublin’, *Catholic Bulletin*, vol. xiii, no. 12 (Dec. 1923), pp. 851-6; Arthur E. Clery, ‘Review’, *Studies: an Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 12, no. 48 (Dec. 1923), pp. 671-3; *Irish Times*, 5 March 1926; *Weekly Irish Times*, 13 March 1926. For a more recent discussion of the book see Diarmaid Ferriter, *A nation and not a rabble* (London, 2015), pp. 28-30.

<sup>124</sup> Ferriter, *A nation and not a rabble*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>125</sup> McDowell & Webb, *Trinity College Dublin*, pp. 429-30.

<sup>126</sup> David Thornley, ‘Patrick Pearse’, *Studies: an Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 55, no. 217 (Spring 1966), pp. 10-20; David Thornley, ‘Patrick Pearse – the evolution of a republican’, Martin (ed.), *Leaders and men of the Easter Rising*, pp. 151-63; David Thornley, ‘Patrick Pearse and the Pearse family’, *Studies: an Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 60, no. 239-40 (Autumn-Winter 1971), pp. 332-46.

<sup>127</sup> Yesult Thonley (ed.), *Unquiet spirit: essays in memory of David Thornley* (Dublin, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>128</sup> Thornley, ‘Patrick Pearse and the Pearse family’, p. 332.

than any other man. And in maybe taking that view he seems to have fallen rather under Pearse's spell. That said, the scholarly biographies of Pearse that followed owe a debt to his work. But Pearse probably has Trinity's Séamus Ó Buachalla to thank for exposing the progressive educationalist, for making available most of Pearse's writings for considered assessment for the first time, and he was instrumental in securing the ownership of the Hermitage for the state.<sup>129</sup> Ó Buachalla changed the mind of the Trinity historian F.S.L. Lyons about Pearse, making him take cognisance of the inner world of the educator and organiser to complicate the quite hysterical Pearse Lyons had written of before.<sup>130</sup> But all the stress on Pearse the educator cannot detract from the central problem he poses still. Trinity's historians have long-grappled with the consequences of Pearse's actions at Easter 1916, struggled with him as others did against the backdrop of the Northern Irish troubles, and have tried to grasp with, I think, some degree of amazement, the quite rose-tinted view of Pearse that seems to have emerged again in all the remembering and celebrating and commemorating that has been happening all around us in the last few months and weeks. What Pearse and his comrades in arms did in the Rising takes us to the heart of thorny questions about the use of force in Irish history. He and they had no mandate for violence, and chose to fight in some of the poorest and most vulnerable parts of this city, bringing a rising that caused more civilian casualties than any other kind of death, and the way he counted on posterity to vindicate him is the provocation, if any were really needed for historians, to defy him any straightforward right to that. I may have only outlined, and probably strained at times to find, that streak of Trinity that ran through his life, but tussling with him, aggravating his contradictions, his unexpected connections, not letting him rest, just as he tussled with Trinity all his life, is probably the honour he deserves if a Trinity discourse is about giving an honour due. We can fathom him only by holding him to honest and rigorous account, by admitting that the best and the worst of us all stand on feet of clay.

---

<sup>129</sup> Séamus Ó Buachalla (ed.), *The literary writings of Patrick Pearse: writings in English* (Dublin & Cork, 1979); Séamus Ó Buachalla, *Pádraig Mac Piarais agus Éire lenna linn* (Dublin, 1979); Séamus Ó Buachalla (ed.), *Na scríbhinní liteartha le Pádraig Mac Piarais: scríbhinní i nGaeilge* (Dublin & Cork, 1979) Séamus Ó Buachalla (ed.), *A significant Irish educationalist: the educational writings of P.H. Pearse* (Cork, 1980); Séamus Ó Buachalla (ed.), *The letters of P.H. Pearse* (Buckinghamshire, 1980); Séamus Ó Buachalla, *An Piarsach sa Bheilg* (Dublin, 1998).

<sup>130</sup> F.S.L. Lyons, 'Foreword' in Ó Buachalla (ed.), *The letters of P.H. Pearse*, p. vii-ix; see, for example, F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939* (Oxford, 1979), p. 92.

