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Le Temps guérit toutes les blessures : la résistance à l'autorité de l'Histoire dans les concepts de nation et de nationalisme

How to Do Things with Words, and Deeds, and Blood

Comment faire les choses avec des mots, des actes et du sang

Article publié le 01 décembre 2014.

Cornelius Crowley

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1. Wounds and the healing of wounds

- 1 The idea that *time heals all wounds* is both appealing and appeasing, precisely because it goes against the evidence of lived experience which suggests that time present is a running sore of carefully nurtured wounds. The question is however fraught with hypotheses which are self-fulfilling: if the sore remains a sore, it is because it is carefully nurtured in an un-forgetting present. Memory is furthermore partial and selective. It dwells more on wounds suffered than on wounds inflicted. It is the nurturing of wounds suffered that is a *devoir de mémoire*, to ensure that there will be no forgetting. Which means that the touchstone of collective memory¹ is therefore the im-

perious truth of the pain felt by the remembering self. And if eventually *time heals all wounds*, the condition to which one accedes will be a healthy amnesia, cured both of traumatic memory and of the very awareness that one *has* forgotten. Healed of the wounds of memory, the subject can function as an objectively knowing subject, if it is through the absence of affective investment in the archival evidence of past lives and social institutions that the historian stakes a claim to the sober authority of history.

- 2 The professional ethic of the historian thus rests upon a strict equanimity before the intrusive lifeline of memory, as it short-circuits the disciplined preliminaries of research, foregrounding instead the claim that one might, or that one must, draw upon one's special relationship to a particular community of the dead, insofar as they are the indefeasible community of those dead from whom one proceeds. The consequence, if one adopts the lifeline of memory, will be a transvaluation of the procedures of history where the imperative of fidelity entails submission to the tribunal of the dead and to the claims of their presumed living heirs, in lieu of the evaluation of one's practice by an ideal academic community conducting its business in accordance with an ethic of disinterested truth, one's professional credibility within the college of peers sole compensation for an indifference to the more intoxicating brew of popular memory.
- 3 A version of the hypothesis of healing is voiced by Eliot in "Little Gidding," the final poem of *The Four Quartets*.

[...] This is the use of memory:
For liberation – not less of love but expanding
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a country
Begins as attachment to our own field of action
And comes to find that action of little importance
Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.
Sin is Behovely, but
All shall be well, and
All manner of thing shall be well.
If I think, again, of this place,

And of people, not wholly commendable,
Of no immediate kin or kindness,
But some of peculiar genius,
All touched by a common genius,
United in the strife which divided them;
[...]:
We cannot revive old factions
We cannot restore old policies
Or follow an antique drum.
These men, and those who opposed them
And those whom they opposed
Accept the constitution of silence
And are folded into a single party.
Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us – a symbol:
A symbol perfected in death.
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well. (Eliot 1969: 195-196)

- 4 Eliot here celebrates an inclusive Englishness, in the particular context of war and the threat of invasion. The graveyard is a garden of remembrance where the tensions of factional strife are obliterated. A forward projection, beyond 1942 to our present-day point of retrospection, enables us to read Eliot's graveyard poem as a decorous contribution to the political trope of England's *Finest Hour*, when the scars of internecine strife could be effaced by way of a benign version of the Freudian category of *nachträglichkeit* or 'deferred action,' which "provides the memory, not the event, with traumatic significance and signifies a circular complementarity of both directions of time" (Eickhoff 2006). In this English version of a *healing* retroaction, the wounds of time are twice effaced. The factions of English civil war are made into one "single party," while the process of healing and remembering is acknowledged by the speaker in the present moment of sacred union where the more recent conflicts of class and politics are also erased in the commonality of resistance to invasion.
- 5 Such benign retrospection has the virtue of dissimulating the more abrasive tones evident in Eliot's earlier writing, both his essays on culture and politics (1934, 1939) and the poetry of his modernist moment between 1910 and of 1922. The earlier Eliot had been less ecu-

menical and more fractious. *The Four Quartets* are in this respect a kind of poetic self-medication, if we compare them to “Gerontion” (1920), a poem whose idea of history bristles with possibilities far more ominous. The speaker of the earlier poem does not subscribe to the idea that the passage of time might in any sense provide solace:

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities. Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
What’s not believed in, or if still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion; gives too soon
Into weak hands, what’s thought can be dispensed with
Till the refusal propagates a fear. (Eliot 38)

- 6 “After such knowledge, what forgiveness?” That, we might say, is *the question*. Unless we simply answer that there is *no forgiveness, no forgetting*, when we carry out the inventory of an anthropological predicament whose defining feature is the present habitation of a space whose contours are secured through their continued animation by the past of our putative, imagined community, where the public uses of history are for the purposes of memory, for mimetic rivalries and the positioning of collective selves by way of a dialectics of resentment.
- 7 A question that is inescapable and beyond resolution, unless we acknowledge that the relation between history and memory requires recognition that the proper use of history *cannot be* for the rearmament of memory, certainly not of a “collective memory” that is the correlative of a “imagined community” (Anderson 1983, 2001: 31-42). But if ever there was a question where the descriptive and the prescriptive are inextricably entangled, it is the nexus of *history and memory*, insofar as the historical subject of nationhood, which came rushing onstage in lieu both of the royal *nous*, which the moment of revolutionary emancipation had done away with, and of the universal *nous* of humanity that had claimed sovereign responsibility for the invention of its present and its future, offered some compensation

for the failure of the revolutionary subject to achieve its enduring self-realisation, as the subject of an emancipated humanity which has triumphed over an unenlightened past (J. Israel 2009, 2014). And if the subject of nationhood achieved this *coup de théâtre*, it was by donning a traditionalist apparel, by way of a self-propelling imagination of selfhood where the fuel of a reanimated selfhood is the remembrance of the wrongs inflicted on the body of the nation (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

- 8 There is of course an erudite history of crops and the price of bread, weather and famine, *histoire de longue durée*, where archival method and rhetorical presentation can forego the rhetoric of a comprehensive prosopopoeia² through which the recorded traces of people's lives are read as so many manifestations of the enduring subject of nationhood. The practice of history as a methodical discipline whose goal is the accumulation of a more extensive sense of the past provides abundant evidence that the actions of social agents can be accommodated within a presentation of past social realities without their being figured as the bearers of the spirit of a *nation*. But if such a disciplined writing of history is a delineation of the material and social conditions of past lives, it is *not* the history of the putative subject of nationhood, which has come to haunt far more than the retrospective writing of history insofar as it constitutes the spinal cord around which history has come to be fleshed out, acted out and fought out in the present.
- 9 Drawing on Hartog's term "presentism," Régis Debray points to the way that an indifference to the past courts ineffectiveness and incomprehension regarding both the burden of history and political responsibilities in the present. For if some can invoke the gift of a belated birth as a contingent but effective shelter from the "nightmare of history" (Joyce 1986: 28), the characteristic property of any present is the disparity between those whose experience involves an oblivion to whatever may have gone before and those for whom such "presentism" is neither possible nor desired:

"Presentism," feeding on flashes and clips, is strategic non-realism, since it obliterates past and future. Looking forward, there is no evaluation of the medium and long-term consequences of immediate decisions, which typically turn out contrary to the envisaged goal –

Sunni Iraq falling under the control of pro-Iranian Shi'ism being the paradigm. Emotional "presentism" undermines strategic intelligence. Looking back, locked in its muddled and volcanic moralism, the presentist West brushes aside the memories of others and the humiliations it has subjected them to. The dominated always have a longer memory than the dominators. The slave trade is not a dead letter for the descendants of slaves; nor the second electoral college, rigged by the French, for Algerians; nor the "no dogs or Chinese" in the French concession in Shanghai for the great-grandchildren of the coolies. The feeling of humiliation, an "engine of history" long underestimated, though more explosive than economic exploitation due to the resentment it entails, has not figured since 1945 on the radar screens of Western decision-makers. There is a price to pay for this disdain. (It might be said in mitigation that to do otherwise would have gone against human nature. We all remember the blows we have received a thousand times better than those we've given.) (Debray 2013: 29-44)

- 10 With its obliteration of past and future, "presentism" amounts to "strategic non-realism," a blindness to those possibilities contemplated in Eliot's "Gerontion." It ignores both the authority of history and the warning which awaits us in the historical real, that is, in the non-repressible archive of history, which we may try to ignore, or from which we may selectively pull a few threads in order to weave them into a fabric to be draped over our present selves. It is this same archive which others will also lay claim to and glean through, for their own purposes, from which they will fashion their particular fabric, by way of their inevitably perspectivist marshaling of the authority of history in the interests of their particular lifeline, whose pivotal, compositional stance in the present offers them their own defining point of *nachträglichkeit*. For if there is an *authority* of history and an *objectivity* of the archive, in no sense do they support the expectation of an ecumenical fit between the sources and vestiges of the past and the achievement of a shared, recomposed commonality in the present. There is no Christo-style pall, to be woven from the available threads, beneath which all the belligerent agents of the past can lie down in peace together. Eliot's reconciliation of factions is a very local and very English affair.
- 11 The authority of history, if by this we understand the evidence of the actuality of all that *did* occur, independently of the interpretational moulds into which we try to cast it, thus amounts to no more and no

less than the postulate of an intractable welter of material which cannot be appeased but which can be misappropriated, by way of the intellectual and political equivalent of simony: an appropriation of the authority of history for the particular needs of a tendentially exclusivist memory, within a politics of collective identity and political projection, the basis of which is neither the bourgeois liberal nor the communist variation upon a universalist grammar. However the abuses of memory and of identity politics are, like Sartre's hell, always the abuses of *les autres*. And if the abuses of the authority of history for present purposes are inextricably bound up with its instrumental usage for a politics of exclusivist identity, this is an effect of the inevitable perspectivism which is both the foundation and limitation of the authority of history. For if the real, for Henry James, represents "the things we cannot possibly *not* know, sooner or later" (James 1934, 31) and if the Jamesian real is as recalcitrant and indomitable as the Lacanian *réel*, the illusion of its appeasement by way of a fiction of nationhood is something that we cannot not resort to. Debray says as much: "we all remember the blows we have received a thousand times better than those we've given." Eliot wrote in "East Coker" that "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality" (Eliot: 172). The retrospective contemplation of wrongs suffered will be more easily borne if the investigation of the past provides munitions for an empowering discourse in the present, that is, a discourse which is not one of oblivious "presentism," or of an inclusive commonality and healing through time, but is rather to be figured in terms of the Lacanian "*point de capiton*," definable as "the position in the signifying chain at which the signifier stops the otherwise endless movement of the signification [...] and produces the necessary illusion of a fixed meaning" (Evans 1996: 151). Why and how is there *nationhood* rather than a commonality of cosmopolitan *no-nationhood*? In reaction to the unfinished and contingent fabric that is woven out of the interminable meshing of intentional projects and suffered adjustments. As a consequence of the ongoing retrospective reconfiguration of this same fabric and the absence of any overarching pattern for its comprehension, coupled with the pliancy of the evidence to a succession of changing, provisionally grand narratives, through which the community to be declared in any particular time and place strives to shape into a usable order of meaning the flotsam of insufficiently determined signifiers, causing them to cohere into a consistency of col-

lective agency. Nationhood provides a trans-individual agent of history which, reflexively or in reaction, functions as an *imaginary* effect of the historical real: nations are the reterritorialized by-products of a deterritorializing modernity; “mediologically” (Debray 1991) they are the concomitants of literacy and of a democratizing print culture. Hence the affinity connecting the institutional authority of history, understood as a discursive corpus of *writing* undertaken in accordance with a rigorous set of rules, in particular the scrupulous deference to one’s sources, to the concept of nationhood and the form of the nation state, understood as a forceful agent in the *making* of history. Historicism and the discourses of history are thus part of the dialectical reaction to the interruption of historical continuities which the suprematist moment of the French Revolution had aspired to when it placed the political under the authority of reason in lieu of the moral authority of history, which Burke had understood as the prudent authority of precedent, use, tradition: as the accumulation of experience over which the writing of history kept watch. Such a stance can authorize a skeptical and *apparently* disinterested investigation of the past, where the historian’s study “is the product of a temperament which delights in the past, and for which the detachment, the immobility, the deadness and the irrelevance of the past are not defects to be removed, but blessed virtue to be enjoyed” (Oakeshott 1958: 18).

2. The authority of history

- 12 The authority of history is thus a dual one, and the duality is a factor of instability and dispute. There is the authority deriving from the historian’s collation of the evidence in the archives and the production of a source-based account of *res gestae: wie es eigentlich gewesen*.³ All academically certified historical accounts thus abide by a protocol which is tendentially Popperian, open to the revisionary challenge by other members of the professional community, drawing on the commonly available body of sources.
- 13 As to the second version of authority, the deference is here to the appropriation of the historical account by those to whom it is considered to be preferentially addressed, a community larger than the academic community of peers. Here the coupling between authority

and deference will result in the production of a narrative in resonance with the project of a nationalist politics. As voiced through the prosopopoeia of the nation's enduring historical spirit, the claims of nationhood rest upon the postulate of an unbroken connection between the past and present inhabitants of a *place*, supported through the diachronic continuity of a shared *national* language, or, in the case of a diasporic nationhood, by way of a continuity to be postulated *inspiteof* the discontinuity of local habitation or even of language. If some variation on the Rankean authority of history can be invoked by the academic community *against* the history-based discourse of nationhood – in support of the demonstration that a particular narrative amounts to a fantasized illusion of continuity and antiquity, – it will require more than the mere invocation of a source-based positivism to discredit the claims of nationhood to its august ancestry: for there are sources and sources, their protean flotsam has the plasticity of Mallarméan *hasard*, with the result that the establishment of any authority for the interpretation of the incompleteness and openness is an act of will involving the impression of a form upon the amenable debris of the past. This second version of the authority of history is thus in no sense objective. It is both *subjective* and *interested* (Nietzsche 1980): an authority of empowerment and of pragmatic effects, involving the subordination of the relative autonomy of the writing of history to the more pressing needs of a present politics.

- 14 In theory, the divergence between the two versions of authority is easily resolvable, by way of the historian's professional commitment to the principles of liberal inquiry and the refusal of any extra-academic agenda. In practice the lines of demarcation are less clearly drawn. Collusion need not involve any explicit abjuration of the standards on which academic authority has been constructed. There is, furthermore, no general, uncontextualised application of the rules governing the interaction between these two versions. The bluntness of the assault upon the finer distinctions of scholarship by the subjective and interested version of the authority of history, in the service of the history of the nation, will reflect both the degree of intra-academic security which prevails and a series of larger, extra-academic factors: in particular the wider, collective sentiment of political security or, on the contrary, of an urgency or desperation of

politics, coupled with the degree to which such diseased circumstances can be considered to be responsive to a therapeutic nationalist reading.

- 15 It is by no means an accident, in this regard, that it is an English historiography which attests the most enduring match between a principled deference to the authority of the archive and the preserved contours of the historical grand narrative, insofar as the archive addressed is the largely consensual archive of the nation. The English case is thus the only remaining instance where the intra-professional disciplinary authority of history and the national-ideological harnessing of the discourses of history in the service of the discourse of the nation are mutually supportive and generally unquestioned, where the enterprise of historiographical revision, the ordinary work in progress of the intra-academic community, leads only to an ever clearer management of the demarcation between the specific texture of the past and the preoccupations of the present (Hutton 1999: 377-391). Such an impeccable fit will in contrast prove impossible whenever the academic community of historians is confronted with any one of the following ruptures and discontinuities: a) defeat in war waged on the national territory; b) revolution, or any process of constitutional *regime change*, with or without violence; c) civil war and secession; d) the collapse of the state monopoly of the legitimate use of violence; e) cases of a foundational *new nationalism*, as when a state-nation is declared in the context of decolonization, within boundaries drawn as recently and as arbitrarily as the 1884 Berlin Conference. It is not simply a case that the new or renascent nation ignores the authority of a positivist history, tearing up the textbook. Nationhood operates according to a dynamic and inventive leverage. Hence its Archimedean dimension, evident in the nationalist construction of a grand narrative where the nation's present moment of collapse, prelude to its imminent and necessary renewal, is reconnected to a sanctified point in the past from which it is rhetorically possible to engineer an act of *redressement*.
- 16 That a self-evident truth which is backed by the authority of history, as invoked by the discourse of nationhood, is in the last instance an *illusion*, (Freud 1928), an imaginary configuration whose command of collective allegiance is preserved intact only so long as the subjects to whom it is addressed rest securely within the dimensions of time and

place which it coordinates, can be illustrated through the following passage from the “Cyclops” chapter in *Ulysses*. It begins with Leopold Bloom’s declaration of a truth grounded on a larger and less local history:

- Persecution, says he, all the history of the world is full of it. Perpetuating national hatred among the nations.
 - But do you know what a nation means? says John Wyse.
 - Yes, says Bloom.
 - What is it? Says John Wyse.
 - A nation? Says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.
 - By God, then says Ned, laughing, if that’s so I’m a nation for I’m living in the same place for the past five years.
- So of course everyone had the laugh at Bloom and says he, trying to muck out of it:
- Or also living in different places.
 - That covers my case, says Joe.
 - What is your nation if I may ask? says the citizen.
 - Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland. (Joyce 1986: 271-272)

- 17 The second version, interested and subjective, of the authority of history thus involves its operation as foundation of the discursive formation of nationhood, by way of a forensic crystallization of *history as evidence*, to be produced in support of the sovereignty of the collective subject that has been fashioned through a forcefully selective reading of the sources, coupled with an exclusive articulation between past and present. In other words, in the face of what is in effect an interminable set of vestiges, the option chosen is to draw up a more restricted, national deck of cards, so that all that is dealt out, all the archival sources to be collated, will form a consistent hand and a plausible permutation on the national game. In the case of an Irish historiography, this will mean that even those contributions which were explicitly drafted according to a *revisionist* or *anti-nationalist* agenda will tend to consolidate the general matrix of the national grand narrative, insofar as they persistently return to it in order to locate their reworking of the sources within the predominant national frame (Boyce and O’Day 1997; Gkotzaridis 2006).

3. Caesura

18 If we address the specific epoch of a *western modernity* (Sloterdijk), we can argue that the latter drew on two complementary modes for the establishment of its regime of temporality. And given the experiential and formal importance of the latter category in the cultural moment of early 20th century modernity (Jameson), their articulation can be regarded as decisive for collective self-definition and for the promotion of a project of domination and enlightenment that we associate with the shorthand but necessary category of *western modernity*. There is the movement of incremental, expansive progress, the preferential mode of a liberal democracy which in its British or French version took on the guise of an expansionist imperialism. And there is also, operating as a minor and antithetical schema, the retrospective mode of *nachträglichkeit*. Two *complementary* modes, evident in the three rival discursive formations: (a) a European liberal democracy that is still expansive, though under severe strain, between 1914 and 1921; (b) a utopian, unflinchingly universalist communism, in its triumphant and anti-imperialist, Leninist moment, before the NEP and the subsequent batten-down of the hatches in consolidation of a territorialized renationalization of the Communist project (Serge 1937); (c) the discursive formation of nationhood, where admission to the company of nation-states rests on the circular rationale of territorial self-determination and the acknowledgement of popular will, once the posited collective self of the nation has declared its unity and voiced its demand for recognition. Each of the three rival discursive formations can be voiced in either the major (dominant) or the minor (plaintive) mode, communism and nationalism being defined by way of their opposition to the central formation of a progressive, liberal democracy.

19 The minor, melancholy voicing of the creed of a liberal democracy is audible in the retrospection of Henry James who, in the circumstances of August 1914, surmises, in a letter written on August 10 to his friend Rhoda Broughton, that one's distinguishing pieties had all the time been an illusion:

The only blot on our unanimity is that it's such an unanimity of woe. Black and hideous to me is the tragedy that gathers, and I'm sick bey-

ond cure to have lived to see it. You and I, the ornaments of our generation, should have been spared this wreck of our belief that through the long years we had seen civilization grow and the worst become impossible. The tide that bore us along was then all the while moving to this as its grand Niagara (James 1968: 673).

- 20 The discourse of liberal *civilization* is habitually forward-looking, incrementally but steadily progressive. When, as here, it adopts the tone of melancholy retrospection, it transmutes, taking on an apocalyptic tone of decadence and collapse. Universal communism, in its predominant mode, is equally linear and progressive, a product, like the liberal discourse of “*civilization*,” of the Enlightenment, albeit a more trenchant version of forward projection and universalist extension: *trans* or *supra* bourgeois rather than *anti-bourgeois* (Althusser 1965). Only later, through the presentiment of its possible vanquishing or in the aftermath of its effective exhaustion, in the writings of Walter Benjamin (Löwy 2013), in the belated Messianic imperative of Derrida’s “*spectral*” Marxism of the 1990s (Derrida 1993), or Godard’s film essays from the same period (de Baecque 2013), does the discourse of Marxism become a mournful consideration of history as it has unfolded, leading to a now evident disorientation in a time that has progressively grown more and more out of joint (Derrida 1993), or merely indifferent to the Marxist schema of reasoned hopefulness.
- 21 Culturally dominant until 1914, the project of a progressive liberal democracy had been sustained by the various tropes of “*civilization*.” The project of a western Marxism, both in its goal of emancipation and its statement of “what is to be done,” notably regarding the tactical use of the contradictions of capitalism and the conflicts between its imperialist agents (Lenin 2010), could draw upon the leverage of a body of Marxist theory consubstantial to the project: no praxis without its circumstantially-adjusted invocation of the authority of a general theory.
- 22 *Nationhood*, by contrast, drew neither on the authority of theory or on the evidence of civilisation’s “growth” which had caused “the worst” to “become impossible.” Its claim was predicated on the authority of history, through which was secured the connection between the nation’s present state and its sacred past. Arthur Griffith, founder of Sinn Fein, wrote a seminal tract entitled *The Resur-*

rection of Hungary (Griffith 2003), deploying a rhetorical model that would prove usable by subsequent movements of anti-imperialist nationalism, throughout Europe and far beyond, with its postulation of a lifeline leading back to an earlier grandeur and the exposure of the nation's abased, subordinate relation to an imperial power in the present.

- 23 Three rival discursive formations, all of them variations on the *immanent* secular discourses of a western modernity. (None of them exclusively invokes a transcendent, divine authority: the subject of political agency is here either bourgeois liberal, universal and communist, or is national-specific). Only nationalism, through its dependence on the authority of history, is in a position to reappropriate a more noble – idyllic, idealized, imaginary – past, in service of a collective political subject, as it declares its right to self-determination. Elsewhere, the connection between past and present connotes, as in James's contemplation of an ultimate irony lurking in the onward march of progress, or Derrida's voicing of a hope which survives only as the spectre of its initial light, a turning away from present agency to a contemplation of the discrepancy between a former hope, which had presumed a congruence between the evidence of *progress* and the necessity of *reason*, and a state of ruin or of general indifference in the present.
- 24 We shall focus on the period between 1914 and 1921, during which these three discursive formations, with their competing projects of political agency and foundational authority, were decisively tested. The period is framed on one side by the beginning of the Great War, "the bitterly ironic revelation to which," for James, "the tide was all the time moving," and, on the other side, by the December 1921 signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, bringing to a conclusion a struggle for independence which, through the performative proclamation of sovereignty and the bearing of arms, had achieved its goal of national liberation and *self-determination*.⁴ The disparity between the world-political milestone (1914) and its chronological complement (1921) – The Anglo-Irish Treaty is a minor secessionist event – need not cause us to question the validity of the framing. The 1921 Treaty signals a decisive shift away from the claims of a liberal imperial civilization, towards a model of self-declared nationhood resting on the willfully appropriated authority of history. The fault-lines of the "short 20th

century” (Hobsbawm 1994) were forged during these years, following the implosion of the belief in a cosmopolitan progress of civilization. Between these two framing dates there will be the Russian Bolshevik revolution and the Amritsar massacre of 1919 (Brendon 2008: 260–264). And there will also be, at the time little noticed, the pilgrimage to Paris of the leaders of various national liberation movements, still embryonic, who travelled in the misplaced hope of gaining a hearing at the post-war peace conferences (Brendon: 289–327). There were all the signs, precursory and ignored – except by those among the avant-garde of the dominated who, to quote Debray, “always have a longer memory than the dominators” – pointing to what we would “all the time be moving to,” in the Europe of the 30s and 40s and in the post-1945 decades of decolonization. Most importantly, there was the fall-out from the belated awareness that the progress of liberal imperial civilization had all the time been leading to its 1914 “Niagara.” To quote another Jamesian maxim, from the closing words in *The Wings of the Dove*, things after this “shall never be again as they were” (James 2006: 689). The quilting point, *point de capiton*, from which the demise of imperial civilization appears evident and irreversible, must mutate. There must of necessity be a change in the symbolic management of the signifying chain. For the show will go on, after a period marked by the violent unleashing of possibilities, and if systemic collapse is only readable in the moment of its occurrence – in the *Niagaresque* event of July 1914 – the enterprise of re-ordering must be quickly managed so as to fill the gap. There in the wings wait the two discursive formations, hitherto marginal – the Leninist avant-garde and the Sinn Féin nationalists – ready to move onstage and assume a position of authority from which it will then be possible to orchestrate a renewed discourse of collective self-justification, of the nation or the revolutionary party, a discourse which, for as long as it commands allegiance to the inaugural revolutionary event, will be reproduced and relayed for decades, in school books, the memorials and ceremonies of public life, the authorized histories of the nation and the ordinary exchange of everyday speech. Retrospectively, after the demise of Soviet communism, coupled with the reaffirmation of China as a great power drawing on the authority of a four-thousand year history, it is clear that it is discursive formation of nationhood which, of the three forms of political and symbolic ordering in competition between 1914 and 1921, has proved the most durable.

- 25 “Presentism” sees nothing, being blind to virtually all that has to do with future consequences. It is however the habitual mode of social existence. The challenge for any historical inquiry, in its solicitation of the interminable archive, is thus to reconstruct the myopia of ordinary lived experience – history from below, as the everyday routine of living, of actions embarked on with inadequate or with no prescience as to consequences, in the absence of any prophetic presumption to be able to read the signs of things to come. The professional historian founds her or his authority precisely on the capacity to neutralize a knowing, retrospective awareness of what it was that the routine was all the time leading to, as to its moment of critical overturning.
- 26 The moment between 1914 and 1921 is exceptional, in terms both of the magnitude of its *Niagaresque* upheaval and the effects it elicited in reaction: an accelerated redundancy of the postures which had been appropriate to the time before. The upheaval we are addressing is thus the correlative, within the general economy of the culture, of the avant-gardist moment in the specific practices of literature and the visual arts. The latter involved a critical exploration of the protocol of perspectivist perception and figuration: an enterprise of deliberate estrangement where it is brought home to artist and to spectator that any putatively self-evident (dogmatic) ordering of experience is self-evident only from *within* the framing of a particular point of view, whose claim to generality, when viewed from a marginally altered vantage-point, is susceptible to inversion or invalidation: it takes only the slightest of torsions to achieve an irreversible modification of that which had seemed to constitute the definitive impression of a form. While however an aesthetic perspectivism can aggregate the objectively non-reconcilable, singular points of view within the comprehensive ordering of the modernist novel’s time-form, or through the juxtaposition of partial forms within the frame of the cubist canvas (Vargish and Mook 1999), politics can only satisfy the imperative on which it founds its anthropological *raison d’être* through the provision of an effective *point de capiton*, that is, the composition of the actually existing and contingent social order by way of the very limited number of options available, within the general formation of modernity: the dispensations of a liberal-imperial, cosmopolitan order, the utopian claims of a universalist communism, the coercive

ordering of an authoritarian corporate or total state, operating through the coercive impression of an exclusivist social order on the actual lives of people, or the secessionist nation-state, as it lays claim to the full exercise of its sovereignty within the space it has carved out for the people it both invents or resurrects, and whose allegiance it claims.

- 27 The grounds for a confident commitment to the first of these options were destroyed in 1914. Only in the second option does the Enlightenment cosmopolitan utopia of a transnational order survive the “Niagara” of 1914, a moment which, for the prosopopoeic “Ireland,” as invoked by the movement of secessionist nationalism, heralded the opportunity for a break with the British imperial liberal order and for an assumption of the leading part in a national theatre of political sovereignty: a Free State, *Sinn Fein*, *ourselves alone*. Our intention is not to propose any evaluative appraisal of the achievement, which became possible in the wake of the performative force of the 1916 Rising. It is merely to remark that a nationalist recomposition of allegiances, along with the Leninist Secession, counts as one of the most plausible of the responses to the 1914 “Niagara.”

4. Ireland on the eve

- 28 The absence of any anticipation of the uprising has been abundantly inventoried in the historiography of Ireland before 1916. It is to these symptoms of an unsuspecting “presentism” that the historian will direct his or her source-based narrative so as to capture the specific texture of the time. In doing so, the historian is both deferring to the authority of the source material and bowing to the authority of the watershed event that will subsequently impose an anti-presentist *re-reading* of this texture of the time, now to be interpreted as a body of signs which, whether by indication or by preterition, are pointers to what *did* come about.
- 29 The final chapter of Michael Wheatley’s book *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910-1916* is entitled “‘Ireland is in a profound state of peace’: Before the Rising.” The quote is a remark made by John Redmond, leader of the parliamentary Irish Party in Westminster, who in 1915 had declared to the *New York World* newspaper that “what is called the Sinn Fein movement [...] is simply a temporary

cohesion of isolated cranks in various parts of the country” (224). Redmond’s qualification, we now say with the facile authority of hindsight, is a remark that is unwittingly enlightening and rhetorically usable, both by the agents of historical change and by the detached academic historian. It provides an appropriate schema on which to construct the source-based account of Irish public opinion “on the eve.” This assessment, basis for the delineation of a post-1914 and pre-Easter 1916 “presentism,” can then be read as a symptom of Redmond’s misplaced confidence that the hegemonic position of the Irish Party in Westminster, whose political strategy supposed the orderly implementation, after the war, of the Home Rule Act which had been passed in 1912 and whose implementation, intended for 1914, had been prorogued for the duration of the conflict, would emerge intact from the ordeal of the conflict. The Redmondite wager supposed, in the words of Yeats’s poem “Easter 1916” that “England may keep faith / For all that is done and said” (1990: 228-230), a hypothesis leaving room for the question that is voiced in the poem: “was it needless death after all?” However the Redmondite reading of Ireland’s present and future would prove to be lacking in any effective leverage on events, and in the 1918 elections held in the aftermath of the November armistice it was the “temporary cohesion of isolated cranks” which now constituted the focal point around which Irish politics would crystallize. Wheatley continues his portrayal of political life in five Irish midland counties on the eve of the 1916 Rising by remarking that:

The Irish party was undoubtedly weaker than it had been pre-war. Its Sinn Féiner opponents were undoubtedly stronger than they had been after the Volunteer split, but no contemporary observer in the five counties predicted the party’s imminent demise, nor the opposition’s future triumph. (Wheatley: 247)

- 30 Wheatley’s sifting through the evidence is enlisted in support of his consideration of the security of the then presentist illusion, and of the demonstration that it was in fact only that, an *illusion* to be swept away through a seismic shift in public opinion, the enduring performative force of the Rising.
- 31 It is thus the historical process of the “imminent demise” of the constitutional Irish Party, by way of the “triumph” of its rival, which

would have conferred on it the rhetorical monopoly of the (nationalist) narrative of history, thus casting a background shadow on all that had been “leading up” to it, while establishing the terms of the subsequent agenda of Irish politics, in which the legitimacy of any decision as to public policy would depend on the capacity to invoke, in support of the options addressed, their compatibility with the heritage of the Rising and the subsequent struggle for independence, even when the programme to be adopted for economic expansion in 1958 repudiates the Sinn Féin dream of protectionist self-sufficiency (Boullet 2009).

- 32 In foregrounding Redmond’s declaration that “Ireland is in a profound state of peace,” Wheatley discredits any claim on behalf of the Irish Party leader to the retrospective authority conferred on someone who has shown qualities of unheeded prophetic perspicacity. Despite their methodological precautions, historians of a national history thus find themselves fusing their own redactional authority with the acknowledgement of the authority of the historical “winners.” Redmond’s remark to a journalist is inevitably framed within the general orchestration of unsuspecting myopic notations that fill out the historical canvas of Ireland “before the Rising.” We receive them as evidence that that while *history written by the victors* can in some cases be supplemented through the inclusion of the vantage-point of the vanquished, what is far more difficult is the recovery of the *underdetermination* of any particular moment in time, by way of its reclamation from the matrix of meaning into which it has subsequently been drawn, in order to restore something of its undecided openness, prior to the irreversible closure of the range of options.
- 33 It is impossible therefore for the historian to neutralize the decisive effect of the Rising, which was to ensure that Ireland would not after 1916 be in a “profound state of peace” and that in all subsequent *Hibernocentric* historical presentations of the period the country’s historical tempo would remain disconnected from the larger imperial and European scansion of war and peace: Ireland “at peace” in 1914 would be “at war” between 1919 and 1921.⁵ Redmond and the Redmondite Parliamentary Irish Party would not be defeated as the central powers were defeated in 1918. Their fate was rather one of ideological inaudibility, in the aftermath of an event which they had not provoked or desired, and as a result of a confrontation that was not

directed against them, that simply circumvented the now demonetized weight of their earlier political authority.

- 34 The historical agency of the Easter Rising unquestionably constitutes an *event*, to draw on the terminology of Badiou (1997). Out of his meditation on its implications and effects, Yeats made a poem which amplified the event's performative force, fashioning the terms of its subsequent interpretation and its ongoing resonance within an Irish politics. In doing so, the poem also established the terms of any possible revisionist or anti-nationalist historiography or politics (Foster 2003: 44-66). The consequence of this eminently literary impression of a fictional pattern on what was (if we abandon the Hibernocentric perspective) a minor incident during the four years of mass death between 1914 and 1918 is that Wheatley's source-based history of provincial Ireland before the Rising coheres precisely to the poetically inspired and *unsourced* figuring of the Easter Rising, a figuring which Yeats had accomplished through the poetic licence to duplicate in words the performative gesture of the rebels, a gesture which had overturned the ordinary through the force of the martyr's inordinate wagering of life. Through its capacity to resonate with the quickened, taut chord of the apocalyptic moment, Yeats's poem shadows the Rising's enactment of the sacralized temporality of nationhood, where the banality of the present is both exposed and shot through by the gesture of sacrifice and where the compromises of the ordinary are definitively discounted. For Yeats and for Wheatley, there can be nothing prior to the event to enable one to suspect what was to happen, of what one was on the eve. That of course is the essence of the event, the effects of which both poet and historian recognize to be *Niagaresque*, through the transformation of the stature of the "temporary cohesion of isolated cranks" who had enacted it.
- 35 The exceptionality of the 1916 Rising thus conforms to the general pattern for the nationalist resacralization of the everyday. The interruption of ordinary routines (1) is forged in secrecy and is unsuspected by the profane; (2) is a *watershed*: there is a *before* and an *after*; (3) is a reanimation of the quotidian fabric of history, and as such is endowed with a potency which will structure the field of the political for generations to come, until the exhaustion of the event's authority over the course of historical agency.

5. Striking a blow

- 36 The performative address of the 1916 Proclamation is “illocutionary” rather than “perlocutionary” (Austen). By this we mean that the Proclamation, precisely because it is not an utterance performed in conformity with the conventional order of politics and because it is an insurrection against the established forms, is not in itself effective: it is not endowed with the conventional efficiency of the mayor’s naming two people “man and wife.” Its effectiveness requires a supplementary outpouring of blood, an expenditure of lives. It begins with the invocation “of God and of the dead generations”:

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.

- 37 The reference to the “tradition of nationhood” reads as a tautology, insofar as the nation’s defining legitimacy is founded on the capacity to invoke a tradition through which the frame of an un-visionary “presentism” will be transcended. Without the predication of a tradition, there can be no nationhood through which to connect the fallen but still redeemable present to the more august realm inhabited by the “dead generations” of ancestors. And if this august realm constitutes the horizon for the political and cultural imagination of the living, it is to the extent that the insistently narrative discourses of a nationalist history have trumped the two rival versions of an Enlightenment project: the universalist republicanism of 1789, the universalist communism of the 1848 *Manifesto*. From which we conclude that the limitations of “presentism” are most effectively transcended neither through an expansive liberal imperialism nor the communist articulation between present exploitation and future emancipation: the antidote to “presentism” is most effectively procured through the tautological referral of the alienated present to the nation’s authentic, non-cosmopolitan past. This is the kernel of the nationalist *roman familial*, the moment of truth when the Irish people cast off its actual figures of authority – the Irish Party of Redmond and the Asquith-led government in London.⁶ The opportunity for such a realignment fol-

lows from the disarray into which the believers in the onward march of an imperial democracy had been thrown as a result of the calamitous magnitude of the war. Within the narrow focus of Irish nationhood, the authority of history can therefore be enlisted by the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation as it cannot be by either the Asquith government or by Redmond, both of whom must put up with the challenges of a historical contingency whose ironic unfolding did not conform to the pattern of incremental progress.

- 38 In his letter to Rhoda Broughton, Henry James showed himself to be perfectly attuned to the pieties of a progressive liberalism, while also demonstrating a sensitivity to the perverse inevitability with which expectations are reversed rather than fulfilled. As a writer, he could make apocalyptic sense of the outbreak of war in terms of its devastation of a society's progressive pieties. As a Liberal party leader of a wartime government, Asquith had, till his replacement by Lloyd George in December 1916, to face the day-to-day challenge of current affairs, even when the affairs were indeed as monstrous as James's 1914 letter had suggested, having been "changed utterly," in a manner far more ominous and irreversible than with the Easter Rising in Dublin (Kinkaid-Weekes 1996: 345).
- 39 The rebel signatories of the 1916 Proclamation were, by contrast, attuned to a dialectics which warranted a capitalization upon the certainty of loss, provided that the latter could be sanctified through its inclusion in a nationalised *memory* of endurance through defeat. The organicist articulation between nation and tradition, the aim of which is to confer necessity and legitimacy on an enterprise which, from the presentist perspective of current events is indeed an improbable *coup de dès*, constitutes the indispensable discursive supplement to the actual deployment of physical force. In this respect, the protocol governing the Nationalist agit-prop Rising is comparable to that which, in the same period, conditions the avant-gardist intervention in the arts: in order to establish its significance, the enigmatic and open-ended modality of the work's presentation requires the complementary elucidation provided by a manifesto statement of aesthetic purpose (Caws 2001). We can pursue the analogy between a minority, secessionist politics and the procedures of avant-garde art by stating that whereas the 1916 Proclamation can be read as the intervention of a little-known, aspiring group whose position on the

political stage was objectively subaltern and marginal in the established imperial order, and while a Futurist or Surrealist manifesto sees a heterodox coterie “strike a blow” for domination in the cultural *champ*, by 1914 Henry James and a pantheon of bourgeois liberal realists had come to occupy a position in the empire of letters comparable to that of the great European powers (Tadié 1999). In the arts as in politics, “all changed” in the space of a few years.

40 And if for James it is possible to envisage the idea that “everything’s terrible, *cara* – in the heart of man,” (James 1979: 534) the upheaval of the period 1914-21 is the revelation that there is something unsuspected and terrible in the heart of Europe, through an ordeal which saw the collapse of the imperial order into a contingency of unanticipated chaos, and where the invocation of a marginal, remnant nationhood could now stake out the site of its own self-fulfilling legitimacy. The latter dialectical reversal requires the leverage afforded those aspiring agents of history in the present by way of their capacity to claim the allegiance of present-day Irishmen and Irishwomen and the patronage of the “dead generations.” Such a *volonté générale*, rooted in the grave, compensates for the absence “for the time being” of any “democratic mandate,” as conferred through the expressed consent of the multitude which cannot fail to acknowledge that its destiny as a nation was voiced through the prosopopoeia of the Proclamation. Ordinary politics did in fact confirm the expectation of the leaders of the Rising that the democratic mandate, as sanctioned by constitutionalized procedure, elections and parliamentary representation, would indeed be conferred *after the event*. The results in Ireland of the December 1918 elections gave to the gesture of the now-dead signatories of the Proclamation a retroactive authority of history, in contrast to the competing enterprises of the belligerent European imperial powers between 1914 and 1918, for whom nothing that happened bore out their earlier pieties.

41 The ironic inversion of expectations which is played out between 1914 and 1921 means that, in one case, we witness a succession of effects which utterly discredit the declared intentions of the great powers, while in the other, through the unfolding of an Irish nationalist relocalisation of history, we witness an improbable performative gesture, which in time will be consolidated through the ordinary procedures of politics, with the result that the routine “presentism” of the south-

ern Irish Free State will for decades conform to the matrix of the 1916 Proclamation.

42 For decades, until the emergence in the 1960s of an Irish “revisionist” school, a nationalist historiography in key with the authority of history, as claimed by the Proclamation’s signatories, would illustrate the basic *mythos* of the Rising, conforming its reading to the terms that are here established for the consideration of the national question:

43 Having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

44 The passage carries an oblique reference to the wider context of the Proclamation and Rising: the “right moment” is the moment afforded by England’s *difficulty*, which for nationalists is Ireland’s *opportunity*. For Redmond, the Rising is a betrayal of trust, for the British war government a *stab in the back*. Looked at from an imperial perspective, the violence in Dublin in April 1916 is grotesque and blasphemous. Grotesque, insofar as it is puny in comparison to the enormity of the war in Flanders or Verdun, in Gallipoli or Tannenberg.⁷ Blasphemous, insofar as it violates the *union sacrée* which the imperial democracies had invoked as a pall to be draped over the antagonisms of ordinary politics. However the comprehensive world-historical authority of the war between the imperial powers can be ignored by any seceding small nation, whose claim is simply based on the appropriated right *not to recognize* the authority of the imperial agenda. And, in any case, the “Niagara” of 1914 had effectively demonitised the claim of the liberal democratic empire to represent the sole route of history, the *voie royale* of progress.

45 It is nationhood which thus affords the most effective foundation on which to perform an act of secession from the grand narrative of civilizational empire. Such an assessment is in line with what Tom Nairn wrote in the 1970s about the enduring robustness of nationalism (Nairn 1981). What he wrote retains its pertinence, whether with reference to ongoing constitutional tensions in Great Britain or to the performative weakness of the European Union, a transnational, cosmopolitan institution that is now the object of a commonsensical

skepticism regarding its finality, with both Eurosceptics and Europhiles invoking contrary versions of the argument of the “the authority of history.” The fall-out from this contemporary predicament is the greater audibility of nationalist and non-cosmopolitan agendas, as voiced by leaders to be numbered among those whom Redmond, adopting the standard idiom of a constitutionalized politics, had referred to as the “temporary cohesion of isolated cranks.”

46 “In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms.” Here the authority of history is invoked to secure the continuity of an Irish nation, past and present, and the consequent legitimacy of the blow struck by the heroic 1916 remnant. Drawing on a more rigorously contextualized analysis of the episodes in the evolving project of Irish nationalism, and drawing also on a more comprehensive typology of European and non-European nationalisms, revisionist historians will, from the 1960s onwards, be in a position to acknowledge the post-Enlightenment genealogy of a discourse authorizing the recovery of an ideal point in an Irish Celtic “antiquity,” from which could then be fashioned a teleological project for the reestablishment of a sovereign Irish Republic in the present: how far back, and through what discursive procedures, can one postulate the continuity of the nation, and to what extent are the Proclamation and the subsequent War of Independence to be regarded as the local, insular version of a larger anti-imperial moment of the 20th century? The questions of the revisionists will however remain *academic*, for as long as they do not impinge on the performative efficacy of the invention of an Irish nation, by way of an antithetical act of self-determination, predicated on the repudiation of a liberal version of “presentism” and the consequent justification of the Rising, understood as the conclusive moment in an unbroken three-hundred year line on which the earlier acts of Rising can be threaded.

47 The antithesis to the Jamesian real, that which “we cannot possibly not know” (James 1934: 33) is the free-floating levitation of the unconnected balloon of “romance.” At various times between 1916 and 1921 and in the subsequent decades, both in Southern Ireland and in the antagonistic and complementary polity of Northern Ireland, the authority of the discourse of Irish nationhood, articulated in the 1916

Proclamation as an exposure of the false consciousness of “differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past” will encounter its limit. The encounter is with the intractable real which the performative Proclamation and the exemplary deed of the Rising had presumed to comprehend and transform. The failure in comprehension and in intended inclusiveness would lead to (i) a more modest, downward re-adjustment of the Proclamation’s territorial claims, by way of the de facto acceptance of the partition of Ireland, after 1921; (ii) a more profound qualification and revision, after the 1960s, of the exclusive authority of the discourses of Irish nationhood, partly as a result of the persistence of those “differences” which, “carefully fostered by an alien government,” were to have disappeared, through the performative force of the Proclamation. In other words, the performative efficacy of the discourse of Irish nationhood would prove unable to subsume the concurrent discourse of a Northern Irish Protestant unionism and its claim to inclusion within a British nationhood (O’Brien 1972). That nationalists could draw upon the litany of Protestant and Catholic Irishmen who had risen up “six times over the last 300 years” is here beside the point, in terms of the political effectiveness of the retrospectively threaded discourse of nationhood, which at some point in the 1960s and 1970s will seriously unravel.

48 Once performed, any act of secession that is aimed at the accomplishment of a national unity, which those who are addressed and summoned are presumed to endorse, will prove difficult or impossible to undo. In addressing “Irishmen and Irishwomen” in a manner that ignores the differences fostered by an “alien government,” the signatories proved successful, in the exceptional context of the Great War, in their symbolic and political realignment of allegiances. The magnitude of the performance can be measured by way of the collapse of the Irish Party, a collateral victim of the Great War. However, whether in Ireland or elsewhere, the forms of nationhood, drawing on a perspectivist reading of history, can achieve what of necessity is a local and a provisionally effective cohesion of allegiances and identities. Once begun, the breaking-up of the vast imperial entities unleashes a potentially interminable process of unraveling and fission. Small nations, smaller nations. The performative force of self-determination can take on a dadaist automaticity⁸. The pruned-down

kernel definition of nationhood we find in the “Cyclops” chapter in *Ulysses* is indicative that the process can assume a dimension that is tautological and self-fulfilling. The politics of nationhood, the status of the nation-state as an efficient matrix of aggregation whose force is that of a Freudian “illusion,” is analyzable as a variation on the symbolic need for an effective closure of form and composition. The terms of the dilemma are addressed by Henry James in the preface to *Roderick Hudson*. The response he offers both acknowledges the necessity of the operation and leaves room for a questioning of the effectiveness and durability of the line that has been drawn (James 1934: 5). However the aesthetic equilibrium of poetic form cannot be a blueprint for the pragmatic burden of politics, where the dilemma is that of the compass and the inclusiveness of the order to be fashioned out of and for the commonality of subjects. And while the rhetorical effectiveness of nationalism has been remarkable as a *drawing of lines* and as an effective antidote to the disenchantment that is consubstantial with modernity, its success can only be as a matrix of non-universalisable durable illusion.

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1 For an analysis of the crucial role of Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), through the republication and translation of his work, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), in the debates on memory and history in recent decades, see François Hartog, *Croire en L'Histoire*, Paris, Flammarion, 2013 (127-130)

and *Des régimes d'historicité : Présentisme et expériences du temps*, Paris, Seuil, 2003.

2 The OED definition is the following: “1. A rhetorical device by which an imaginary, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking or acting; the introduction of a pretended speaker; an instance of this. 2a. A figure of speech by which an inanimate or abstract thing is represented as a person, or as having personal characteristics, esp. the power to think or speak; an instance of this.” [/ \(http://www.oed.com/faraway.u-paris10.fr/\)](http://www.oed.com/faraway.u-paris10.fr/). The definition justifies the use of the term with reference to the rhetoric of Irish nationhood in the 1916 Proclamation and, more generally, in the political discourses of Irish nationhood. This does not involve any attempt to reduce the method of historical investigation to the analysis of rhetorical devices. For a critique of the reduction of the method of historical redaction to a set of rhetorical strategies, see Hartog (2013: 111-126).

3 The references to Ranke in Hartog (2013: 150) amount to a firm invocation of his “famous motto.” They are coherent with Hartog’s reference to the clear distinction made by Aristotle in the *Poetics* between the status of the poet, whose *mimesis* aspires to a representative typicality, and the historian’s dependence on that which did in effect occur: “l’historien, tout au contraire, est requis par ce qui est arrivé” (143-144). For a diametrically opposite approach to the relation between memory and history, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The past within us: media, memory, history*, London, Verso, 2005.

4 Throntveit, Trygve. 2011. “The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination.” *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 3: 445-481. The author argues that “such *national* self-determination – the principle that groups bound by common language or lines of descent have a right to political and territorial independence – was not one of Wilson’s Fourteen Points and was never central to his peace program. Even the bare phrase ‘self-determination’ is absent from the text of his famous speech and from nearly all his public pronouncements of the war years” (445-446).

5 For an account of the period between 1910 and 1922, during which the goal of Home Rule, through the continuation of the parliamentary strategy of the Irish Party, was superseded by the achievement of an Irish Free State, following the Rising and War of Independence, see Fanning (2013).

6 In Foster (2003: 52, 64) there are two references to Asquith, the British prime minister, in the chapter dealing with the period 1916-17. There is a mention of Yeats’s intercession to the prime minister on behalf of Roger

Casement, sentenced to death for his role in seeking German support for Irish revolution (52); there is an account of the advice given to Yeats by Lady Gregory, to whom he had written to inform her “that there had been a plot to take away his pension, on the grounds that he was pro-German [...] who replied wrathfully, telling him to go straight to Asquith” (p. 64).

7 The *Encyclopedia Britannica* indicates a total of 8,500,000 casualties for the belligerents. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “World War I,” accessed March 28, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/faraway.u-paris10.fr/EBchecked/topic/648646/World-War-I>. Regarding the War of Independence and the Rising, Hart (2003: 30) indicates a total of “well over 7,500 people [...] killed or wounded, in a country where murder had been a rarity. If the casualties of the Easter Rising are included, the toll rises to over 10,000.”

8 See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Micronation> for a typology of “micronations.” For an account of the workings of rival projects of fragmentary national nationalism in central Europe immediately after 1989, Slavoj Žižek, “Eastern Europe’s Republic’s of Gilead,” *NLR* 1/183, September-October 1990, 50-62.

English

The present article examines the divergent meanings of *the authority of history* as it is concurrently invoked, in the procedures of academic research and in the explicitly political context of a project articulated around the idea of *nationhood*. The analysis focuses on the exceptional moment of crisis affecting the European order after 1914, a moment when the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic, protagonists in the Easter Rising, invoked the authority of history in support of an event subsequently to be endowed with an interpretational authority within a nationalist perspective on Irish history.

Français

L'article analyse les interprétations divergentes de la notion d'*autorité de l'histoire*, dans le champ académique de la recherche menée par les historiens, puis dans le contexte directement politique d'un projet articulé autour de l'idée de *nation*. Sont examinées les conditions de crise et de rupture de l'ordre politique européen après 1914, où les auteurs de la proclamation d'une république d'Irlande en 1916, acteurs de l'insurrection de Pâques, ont invoqué l'autorité de l'histoire comme fondement de leur geste et sont ensuite parvenus à *faire autorité* dans la mise en perspective nationaliste de l'histoire irlandaise.

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