The Cult of Self-Sacrifice: Failure and the 1867 Rising

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The Cult of Self-Sacrifice: Failure and the 1867 Rising

The Rebel brings "forth supreme dignity from supreme humiliation" thus becoming Christ in human form redeeming the collective sin of alienation."¹

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An Ireland, happy, vigorous, spiritual [was what] fired the imagination of our poets; that made successive generations of patriot[s] give their lives to win religious and political liberty, and that will urge [others] in our time and future generations to die if need be, so that these liberties may be preserved -- De Valera (1882-1975)

In the context of 19th and 20th century Irish history, which is full of Risings against English rule, comprehensive analyses of the 1867 Rising are virtually non-existent. This is in strong contrast to the Risings that precede it: 1798, 1803 and 1848 and those that follow it namely the Easter Rising of 1916. An attempt to begin creating a comprehensive analysis of 1867 in almost any context, be it in light of the Irish belief in justice, self-sacrifice, religious freedom or independence from England represents an important first step in adjusting this situation.

Therefore, instead of attempting to explore all the reasons and motivations behind the 1867 Rising, this thesis will concentrate on how the cult of self-sacrifice was used by the Fenians, especially after the Rising to further their cause. The actual Rising itself lasted only a few short days, spent mostly crawling out of a violent snow-storm covered hills. What motivated the Fenians to rebel, as well as the consequences of their Rising on Ireland and England will be explored.
These ideas are an expansion upon those presented in an article written by Daniel O’Neil entitled "The Cult of Self-Sacrifice: The Irish Experience." In addition to exploring how this theme is relevant to 1867, it is my hope that this thesis will begin a new discourse on the 1867 Rising itself. I hope that in time, the 1867 Rising will be brought out of the historical shadow it has occupied for over a century.

In "The Cult of Self-Sacrifice" O’Neil goes into great detail to describe how the Easter Rising of 1916, had characteristics similar to previous Risings in Ireland, such as those in 1798, 1803, 1848 and 1867. The risings he describes promoted the creation of martyrs for the Irish cause of liberation and encouraged future Irish leaders to attempt similar risings.

O’Neil only briefly mentions how the Rising of 1867 was an example of the cult of self-sacrifice. He states that the sacrifices of the Fenians during the Rising "produced legends celebrated in song, story and pilgrimage." However, in previous writings that I have read on the 1867 Rising, this fact is overlooked, if not completely ignored. O’Neil himself, makes no further reference to the 1867 Rising except to state that this kind of "minority" Rising "represented the real Ireland."

To determine how the Fenians used the cult of self-sacrifice in 1867 this thesis will answer the following:
Did the Rising make a virtue out of necessity? Did the Fenians use self-sacrifice and martyrs to contribute to their ideological legitimacy? Did the Fenian’s use of self-sacrifice create role-models for the uninitiated? Did the Fenian’s use of self-sacrifice cause plaudits from followers and potential followers? Did the Fenian’s use of self-sacrifice appeal to the machismo or masochistic values of a marginalized society? Finally, did the Fenian’s use of self-sacrifice continue Ireland’s traditional grievances against England for centuries of English occupation and persecution against the Irish Roman Catholic majority.

Proving that O’Neil’s thesis also applies to 1867, should begin a new discourse on the Rising itself. For if the Rising of 1867 was an example of self-sacrifice, then the previous belief in the Rising as little more than a political and military "failure" must be re-evaluated.4

In this thesis, the words sacrifice and Rising have dual Christian and Fenian contexts. In Christianity sacrifice brings to mind Jesus’ dying on the cross. In Fenian ideology, sacrifice refers to the lives lost to free Ireland from English rule. In Christianity, the word Rising alludes to the Resurrection of Jesus, while for the Fenian it refers to the series of Irish rebellions against the English.

The Irish rebelled repeatedly throughout the 19th and
20th centuries, culminating in the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922. The Fenians, perhaps subconsciously, used the words of the pulpit. To do otherwise would have cut them off from the soul of Ireland. In time, they hoped that a Rising would finally liberate Ireland, in the same way Christians believe that the next Rising of Jesus liberates the world.

I Who were the Fenians, and why did they chose 1867?

The 1867 Rising was not fought in a vacuum. The 1867 Rising signifies one struggle in a chain of centuries of conflict against English occupation. These Risings led to Ireland ceasing to exist as a nation in 1801. The 1801 Act of Union was an English response to two Risings in 1798.

One of these 1798 Risings was led by Wolfe Tone and was secular in nature, while the other was in Wexford county led by Roman Catholic priests. Both Risings failed. These Risings created a desire in England to remove the Irish threat once and for all. By uniting Ireland and England, and moving the Irish government to London it was hoped that in time the Irish would cease to be a threat to England, and would adopt English norms and customs in the same manner as the Welsh and Scots.

In order to keep this from happening, Irish revolutionaries resisted the incorporation of Ireland
into England through repeated Risings. The first Rising in the 19th century was in 1803, led by Robert Emmet. The next was in 1848, led by the Young Ireland movement. The third Rising, and the topic of this thesis, was in 1867, led by the Fenians. Though each Rising failed, they did continue the struggle against English rule, and kept alive the dream of a free Ireland.

The Fenians of 1867 sought to continue the struggle for Irish independence. Like the Fenians of 1848, they wanted to maintain a connection to the 1798 Rising of Wolfe Tone. Tone set the stage for both the 1848 and 1867 Risings by establishing the idea of Ireland united as a nation, separate and equal from England.

On March 17, 1858, only ten years after the failure of the 1848 Rising, and during the peak of the Great Famine, James Stephens (1824-1901) and John O’Mahony (1815-1877) founded the Fenian movement.\(^1\) Both of these men had participated in the 1848 Rising.\(^2\) The day chosen to found the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was not chosen at random, March 17th is St. Patrick’s day. The IRB’s goal was a total break with British rule. This break was a further evolution of the ideals of the Young Ireland movement that sought to break free of the Old Ireland of Daniel O’Conner (1775-1847).

The Fenians, under the initial leadership of James Stephens, renewed the militant nationalist pride of the
Irish that had been found in the Ribbonism and Whiteboys of previous eras, and had emerged in truly organized forms during the 1790s and then again during the late 1840s. Stephens and O'Mahony, like Wolfe Tone before them, sought to base the ideals of the IRB on the French Revolution, where the masses rose up against the established powers and created a new order. Though the Fenians often went years without accomplishing much for Irish liberation, the Fenians themselves never died out. Their dream of a free Ireland never faltered, which "enabled the men of 1916 to claim direct descent from them."  

Fenian cells were formed by the IRB in America and France. The IRB hoped these cells would light a fire in the spirit of the Irish nation, similar to the revolutions which had swept the rest of Europe in 1848. A Rising in Ireland, coinciding with those on the continent, might have succeeded and gained the support of the new revolutionary governments abroad. Their main obstacle, during the 1840s and early 1850s, was the Great Famine. The Famine decimated the population of Ireland and left those Irish who survived with larger stakes of land. This gave them less of a desire to lose what they had gained through the deaths and emigration of their relatives in a violent attempt at revolutionary liberty. In addition, the militant and radical Fenian political stance, the "seriousness with which they took themselves,
and their willingness to use violent methods," left the middle and upper classes of Ireland disaffected and strongly opposed to their cause.⁵

By 1867, the Fenians had failed to gain the key backing of the majority of Irish farmers with 30 or more acres of land who were emerging as the key to Ireland’s future. The Fenian’s emulation of the Young Italians who desecrated the Vatican during their 1848 Rising in Ireland earned them the whole-hearted opposition and condemnation of the Catholic Hierarchy.⁶ Support for the Fenian cause came from the lower class workers, which in Ireland meant the "laborers, small tradesmen and sons of peasants."⁷ To understand what the Fenians were struggling for, one might study the organization and oaths that they were required to take and participate in. The Fenians, like many secret societies of Ireland and Europe before them, were based on a cell-like structure, called circles. Their oath was an important part of Fenian initiation which established camaraderie similar to that of a conventional army. Two versions exist -- the original and the Paris. The original oath was:

I, A B, do solemnly swear, in the presence of Almighty God, that I will do my utmost, at every risk, while life lasts, to make Ireland an independent Democratic Republic; that I will yield implicit obedience, in all things not contrary to the law of God, to the commands of my superior officers; and that I shall preserve inviolable secrecy regarding all the transactions of this secret society that may be
confided in me. So help me God! Amen.

The oath was the first stage in joining the Fenians. The second phase was one’s placement in a Fenian circle. Fenian circles were equivalent to a military regiment. The leader of the cell was known as the centre, referred to by the letter A, and might be considered equivalent to a colonel. The A’s chose nine B’s, or captains. The B’s chose nine C’s, or sergeants. The C’s chose nine D’s, who constituted the Fenian rank and file. John O’Leary (1830-1907), an IRB leader explained: "an A should only be known to the B’s; a B to his C’s; and a C to his D’s; but this rule was often violated." The circle cell structure offered the Fenians a certain sense of security and united them with similar underground groups throughout Europe.

In 1859, Stephens and O’Mahony brought their Fenian movement to the United States. A main base for the Fenians was New York City, which, after the Great Famine and the large immigrations of the 1840s and 1850s, had become an Irish stronghold. By 1860, New York had become the financial capital of the Fenians. Then came the first major setbacks. In 1865, the British closed down the Irish People in Dublin, stopped the shipments of men, money and material from the United States to Ireland and promptly arrested James Stephens. These actions caused repeated postponements of the Rising, making it impossible
to start the Rising until 1867.

Stephen's escape from prison in 1865 made him a hero to the Irish people. Unfortunately for the Fenians, on the day set for the Rising, in March 1867, a freak blizzard occurred. The blizzard paralyzed the Fenians, making their arrests and imprisonments easy for the British authorities. The Fenians who managed not to get arrested, made an ineffectual assault on Dublin from Wicklow Hills. Instead of the heroic storming of the city, the Fenians "unarmed, unprovisioned, unsheltered, unsupported [were forced to part] company, slipped back into their homes." Those Fenians who escaped, slipped out of Ireland to safer lands.

The constant delays in starting the Rising and the lack of needed men and material, can be better understood after an investigation into British surveillance of the Fenian movement. It is an understatement to say that the surveillance was extensive. An example of this can be seen through the story of Matt Harris.

Matt Harris (1825-1890) was "one of the three members of the Supreme Council of the Fenians," who had helped to organize the 1867 Rising. Records show that Mr. Harris was followed by British police even outside of the British Isles. They went so far as to "open his mail at his hotel in New York." This kind of surveillance created an atmosphere of caution. This led the leaders of the
Rising, especially Stephens, to continually postpone the starting date of the Rising as plans were discovered and men captured.

Yet, even when one acknowledges that the 1867 Rising was feeble, poorly planned and riddled with informers, it is important to keep in mind the words of John O'Leary:

both as to the numbers and places [because of] the lack of money and the consequent difficulty in finding agents, or rather in paying them 16

In time, the 1867 Rising took on great significance. Ironically, this happened through the actions of the British themselves. These actions included wide-scale crack-downs throughout Ireland and the suspension of civil rights. But the most counterproductive actions of the British were the executions and imprisonment of Irish rebels, which turned little known Irishmen into national heroes.

The 1867 Rising failed to achieve its military objectives in all but a few small towns. Even these short lived victories could not be held by the Fenians. The Rising also failed to spark a general revolt in Ireland. Yet for all these failures, the 1867 Rising achieved a great deal through the creation of a new generation of martyrs in the cause of Irish liberation. The Fenians showed that a revolt against English rule was possible even sixty-six years after the Act of Union, and perhaps more importantly, they showed that the British
were not invincible.

The Fenians of 1867, first seen as being foolish by the general Irish populace, became folk heroes celebrated in song. This is especially true after the execution of the Manchester Three, whose deaths inspired the Irish people. Songs of a free and independent Ireland were motivated by their last words. T. D. Sullivan (1827-1914) wrote:

desirous of paying tribute as I could to the memory of the patriots, I wrote, a few days after their execution, a song which had for its refrain the prayer which [the Three] had uttered on the dock, 'God Save Ireland',"17

Mr. T. P. O'Connor (1848-1929), a contemporary of Mr. Sullivan, stated that whenever Irish people met the "proceedings regularly close[d] with the singing of 'God Save Ireland.'"18

It is easy for one to forget these men were killed for allegedly attempting to rescue Fenians like Colonel Thomas Kelly Henry, who had participated in the 1867 Rising.19 If there had been no Rising, there would have been no rescue attempt, and therefore no martyrs. A more thorough understanding of the aftermath of the 1867 Rising makes clear that it was not just a failed revolutionary attempt. Rather, the 1867 Rising becomes part of the chain of Risings where the cult of self-sacrifice is used by the Irish revolutionary to maintain a separate identity from England. There is no better example of this for the
1867 Rising than the Manchester Martyrs described above.

II Did the Rising make a virtue out of necessity?

The leaders of the Rising of 1867, particularly in its early stages, did make a virtue of necessity of starting the Rising as soon as possible. Apart from the constant postponement, there was a sense of urgency that Ireland had to be liberated from English rule. Even so, as mentioned before, the Fenian leadership constantly postponed the date of the Rising. The original date of the Rising was put off from 1865 repeatedly. Finally in October of 1866 James Stephens was removed from leadership "having failed to fulfill yet another promise of action."

The men who replaced Stephens, like Colonel Thomas H. Kelly (1833-1908), were hardly more practical than Stephens in their understanding of the reality of a successful uprising against British rule, but they were much more desirous of the uprising starting as soon as possible. The new leadership believed:

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too many promises had been made, too many hopes had been raised, and too many subscriptions had been taken up to permit of [sic] any turning back. As they saw things, they had burnt their boats, both as individuals and collectively, and the credibility of fenianism was at stake.
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However, the procrastination of the previous leadership had cost the Fenians valuable time. The Irish regiments in Ireland, that would have formed a core of trained Irish soldiers, were transferred by the British to England.
Informers and British spies had thoroughly infiltrated and exposed the Fenian plans by the time a firm date was set for 1867 as seen by the mass arrests two years earlier under the suspension of *Habeas Corpus*.³

The Fenians were aware of the difficulty of their situation. Every day of waiting made their plans harder to realize. This created a Fenian leadership more interested in the practicalities of getting the Rising started rather than considering its consequences should it succeed or fail. The Irish writer Sean O'Faolain (1900 - ) admonishes the Fenians during this period for the way they "choked the critical side of their minds...so that their passion for change and their vision of change never pierced to organic change."⁴ O'Faolain also criticizes the militancy of the Fenians cause. He feels that it "gave nothing to political science--gave less even than the priest was to give to science and religion."⁵ For all these honest criticisms it is helpful to realize that in the formative time of a revolution, grand schemes and political ideologies are often set aside until the actual act of liberation occurs.

Fenian and IRB doctrine called for an "ultimate resort to armed force" based on what the Young Irishers of 1848 had learned from the Europeans, especially the Italians, during the revolutions of 1848.⁶ They based their planned revolution on the conspiratorial Carbonari
model, which reached its "apotheosis in the prelude to the Easter Rising of 1916."7 Those who sought membership in the IRB, needed to show their conviction and dedication to work for the cause of "separatism without pay or and other material reward".8 It should be noted that not all those included in the Fenian movement were members of the IRB. Even so, the IRB was ready to use individuals "who could help in the liberation of Ireland".9 Yet for all the division, it was the IRB which led and dominated the rank and file of the 1867 Rising.

After the 1867 Rising, several decisions made by the Fenian leadership almost defeated the rationale for having the Rising in the first place. One such decision was backing Charles Stuart Parnell (1846-1891). In backing Parnell, the Fenians tempered their violence and used their movement to stir up support for Parnell’s constitutional reforms. The success of the Parnellite movement in creating land reform through a non-violent constitutional reform almost eliminated the need for Fenians altogether. When the Parnellite movement gained momentum, and a free Ireland seemed at hand, the cries for violent liberation had little audience with the Irish masses and the Fenian movement itself was in danger of crumbling.10

Two realities saved the Fenians. The first was Parnell’s loss in the House of Commons. Parnell’s failure
at constitutional reform postponed Home Rule indefinitely. The second was the realization that the new Land Laws that Parnell and his Home Rule party did gain from the House of Commons were "not a real solution to the Irish Question."

These laws "did not let those who work the land," own it as well, resulting only in a new and more oppressive form of land tenure. The desire to remove the landlord's oppression found its agent in the Fenian and violent Irish nationalism. In time, the Fenians returned to their goal of a quick and decisive victory against English rule to liberate all of Ireland.

III Did the Fenian's use of self-sacrifice and martyrs contribute to their having ideological legitimacy?

Because the Fenians were determined to use military force to free Ireland, those parties that sought a peaceful transition, such as the constitutional nationalist politicians and the Catholic clergy, were forced to work together to restrain the people. Yet in the years following the 1867 Rising a coalition was formed between the three parties when the political and religious factions realized that if they joined with the Fenians, instead of fighting them, real change could be achieved.

The success of the politicians almost eliminated the Fenian cause altogether. However, their failure to achieve Home Rule for Ireland placed the mantel of revolutionary leadership back into the hands of the
Fenians. The Fenians, emboldened by the failures of the politicians, were more than willing to return to an attempt at violent liberation.²

To better understand how the Fenians achieved ideological legitimacy by being rebels defending Irish culture, the views and observations of the Irish writer O'Faolain, who explores this theme in his monograph The Irish will be addressed. O'Faolain explains that the first kind of rebel fights against "immediate injustice, from these rebels come peasant revolts and men like the Whiteboys and Ribbonmen."³ These two forces represented groups determined to use violence against English oppression in the decades before the 1867 Rising. However, they were poorly organized, and did little more than sow terror in the night.

The second kind of rebel "sees beyond the immediate thing to the larger implications," through the use of revolutionary language like "Emancipation, Liberty, Freedom."⁴ These rebels were more like the Fenians of 1867. Even though O'Faolain does not feel the Fenians had had long range goals, they did represent a more organized and efficient form of rebel.

This kind of rebel was not as concerned as past revolutionaries were with the concept of failure. This lack of concern came from their realization that the Fenian was:
a professional or vocational failure... he always knew that the odds were against him... Death did not mean failure so long as the Spirit of Revolt lived. The Rebel did not... mind obliteration and anonymity.

O'Paolain goes on to state that "thousands upon thousands of Irish rebels have never been known and their sacrifice will never be known," but indeed the sacrifices of the Fenian of 1867 have been preserved and remembered.

The preservation and remembrance of the Fenians of 1867 begins with the very words they chose to describe themselves and their cause. For example, the word Fenian calls back to the primordial history of Ireland; an Ireland before the coming of St. Patrick. This was an Ireland where pagan Celtic tribesmen fought fierce wars against God, beast and their fellow human beings.

The word Fenian comes from the Irish Gaelic word Fian, and refers to a band of warriors. The word Fenian recalls the bands of Irish warriors before Ireland was conquered by England. The word Fian was used again by Eamon De Valera (1882-1975) in his Fianna Fail party, and recalls his party's ties to the 19th century Fenians and his own twentieth century IRA.

The most famous Fenian tales are those of the Red Branch. These stories comprised for the Irish, like myths of Homer did for the Greeks, a "national epic." They featured Cuchulain, "the immensely powerful and cunning champion of Ulster" and his battle with Ferdia, his
foster brother. The images of him "fighting animals" made a "fitting conclusion to a story full of violence, passion and nobility. It is known that John O'Mahony, chose the name Fenian "in honour of the ancient Fianna."

It is not surprising to find this kind of strong tie between Fenian nationalism and Irish folklore and poetry. Large numbers of teachers were involved in the Fenian cause. The Shanachies, or storytellers, have long been important figures in Ireland. In Irish culture, poets are seen as "extremely powerful figures...respectful of the spoken word, and concerned that self-identity and corporate identity--both defined by law, memory, and legend," so that the tales and culture of Ireland would not be lost to those of England.

Therefore, the Fenians gained ideological legitimacy as soldier-guardians of Irish culture against English thought and culture. Their lexicon called back to their nation's pagan, as well as Christian past. Their lexicon represented what they felt made Ireland unique and different, which would be lost if Ireland became English.

The Fenians considered Wolfe Tone's act of suicide in 1798, preventing his execution as an English criminal, a heroic act for Ireland. After Tone's death, the Fenians viewed acts of treason against England to be the "highest form of loyalty, to Ireland."
IV Did the Fenian’s use of self-sacrifice create role-models for the uninitiated?

The Fenians of 1867 represented one segment in an unbroken chain of revolutionaries, from the 19th century to the 20th. During the period between the 1867 and 1916 Risings, the Irish Republican Brotherhood became the Irish Republican Army. The Fenians learned from the failures of the Young Ireland movement. Many Fenian leaders, and detractors, like William O’Brien, survived or escaped imprisonment from the 1848 Rising. Fenian leaders such as James Stephens and John O’Mahony evaded captured during the 1848 Rising and went to Paris, then a center for European revolutionaries.

The initial failure of the 1867 Rising did not help the Fenians garner support from the Irish populace. It was not until the execution of the Manchester Martyrs, on November 23rd, 1867, that public opinion towards the Fenians changed. The British authorities sought to crush the Fenians once and for all, and decided to execute several Fenians and suspected Fenians to make their point. According to the British, the reason for the execution of the men, who came to be known as the Manchester Three, was that there had been:

an attempt [by] a small party of excited Irishmen to release from a prison van as it rolled through the streets the Irish political prisoners enclosed in it resulted in the death of a policeman
The Manchester Three included William Allen, Michael Larkin, whose grandfather had participated in the Wexford Rising of 1798, and Michael O’Brien. Michael O’Brien had joined the Fenian cause in America during the Civil War, earned the rank of Lieutenant and went to Ireland after slipping past British security. The executions of these men recalled the hanging of Robert Emmet (1778-1803) for his failed 1803 Rising. On the dock, it is said that the three men shouted out the words "God Save Ireland!"\(^2\)

The executions created a backlash against the British rule. The execution of the Manchester Three turned a failed Rising into a rallying cry for the Fenians, and allowed them to rise out of their defeat. By December of 1867, there were massive demonstrations in Ireland. The words "God Save Ireland!" became a rallying cry, an underground anthem for the Fenians.\(^3\) Even members of the clergy, such as Cardinal Newman (1801-1890), were moved by the ordeals of the Fenians, especially those who had been imprisoned. Cardinal Newman stated that had he been born an Irishman "I should be (in heart) a rebel."\(^4\)

While still a young man, Charles Stuart Parnell witnessed the execution of the Manchester Martyrs on Saturday, November 23rd, 1867. Upon investigating their cases, Parnell came to the conclusion that the three had been innocent of the crimes they had been executed for. Parnell also heard the last words of the Three.\(^5\) These
words changed how Parnell saw Ireland. Three years after the 1867 Rising, Parnell's anger led him into the leadership of the Home Rule movement which fought for Irish independence.  

For the Fenians, enlisting a man like Parnell represented an immense boon to their cause. His presence gave the Fenians the semblance of political legitimacy. One of the Fenians responsible for enlisting Parnell was Michael Davitt. Davitt (1846-1906) had fought in the 1867 Rising, was imprisoned and endured hard labor. He was released in 1870 through the actions of Parnell. Michael Davitt's work with Parnell led to the creation of a Fenian-constitutional alliance which became known as the New Departure. This New Departure concentrated on how to change and make the land ownership in Ireland more proportional for those who lived and worked it as well as those who owned it.

The New Departure was a political attempt to gain the reforms in land tenure and political independence, which the 1867 Rising had not gained through force. The 1867 Rising gave the Fenians power and influence within Irish politics which could not be ignored by the constitutional politicians like Parnell. It is unlikely that without the 1867 Rising and the execution of the Martyrs, Parnell would have been willing to work so openly with the Fenians. The Rising empowered the hand of Parnell in his
attempts to bring the injustices of Ireland to the forefront of English politics. The Fenian’s repeated use of violence made Parnell’s implied threat of violence, if the Home Rule movement failed, more plausible. When the negotiations with the British failed, Parnell and his followers joined with the Fenians, initiating a struggle against English rule known as the Land War.\(^\text{10}\)

In addition to Parnell, William Gladstone (1809-1898), Prime Minister of England during the 1867 Rising, was moved by the experiences of the Fenians. This influence came through the writings of John Stuart Mill.\(^\text{11}\) Gladstone’s conscience was a powerful thing, and the 1867 Rising brought it to bear on the conditions of Ireland. It was under his leadership that Parliament moved to disestablish the Church of Ireland, leading the way for the re-establishment of the legality of the Roman Catholic church and a renewal of a separate Irish identity.\(^\text{12}\) In 1870, Gladstone introduced an act which began the process of gradual reform in the conditions of tenant farmers in Ireland.\(^\text{13}\) The 1867 Rising and the Manchester Three which came from its aftermath represent an important influence, that gave him a firm reason to initiate reform in Ireland. Without the 1867 Rising Gladstone might have delayed his Irish reform, or not initiated them at all.

\(\checkmark\) Did the Fenian’s use of self-sacrifice cause plaudits from followers and potential followers?
One example of how the Fenians in their calls and attempts to make Ireland independent caused plaudits from potential followers can be found in John Bright (1811-1889). Bright was an English businessman who became known as "one of the great radical spokesmen" of the later part of the 19th century.¹ Bright provides an example of how the Fenians influenced some English citizens in a speech delivered in Dublin on November 2, 1866. He stated that:

I have thought, if I could be in all things the same, but by birth an Irishman, there is not a town in this island I would not visit for the purpose of discussing the great Irish question, and of rousing my countrymen to some great and united action.²

But Mr. Bright was just one man. The Fenians wanted to make the whole of Ireland turn its back on English rule. To succeed in this they needed martyrs. They needed people who's deaths would rally the nation behind the Fenian cause as examples of Fenian and Irish national pride. The Fenians found their needed Martyrs in the form of the Manchester Three.

The ill treatment of the Fenian prisoners and the execution of the Manchester Martyrs turned many Irish citizens against the British. As mentioned before, their execution was a catalyst in Charles Stuart Parnell's political career, leading to the foundation of the Amnesty Association whose actions on the part of imprisoned Fenians brought their cause into the homes of Ireland and
England. Specifically for Parnell, according to Katherine O'Shea (1845-1921), his second wife, the execution of the Manchester Three "crystallized his hatred," of English rule over Ireland.³

In contrast to Parnell, the Irish Roman Catholic clergy had no love for the Fenians or other Irish nationalists during the 19th century. Bishop David Moriarty of Kerry (1814-1817) went so far as to state that "hell was not hot enough nor eternity long enough for members of the Republican Brotherhood."⁴ The Irish clergy, under Cardinal Paul Cullen (1803-1878) attempted to stop Fenians of 1867 by condemning them as heretics and not allowing them to receive the Eucharist. Cardinal Cullen went so far as to forbid "the use of the pro-Cathedral, Dublin for the lying in state" of Terence MacManus (1823-1860) a Young Irelander and Fenian.⁵

However, the execution of the Manchester Three placed the Roman Catholic Church into a short, unspoken alliance with the Fenians. After the execution of the Three, the Irish Catholic Church allowed a "flood of funeral processions, demonstrations and requiem services in 1868."⁶ The ability of the Fenians to use violence to forge short periods of union with other, often opposing, groups has been noted by A. M. Sullivan (1830-1884). He stated that during this time the "distinction between Fenian and non-Fenian Nationalists seemed to disappear,"
and the idea of an Irish identity was slowly reborn.\textsuperscript{7}

In addition to famous leaders, it is useful to explore how the 1867 Rising effected Irish not as famous as Parnell, Mill or Gladstone. One such person was Joseph McDonnell. His participation in the 1867 Rising gave him the tools he used to fight for improvements in the conditions of the workers in America.

Joseph McDonnell was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1847. Five years after the 1867 Rising, McDonnell represented Ireland in the Hauge Congress of the First International where he "sided with Marxists, organized several huge London labor free-speech demonstrations and served three terms," before coming to American in the early part of 1873.\textsuperscript{8} During his years as a militant worker's advocate, McDonnell "edited a New York socialist weekly," traveling the Eastern United States in order to further the cause of socialism.\textsuperscript{9} Though it might be argued that McDonnell's experiences pushed him beyond the primary call of the Irish revolutionary, it is unlikely that he would have embraced the broader goals of Marxism -- liberation of the working class as a whole, without his participation and imprisonment following the 1867 Rising.

A final example of how the Fenians offered plaudits for potential followers and sympathizers can be seen in poet Matthew Arnold (1822-1888). His comments on the 1867 Rising are found in "Doing As One Likes". In this
essay, Mr. Arnold stated:

the difference between an Irish Fenian and an English rough is so immense [he is] so evidently desperate and dangerous, a man of a conquered race, a Papist, with centuries of ill-usage to influence him against [the English] with no admiration of our institutions, no love of our virtues. Tell him [of] British industrialism and individualism [and] he remains cold! Evidently, if we could deal tenderly with a sentimentalist like this, it is not out of pure philanthropy.

Though Arnold uses words like Papist to describe the Irish, one should note in his defense that some scholars view that this kind of essay offered "in theory at least...an opening for positive initiatives," for the betterment of Ireland.

VI Did the Fenian’s use of self-sacrifice appeal to the machismo or masochistic values of a marginalized society?

In 1848, Roman Catholic priests were perceived as possessing the real political power in Ireland. It has been argued that if even a handful of the clergy had "placed themselves at the head of their people, like the Wexford priests of 1798, matters might have been different." As mentioned before, the Irish clergy did not support the 1848 or 1867 risings. To understand why the Irish clergy strongly opposed the Fenians, one needs to return to the Wolfe Tone's 1798 Rising.

By 1798, the Irish clergy had imported a style of ecclesiastical control from France which promoted a
"hatred of the revolutionary spirit in their devotion to the old monarchical absolutism."² The next step in understanding the Irish clergy's hostility to Fenianism is to return to the Rising of 1848. In 1848 Italian revolutionaries, who the Fenians emulated, sacked and desecrated the Vatican. The Irish clergy had no desire to support this kind of revolutionary nationalist.

These events created an Irish clergy willing to support the English, even if it meant crippling Irish liberation through excommunication. Priests often worked alongside English magistrates to halt the relaxation of "the authority's grip on society [even] over popular recreation."³ The Fenians garnered a large share of support from the lower classes and artisans of the period -- by offering an alternative to these restrictions imposed by the Clergy and authorities. The Fenians promised a liberated Ireland, and challenged the authority in their fear of "'manliness'" emerging from subversive activities which threatened clerical control⁴

The Fenians sensed that the Irish needed a more dynamic outlet for their frustrations than the prayer groups offered by the clergy. By the late 19th century, the use of weapons to maim, kill and intimidate, had been firmly established in Ireland.⁵ Violence against English rule during the 19th century first appeared in the form of random atrocities by anti-landlord bands called
Whiteboys. The angst which the Whiteboys represented was re-channeled into the Fenian cause. The Fenians believed that the Irish, use to conspiracy, swearing in, and arms seizures would support a revolution.

VII Did the Fenian's use of self-sacrifice continue Ireland's traditional grievances against England?

In trying to understand why the Rising of 1867 provided a means to continue Irish grievances against English rule, it is important to recall how the Irish reacted to the previous Rising of 1848. Though the 1848 Rising was somewhat more extensive than the 1867 Rising, it too ended:

in bitter recrimination. The revolutionaries blamed the priests [while others] blamed the people. The priest in turn blamed the revolutionaries because it failed to create real change in the daily lives of the Irish population.

The 1848 Rising left Ireland in bitter poverty and pain. It did not help Ireland come out of the desolation of the Great Famine. Even so, the Fenians continued their revolutionary struggle to 1867 and beyond. They continued their struggle if only because they "could see hope in resistance [where] the alternative was submission." John O'Leary (1830-1907), publisher of The Nation proclaimed that the literature and culture of Ireland would remain
tied to England unless Irish intellectuals and writers aided the Fenian cause and re-introduced Irish culture, language and literature. An Ireland without a separate identity from that of England could not produce "great literature."5

Severing ties with England had to be swift and final. Such a belief led to the Irish cultural revival, best represented in the works of writers like William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). In the realm of politics, severing ties with England was desired by the Fenians who felt that slow political devolution, desired by the Home Rule movement, was not acceptable. This is true, even though as mentioned before, the Fenians often engaged in alliances with men like Parnell. Britain was seen as an occupier, their culture overpowering that of Ireland. Revolution was required to stop the destruction of Irish culture and language before the damage was irreparable.

Therefore, the Fenian, like many nationalists during the 19th century, tried to create a national consciousness through violence.6 The Fenians enabled constitutional reformers like Parnell to play the role of the moderate, using the Fenian card as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the English. When men like Parnell failed, the Fenians were empowered to act more forcefully in the name of the Irish nation.

During the period of 1865 until the actual Rising in
1867, the Fenians attempted to renew their membership drive with the publication of John Mitchell's (1815-1875) *Jail Journals* in the United States. Through the publication of this journal, the Fenians attempted to build upon American bitterness for the British and re-awaken American support for the Fenian cause. Mitchell's writings strongly condemned England and its government. The Fenians hoped to capitalize on the opportunity of having so many Irish-Americans leaving the Union Army after the Civil War in order to enlist them into their cause.

By the end of the American Civil War there were nearly three million Irish living in the United States, almost the population of Ireland itself at that time. Many of these Irish returned to Ireland, often to help the Fenian cause. By 1865, English prisons were filled with Irish Americans "arrested for treason or sedition." The English felt that they were returning solely to aid the Fenian cause. More Irish Americans might have returned to Ireland to fight for the Fenian cause if the Fenian leaders in America had not made the fatal error of launching an invasion of Canada in 1866. The invasion failed, frightening many prospective Irish-Americans away from the Fenian cause and making the Fenians look foolish.

The Fenian failures in Canada also made the British more determined to stamp out the Fenians in Ireland.
During the years of 1866-67, the British intercepted over one thousand shipments of arms to Ireland from the United States, and thoroughly infiltrated the cell structure of the Fenian movement. Yet the success of these actions against the Fenians only added to Irish hatred. The arrests, "trials, speeches from the dock, imprisonments," increased the level of suffering of the Irish people, and enlarged the cult of self-sacrifice by making Fenian sacrifices look noble and inspiring.  

The 1867 Rising and its aftermath also served to bring the Fenian cause to the attention of the world. Newspapers like the New York Times printed stories on their actions. Although they painted a bleak picture of the Rising, they did report the fact that a Rising had occurred. News of the 1867 Rising also found their way into the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederick Engels (1820-1895). The two noted, in letters dated November 20th, 1867, that the killing of the Manchester Three would be viewed by the Irish people as an act of "political revenge." In a letter written to Marx, Engels stated that the:

> Fenians could not have asked for a better precedent...the execution of the three has made the liberation of Kelly and Deasy a heroic deed...which will now be sung to every Irish babe in the cradle in Ireland, England and America.

The writings and opinions expressed by these men,
turned the 1867 Rising into a reference for future Marxists, namely their modern IRA and provisional [PIRA] descendants. Their writings show how England's execution of the Manchester Three actually assisted the Fenian cause by creating needed martyrs. Therefore, the 1867 Rising, which might have faded into total oblivion, was ironically rescued by the English themselves.

The execution of the Manchester Three created an upsurge in Irish hostility toward the English. The English turned a failed revolt into a lesson for the next crop of Fenians. This was a mistake the English repeated, through the execution of the next generation of Fenians, during the Easter Rising of 1916. Their executions created so much Irish indignation that a full scale civil war erupted six years later. This new generation of Fenians, inspired by 1867, fought in the Easter Rising of 1916. The 1916 Rising in turn led to the Black and Tan War of the 1920s, without which, the Irish Republic of today would not exist.

VIII The 1867 Rising in Historical Perspective:

After the apparent failure of the 1867 Rising, and the success of martyrdom, the large turnouts of Irish citizens during Fenian burials were not lost on the Fenian leadership. The funerals acted as catalysts for creating a true Irish national identity. The funerals of
Fenian martyrs became important rallying points after 1867, and continued to be so even after the 1916 Easter Rising. The practice began with the funeral of "Terence Bellew McManus in 1861."¹ The Fenians realized that a "great demonstration journey for his remains" would create sympathy for their cause and would combat clerical attacks like those of Cardinal Cullen.² Funerals of this kind can still be witnessed in the streets and cemeteries of Ulster.

The children of the 1867 Fenians became the leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916. The 1916 Fenians realized that even a military defeat, similar to that of 1867, was worthwhile. They felt that a "heroic action, even a futile one, would galvanize public opinion."³ These Fenians, like their ancestors, were willing to die as "a moral gesture," in order to incite the Irish people to revolution.⁴ The 1867 Fenians and their successors established a maxim in Irish nationalism that only a revolution "could free Ireland of British rule."⁵ They felt that playing a political game by Britain's rules in the House of Commons non-productive and only stalled Irish freedom.

It has been argued that the martyrdom of the leaders of the 1867 and 1916 Risings had no meaning -- that they failed.⁶ The Easter Rising, like the Rising of 1867, was led by a small elite detached from the majority, who
lacked support due to their being condemned by the Church. They failed to get the backing of the constitutional nationalists and the people initially threw mud at them, calling them fools. This is a shortsighted argument. It could be argued that the Easter Rising of 1916 was almost intended to fail. With so few men and only light weapons there was really no way they could succeed against the English.

Upon further investigation into the 1916 Easter Rising, one finds connections to the generation before who participated in the Rising of 1867. This is not unlike the previously mentioned connection of leaders and Fenians from 1848 participating in the 1867 Rising. Several of the key figures of the 1916 Easter Rising such as John Devoy (1842-1928), Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa (1831-1915) and others, immigrated to America after being incarcerated for their actions before and during the 1867 Rising. Later, they returned to Ireland to plan and participate in the Easter Rising. Many of these Fenians, who fought a second time in 1916, lost their lives.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Fenians within it, remained a powerful force in Ireland until the Easter Rising of 1916. It has been argued that the Fenian Brotherhood died in the 1870s and was succeeded by an organization called Clan na Gael. However, this argument admits that after the failures of 1867 and 1916, the Irish
Republican Brotherhood survived as a force in Irish nationalism. By the early 1900s, those Fenians who survived, along with their descendants, were found to be attending "every Convention of the Clan na Gael," which was one of the successor organizations to the IRB.9

In addition to participating in the Clan na Gael, many 1867 Fenians and their descendants, joined the Irish Volunteers during WWI. After the Rising of 1916, the newspaper of the Volunteers An T-Oglach (the Young Warrior) declared, on December, 1918 that "the Irish Volunteers are the Army of the Irish Republic."10 This Army of the Irish Republic became known as the Irish Republican Army.11 After the liberation of the majority of Ireland, there was a period of calm with little Fenian violence. Then, after peaceful demonstrations in Ulster provoked protestant violence during the 1960s, the ideals of the Fenians re-emerged through the IRA as a force for Irish-Catholic liberation.12

IX Personal Reflections:

The Irish Rising of 1867, when mentioned at all in historical essays and monographs, is most often referred to as a failure. I disagree. The aftermath of the 1867 Rising, especially the execution of the Manchester Three, re-shaped the political climate of Ireland and England by bringing Charles Stuart Parnell into politics. The act
also gave inspiration to the next generation to rise in 1916 and eventually won full independence for Ireland in the 1940s. If the Fenians had not risen against the English in 1867, and again in 1916, WWI might have bonded the Irish identity too closely with England. Such a bond might have been impossible to overcome, resulting in even greater amounts of blood being spilled.

The cult of self-sacrifice was one of the important influences in the aftermaths of both the 1867 and 1916 Risings. The actions of revolutionary societies, like the Fenians and IRB, forced the English into a paranoia, resembling the Penal Code era of the last century. Any pretense of the Irish being British citizens was removed. In time, the Irish farmers, the Catholic Church, and the constitutional nationalists came to see the Fenian use of violence as necessary.

Without violence, at least initially, there would have been no hope of breaking from the union with England. There would have been no freedom or identity if they remained in the empire. This was perhaps the most important step the Irish people took toward national identity. Without realizing the value of the Rising and of violence, Ireland would have remained part of the British Commonwealth, still under the reign of the English monarchy.

Trying to understand the modern manifestations of the
Fenians, the IRA and Provisional IRA [PIRA] without studying the actions of their ancestors, makes it easy to categorize the IRA and PIRA as fanatics who kill without reason. Understanding that the IRA and PIRA, through bombings, and fasting in prison, continue the struggle of their grandparents and great-grand parents, makes the present situation in Ireland only more tragic.

Without knowing how the 1867 Rising, and the Martyrs set the stage for the present conflicts, it is easy to say the IRA and PIRA are fighting in a vacuum. This lack of understanding the past makes it difficult to understand the present. I feel research into the 1867 Rising is an important step in bringing the present Irish situation into focus.
Endnotes

Title page:

Introduction:

Section 1:
1. John O’Beirne Ranelagh, A Short History of Ireland, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p.120.
5. Gallager, Idem.
15. O’Connor, Idem.
Endnotes cont.

Section 2:
5. O’Faolain, op. cit., p.128.
7. MacDonagh, Idem.

Section 3:
3. T.P. O’Faolain, The Irish (Old Greenwich, Connecticut: The Devin-Adair Company, 1979) p.120.
4. O’Faolain, op. cit., p.121.
5. O’Faolain, Idem.
Endnotes cont.

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7. MacDonagh, op. cit., p.84.
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7. MacDonagh, *Idem*.

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Section 8:
2. MacDonagh, Idem.
5. Fallis, op. cit., p.75.
8. Ward, op. cit., p.54.
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