



Friday, March 5, 2004

Professor proposes alternative approach to history

By *Jeff Samoray, OU Web Writer*

In a presentation dealing with the historical conflict between Ireland and England, Associate Professor of History Seán Farrell Moran made the case for taking a psychoanalytic view of history in his lecture, "Ireland, the Irish, and the 'Terrible Beauty' of Irish History," given at the President's Colloquium March 4 in the Oakland Center Banquet Rooms.

Moran spoke of his research on Patrick Pearse, an Irish revolutionary executed by the British following the 1916 Easter Rebellion. Pearse has since emerged as one of the most contentious figures in Irish history and is often cited as the "founder" of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Moran positioned his argument for looking at the irrational elements that motivate action against revisionist and nationalist views.

"My [scholarship] has been about what compels people to do things," said Moran, a dual citizen of Ireland and the United States. "Every nation gets its identity from its history. History also is an ongoing discussion about the past, thus, history is constantly changing...Nationalists tend to present a view of history that is repeated over and over. Revisionists have no understanding that in destroying myths you create other myths. They also fail to provide understanding in a more intimate, personal sense. Ultimately, history is not about documents. It can only be understood when we examine the impact of ideas. We cannot accept that the archives will help people understand themselves."

Moran developed his approach by way of experience he acquired working with schizophrenic patients at the Mental Health Care Unit of Georgetown University Hospital.

"I was not headed toward [studying] Irish history when I was an undergraduate," Moran said. "I sought out psychoanalytic training and was accepted to medical school. But I loved the history of ideas and became interested in the political violence between Ireland and England and the inner motivations behind that. And this led me to study Pearse, a writer and poet who on the surface seems like an unlikely revolutionary."

The gravity of the subject didn't dissuade Moran from interjecting a number of humorous asides throughout the lecture.

"As an undergraduate, I took a course on Islam and was interested in jihad," Moran said. "I asked how it is possible to do something that will inevitably lead to your demise. Terrorists are eventually killed. It's not like we have a bunch of old terrorists running around."

With regard to conflicts between Ireland and England subsequent to Pearse's execution, Moran proposed that the recent peace negotiations between the IRA and the English government could be a model for conflict resolution worldwide.

"We have to understand that terrorism is about politics, and terrorism cannot be stopped with force," Moran said. "To find a solution, you have to talk with the terrorists. It was not until the English were ready to talk with the IRA sitting across the table that they could begin to find a resolution to the conflict."

Those in attendance were intrigued by Moran's approach to history and were encouraged to learn more about Ireland.

"I thought it was an excellent presentation," said Harah Frost of Royal Oak. "Any instruction we can get about the irrational aspects that motivate history is welcome. I also thought Moran's psychoanalytic background is interesting. I noticed how the words he used, like 'memory' and 'empathy,' take on a lot of weight. The lecture makes me want to read more recent theoretical work in history."

Karen Cogswell of Northville attended the lecture with her husband, Tom, who is the president of the St. Andrews

Society of Detroit.

"Tom attended a lecture on Scotland given by Moran earlier this year," Cogswell said. "I heard how fascinating it was, and I was very eager to hear today's presentation. I thought it was informative, humorous and thought provoking. I never previously thought of looking at history from his particular perspective."

Associate Provost and Professor of Rhetoric Ron Sudol appreciated the opportunity to learn more about Ireland through Moran's presentation.

"The lecture was thoroughly illuminating and filled in some gaps in my knowledge of Ireland," Sudol said. "I wholeheartedly agree with Moran's alternative approach to the study of history. I found it an interesting and worthy perspective and also enjoyed the humor."

Moran's book, "**Patrick Pearse and the Politics of Redemption**," was published in 1994 by the Catholic University of America Press. He currently is working on a textbook on Irish history as well as one exploring the history of the concept of "hope." He is a member of the national executive committee of the **American Conference for Irish Studies** and is president of its Midwest Region.

The President's Colloquium Series, established in 1995, showcases the achievements of Oakland University researchers, promotes communication and collaboration among scientists, and recognizes the outstanding work of "Nobel Class" scientists.

SUMMARY

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