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"This Should Not Be": Iris Murdoch's Critique of English Policy Towards Ireland in The Red and the Green

by LOUISE A. DESALVO

IN HER NOVEL The Red and the Green, published in 1965, Iris Murdoch raises the thorny moral and political issue of the relationship between England and Ireland and, in more general terms, the issue of the relationship between strong, dominant countries and the countries that they have subjugated.

Although Murdoch is commonly thought of as an English novelist and philosopher, and although she has lived in England for most of her life, she was born in Dublin in 1919. The Red and the Green is set in the Ireland of her parents' day, during the 1916 Easter Uprising, and it may be one of the most profound and provocative attacks on English policy towards Ireland that has ever been written and, by extension, it may also be one of the most penetrating attacks against English imperialism in the contemporary British novel.

The events in the novel take place during the days preceding the Easter Uprising in Dublin in 1916, with an Epilogue which traces the lives of the principal characters through April 1938. The Red and the Green concerns the interrelated fortunes of the members of several related families: the Chase-Whites and the Bellmans, who are Anglo-Irish, and the Dumays, who are Irish Catholics, but who are all, for various reasons, living in and near Dublin during the days preceding the Uprising. By the end of the novel, each of the characters has been profoundly affected by the events of the Easter Uprising.

The central characters are Andrew Chase-White, a Protestant Anglo-Irishman who has passed himself off as Irish without understanding what it means to be Irish, but who is now a member of the regiment of King Edward's Horse; his Irish Catholic cousins Pat and Cathal Dumay, who are fiercely patriotic to the cause of Irish independence, and who give up their lives; and Frances Bellman, an Anglo-Irishwoman with a splendid sense of history and a profound sympathy for the Irish cause.

1. The Red and the Green (New York: Avon Books, 1965). All quotations are to this edition and will be placed within parentheses within the body of the paper. I should like to thank Jane Marcus and Ernest J. DeSalvo, who listened to drafts of this paper and who made suggestions and criticisms. I should also like to thank Anne and Michael Gill, who placed their superb collection of books on Irish history at my disposal when I stayed at their home, The Old Vicarage, in Donabate, County Dublin. I am grateful to Stewart Donovan, who provided me with many important insights from his work on Anglo-Irish writers.
Then there are their elders: Andrew’s mother Hilda, who has come to live in Ireland in order to escape the German air raids in London; Pat and Cathal’s mother, Kathleen, a self-abnegating, saint-like woman who visits the slums, and their step-father, Barney, an alcoholic, who is engaged in writing a memoir and in researching the life of St. Brigid; Frances’ father, Christopher, who shares her political ideas; and Millie Kinnard, a colorful, revolver-brandishing, trouser-wearing femme fatale, who engages each of the men in the novel (with the exception of the fourteen-year-old Cathal) in a love tryst before the novel is over.

Most critics, although they recognize that *The Red and the Green* is an historical novel, read it as a typical Murdoch novel about the inter-relationships between human beings, and about the difficulties in loving well, claiming that the novel’s setting in Ireland during the Uprising is inconsequential to the novel’s meaning.²

And the novel is a love story, although in typical Murdochian fashion, it can hardly be called a simple love story. For in this love story, the issue of good loving and the issue of morality in politics are inseparable: they are, in fact, at base, the same issue.

First, there is the relationship between Andrew Chase-White and Frances Bellman. Andrew is in love with Frances and has been in love with her since his childhood. He believes that all he needs to do to marry her is to simply declare his love for her and then spirit her back to England when this messy war is over.

The problem with Andrew’s love for Frances is that it doesn’t take Frances into account. Andrew is a soldier in the service of the king of England; Frances despises the way that the English have treated the Irish. She believes that “Ireland was a civilized country when England was still barbarous ...” (32). Except for the Dumay brothers, Frances is the fiercest revolutionary in the novel, and she has Marxist and feminist leanings as well, whereas Andrew has more than his fair share of the rather typical Anglo-Irish contempt for and sense of superiority over the Irish. The magnetic center of Andrew Chase-White’s interest in his Irish relations was Pat Dumay, his cousin, whom as a child he had regarded with horror, largely because of Pat’s Catholic religion: “With years of reason and tolerance the horror had diminished, but in the quality of his persisting interest in his cousin there was still a sort of shudder as at something primitive and dark” (16).

Frances equates the Irish question with the issues of both class struggle and the woman’s question. She remarks that “being a woman is like being Irish ... Everyone says you’re important and nice, but you take second place all the same” (28–29). In a discussion that takes place with Frances present, Christopher argues that Ireland and England are not one country, even if the English soldiers “when they sing ‘It’s a long

way to Tipperary’” (31) think it’s true. According to Christopher, “it’s always easy for the top dog to extend his sense of identity over his inferiors. It’s a different matter for the inferiors to accept the identification” (31). Much later in the novel, in a discussion with Barney about her feelings of helplessness in the face of so much human suffering in Ireland, Frances describes a woman and her children begging near St. Stephen’s Green in Dublin—“a mother, she must have been my age, with clothes, well they weren’t clothes, just jumbled bits of stuff, and four little children, all of them barefoot, and she was begging, and the little kids were sort of dressed up like little monkeys, and trying to dance, and they were crying all the time—” (101) and she asks Barney, “what will Home Rule do for that woman begging in the street?” (101).

Andrew, rather than understanding that Frances’ political views are a very important part of her being, in fact that they are fundamental to her being, believes that they are “extremely confused and discontinuous” (32). Andrew is, in fact, in love with his own image of Frances, which has nothing to do with the woman as she truly exists. The most hilarious example of this in the novel is the sonnet that Andrew writes to Frances and that he keeps in his pocket on the day that he intends to ask her to marry him. He never does get to give her the poem and it gets more soiled and ragged as the day wears on. In the sonnet he writes:

Now as you trip with little tiny steps,
Your petal hands and water-crystal voice,
Your flower-fragrant, oh-so-sighed-for lips
Make my dull essence tremble and rejoice. (135)

But, even as Andrew himself admits, “‘Little tiny steps’ was not perhaps quite realistic, as Frances rather tended to stride along. . . .” But for Andrew “it was symbolically right, expressing the tripping, gliding motion of the beloved . . . .” (136).

It becomes clear in the course of the novel that Andrew Chase-White is imposing his fantasy of what Frances should be like upon Frances. And when he thinks of proposing to her, he conceptualizes the event in despotic terms: “Suddenly he was omnipotent, the benevolent despot of his little world” (136). Given Frances’ political ideology, and her hatred for domination of any kind, it becomes clear to the reader, although it is not clear to Andrew, that she will not accept him. When he finally does get around to proposing to her, she refuses him and he is crushed. Nonetheless, he realizes that she is, after all, “exercising her last inalienable and terrible natural right, the free disposition of the heart” (155). And it is just as well because marriage to Andrew could not have been wonderful for Frances because he equates the idea of sexual intercourse with death: it is “an act of terrible violence involving the destruction of both the aggressor and the victim . . . .” (21).

What Andrew Chase-White does, both with Ireland and with Frances,
is to keep them at arms’ length and to erect fantasies about them that have nothing to do with what they’re really like. What this insures is that he gets to know neither. This substitution of the erection of a fantasy about Ireland or about Frances instead of taking the time and the energy to get to know what each is like, is, in one sense, the way Andrew exercises his sense of superiority to both Frances and Ireland. And the way Andrew treats Frances is, of course, the way the English treat the Irish: that is, they have erected fantasies about what the Irish are like so that they can dominate them; they have not taken the time or the trouble to get to understand the “otherness” of the Irish, just as Andrew has not taken the time and the trouble to understand the “otherness” of Frances. Taking the time to understand another person or another nation is, after all, the ultimate admission that another person or another nation is one’s equal, and this neither the English nor Andrew can do with Frances or the Irish. And so Ireland, like Frances, is viewed as a seething, primitive, powerful, terrifying possibility.

A second relationship in the novel exists between Barney and Millie Kinnard and that one, like Andrew’s with Frances, exists largely in fantasy and has to do with subjection and domination. Barney has, in fact, given up the priesthood for Millie, and she has encouraged him to do so, largely because she wants to dominate him: she wants him as “her slave, a pet to fondle and caress. She wanted to arouse a blasphemous passion in this pale, long-skirted half-man” (89).

The best way that Millie can dominate Barney is to tantalize him with the promises of an erotic relationship that she never delivers to him. And so he has been a slave to her throughout the years, and has married his wife Kathleen in an attempt to erase the image of what he perceives to be his sinful attachment to Millie. What he believes he must do because of his feelings for Millie is “forswear the world and aim at perfect sanctity” (88). But so profound has been his attachment to Millie that he has never consummated his marriage. Instead, he has buried himself in a life of alcoholism and repentence, and is in the process of writing a self-abjuring, self-congratulatory memoir about his life with Kathleen. He has gotten to hate Kathleen because he construes her life to be saintly in contrast to what he sees as his evil life of the flesh, and he now blames her for the life he is leading. What is so pathetic about Barney’s life is that whatever passion or evil he lives, he experiences in the world of his fantasy. His actual life consists of sitting in churches in an alcoholic stupor, of waiting for Millie to pay attention to him, which she hardly ever does, of sitting in libraries and writing his memoir or doing his research, and of innocent encounters with Frances, the one woman who truly understands him and with whom he has the most meaningful relationship of his life.

Millie Kinnard is the most colorful character in the novel, a woman with progressive views on the woman’s question, who has taken nurse’s
training contrary to her family’s wishes during the South African War, and who has even managed to get herself to the front to see some action. “She had, it was said, not mourned too long after her husband’s death. She was rumoured to wear trousers and smoke cigars. She possessed and could fire a revolver. She had a great many gentleman friends” (18).

Millie is, however, continually trying to dominate the men in the novel. Not only does she see Barney as her possession, she tempts Andrew Chase-White into her bed after his abortive attempt to get Frances to marry him. No sooner does she succeed in Andrew’s seduction than she turns her attentions to Pat Dumay, with whom she is supposedly madly in love, and whom she has tried to seduce earlier by telling him: “I will be your slave and your executioner” (152–53). But Pat Dumay goes to her, instead, to mortify his own flesh.

Pat Dumay, the consummate revolutionary, has little use for women: “He connected them with the part of himself which disgusted him” (77). He is therefore very much like both Andrew Chase-White and Barney. But Pat sees Millie as his quarry just as Millie sees him as hers, and just as Andrew sees Frances: “He had imagined her like a helpless quarry, like a victim tied to a post. . . . He had expected, he had wanted, violence and pain, not muddle” (206).

Millie has lured Pat to her bed on the eve of the Easter Uprising by telling him that she has always loved him; what he finds when he gets to her country house, Rathblane, is Andrew Chase-White in Millie’s bed. Millie is, in fact, acting out her fantasy of dominating all of these younger men, partially because she is a woman and because this is the only way that she can exert power, but also because Frances’ father, Christopher, despite his enlightened views on the Irish question, has tried, in his own way, to dominate her.

Christopher knows that she is in desperate financial circumstances, and he seizes this as his opportunity to bind Millie to him. She is, to him, “a gorgeous, desirable object” (64). After he lends her money, and she becomes financially dependent upon him:

Christopher had her cornered and she knew it. She used now her resources of irony and humour to cover the loss of her dignity as a free being. She seemed without resentment. There was something beautiful and sad in this loss of power which made him feel very tenderly towards her. It was like a stage in taming a wild beast when it becomes suddenly gentle and puss-like. It plunges far off, but feels the rope that draws and draws it. Now it trots more soberly nearby. Soon it will come to the hand. It will have to. (67)

When Barney hears of Millie’s subjugation, he is in despair. To him “Millie was so essentially a free animal. What awful desperation must lie behind this choice to wear the collar of slavery?” (123).

What desperation lies behind Millie’s choice is, of course, the same desperation that prompts the children near St. Stephen’s Green to dance barefoot: financial desperation. Millie, given the fact that she is a woman, cannot support herself financially. She needs a man. And so
she succumbs to Christopher’s attempts to enslave her. But she makes him pay. And the way she makes him pay is by forcing him to watch her dominate younger and more vulnerable men. He can have her partially; if he wants her and insists upon the subjugation of her will, it will be at his peril, and at the cost of Millie’s dominating a number of other human beings.

The title of Murdoch’s novel, *The Red and the Green*, is, I think, a deliberate reference to Stendhal’s title *The Red and the Black*. By referring to Stendhal’s title in her own, Murdoch emphasizes the similarity in theme between the two novels: just as *The Red and the Black* is about Julien Sorel’s inability to love because he has a more dominating passion in his life than a woman—his commitment to his image of himself as a Napoleonic hero born out of his proper time—so *The Red and the Green* is, among other things, about Pat Dumay’s inability to love primarily because his only passion is for a free Ireland, for Cathleen ni Houlihan:

The shock, the experience of subjugation; the knowledge of belonging to a subject race, came to him with his first consciousness, together with a cold, fierce will to freedom. And when, at George the Fifth’s coronation visit, the town had been decked with hostile streamers declaring, “Thou art not conquered yet, dear land,” Pat had felt himself come of age for Ireland. (73)

Because Pat Dumay has no time for anything but his political activities, and because he cannot love a woman unless he is free, he passes up the opportunity to be loved by the most sensitive, most morally perfect character in the novel, Frances Bellman.

The fact that Frances has loved Pat is not even alluded to in the novel itself. We find out in the Epilogue that Pat has been killed, together with many other leaders of the rebellion, in the Dublin Post Office, the headquarters of that ill-fated, but nonetheless significant armed insurrection. He has died without even knowing that this splendid woman had cared for him. But even if he did know it, it probably would not have made any difference to him.

So great and so perfect is her love for him, however, that she did not thrust herself upon him. Instead, she understood that his most compelling need was to be a hero for Ireland, and she stayed back, inactive, watching him and holding him in her attention for the duration of those difficult days. One only regrets that, unlike the real-life revolutionary Irish heroine, Countess Markievicz, she did not fight beside him.

It is only in the Epilogue, in the closing lines of the novel, that we get to know what life must have been like for Frances, holding this love for Pat inside of her as she heard the English guns shelling the Dublin Post Office day after day after day:

She did not really think that much about the old days; and yet now for a moment it seemed to her that these thoughts were always with her, and that she had lived out, in those months, in those weeks, the true and entire history of her heart, and that the rest
was a survival. . . . They, those others, had a beauty which could not be eclipsed or rivalled. They had been made young and perfect forever, safe from the corruption of time. . . . They had died for glorious things, for justice, for freedom, for Ireland. . . .

She got up and went to the window to hide some sudden tears. . . . Tears flowed more freely now; and she heard drumming in her ears, heard, as she had heard it all through that dreadful week in nineteen-sixteen, battering and breaking her heart, the thunder of the English guns. (272)

But the Epilogue is set in April 1938, many, many years after the events that have taken place in the core of this novel. Now, the 1916 uprising in Ireland is, in the minds of many, a dim memory, if any memory at all, and the headline of the day reads “Franco Threatens Barcelona” (267). Frances is now, ironically, living in England, married to an anti-Irish Englishman. Perhaps Murdoch’s Epilogue is intended to serve as ironic reminder that patriots are soon forgotten, that life goes on, that political sympathies shift, and that the living soon forget the dead, even if the dead were brave, even if the dead have served the cause of freedom. In the Epilogue, it seems, at first, that Frances has become apolitical or that she has completely submerged her political self, at least in front of her husband. To her husband, Ireland is a dump; a dairy country “that can’t even invent its own cheese” (267); the 1916 uprising, “nonsense” (267).

But Frances’ tall son does not think that 1916 was nonsense. Frances’ tall son thinks that the 1916 uprising was “wonderful” (270). In the closing pages of the novel, Frances, her husband, and their tall son argue about whether or not future generations will remember the 1916 uprising, and other battles such as Guernica, Irun, Toledo, Teruel. Although Frances seems to agree with her husband, in his presence, that these events will be forgotten, Frances’ son disagrees. He believes that these “names are part of European history. Like Agincourt” (269). Frances’ husband disagrees, propounding a view of small nations that might be termed imperialistic. He states: “In this century, small nations have got to pack up, and the sooner they realize it the better. You’ve got to belong to a big show nowadays . . .” (269). The irony, of course, is that Frances’ husband clings to a view of England that would soon no longer apply, and that England, itself, with the decline of the Empire, was well on its way to becoming one of those small nations.

Frances has hidden her Irish past from her husband to the extent that she has never told him that Christopher, her father, had been killed by a sniper’s bullet during the uprising. Frances’ revolutionary sympathies live on in the person of her tall son, whose best friend has gone to join the International Brigade to fight in Spain. Every morning, after her husband goes to work, Frances and her son share “the slightly guilty air of a relieved complicity which was part of their morning ritual” (269). It is in these early morning conversations, one believes, that Frances has educated her son, has reminded him of his past, and it is during this early morning conversation that she confesses to him her love for Pat
Dumay during the 1916 uprising. Thus, Frances has lost two men to that insurrection: her father and the man whom she loved in secret. And Frances now lives with the fearful probability that her own son might join his friend fighting against Franco in Spain. Perhaps Frances, the revolutionary sympathizer in 1916, having lived with the consequences of armed battle, has become, like many women before her, a pacifist.

In *The Red and the Green*, Murdoch explores the idea that it is impossible to love well or to love at all when one is subjugated. And, when one is subjugated, one tends to try to dominate another person. The novel, therefore, explores the repercussions of historical events upon how people behave towards one another in loving relationships. To put it simply, if a man feels impotent because his country has been subjugated, he will probably be sexually impotent; if a woman feels powerless because her sex has been subjugated, she will probably not be loving. Either that or men and women will try to dominate one another or will try to brutalize one another. And this is probably how the subjugating country wants it, for, in order to foment a revolution, one must feel powerful, and if women and men feel powerless or if they are preoccupied with dominating one another, then they will probably not have the time nor the energy for overcoming their oppressors.

In “Knowing the Void,” a review of the *Notebooks of Simone Weil*, Murdoch remarked upon Weil’s observation that a “sufferer communicates his suffering by ill-treating and distressing others. All beings tend to use all the power at their disposal.” Murdoch believed that Weil understood, perhaps better than anyone else, how suffering corrupts the sufferer. In other words, in any dominated country, suffering breeds suffering. In any dominated country, the behavior among people often imitates how the dominating country behaves: equal, loving, giving, caring relationships, based upon the coming together of free and equal people, are not possible.

In a number of her reviews and essays, Murdoch states that the attitude that people adopt when they love well is essentially the same attitude that political leaders should adopt when they are behaving in a morally correct way in political encounters. She has borrowed this idea, in part, from Simone Weil, whom she considered one of the most profound and original political thinkers of our time. What she liked so much about Weil was how Weil’s work considered the moral in politics, and, according to Murdoch, the idea of goodness and morality in politics was missing in contemporary political theory.

In “Knowing the Void,” Murdoch cites Weil’s observation that in politics (particularly in the relationship between one country and

another), doing the morally correct thing often entails not making a choice, or not performing an action. Simone Weil, instead, substitutes an attitude of "waiting" and "attention" in which one struggles to understand the "otherness" of the person or the political situation. This is analogous to how one behaves when one loves well. Goodness, therefore, is often connected, not with performing proper actions, not with making proper choices, as the existentialists would have us believe, but instead with "a refined and honest perception of what is really the case, a patient and just discernment and exploration of what confronts one, which is the result not simply of opening one's eyes but of a certainly perfectly familiar kind of moral discipline." According to Murdoch, philosophy, especially existential philosophy, has been too preoccupied with choice and with freedom, when, in fact, "love is a central concept in morals." Morality does not exist only at the moment when one is making a choice and when one is acting. Instead:

if we consider what the work of attention is like, how continuously it goes on, and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value round about us, we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over. This does not imply that we are not free, certainly not. But it implies that the exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business which goes on all the time and not a grandiose leaping about unimpeded at important moments. The moral life, on this view, is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices.

Murdoch reminds us that the task of diplomacy, like the task of loving well, is endless. There is no one moment, no one action in diplomacy that will change anything, just as there is no one moment for loving. What we must continually try to do, both in our love lives, and in our political lives, is to try not to dominate the other person or the other country, but we must instead try to see her or him or them clearly. And Murdoch states that, both in loving and in politics, this apprehension of the other as separate from ourselves is a difficult and continuous process, for we are eternally disposed to forcing our own fantasies about people upon them and our own fantasies about how countries should be behaving upon them. But if instead the "more the separateness and differentness of other people is realized, and the fact seen that another man has needs and wishes as demanding as one's own, the harder it becomes to treat a person as a thing."

The Red and the Green was published in 1965, during what might be described as a temporary lull in the difficulties in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland had just been through a relatively peaceful period, with the IRA having given up their militant stance in favor of a policy


that emphasized concentration on socialist objectives by political means. But the flying of a tricolour in the headquarters of Liam McMillan, the Republican candidate for West Belfast, led to a riot in 1964 that was just a taste of the things that were to come.

In 1966 the Malvern Arms murders revealed the existence of the Ulster Volunteer Forces, who saw themselves as the loyalist equivalent of the IRA. And in August of 1969, the event that marks the beginning of the current period of armed guerilla warfare between the Provisional IRA and Protestant groups, and English intervention, occurred: the Protestant Apprentice Boys of Derry were attacked on their march; the Catholic sector in the Lower Falls Area was invaded by a hostile mob and seven people were killed and 3,000 lost their homes. And the British government sent an army into Derry and Belfast for the first time.

One of the reasons, I suspect, that Iris Murdoch wrote her novel when she did was to instruct the English in how the Northern Irish Catholics would probably behave if the English pursued their policy of intervening in the affairs of Northern Ireland. In *The Red and the Green*, Murdoch describes how any time the Anglo-Irish in Ireland started to think of themselves as Irish, the English intervened. According to Christopher Bellman, “the Act of Union was the big Irish disaster” (33). When Ireland started really becoming an independent country, and the great landowners started thinking of themselves as Irish, “that began to scare the English stiff. Hence the Act of Union and all our tears” (33). According to Christopher, the arming of the Ulster Volunteers led to people arming themselves in the South: “After all, it’s the right of free men to prepare themselves to defend their freedom” (35). “You’ll find the Red Hand of Ulster in the British Army, but there’s no sign of the Harp” (36).

But *The Red and the Green* was not only a denunciation of English policy in Ireland. It was, by analogy, also an attack upon United States intervention in Vietnam. It was published soon after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, and on September 21, 1967, Iris Murdoch published an article in *The Listener* entitled “Political Morality” which was, in large part, a denunciation of American imperialist policies in Vietnam. In that article, she also articulated the ethical and moral responsibilities of larger, more powerful countries to smaller, weaker countries. The article is significant in understanding Murdoch’s political philosophy and in understanding both her view of American participation in the affairs of Vietnam and her view of English participation in the affairs of Ireland and Northern Ireland.


She begins the article by conceding that it has become more difficult in recent years for people to make moral judgments in politics and that political thinking has a tendency to degenerate into cynicism "because of the obvious fact that national self-interest is regarded as a normal and respectable motive force." But she insists that in a civilized world, this principle of self-interest in international politics should be tempered by certain rules of decency. And, she asserts, in light of the events in Vietnam, that "it has never been more important to assert that political decisions are moral decisions. . . ." She regards the Vietnam War as "a kind of war to which we are in danger of getting accustomed, where-in great powers intervene in a local conflict." For Murdoch, this form of dominance of one country over another is unconscionable. Her view, given the events that have occurred in both Northern Ireland and in Southeast Asia since she wrote her article, was prophetic. The Americans, she argued, could not present the Vietnamese with a short cut to what she called a "stable liberal democratic government." To conceive that they could was arrogant and meant that they had not apprehended the conditions in Southeast Asia as they really existed. She saw the American presence, or the presence of any third power in an internal conflict, as the chief obstacle "to any attempt by the Vietnamese themselves, or by a responsible international body, to consider the future of this territory coolly and rationally."

The analogy to England's intervention in the affairs of Northern Ireland should not be missed. For Murdoch, Vietnam presented an example of the incursion upon one of the most fundamental rights of human beings: "People have the right, one might call it the natural right, to be the proprietors of their own national territory." 10 And what Murdoch loathed so much about the Vietnam war was the number of innocent non-combatants who "have been almost casually subjugated to the most terrible suffering." 11 Vietnam, therefore, was similar to Guernica, and she refers to Guernica in the closing pages of The Red and the Green. She concludes her essay on political morality by stating: "Have we become so used to the suffering of the innocent that we have lost our ability to say: this should not be?"

The Red and the Green is, therefore, a significant argument against English intervention in Ireland. It is an argument in favor of the morality of armed resistance to such tyranny. As Christopher Bellman remarks: "the only way for Ireland to become really independent is to fight. England will delay Home Rule and pare it away until there's practically nothing left. An imperialist won't really budge without a show of force. And a show of force is one thing one can't be too rational about, it comes when it has to" (177). And Barney has this to say about the history of Ireland:

The history of Ireland was such a tale of misery and wretchedness, enough to make the angels howl and stamp their golden feet. England has destroyed Ireland slowly and casually, without malice, without mercy, practically without thought, like someone who treads upon an insect, forgets it, then sees it quivering and treads upon it again. Was there under heaven no tribunal where such a wrong could be set right and where the voices of the starved dead could mount into a mighty tempest at last? Were the young men wrong to imagine that an Ireland set free by its own righteous anger would be an unimaginably different place? (183)

In the Epilogue to The Red and the Green, in the closing pages of the novel, the 1916 Easter Uprising in Dublin becomes emblematic of all those armed uprisings in countries that have fought against oppression. It is like Guernica, Irun, Toledo, Teruel; and like Vietnam and Northern Ireland as well. In the words of Frances’ tall son:

It was a reminder that people can’t be enslaved forever. Tyrannies end because sooner or later people begin automatically to hit back. That’s the only thing which really impresses the tyrant and makes him give way. Freedom belongs to human nature, and it can’t vanish from the earth. Even though we forget the details of the fight, the fight goes on, and men have to be ready to go down among the details that are forgotten. And whenever it’s the turn of the country, however small, to rise against its tyrants, it represents the oppressed peoples of the whole world. (270)

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