

Could be complete  
—had every library  
been disassembled  
and



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Could the actions of just a few incite the entirety of history to change? Or, are certain events just destined based on human's innate mentality? How

The Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe by Thomas Cahill may polarize the readers based on such questions. An account of the responsibilities the Irish, "the island of saints and scholars," exclusively played as the protectors of medieval literature and provokers of scholarship, Cahill claims that history is simply a vacuum of affairs amalgamating "a narrative of human pain" (ix). From this point of view, Cahill establishes the thesis that the Irish, ensuing the collapse of the Roman empire, were the "great gift-givers," because of their arrival and aid of Western society in their time of crisis (ix). Rather than assuming the predominant historical process of analyzing stagnant happenings, he turns history into a domino effect—transitioning the fall of Rome to the Dark ages to the Medieval era with only the Irish's "unparalleled" contributions. This work puts out an embellished thesis, but Cahill fails to proportionately uphold and maintain it.

This being so because Cahill's thesis established around the idea that the evangelization of Ireland through St. Patrick Ireland became a hub of monasticism and hence the core of learning and literacy. Ireland's historical open mindedness and regard for ideas allowed this tide of learning to take hold, "they brought into their libraries everything they could lay their hands on. They were resolved to shut out nothing" (Cahill 158). Thereupon, as the Dark Ages began and the sprouting Irish monastic communities began scatter throughout continental Europe, they brought their coveted books with them.

Cahill argues that it was this conservation of the western world through books that the Irish essentially saved civilization. However, this argument revolves around a tremendous “what if” statement. In Cahill’s words: “What is about to be lost in the century of barbarian invasions is literature—the content of classical civilization. Had the destruction been complete—had every library been disassembled and every book burned—we might have lost Homer...all of classical history...Plato and Aristotle and all greek philosophy... we would have lost the taste and smell of a whole civilization” (Cahill 58). With this, the readers can come to the conclusion that Cahill is operating from a flawed assumption: that if it weren’t for the Irish all the books which upheld western civilization—their morals, their scholarship. Cahill neglects to focus on the counterfactual observation. In a historical context, it is not certain that all the books in continental Europe crucial to civilization were in fact burned. Hence, it appears more appropriate to claim that the Irish played a role in salvation of Europe’s civilization through literature, but not as the sole or even primary saviours.

In any event, Cahill completely undermines the Irish’s role in saving all of European civilization when he later states: “The Hebrew bible would have been saved without them, transmitted to our time by scattered communities of Jews. The Greek Bible, the Greek commentaries, and much of the literature of ancient Greece were well enough preserved at Byzantium” (Cahill 193). Cahill’s quotes seems to more closely resemble Orlet’s claim that the countless contribution of “..

. independent scholars who understood the importance of rescuing the rotting Greek and Latin manuscripts from the damp monasteries and getting <https://assignbuster.com/could-been-complete-had-every-library-been-disassembled-and/>

them into the hands of printers and scholars. And by far the majority of that unearthing was done, not in Ireland, but in Constantinople and nearby Muslim countries” (6). All of above call into question the legitimacy of his previous statement of the total lose of “ the content of classical civilization” (Cahill 58). Thereby, the issue of whether an entire civilizations can be epitomized and maintained through literature is a whole other problem, once again not addressed. Cahill commenced with this bold claim, that the Irish “. .. single handedly re-founded European civilization” (Cahill 4), but as one reads on, unignorable breaks in logic began to develop.