Ireland’s path to independence is paved with stories of legends and martyrs who, more often than not, are one in the same. The Celtic Revival imbued a sense of nationalism that was strictly directed at love for the Irish and disdain for any people that intruded on the Irish and their home. Irish writers called back to the days of myth, before civility reigned, and generated their own modern mysticism to spur the Irish spirit into revolution.

Writers were inspired by Ireland’s folklore to create new mythological figures for Ireland to revere and love. Cú Chulainn and other Irish legends were ancestral idols meant to instill pride and a sense of identity for the common Irishman.

Cathleen ni Houlihan, the name and subject of a W. B. Yeats play, became the most important figure for Irish revolution. An icon of Mother Ireland, young and beautiful to those who see her for what she is, old and decrepit to those who do not appreciate her. In the play, she roused a young Irishman to go fight and die for her freedom. The audience was moved and understood that they, too, should fight for their country, ignoring death and even welcoming its possibility. Ireland’s independence today stands on the back of those who sacrificed themselves for the idea of Ireland, for their ancestors, for the stories they believe in.