

# JOYCE AND THE DIVIDED MIND: HIS IMPORTANCE IN IRISH AND GALICIAN LITERATURE

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“The Divided Mind” is the title of an essay by the contemporary Irish poet, Thomas Kinsella. In it he examines the problems inherent in Irish literature caused, not only by the existence of a native language very distinct from English, but also by the existence of a very distinct literature written in this language. He speaks of that problematic term for writers in Ireland, “Anglo-Irish”. He defines it as “poetry written in English by Irishmen, or by someone with Irish connections”(208). It is useful to add that up until recently, and even now, Anglo-Irish meant that Protestant ascendancy of English settlers who owned lands due to the English conquests. Such writers as Swift and Goldsmith would belong to this group. As opposed to them we have the Celtic or native tradition, writers using the native language, Irish, and whose origins were in the population resident in Ireland before the invasions. It must also be mentioned that when we speak of this native tradition we shall be speaking exclusively of poetry, as writers in Irish devoted themselves to this genre, as a general rule.

Kinsella, while recognizing that the separation between the two languages and literatures was never complete, admits that the Irish poet writing in English is “unlikely to feel at home in the long tradition of English poetry” (208-209). He cannot use the legacy of poetry written in Irish until the end of the eighteenth century either because he is separated from it by a “century’s silence and through an exchange of worlds”(209). This tradition is, for him, a “great inheritance and, simultaneously, a great loss”(209). The continuity and shared history which this native tradition could give the Irish writer is missing now as it was in the nineteenth century also. It is the divided mind of the writer in Ireland of which Kinsella remarks “I recognize that I stand on one side of a great rift, and can feel the discontinuity in myself. It is a matter of people and places as well as writing — if coming from a broken and uprooted family, of being drawn to those who share my origins and finding that we cannot share our lives”(209). This identity crisis which Kinsella feels so personally as a poet is expanded on by Robert Welch in *Irish Poetry from Moore to Yeats*. He comments that “writers writing in Irish have no problem about whether they are Irish or not, whereas some of the Irish poets writing in English did”(15). He recognizes that in Irish poetry in the nineteenth century “there is a hesitancy, a lack of directness, an inability to speak out that may have a great deal to do with linguistic uncertainty”(15). He observes that much of the imagery used by Thomas Moore and James Clarence Mangan, two nineteenth century poets, is that of “freezing, dumbness, inarticulateness”(77).

Hesitancy, lack of identity, the inability to identify with a mute literary tradition in another, totally different language, are these necessarily negative influences on the writer? Or, to be more specific, were they a hindrance to Joyce, a writer whose origins were in that native, Celtic population? The discontinuity in Irish literature, which caused all of the above, “is not necessarily a poetic calamity” according to Kinsella. He claims that a “continuous tradition, like the English or the French, accumulates a distinctive quality

and tends to impose this on each member”(216). He later adds that “ what matters” is the “ quality of response” of writers to this state of affairs (217). It will be seen that Joyce recognizes the dichotomy in the Irish literary tradition that Kinsella has spoken of and it will be suggested that his coming to terms with it is not that different from what the later writer has suggested above.

Joyce’s knowledge of Irish literary history, though at times a little unreliable, is full of contradictory, passionate and inspired responses. In his essay, “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages” he quite proudly states that the Irish language has “ a history almost three thousand years old” and that “ it has been set on a level with the other modern languages, such as French, German, Italian and Spanish” (Ellmann 155-156). He is proudly aware of a native language in his country and also knows of the “linguistic uncertainty” which an Irish person experiences when speaking a language not his own, English. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* during an interview with the English dean of studies Dedalus comments

-The language in which we are speaking is his before mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language(172).

One could say from this reading that Dedalus is Irish speaking. He is not. He is English speaking and this dialogue is a step in his development as an artist, a stage of distancing from his own language, which is English. This distancing is dramatic. The dialogue is dramatic because the dean is English. And it is a dramatic situation in the political context, a power struggle, centring on the word “master”. All this makes Dedalus feel a “ smart of dejection” (172). It is a passionate response to a “ linguistic uncertainty” which reminds us of Kinsella’s remarks and Welch’s idea that some Irish writers writing in English have a problem feeling totally at ease in it. What is most interesting in this passage, and something that has been played down perhaps because of his criticism of the Gaelic Revival Movement, is the fact that Joyce recognizes that being Irish and having to use this “acquired speech” is a problem. He has identified it as such. It makes him “fret” and when speaking of writing in this language, English, he experiences “unrest of spirit”. He speaks proudly of his native language and yet cannot use it. It is a “ great inheritance” but also a “great loss” to requote Kinsella again. He suffers this dilemma in common with other Irish writers.

In the second of his two essays on the nineteenth century Irish poet, James Clarence Mangan, he mentions the division we have spoken of between Anglo-Irish literature and the Celtic native tradition. He says that “Ireland’s contribution to European literature can be divided... into two large parts, that is, literature written in the Irish language and literature written in the English language”(Mason and Ellmann 176). It is worth noting that Joyce refers to what Ireland has contributed to European literature, and he always has this ability to put things into an overall perspective, to see things from above as it were. This helped him to meet the demands made upon him in such a conflictive state of affairs as that which existed in the world of Irish letters. He had an ability to look beyond England and its literary tradition, the canon of the colonizer. To the second of the “two large parts”, that is Irish poets writing in English, belongs the rather mysterious figure of James Clarence Mangan. Joyce calls him “the most significant poet of the modern Celtic world” (Mason and Ellmann 179). He is praised, among other things, for the fact that he

kept “his poetic soul spotless. Although he wrote such a wonderful English style, he refused to collaborate with the English newspapers or reviews; although he was the spiritual focus of his time, he refused to prostitute himself to the rabble or to make himself the loud-speaker of politicians”(Mason and Ellmann 184). Joyce admires Mangan’s rebellion against the canon of the colonizer and on the other hand his defiance of those who would use his poetry for political purposes. It is the dilemma of other Irish writers and even of Joyce himself, when they have to resist both the demands made on them by the dominant culture which tends to impose its norms on them and the reactionary one of their own country. Joyce prophetically recognizes the problem which was to face Irish writers of a later generation when speaking of Mangan:

The history of his country encloses him so straitly that even in his hours of extreme individual passion he can barely reduce its walls to ruins. He cries out in his life and in his mournful verses against the injustice of despoilers, but almost never laments a loss greater than that of buckles and banners (Mason and Ellmann 185)

Mangan, a figure whose poetry is sometimes a nationalist response to oppression, is trapped by the fledgling canon which he helped to found, the concept of country and patriotism so inherent in later Irish literature, keeps him from fully expressing himself.

So how did Joyce come to terms with this? He gives quite direct answers especially in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and here in this essay

Poetry considers many of the idols of the market place unimportant — the succession of the ages, the spirit of the age, the mission of the race. The poet’s central effort is to free himself from the unfortunate influence of these idols that corrupt him from without and within,... (Mason and Ellmann 185).

Again it seems as if Joyce is looking at the problem from above, taking an omniscient view. The “succession of the ages” or tradition and the race to which he belongs are “false idols” from which the poet should free himself. As Kinsella remarks “what matters... is the quality of response” to tradition and here by the very faith he has in himself as an artist Joyce rises above the problems we have just mentioned.

Two additional points must be made to qualify this statement. Firstly, it could be suggested that Kinsella’s comments that discontinuity in a literary tradition is not necessarily “a calamity” could be applicable here. Joyce was writing, as he himself has commented on Mangan, “without a native literary tradition” (Mason and Ellmann 182). Joyce uses this fact to explain Mangan’s sometimes poor efforts. Let us suggest that for Joyce, on the contrary, this lack of a native literary tradition gave him a certain freedom from what Kinsella calls the imposition of a “distinctive quality”. Worthy of remark also are Joyce’s comments on Mangan’s views of his native land saying that it had “become an obsession with him, he has accepted it with all its regrets and failures and would pass it on just as it is”(Mason and Ellmann 185). Joyce implicitly makes a statement of intent about Irish literature. We get this idea in his criticism of Mangan’s unimaginative passing on of this tradition “just as it is” and that he, Joyce, would do the opposite, and write a new chapter in his country’s literary history, so changing it. This contrasts with his aloofness towards it which we have previously mentioned.

Before speaking about the generation of Irish writers after Joyce dealt with the Anglo-Irish /Celtic dichotomy, we must make a few comments on the demands made on Irish literature to write in conformity with a canon whose function is to produce an iden-

tity. This is the canon of the colonizer, English literature. David Lloyd in *Nationalism and Minor Literature* speaks of that key text in the history of Irish nationalism, John Mitchel's *Jail Journal*, an account of this revolutionary's transportation. Lloyd comments that the book "clearly articulates the fixation of Irish nationalism on the question of individual and national identity"(49). This reminds one of Joyce's remarks on Mangan's obsession with national identity. Certainly for nationalists and writers of Mitchel and Mangan's generation, the early to middle nineteenth century, there was a resistance to Great Britain which manifested itself in Irish literature written in English. There was a search for identity which was reenforced by the "history of the nation" according to Lloyd(51). This search was the beginning of a resistance to the major canon. The previous generations of writers such as Swift or Goldsmith had been content to accept this as their own. The writers of the eighteen forties and fifties, Mangan, Samuel Ferguson, Edward Walsh, wanted to discover a native tradition for themselves and resist the demands of the colonizer. They did this in part by translating into English, the by then principal language of the country, poems from the Irish, Celtic tradition. In some ways the great success of German literature in Ireland was influential on these writers. German writers had taken an interest in their native folklore just as the Irish were to do later. We must also take into account that this was a time of political upheaval and resistance to the Crown. Certainly by taking an interest in the Celtic tradition of poetry written in Irish these writers were not only looking for a continuity in the Irish literary tradition but also resisting the major canon. And to resist this, an identity was needed which would be more than that of a British colonized subject writing English poetry in the provinces. Indeed, the Young Irelanders, a revolutionary movement of this time, saw that literature could be responsible for preserving or creating a national identity. In the case of Mangan, however, although he was allied to this group we find traces of self-doubt and an inability to express himself which could be said to be symptoms of a lack of literary identity. We have mentioned the images of dumbness, inarticulateness, hesitancy to be found in his poetry. There is a type of paralysis that writers from a colonized culture experience when faced with the strength of tradition of the colonizer's literature. They have to struggle alone and only the stronger spirits, such as Joyce, survive. Lesser geniuses do not.

We shall see that both he and Mangan were not taken into consideration by the generation of writers in Ireland of the nineteen forties. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, in the case of Joyce, severe censorship laws and a sense of public morality in the Free State of Ireland did not allow the reading of all his works. Secondly, neither Joyce nor Mangan were saying what the newly created literary canon of the State wanted to hear. We must remember that by the forties the Celtic Twilight had had its heyday and the Gaelic Revival had had some success in that Irish was one of the official languages of the State and compulsory in schools. Patrick Kavanagh tells us in "From Monaghan to the Grand Canal" that when he first went to Dublin in 1939 the "dregs" of the Celtic Twilight "were still stirrable" and "the virtue of being a peasant was much extolled"(191). Yeats and the Celtic Twilight were still a strong element in the Irish literary world and the extolling of the native Irish tradition, advocated by them, was reaching fanatical proportions. In *The Backward Look* Frank O'Connor says that at this time there was an "official attempt at destroying Irish literature in English"(229). There was an attempt to impose the native Irish language on all writers. Amongst the majority of Irish writers in the forties there was an obsession for the theme of patriotism. Added to all this an air of intolerance existed in the country. O'Connor in *The Backward Look* tells us of Sean O'Faolain's famous literary magazine *The Bell* which because of its criticism of the

Irish state and church “was visited by the Vice Squad who threatened him with what would happen if he went on in this way”(224).

Obviously, this was an attempt to create a literary canon that would overthrow the dominant English one by its resistance to the English language and its obsession with patriotism. It was an attempt to drive out this alien culture just as the British were driven out of Southern Ireland in 1921. This repressive and let us say imperialistic attitude reminds us of David Lloyd’s comments in *Nationalism and Minor Literature* on major literature. He says that it is “predicated on the notion of universality, this aesthetic both legitimates and transmits the ethnocentric ideology of imperialism”(20). The Ireland of the nineteen forties was attempting to create a major literature based on the imperialism of a reactionary nationalism, but because of its intolerance succeeded quite often in being parochial instead of universal. A lot of writers did not succeed in flying those “nets” of nationality, language and religion that Dedalus speaks of in *A Portrait*(184). There was a desperate, panic-ridden search for literary identity, a reaction against the English culture which it despised yet desperately needed.

Joyce quite obviously held himself aloof from this type of nationalism and so was perhaps, for this reason, not so appealing to some writers in the forties. O’Connor speaks of the uniformity of the writers of his time in *The Backward Look*. They were obsessed with patriotism. Joyce, and indeed Mangan too because of his quirkiness and eccentricity, would not fit in with this uniformity of patriotic impulse. We have mentioned Kavanagh’s comments on the importance of Yeats and the Celtic Twilight for Irish writers in the nineteen forties. Their familiarity with Yeats’ work is a stark contrast to their ignorance of Joyce’s writing. O’Connor in *The Backward Look*, while emphasizing that *Ulysses* is one of the “great monuments of Irish literature” adds that it is the greatest because of “its description of the poetry of everyday life in Dublin” at the beginning of this century” (209). Sean O’Faolain in *The Irish* writes that “the generation of and after Yeats did not hear or heed Joyce” (140). What are the reasons, then, for the interest shown in him by a European culture quite distant from Ireland?

Galicia suffered from a colonialism which left its native culture suffering from a lack of literary identity which reminds us of the state of affairs in Ireland. Vicente Risco writes in *Nós* of December 1921 that there was a similarity in the treatment of both the Galicians and the Irish at the hands of the neighbouring conquerors. The Galicians and the Irish had to renounce their language and their civilization and were mocked and disdained by the colonizers (8:20). It perhaps has not been said often enough that disdain and mockery are among the worst and most damaging weapons of colonization. It robs a nation of its dignity. And a nation without dignity loses interest in its native culture, its identity is slowly eroded because of this loss of interest. What is most predominant in “Xeración Nós” is the effort made to reassert a national selfhood, a search for that identity other than the rather demeaning one imposed by the colonizer. This was sought in Catalan, Portuguese and Irish literature, principally, but anywhere other than the Castilian. As regards Irish literature they put emphasis on the word “celt” and all that this could tell the Galicians about themselves. Risco in “A Moderna Literatura Irlandesa” says that “pra nós, o Celtismo non é somentes unha recreanza arquelóxica: é un imperativo” (26:5). The Galicians were in urgent need of reasserting their identity and this urgency formed itself around the concept “celtic”. It is self-evident that Ireland, that rebellious Celtic ex-British colony, would be of extreme interest for them.

Risco praises the Irish literature of his day for being “unha literatura que ceceais sexa antr’as modernas, a mais orixinal a mais nove, a mais arriscada” (*Nós* 26:5). In a later

issue of *Nós* his appreciation of Joyce is expressed in similar terms. In the last part of the series of three articles “A Moderna Literatura Irlandesa” he accentuates the Irishness of Joyce and his obsession with Ireland: “qu’o qu’o quiera facer falar, tenlle que falar da Irlanda. Qu’il tristeiro, desgraciado, exiliado... plo’o derradeiro, qu’o seu espírito é fondamente irlandés; irlandés plo-a sua rebeldía pol-a exaxeración, pol-a paixón, pol-o humorismo, pol-a cobiza do misterio, pol-a rareza, porque non s’imita a ninguén...” (28:5). This echoes Risco’s previous quotation in this article from Simone Téry’s *Lile des Bardes* who gives the definition of the Celtic soul as “turbulente, melancólique, allegre, reveuse, mystique, passionée”(26.5). For Risco Joyce’s genius comes from the fact that he is Irish, that he is a Celt. Great importance is given to the race he comes from. And the qualities he has because he is a Celt, because he is Irish, are independence and the ability to do something new and original. In some ways the Galician literary movement to which Risco belonged, “Xeración Nós”, was reasserting their national pride by claiming Joyce as one of their own, another Celt. Also, and perhaps more importantly, the emphasis being put on Joyce’s strangeness, his rebelliousness, the fact that he does not imitate anyone, is really a statement of intent on the part of these writers. There was a definite desire to open new frontiers for the Galician literary system, it was no longer sufficient to be a mere satellite of the Castilian canon. This desire for originality makes a most remarkable contrast to what has been mentioned of the desire for uniformity in Ireland among the generations after Joyce and Yeats.

The importance of Otero Pedrayo’s translation of fragments from *Ulysses* is now quite obvious. X. González-Millán gives some interesting ideas on this topic in his article “James Joyce e a Xeración Nós”. For Millán the translation is problematic because of the fact that Galician intellectuals were making an anti-nationalist reading of Joyce’s novel (39). This is not so problematic as it may seem. Risco was aware of Joyce’s criticisms of nationalism of which he speaks in “A Moderna Literatura Irlandesa”. He compares Joyce to the devil and again underlines his independence “nin estivo cos renacentistas (that is Yeats and the Celtic Twilight) nin cos seus nemigos” (that is the English) (28:3).

Perhaps when looking back on this period we now feel that a search for a new literary identity should go hand in hand with nationalism. As far as I can see, the “Xeración Nós” in their attitude to Joyce were not terribly obsessed with that drawing of frontiers on a native literature so inherent in nationalism. As Leandro Carré said in 1926 “para nós será univversalista unha novela cando a sona d’ela sexa tan grande que a obra traspase as fronteiras” (*Nós* 27:12). This should remind us of that definition of major literature mentioned earlier. It is something “predicated on the notion of universality” (20). obviously a colonized culture will try to create a major literature equable to those of other nations. However if we compare the Irish and the Galician cultures we shall see that the “Xeración Nós” was aiming to do something new, vanguard, that would break frontiers and attempt universality. It should be remembered that the Galician literary system was still in a process of development, still seeking an identity. The Irish literary system of the generation just after Joyce, of the nineteen forties, was making an effort to become established. We have seen that Joyce and the Celtic Twilight were already an establishment, a fledgling literary canon. There was an emphasis on uniformity, to be an Irish writer meant choosing patriotic themes to a certain extent. This was an accentuation of literary boundaries which made that “notion of universality” more difficult to assimilate. In this literary system the figure of Joyce, the romantic, mysterious, demonic Celt of the “Xeración Nós”, was all but ignored. Ironically, he went practically unheeded in his own country.

This should show us, if anything can, the dangers inherent in the attempts of a once dependent culture to create a literary canon as a reaction against that of the colonizer. This can lead to narrowmindedness as opposed to flexibility and freedom, the latter being that which Joyce so passionately desired for himself as an artist.

And what of James Clarence Mangan that enigmatic figure who was so influential in Irish literary history? He was, and still is, ignored and forgotten by the Irish literary canon. As Brendan Clifford, the Irish poet and folklorist, remarks in his book on Mangan, *The Dubliner* those who “determine what is published in Ireland”, that is according to him, Seamus Heaney and “the Arts Council and the UCD coteries” are going “around the world with the little glass slipper they have made, and they chop off all the feet that won’t fit into it” (167). Let us hope, for the sake of Irish letters, that this is not totally the case. However, it is rather strange, when we take the work of Mangan into account, that even though he is not a major literary figure like Yeats and Joyce, he is still important both because of what he wrote and his place in Irish literary history, not to be totally forgotten. The sad truth is that he is. This could suggest that there is still something amiss in Irish letters, that that reactionary spirit of the nineteen forties still partly survives. And that the Irish are still uncertain enough about their literary identity not to accept this nineteenth century poet. Kinsella suggests that Irish writers do not feel at home with the English literary tradition. But perhaps they do not feel at home with their own either.

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